Maria Katharina Wiedlack

QUEER-FEMINIST PUNK

An Anti-Social History

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1. Introduction

This book presents a map and analysis of queer-feminist punk histories that are located in the US and Canada. It offers a very detailed description of people, bands, events, and their politics. Although the collection and analysis are definitely a good read for punk knowledge showoffs or anyone looking for inspiration to update hir personal countercultural collection, they are by no means exhaustive. This work is limited by my "outsider" status as a white European academic, as well as by my education and personal interests, and therefore should not be understood as universal or true for everyone. Hopefully, however, the book will appeal to queer-feminist punk "nerds," academics and activists alike. It offers many insights into alternative strategies for queer-feminist political activism, and hints at alternative opportunities to regroup and bond, experience pleasure and fight against oppressive structures. In addition, chapter three in particular provides a good read for all academic dissidents who gain pleasure from losing themselves in hardcore psychoanalytic theory. Chapter three is not a must-read to understand the analysis of the queer-feminist punk material and of the social bonds created around and through queer-feminist punk. However, I encourage readers to follow me on my adventure through "the evil ways" of queer theory. There might not be a bright future awaiting the traveler at (death) the end of the journey, but there could be something unexpected or important in store.

With this book I offer a historiography that starts in the mid-1980s, highlighting Toronto's queer-feminist punk dissidence as one origin. However, there might be different versions of queer-feminist punk's emergence. It reflects my journey through tons

of queer-feminist punk lyrics, tunes, zines, academic articles and books, as well as the unforgettable impressions gathered during endless nights in the middle of (queer-feminist) mosh pits, and bits and pieces of firsthand information from discussions with musicians, organizers and activists. In other words, this historiography is highly subjective and aims to provoke dialogue—or better yet, have others tell their version of queer-feminist punk history.

Queer-feminist punk has many beginnings, and although this book tells exciting punk stories, they are not the only ones. Moreover, the histories of queer-feminist punk are often entangled with other histories and movements that inhabit punk's centers and margins, and leftist punk scenes and circles in general. Although this entanglement must be acknowledged and indeed highlighted, this book puts queer-feminist and anti-racist politics at the center of punk rock's history. It focuses on the individual bands, musicians, writers and organizers, whose politics and productions usually reflect the margins of the punk culture they inhabit according to the punk literature. This book seeks to bring queer-feminist punks of color, riot grrrls and queercore, homocore or dykecore to the fore and map out their political and performative agendas, strategies and methods. Following contemporary queer-feminist anti-racist punk scholars like Fiona I. B. Ngô and Elizabeth A. Stinson ("Introduction: Threads and Omissions"), Mimi T. Nguyen ("Riot Grrrl, Race, and Revival") or Tavia Nyong'o ("Do You"), this book proposes that queer feminists and punks of color as well as the politics around racialization and non-normative genders, sexes, and sexualities have always been important parts of punk culture and that it is time to complicate the picture, rather than renarrate the straight punk history of white middle-classness, homophobia and racism again and again.

By focusing on queer-feminist punks and queer-feminist punks of color within punk rock history, I also subsume many individuals and groups under the label *queer-feminist punk* that might use or reject different labels like *queercore*, *homocore* or *dykecore*, as well as *riot grrrl* or *Afro-punk*. Despite their different labels, and self-identifications, as a whole the individual protagonists, scenes, as

well as their artistic and political discourses, share important politics and strategies. Accordingly, I argue that queer-feminist punk countercultures belong to or form a political movement and that their productions—lyrics, writing, sound and performances—should be seen as a form of queer-feminist activism and agency. Furthermore, I propose that queer-feminist punk countercultural agents do not only engage with queer and feminist politics, as well as with academic theory, but also produce queer-feminist political theory—a more or less coherent set of ideas to analyze, explain and counter oppressive social structures in addition to explicit open violence and oppression. The focus on queer-feminist anti-racist punk politics within punk rock is not only an attempt to rewrite punk and riot grrrl history but, to use the words of Ngô and Stinson (170), also an attempt to "expand the places where we find valuable knowledge, to re-imagine who counts as an intellectual producer, and to work across genres." My use of the term *queer-feminist politics*—rather than queer politics—is inspired by the tradition of many activists around the world who call attention to the still prevalent sexism, misogyny and inequality in mainstream cultures, including queer movements, by foregrounding the feminist aspects of their queer politics. More recently, similar politics have found their way into academic writing, for example, through the work of Mimi Marinucci,[1] José Muñoz,[2] Judith Jack Halberstam,[3] and others. Such activist and academic approaches conceptualize queer politics as a continuation of feminist movements and theory rather than as a revolutionary

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1 Feminism is Queer: *The Intimate Connection between Queer and Feminist Theory*. London: Zed Books, 2010.

2 In particular, the books *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) and *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009) by José Muñoz are from a decidedly feminist and queer perspective.

3 Halberstam explains her feminist take on queer theory strongly in her books, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005) and *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

break with them. Furthermore, they seek a dialogue between lesbian and gay movements, second-wave feminists and the diverse range of queer movements to build alliances and different forms of solidarity.

My examples of queer-feminist punk rock activists also seek to find alliances with different groups of queer, feminist and decolonial thinkers and activists. These groups and their allies understand the usefulness of queer, feminist and decolonizing politics, activist strategies and social analysis against the racialized discrimination, misogyny, homophobia, ableism and transphobia of mainstream culture as well as the countercultural environments of punk rock and queer scenes. They combine feminist and decolonial accounts with their specific punk philosophy of anti-social queerness or queer negativity. By analyzing lyrical content, writing, music, sound, performances and countercultural settings in general, I provide examples of queer-feminist anti-social accounts of punk music (e.g., expressions of negativity and anger) and argue that queer-feminist punk rock as such can be understood as a politics of negativity. Relating such queer-feminist punk negativity to academic concepts and scholarly work, I show how punk rock is capable of negotiating and communicating academic queer-feminist theoretical positions in a non-academic setting. Moreover, I argue that queer-feminist punk not only negotiates, translates and appropriates academic approaches, but also produces similar negative and repoliticized queer-feminist theories without any direct inspiration from academic discourses.

Taking queer-feminist punk countercultural discourses seriously, I furthermore argue that queer-feminist punk communities accomplish what academic queer theory following the "anti-social turn"[4] often does not achieve: They transform their radically anti-social queer positions into (models for) livable activism. Moreover, they form social bonds through queer negativity that exceed normative forms of relationality.

4 Halberstam, "The Anti-Social."

1.1. Radically Queer

Considering contemporary usage of the term *queer* in the area of theory as well as political activism, I claim that queer-feminist punk offers a perspective on queerness as well as models for queer and feminist critique and social activism, which are able to counter the ongoing inclusion of queerness in neoliberal capitalism. Such politics are able to reactivate the radical potential that the term and concept *queer* used to have in earlier times.

From a historical perspective, the term *queer* emerged on the landscape of political discourse and activism in the 1990s as a counterposition or intervention. It was a term of resistance against oppression and a statement for radical social change.[5] "It was a term that challenged the normalizing mechanisms of state power to name its sexual subjects: male or female, married or single, heterosexual or homosexual, natural or perverse," as the scholars David Eng, Judith Jack Halberstam and José Muñoz emphasize in their article, "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" (1). For example, the word *queer* in the name Queer Nation—the radical AIDS activist group known for appropriating the term as a provocative self-reference first—"highlight[s] homophobia in order to fight it" (4), as Robin Brontsema points out.

When theorists imported queer as a theoretical concept into the academy in the 1990s, they aimed for a similar effect—to challenge norms. Teresa de Lauretis was the first documented scholar to use the term queer theory in an academic setting. David Halperin recalled de Lauretis's intention in her use of "queer" in his article, "The Normalization of Queer Theory":

> [She] coined the phrase "queer theory" to serve as the title of a conference that she held in February of 1990 at the University of California, Santa Cruz [...]. She had heard the word "queer" being tossed about in a gay-affirmative sense by activists, street kids, and members

5 Cf. Shepard 512; Brontsema 4.

of the art world in New York during the late 1980s. She had the courage, and the conviction, to pair that scurrilous term with the academic holy word, "theory." Her usage was scandalously offensive. [I]t was deliberately disruptive. [S]he had intended the title as a provocation. She wanted specifically to unsettle the complacency of "lesbian and gay studies." (340)

I want to call attention to Halperin's interpretation of de Lauretis' motives as "provocation" and "deliberately disruptive." He suggests that de Lauretis used queer theory to reject dominant gay and lesbian identity politics as well as academic approaches that focus on sexuality as a stable identity category. Halperin's anecdote indicates that queer theory was once seen as a promising and radical political intervention in the production of knowledge and meaning, social structures and institutions. Moreover, it implies that the concept of queer emerged within countercultural spheres and activism, among "street kids" and "the art world" during the 1980s and was introduced into academia only afterwards.

The successful incorporation of the term *queer* into the language of capitalism, the promotion of lifestyle products, the concept of metrosexuality, however, speaks to the deradicalization and depoliticization of queerness in such contexts, as well as the flexibility of capitalist heteronormative patriarchal power structures. Its introduction into commercial entertainment through the late 1990s and the 2000s—for instance, in shows like *Will & Grace*,[6] *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*,[7] or *The L Word*[8]—equally

6 *Will & Grace* was a US television sitcom about a successful New York-based gay lawyer called William Truman and his straight female friend Grace Adler, a successful designer. The sitcom was produced by James Burrows and NBC Studios and aired from 1998 to 2006 for a total of eight seasons. It was arguably one of the most successful sitcoms with gay characters in the history of television.

7 *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* was a US reality television series on the Bravo cable television network from 2003 to 2007, produced by David Collins, Michael Williams and David Metzler (Scout Productions).

8 *The L Word* was a US television drama series on the cable channel

furthered the process of depoliticization. Such corporate media representation of gays and lesbians created mainstream perceptions of queerness as non-threatening, successful, beautiful and predominantly white and, most important, compliant with capitalist consumer logics. Shortly following the annexation of the concept in academia, a deradicalization of the term *queer* within the mainstream became apparent and both, being queer as well as using the term queer, became normalized within the academic landscape. The incorporation of queer theory in gender studies programs, the numerous queer studies and queer theory readers by commercial publishing companies such as Routledge,[9] Palgrave MacMillan[10] and Blackwell Publishing[11] as well as the establishment of queer theory book series such as *Series Q* by Duke University Press mark such processes of absorption and deradicalization of queer within the mainstream academic field. Resisting that end, my analysis here aims to "find ways of renewing [queer's] radical potential" (343), to borrow Halperin's words again. I argue that the appropriation and use of the term queer within queer-feminist punk rock is an approach that has the radical potential to resist the ongoing inclusion of gay and lesbian identities in mainstream discourses and consumer culture, the transformation of gay and lesbian identification into a lifestyle choice as well as a legal category. Moreover, queer-feminist punk rock uses the term *queer* to counter the process of queerness becoming an identity category itself. A validation of countercultural queer theory, as

Showtime that ran from 2004 to 2009. The series was produced by Ilene Chaiken, Michele Abbot, and Kathy Greenberg and originally portrayed the lives of a group of lesbians, and bisexuals, their families and partners. During the six seasons, one transgender and a couple of more fluidly sexual-identified protagonists were added. The cast consisted of exceptionally gender normative, tall, conventionally beautiful, predominantly white, rich people. The location is West Hollywood.

9 Hall, Donald E. and Annamarie Jagose, eds. With Andrea Bebell and Susan Potter. *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

10 Morland, Ian, and Annabelle Willox, eds. *Queer Theory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

11 Corber, Robert J., and Stephen Valocchi, eds. *Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

in my example of queer-feminist punk rock within academic discourses, could halt the process of academic queer theory becoming normative. This research could participate in developing "a renewed queer theory" (Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz 1)—a queer theory that necessarily needs to understand sexuality as "intersectional, not extraneous to other modes of difference, and calibrated to a firm understanding of queer as a political metaphor without a fixed referent" (ibid.). In other words, my project presents theories and approaches within the countercultural sphere of punk rock in which queer still has the political potential to irritate and resist neoliberal incorporation, and reject oppression. In addition, it presents countercultural concepts "for different ways of being in the world and being in relation to one another than those already prescribed for the liberal and consumer subjects," as Halberstam puts it in the recent book *The Queer Art of Failure* (2). I argue that queer-feminist punk countercultures produce queer-feminist theory that is neither less sophisticated nor less valuable than academic approaches.

Furthermore, contrary to much of academic theory, the theoretical approaches developed within the queer-feminist punk movement have a strong connection to the everyday life of its participants.[12] Within the countercultural sphere of queer-feminist punk rock, "the divisions between life and art, practice and theory, thinking and doing" are not clear-cut, but fluid or "chaotic," according to Halberstam (ibid.). Accordingly, theory is not just a product of cognitive and emotional processes, the processes themselves must also be understood as theory. Following the anarchists among the queer activists and scholars, such as Benjamin Shepard, theory does not just influence practice, both aspects are inseparable within queer activism (515). Theory is a doing, a practice and "the understanding of human practice" that becomes "directly lived," as Guy Debord emphasizes in *The Society of the Spectacle* (qtd. in Eanelli 428). To account for both the processes and products of knowledge production and distribution, the term

12 Cf. McLemee; Rogue and Shannon; Klapeer; Rauchut.

and concept of theory itself needs to be reworked for the purpose of my investigation.

To contribute to the broader academic discussion within the field of queer studies, I contrast references from theorizations of the countercultural sphere of queer-feminist punk rock with academic queer theory. The forms of theorized resistance against hegemonic logic that seem most promising to me, as mentioned above, are the places of the radically queer. Radical queer theories can be found in both academia and countercultures. Such accounts, as I understand them, are theories that refuse and reject complicity with neoliberal consumer and heteronormative cultures. In other words, I focus on the irritating, the disturbing, and the unsettling. Moreover, in combining the academic with the countercultural, I aim to develop a new, radical theoretical approach dedicated to dismantling oppressive power structures in their full complexity.

As I argue throughout my analysis, queer-feminist punk rock can be seen as one of the most radically queer countercultural spheres or movements of resistance against heteronormative knowledge production. The intersectional politics of resistance that queer-feminist punks use are anti-social queer politics. Such politics show interesting parallels with recent developments in queer theory that have become known as anti-social queer theory. Moreover, the embrace of negativity connected to the word queer within punk rock was an anticipation of queer as anti-social even before academia "jump[ed] on the negativity bandwagon," in the words of queer anarchist Tegan Eanelli (428), a position taken also by queer theorists such as Halberstam,[13] Nyong'o,[14] and Muñoz.[15] Although radical queer-feminist activists such as Eanelli disdain academic anti-social queer theory, I see potential for the radical irritation of hegemonic discourses in the corpus of academic queer theory that Judith Jack Halberstam framed as the "Anti-Social Turn in Queer Studies."

13 Halberstam, "The Anti-Social"; "The Politics"; *The Queer Art*.

14 "Do You."

15 *Disidentifications*.

1.2. Anti-Social Queer Theory

As a theoretical concept, the anti-social turn is informed by psychoanalytic—mostly Lacanian—concepts of sexuality. Following queer psychoanalytic approaches, such as those of Leo Bersani,[16] sex is understood as anti-communicative, destructive, and anti-identitarian. One of the most influential theorists following this development of queer theory is the American literary theorist Lee Edelman in his book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Edelman's book posits that sexuality in our symbolic order marks the irritation of the self as in control, whole and autonomous. In other words, sexuality and sexual acts irritate the constant construction of identity and autonomous agency. To integrate sexuality successfully into the illusion of an autonomous self, it must be attached to the purpose of reproduction. Consequently, queerness in this logic can only signify the opposite of creation and reproduction or "the place of the social order's death drive" (*No Future* 3). What constitutes and structures queerness as a meaningful term, according to Lee Edelman, is not its relation to queer desire but to "jouissance" (ibid.). Jouissance is "the painful pleasure of exceeding a law in which we were implicated, an enjoyment of a desire (*desir*), in the mode of rage or grief, that is the cause and result of refusing to be disciplined by the body hanging from the gallows of the law," to use the words of psychoanalytic theorist Elizabeth Povinelli ("The Part" 288). I read the law Povinelli mentions and which jouissance exceeds as the symbolic order of meanings, as well as social rules and regulations—everything that signifies certainty, familiarity and safety. However, as potentially radical or dismantling as Edelman's theory is, it also precludes any possibility of political activism. Moreover, Edelman argues that queerness is not only the opposite of society's future, but also the opposite of every form of politics.

Nevertheless, many queer scholars affirm and rework anti-social psychoanalytic queer theory as politics. Judith Jack Halberstam,[17]

16 Bersani, Leo. *Homos*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

17 "The Anti-Social."

Elizabeth Povinelli,[18] Tavia Nyong'o,[19] and José Muñoz[20] hold on to the political potential in anti-social queerness. They criticize Edelman's account for its "inability to recognize the alternative sexual practices, intimacies, logics, and politics that exist outside the sightlines of cosmopolitan gay white male urban culture" (Rodríguez, "Queer Sociality" 333). My work tries to connect multiple anti-social queer theories and criticism. I merge different anti-social academic accounts to develop a theoretical account that has the potential to criticize and resist hegemony. In addition, I combine and extend anti-social queer theories with works by the black feminists bell hooks and Audre Lorde to argue that their theorization of anger allows for a thinking through of anti-social and queer at the intersection of racialization. Moreover, a focus on anger enables us to extend our analysis of anti-social queer politics from the realm of symbolic meaning to the realms of the corporeal and affective: action, feelings, experience and the body.

I relate such different academic accounts to queer-feminist punk movements to establish a dialogue between both fields and enrich them in terms of their ability to resist the deradicalization of queer theory critically. To do this, I use academic psychoanalytic accounts to analyze queer-feminist punk productions and the social relations they create and circulate within, as well as to make queer-feminist punk productions more comprehensive to an audience unfamiliar with punk rock conventions. By making connections between academic theory, countercultural productions and social spaces, I aim to gain attention and interest from activists of the countercultural movement of punk rock who might not necessarily relate well to the machinery of academic knowledge production.

18 Povinelli, "The Part."

19 "Do You."

20 *Disidentifications*.

1.3. The Culture(s) of Queer-Feminist Punk

The field, or object of my research, as I have already frequently mentioned, is queer-feminist punk rock produced by US-based queer- and punk-identified musicians, writers and community organizers of the mid-1980s until today. I reflect on the particular countercultural movement in connection with the broader sociopolitical and cultural environment of the US. In chapter two, I show that the queer-feminist punk movement emerged in reaction to the political and social US-specific discourses on homosexuality, gender, HIV/AIDS and racialization between the late 1970s and early 1980s. I give examples of how queer-feminist punks analyzed those discourses and formed their political resistance accordingly. Moreover, by analyzing the political themes and agendas of the queer-feminist punk movement's historical overview until today, I show that activists broadened their initial focus to analyze and resist US-American hegemonic discourses such as colonialism, neoliberalism and globalization.

Although I insist on the term counterculture to describe the queer-feminist punk movement, I want to emphasize again that the movement does not disassociate itself from the rest of US society. On the contrary, even though they reject US cultural and political hegemony, queer-feminist punks actively establish a dialogue with other oppressed people in the US. They build alliances and community far beyond the limits of their own countercultures. The results of such initiatives can be seen in the reactions of countless fans of queer-feminist punk rock who describe their experience of the music, the writing and art as crucial to forming their queer identities, developing self-esteem and becoming political. Moreover, the long-lasting effect of queer-feminist punk politics can be seen in the over 30-year existence of the movement and communities, as well as in the punk activities within other social movements, which I discuss in the final chapter.

I want to underscore again that the countercultural sphere of queer-feminist punk rock is not restricted by definite borders, therefore it is quite fluid; however, the music, writing and social

scenes I designate as queer-feminist punk are connected in a multitude of ways. First, queer-feminist punk productions are connected through their politics. Some are also connected through explicit verbal references, while others relate through an identification with riot grrrl, queercore or homocore, and dykecore; some bands, writers, organizers and scenes are connected through mutual projects as well as personal friendships. In addition, in close relation to their shared politics they are also connected through their musical style via punk rock.

Although I want to emphasize punk rock in queer-feminist punk, this musical style is by no means clearly defined. Punk in queer-feminist punk rock is as fluid and anti-identitarian as queerness. It clearly exceeds conventional definitions of punk music as based on three chords, simplicity or amateurism. Beyond, or in close connection with the musical style, I argue that the word and concept *punk* is defined through negativity and anti-social politics. On the broadest level, queer-feminist punk means to "question everything, [to] take nothing as given […] even if it doesn't win me social points. [A] constant thinking and talking about privilege, fucked up social structures, refusing to let people get away with bigotry," says punk writer Jessica Skolnik ("Modernist Witch"). This does not mean that style is not important. On the contrary, as I show in chapters two and three, punk style—the music's speed, high volume, DIY character and aggressive performances—corresponds to the outspoken anti-social behavior, liberating verbal violation of rules and embrace of outsider status of its followers, all of which are crucial for queer-feminist punk politics. Queer feminists understand the elements of punk to be potent strategies to articulate their discontent and anger about contemporary society. Punk translates the symbolic rejection of society from the standpoint of an outcast and the affirmation of this negative status into sound. Nevertheless, punk's style or "noise," as Dick Hebdige described it in his seminal work *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, is not limited to defined norms of *punkness*. After all, if there were rules that were strictly adhered to, it would not be punk.

The starting point for this investigation into the countercultural sphere of queer-feminist punk is an understanding of its productions—music, zines and other types of expression—as ways to produce meaning and active, political intervention into hegemonic power structures following the cultural-studies approaches of Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson,[21] Dick Hebdige,[22] and George Lipsitz.[23] Moreover, I understand queer-feminist punk communities, concepts and ideas, as well as their cultural productions to be entities connected through a political movement. The concept of a movement emphasizes this connection between queer-feminist punks and their output on a discursive level. In other words, calling queer-feminist punk a movement suggests a meta-connection between the various cultural productions, their politics and the multiple social scenes in which they circulate. I theorize queer-feminist punk as a movement in order to emphasize its forms and products as activism or doing. In addition, the idea of a movement emphasizes the connection between hegemonic culture, location and time. It allows us to see similarities and differences between individuals and groups, as well as their social structures, political views and methods. The similarities that bind individuals together in this movement are the strategies they use—the musical style, the offensive language, the self-made prints and records—as well as the anti-social understanding of queerness and punkness, and the rejection of US hegemony. While the strategies and styles of different groups and individuals are not exactly the same and the political issues vary as well, core topics can be identified throughout the thirty years of the movement's existence. In particular, the politics have changed over time, in keeping with the broader socio-political context within the US and beyond. Moreover, queer-feminist punks address individual and structural differences of

21 Hall, Stuart, and Tony Jefferson, eds. *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. London: Routledge, 1976.

22 *Subculture*.

23 Lipsitz, George. "Cruising around the Historical Bloc: Postmodernism and Popular Music in East Central Los Angeles." *Cultural Critique* 5 (1986): 157–77.

experiences and politics themselves. They do not share a group identity for the most part. Hence, the notion of a movement alludes to processes of change over time, to differences among individuals and groups as well as to the fact that people are bound together through their political agenda rather than their personal identity. My analysis aims to reflect this continuation and change by showing the stringency of key concepts within queer-feminist punk throughout its history as well as the changes and shifts in meanings, forms and activities over time.

1.4. The Meaning(s) of Queer-Feminist Punk

To account for the multilayered meanings, strategies and politics of queer-feminist punk rock throughout history, I will first explain what the forms or styles of queer-feminist punk rock look like and who the performers of queer-feminist punk are in chapter two. Based on the assumption that cultural products of queer-feminist punk rock and especially their style have political and social relevance, I will lay out what the politics of queer-feminist punk are and explain their intersection with contemporary academic queer theory. I will then address the purpose of the appropriation of queer as well as punk.

I want to highlight that queer-feminist punk movements create political, social and cultural theory. Nevertheless, they often do so in exchange with other queer activist movements and communities as well as scholarly research. Moreover, I agree with Judith Jack Halberstam that it might be time to rethink the perception of "the academy" and "the counterculture" (*The Queer Art of Failure* 7–15). Queer activists are often students, researchers or even faculty members of universities. Hence, not only has academic queer theory influenced countercultural spheres but sometimes also developed within those countercultural spaces through academics as well as non-academics. In addition, queer-feminist activism has intervened in multiple cases in discourses on academic territory. Thus, my account differs significantly from scholarly

views that suggest queer theory has lost its social relevance in recent years.[24] Nevertheless, it needs to be emphasized that academia follows a set of norms and rules that do not allow for total invasion by queer-feminist countercultural protagonists like punk rock musicians. Academia's administrative, legal and social apparatus does not allow for a total deconstruction through queer theory. Accordingly, I argue that queer-feminist countercultures have a greater potential for radical resistance than academia can ever have, because becoming part of academia requires a great deal of self-disciplining, assimilation and normativity in the first place. In other words, to become resistant to academia, the individual has to assimilate her or himself to academic norms first. These norms are patriarchal, capitalistic and mostly white. Although the US and its apparatus as well as its social conventions and norms oppress queer-feminist punks, its hegemonic power and survival demands assimilation.

My research argues that the social structures of both academia and queer-feminist punk rock need to be understood as highly intersectional. Since they are hardly separable from each other, an analysis of their specific intersections is needed. I have chosen the range of academic queer and feminist theories and queer-feminist punk theories, productions and politics because they either parallel the discourses of my research material or were explicitly mentioned in queer-feminist punk productions. Consequently, my approach can be understood as a bottom-up approach starting from countercultural phenomena to academic theory. As already suggested, the theories applied are mainly, but not exclusively, antisocial queer theories.

Queer-feminist punk's production of meaning and knowledge must be located on various levels: textual, oral, performative and emotional. Apart from being intersectional, it changes over time. Consequently, my project is highly interdisciplinary in its usage of not only theories but also methods. The assemblage of different theoretical approaches and analytical instruments at play

24 Cf. McLemee; Rogue and Shannon; Klapeer; Rauchut.

can best be addressed with what Judith Jack Halberstam calls a "queer methodology" (*Female Masculinity* 10). It combines "textual criticism, ethnography, historical survey, archival research, and the production of taxonomies" (ibid.). Such a methodology is "queer because it attempts to remain supple enough to respond to the various locations of information" and, furthermore, "betrays a certain disloyalty to conventional disciplinary methods," as Halberstam explains (ibid.). Large parts of my analysis deal with cultural artifacts—especially writings and oral expressions, like lyrics and interviews—and their meanings. Accordingly, the method most frequently used throughout my analysis can be termed semiotic, as developed by cultural studies scholars. For the purpose of my analysis, the most important punk researcher is Dick Hebdige. His thesis, formulated in 1979, maintains that countercultures affect hegemony through style-influenced decades of semiotic analysis of countercultural productions. Moreover, his research was well-received by punks themselves and therefore influenced their understanding of style as resisting. Following Hebdige, as well as more recent queer theory scholars like Halberstam, Driver, Muñoz and Ngyong'o, I investigate queer-feminist punk style at the intersection of political agency, knowledge production and social relevance. Including writings about queer-feminist punks' experiences, especially with their community, and data gathered through interviews, as well as participant observation, I analyze how queer-feminist punk communities translate their political values and theories into social practice. To explain the forms of community that emerge through the politics of negativity, I use Jean-Luc Nancy's[25] theorizations on counter-hegemonic concepts of social bonds.

The analytical theory used for the interpretation of my examples is mostly, but not exclusively, informed by the queer psychoanalytic work that I described earlier. Inspired by queer-feminist punk rock's

25 Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Being Singular Plural*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

use of the term queer as anti-social, I read contemporary anti-social queer theory against a selection of representative queer-feminist punk lyrics. Furthermore, I use Edelman's account of the queer as anti-social and opposed to futurity and "the Child" (*No Future* 3) to explain why queer-feminist punk rock refers to queerness as anti-social. To do this, I read queer-feminist punk lyrics against Edelman's account to show that the theorization of queerness as anti-social in queer-feminist punk predated his own. However, using the psychoanalytic work of Elizabeth Povinelli, I argue that the value of such politics does not necessarily remain in the deconstruction of existing meanings, values and social relations. On the contrary, referring to Judith Jack Halberstam,[26] Elizabeth Povinelli[27] and Antke Engel,[28] I suggest that the value of queer-feminist punk's politics of negativity lies in its potential to create queer social bonds that are able to resist heteronormative logic.

Queerness, however, is not the only issue that queer-feminist punk lyrics and literature address. In the course of a detailed reading of selected lyrics and writings, I enumerate and discuss the various issues that queer-feminist punks address and show that queer-feminist punk rock theorizes and communicates the interdependency of categories and forms of oppression. In addition, I account for the intersectional approaches in my queer-feminist punk examples by applying contemporary queer theory to explain the interconnections of categories such as sexuality, class, gender, bodily ability and race (e.g., José Muñoz, Juana Maria Rodríguez, Jasbir Puar, Amit Rai, and Dean Spade). In referring to such works, I make a connection between the production of meaning, social relations and institutional oppression.

In analyzing queer-feminist appropriations of feminism and their relationships to other feminist movements, I draw on the works of Judith Jack Halberstam (*In a Queer Time and Place*),

26 "The Anti-Social"; *The Queer Art of Failure*.

27 "The Part."

28 Engel, Antke. "Desire for/within Economic Transformation." *e-flux journal* 17 (June/August 2010).

Rebecca Walker and Ann Cvetkovich. In connection with queer-feminist punks, and anti-racist and decolonial politics, I draw on a corpus of cultural studies approaches to punk rock that are not necessarily queer, such as texts by Hebdige and Frith.

In addition, I focus on the intersection of queer-feminist punk's politics by closely analyzing its complex deployment of anger. Furthermore, I refer to text references in queer-feminist punk writing by black feminists like bell hooks and Audre Lorde through an analysis of such discourses and create a fruitful dialogue between them and contemporary cultural studies approaches by Halberstam, Nehring (*Anger*) and others. I try to explain the position that queer-feminist punks of color inhabit within their scenes by drawing on the concept of "third space" as developed by scholars like Homi Bhabha, as well as that of "borderlands" by Gloria Anzaldúa. I also elaborate on the relationships between queer-feminist punks of color and their peers by drawing on the concept of decolonizing politics by Laura Pérez.

1.5. A Queer-Feminist Punk Reader's Companion

The following quick overview of each chapter is my attempt to provide a navigation system through the myriad paths of my work. Each chapter—although connected to the others—has a meaning and story of its own and can be consumed accordingly. I start my project by giving a historical overview of bands, communities, and some of their cultural productions in chapter two. The overview is by no means exhaustive, but can be considered as the first collection of bands, subcultures, cultural productions and collective initiatives accounting for the heterogeneity and diverse political agendas contained within this "scene." I reflect on the current state of research on queer-feminist punk to point to the necessity of broadening the research focus from queer-feminist politics to their intersection with anti-racist, decolonial, anarchist and disability politics. Such a broadening is necessary not only to

do justice to queer-feminist punk activism but also to disrupt the notion of a strictly white male countercultural archive. In other words, I collect or assemble queer-feminist punk productions to contribute to the existing anti-social queer archive that theorists such as Lee Edelman and Leo Bersani have established through their analytical work. Moreover, I want to challenge the archive that "oddly coincides with the canonical archive of Euro-American literature and film," as Judith Jack Halberstam emphasizes ("The Anti-Social" 152), and expand its focus from "a select group of anti-social queer aesthetes and camp icons and texts" (ibid.) to my diverse collection of countercultural protagonists and their cultural productions. Incorporating queer-feminist punk into an academic archive, however, is also an act of normalization. I address this problem in chapters two and four.

Chapter three distills hardcore theories from queer-feminist punk music through a semiotic analysis of queer-feminist punk lyrics, sound and performance. I argue that queer-feminist punk politics of negativity can be found at the level of verbal expression as well as within sound and embodied performance and that such performatives irritate heteronormativity, experience of time and social relations. Moreover, I argue that anti-social queer-feminist punk politics have the potential to establish non-normative social bonds.

In chapter four, I focus on queer-feminist punk politics as an intersectional critique of oppression. Queer-feminist punks address and analyze the intersections of social, political and institutional oppression and oppressive concepts such as the state, capitalism and white hegemonic power. Interestingly, the rejection of the plethora of intersecting hegemonic discourses of class, gender, race and sexuality is often labeled anarchy. I show how such anarcho-queer politics are formulated, what they address and what their aim is.

In chapters five to eight, I focus on various specific issues that queer-feminist punks address through their intersectional anti-social politics. In every chapter, I exemplify aspects of feminist politics, antiracism, and critical whiteness approaches by referring to a

corpus of lyrics, as well as to the efforts of bands and communities. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that a queer-feminist punk politics of negativity is intersectional, and that the examples I present are not necessarily representative of a single band, its products or communities as such, but rather of a specific aspect of the band's politics. In other words, queer-feminist punks can hardly be reduced to only one political agenda. The agendas I address are more or less separate products of my foci or interests.

In chapter five, I address the feminist politics of anti-social, queer-feminist punk rock. In chapter six, I discuss white hegemony within queer-feminist punk communities and highlight some crucial interventions by queer-feminist punks of color. Chapter seven continues the focus on anti-racist, anti-privilege and decolonial interventions by queer-feminist punks within their communities, and addresses the meaning and use of anger. I propose that queer-feminist punks' appropriation of anger represents a new facet or instantiation of anti-social queer-feminist punk politics from the perspective of people of color. On a theoretical level, such accounts suggest that black feminist examinations and appropriations of anger could add important insights to the archive of anti-social queer theory. In the final chapter, I briefly summarize the most significant results of my study. Moreover, I come back to the question of how queer-feminist punk activism forms alliances across countercultural, musical and national borders. I show how queer-feminist punk activists engage with the larger society in the concrete context of the contemporary Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland movements and briefly analyze the readings of the latest Free Pussy Riot solidarity actions by transnational alliances. These examples highlight the effect that queer-feminist punk movements have beyond the limits of their countercultural spheres and prove that the production and distribution of queer-feminist, anti-capitalist and decolonial punk knowledge transgress mainstream values.

2. "To Sir with Hate":[29] A Liminal History of Queer-Feminist Punk Rock

"We're punks.
We should be taking the piss out of the past."[30]

This chapter gives an overview of the last three decades of queer-feminist punk bands, zine writers, record labels, events, and other cultural productions. It shows that queer-feminist punk was signified through anti-social politics, and the politics of queer-feminist negativity from its emergence in the 1980s onward and that the movement is still informed by such politics. Considering the vast number of bands, communities, productions and artwork, as well as their sometimes short-lived existences or rootedness in specific localities, this collection is by no means complete. However, the chapter provides a view of a broad spectrum of activities and people, by highlighting some of the most interesting cultural

29 The title *To Sir with Hate* was the title of the first LP of the band Fifth Column in 1985 (Bruce LaBruce qtd. in Rathe 1). Fifth Column was a feminist, anti-patriarchy hardcore punk band from Toronto. The band members included G.B. Jones and Jena von Brucker. The term *fifth column* refers to clandestine groups who try to undermine, deconstruct and sabotage social institutions like nations from within. The term was often used to refer to anarchist groups during the Spanish Civil War (Encyclopedia Britannica. Web. 10 May 2012. <http://www.britannica.com/>).

30 This quote is from Carolyn Keddy's punk column "Bring Me the Head of Gene Siskel" in *Maximumrocknroll* 347 (April 2012). Keddy urges the contemporary punk community to critically reflect on the forms of oppression and hegemonies in and throughout past punk communities.

productions of queer-feminist punk. Moreover, the collection assembled here is probably the first historical overview that covers the diversity and intersectionality of queer-feminist punk productions and protagonists beyond specific scenes, groups or historic periods. In addition, it is the first queer-feminist punk documentation that focuses on the issues and agendas of queer-feminist punk, and their politics in general, from an intersectional perspective, which goes beyond an exclusive focus on representations of queer and feminist identifications and politics. It highlights not only queer-feminist punks of color, disabled, genderqueer or working-class identified punks but also focuses on anti-capitalist, anti-racist, decolonial, anti-ableist and genderqueer anti-social politics.

First, I will introduce the very first people who explicitly fostered queer-feminist punk politics with the labels homocore and queercore. I will briefly describe those terms and explain why queer-feminist punks created the labels that refer to their bands and productions. Despite queer-feminist punks' self-identification as or with queercore and homocore—especially during the late 1980s and early 1990s—I decided to use the phrase queer-feminist punk rock instead. I made this choice because the terms queercore and homocore seem too limited to account for the diversity of politics significant for the movement. Moreover, the expression queer-feminist punk accounts for the fact that not all bands, writers and artists who fall under the broader spectrum of anti-social queer-feminist punk politics identified with the labels queercore or homocore. Some, for example, preferred the term riot grrrl. Hence, I use the phrase queer-feminist punk because it seems more appropriate for addressing the flexibility and openness of the terms of self-identification and the research field, as well as the countercultural productions and spaces it covers. In addition, I choose to label queer-feminist punk as a political movement to further account for the flexibility and diversity of identifications, politics, artistic expressions and productions, and the social structures within them. Moreover, it accounts for the processes of countercultural knowledge production and transmission that have taken place

over the last three decades. Although the social bond between the collected individuals, communities and their art is fragmented, and to some degree inconsistent, feelings of belonging to the broader queer-feminist punk movement are important for its protagonists, as will be shown. Besides the identification with queer and feminist politics, this sense of belonging is expressed through references to punk music and politics. It ought to be emphasized that the subsumption of the diverse crowd of people, identities, and cultural productions provided here, although eclectic to some degree, is appropriate not least because of the shared anti-social queer-feminist politics. These politics are found on the verbal or language-based level, as well as on the level of embodiment, musical style and sound. Punk music and sound must be understood as a politics of negativity as such.

I will explain why queer feminists appropriated the music, style and political concept of punk rock for their political activism, rereading some early queer-feminist punk articles. Furthermore, I will focus on some of queer-feminist punks' main agendas and points of critique at that time in history. Second, I will explain queer-feminist punk aesthetics and politics, by making a brief digression to the origins of punk rock in the 1970s, more precisely to the emergence of punk as an anti-social aesthetic form. Moreover, I will trace the specific forms of expressions of negativity occurring in queer-feminist punk back to punk concepts, while relating them to queer concepts and movements. In doing so, I attempt to add queer-feminist punk rock to the archive of scholarly anti-social queer theory as well as queer counterculture productions. Third, I will show that the anti-social queer theory of queer-feminist punk is characterized by an intersectional approach. In other words, queer-feminist punks target not only homophobia, transphobia and misogyny, but also understand the intersectionality of oppressive power structures across the categories of race, class, and able-bodiedness.

The notion of an archive that I want to promote here necessarily—as Judith Jack Halberstam has stated—

> extend[s] beyond the image of a place to collect material or hold documents, and […] has to become a floating signifier for the kinds of lives implied by the paper remnants of shows, clubs, events, and meetings. The archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity. (*In a Queer Time and Place* 169)

I see my work as a contribution to such a queer theory archive, while acknowledging and emphasizing the problematic position that it occupies, especially within the countercultural spheres of queer-feminist punk. It is problematic because my presentation and analysis of people, bands, and events reflect my white European academic background, education and personal interests. Moreover, by claiming space within academic queer theory for queer-feminist punk, the politics and cultural productions become incorporated in academic discourses, regardless of how marginal those discourses might be within academia. In relation to the critique on the incorporation of countercultural knowledge and art into academia, the final part of this chapter discusses and further problematizes the subjectivity of documenting and archiving the queer-feminist punk movement. This is done in order to highlight accessibility as one major aspect of the queer-feminist punk agenda.

2.1. "Gay Punk Comes Out with a Vengeance":[31] The Provisional Location of an Origin

The first documented use of the name homocore (which later became replaced by queercore) was in the Toronto-based zine *J.D.s,*[32] created by the filmmakers, artists, and musicians G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce in 1985/6. "Homocore [a neologism created out of the terms homosexuality and hardcore] was the name of this fictitious movement of gay punks that we created to make ourselves seem more exciting than we actually were," says Bruce LaBruce (qtd. in Ciminelli and Knox 7). "Queercore was a call to arms and storming out of the closet," Adam Rathe notes in his oral history of queercore *Queer to the Core*. The zine *J.D.s* featured photos, drawings and comics about queers within punk scenes in Canada and the US mixed with personal stories by queer punks, mockeries of Hollywood stars and articles on homophobia and sexism. The politics of *J.D.s* were communicated through various forms of writings, graphic designs and drawings. During its existence, *J.D.s* developed an increasingly fierce criticism of mainstream culture and politics, as well as of the gay and hardcore scenes. Issue 5 from 1989, for example, included a collection of angry fan letters by gays and lesbians to *Maximumrocknroll*,[33] as well as a collection of writings that exposed homophobic messages from the same magazine. *J.D.s,* like the many publications that followed, was

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31 Rathe, Adam. "Queer to the Core: Gay Punk Comes Out with a Vengeance. An Oral History of the Movement That Changed the World (Whether You Knew It or Not)." *Out*. Web. 12 April 2012. <http://www.out.com/> (capitalization added).

32 Bruce LaBruce mentions that the primary meaning of *J.D.s* was "Juvenile Delinquents," but adds that "[i]t also stood for James Dean and J. D. Salinger. And [...] Jack Daniels" (qtd. in Rathe 2).

33 *Maximumrocknroll* is a very popular, widely distributed, monthly fanzine from San Francisco founded in 1982, which covers bands and news from punk scenes all over the world. Its production and distribution are very professional, and also allow for international mail orders. While the magazine itself is done in an early punk style, it is professionally printed and digitally edited, produced on thin newsprint paper, uses many different fonts and has no page numbers.

created as a twofold intervention to queer the macho-dominated punk rock scenes by contributing to them from a queer-feminist perspective, as well as deliver a harsh critique of gay lifestyle cultures through punk style and politics. Every issue also included a list of punk bands and titles, which helped queers to learn about and connect with each other. LaBruce also produced a homocore compilation tape, for which he recruited people through *J.D.s*.[34] Although it might be an overstatement to call LaBruce and Jones the founding figures of queer-feminist punk, they certainly played a significant role within the movement.[35] Jones, LaBruce and their activism reached the broader punk scenes all over the US and beyond with an angry six-page article in an issue of *Maximumrocknroll* titled "Don't Be Gay: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Fuck Punk up the Ass" in 1989. The piece criticizes the gay and punk scenes, as well as mainstream culture in extremely blunt and sometimes very offensive language.

Soon after the introduction of the term homocore in *J.D.s* in 1985, the San Francisco-based queer punks Tom Jennings and Deke Motif Nihilson, who played in the queercore band Comrades In Arms, took up the label for their own zine. Jennings and Nihilson met at Toronto's *Anarchist Survival Gathering* in 1988, where they were exposed to Jones' and LaBruce's zines and politics (Ciminelli and Knox 9). *Homocore*'s first issue emerged in the same year as the typical Xerox-printed zine style. Until its final issue in 1991—even as the aesthetics of *Homocore* became more professional—the zine was printed in newspaper style and format. Its politics also remained DIY, featuring punks and punk productions from all over the world, from various punk groups to artists and writers like LaBruce, Jones, Steve Abbott and Daniel Nicoletta, Chainsaw

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34 See Jones and LaBruce, *J.D.s 5*.

35 By 1989, Jones and LaBruce had already connected a quite impressive number of queer-feminist punk bands and zines, the latter including Los Angeles-based *Homocore* from San Francisco, *Notes From The Floorboards* from Warren, Ohio, and *Raging Hormones* (anarchist-lesbian zine) from Boulder, Colorado (see Jones and LaBruce, *J.D.s 5* 47–8). Explicit references to *J.D.s* as inspiration to create a zine can also be found in the San Francisco-based *Fucktooth* (Screams 35), and *Outpunk* (1).

Records label owner and musician Donna Dresch, and Lookout Records founder Larry Livermore. *Homocore* zine not only covered and influenced an impressive number of Bay Area and West Coast queer-feminist punks but also connected bands and zine writers from far-flung places and beyond national borders, as local zines like *Homocore NYC* (Flanagin, *Girl-Love*) document.

Around 1988, a queer-feminist punk scene emerged in New York around the "Lower East Side Mecca *The World*, where the Sissified Sex Pistol threw *Rock 'n' Roll Fag Bar* on Tuesday" (Downey 24). New York locals Sharon Topper and Craig Flanagin formed their band God Is My Co-Pilot[36] in 1990. The two editors of the zine *Homocore NYC* were well connected with queer-feminist punks all over the US and their band project was frequently supported by a varying set of other New York-based musicians such as Fly, Daria Klotz, John Zorn, Jad Fair, Fredrik Haake and others.[37] Moreover, they influenced generations of queer-feminist punks such as the Skinjobs, whose name picks up a theme from God Is My Co-Pilot's song *Replicant*. An early Los Angeles-based queer-feminist punk was drag performer Vaginal Crème Davis. Davis, who refers to herself as "an originator of the homo-core punk movement and a gender-queer art-music icon" on her personal website, made a name for herself with her DIY zine *Fertile La Toyah Jackson Magazine*,[38] before she entered more deeply into punk music and history with the zine *Yes, Ms. Davis* and her various band projects. Starting her music career with the Afro Sisters around 1978, Davis has performed

36 God Is My Co-Pilot was probably named after the 1945 American propaganda film based on the autobiography of Robert Lee Scott, Jr., a United States Army Air Force pilot during World War II.

37 Their lyrics almost exclusively addressed themes of sexuality and gender, most of them in English with occasional lines in French, Yiddish, German, Finnish, and Turkish, among others. Their creative work between 1991 and 1999 encompasses more than 15 full-length albums, many singles, a compilation and several zines.

38 Vaginal Crème Davis' punk zine *Fertile La Toyah Jackson Magazine* (1982–1991) actually predated Jones' and LaBruce's zine by a couple of years. Drag performer Davis produced various zines during her long and ongoing career, including *Dowager* (1972–1975), *Crude* (1976–1980), *Shrimp* (1993) and *Yes, Ms. Davis* (1994), as well as *Sucker* (1995–1997).

with Cholita! The Female Menudo (where she played with punk legend Alicia Armendariz aka Alice Bag) from the 1980s on, as well as with the more recent Black Fag, who shares its name with another queer-feminist band from the Bay Area. The band that scholars have paid most attention to regarding the topic of queercore is Pedro, Muriel and Esther.[39] A more detailed discussion of Pedro, Muriel and Esther, its particular use of negative queer punk aesthetic and content with a focus on Vaginal Crème Davis is provided in chapter three. In the band Pedro, Muriel and Esther, Davis performed with Glen Meadmore, another of Los Angeles' provocative music and drag performance artists. Country punk Meadmore garnered media attention for his outrageous stage performances, which included getting naked and "stick[ing] a chicken head up his butt" (Ciminelli and Knox 77).

Around the same time that Meadmore and Davis appeared on punk stages, another fierce and furious punk band featuring queer themes entered Los Angeles' punk scene: Extra Fancy. Neither Extra Fancy's singer, Brian Grillo, who was the only gay member of the band, nor his bandmates identified with the label queercore (Ciminelli and Knox 19). Nevertheless, their music influenced many queercore musicians with their "particular variant of the hardcore" (Schwandt 77) style. Grillo was well-connected with queer-feminist punks like Ryan Revenge from the band Best Revenge and the independent label Spitshine Records, and the band's concerts attracted a committed queer-feminist fan community (Ciminelli and Knox 18–42). Furthermore, Extra Fancy's lyrics "explicitly and often graphically address male homosexuality," as musicologist Kevin Schwandt observed (77). Such lyrics intervened in the homophobic punk culture of Los Angeles and beyond. Interestingly, Extra Fancy continued to be a strong influence within the hardcore community despite their explicitly queer lyrics. They managed to do this through "[t]he exaggerated masculinity of Brian Grillo's performing image" (ibid. 89). Schwandt analyzed Grillo's performances of masculinity as

39 See Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 93–115.

> a unique sort of empowerment dependent upon the musical expression of a rough gay male sexuality. The musical deployment of this macho sexual self-fashioning […] conflates a conception of contemporary masculinity often discursively denied to gay men with an idealized sexual past in which queer machismo is perceived as having been self-consciously fostered. Grillo's sexuality becomes the musical source of a threatening, violent potential for resistance to homophobia. (ibid.)

Grillo's performances were successful interventions in hardcore scenes, where more ambiguous masculinities or femininities simply had no access. Moreover, Grillo offered an alternative form of queer and punk masculinity that was rarely represented in the gay lifestyle culture of that time. Nevertheless, his representation of masculinity also confirmed mainstream body images and gender roles.

One of the few queercore bands to reach audiences the size of football crowds were Pansy Division. According to his autobiography *Deflowered* (18), Pansy Division's initiator Jon Ginoli was inspired to form a pop-punk bank by the San Francisco zine *Homocore* and by *J.D.s*. Ginoli and Chris Freeman started Pansy Division in 1991,[40] and continued for 16 years until finally disbanding in 2007. Interestingly, Ginoli explicitly refers to his music as a form of queer activism in *Deflowered* (27). He had been looking for a form of activism that appealed to him during the late 1980s and early 1990s and had been part of ACT UP in San Francisco, but had become alienated from the movement by 1990. "[F]orming Pansy Division was [his] way of doing activism" (ibid.). In 1994, Pansy Division reached mainstream publicity when they toured with Green Day.[41] Pansy Division's music, though clearly

40 In 1996 drummer Luis Illades joined the band, followed by guitarist Joel Reader in 2004.

41 Green Day is a contemporary punk band from Berkeley, CA. They emerged from the Bay Area's radical political grassroots punk scenes and became world famous in 1994. Green Day's major label debut

emphasizing fun over punk rage and anger, always had a political and educational purpose. Their lyrics featured queer themes and they used their concerts and record releases to provide queer communities with important information. On their album *Deflowered,* for example, they released a list of contact addresses of gay youth groups around the US. Pansy Division went on multiple tours throughout the US, Canada and many places in Europe. They were well-connected with other queer-feminist bands like Tribe 8, and riot grrrl icons Bikini Kill. Ginoli describes his life with Pansy Division, the numerous tours, friendships and alliances with other queer-feminist punks, their connections to punk scenes in general, the different places they played, as well as the reactions of audiences and the press in his book *Deflowered*. His autobiographical book, written in the style of a diary, is a very important contribution to what Judith Jack Halberstam refers to as a queer archive (*In a Queer* 32–33). It exemplifies how aesthetics, sound, pleasure and politics are interwoven within queercore. Furthermore, it can be read as a documentation of the impact that this music with political content had on its protagonists, fans and sometimes opponents.

Equally important for the fast propagation of queer-feminist punk was the previously mentioned San Francisco-based Tribe 8. I will analyze Tribe 8's aesthetic and politics with a special focus on feminism in chapter five in detail. However, I first want to emphasize Tribe 8's key role within the queer-feminist punk movement. Founded in 1991, "San Francisco's own all-dyke, all-out, in-your-face, blade-brandishing, gang castrating, dildo swingin', bullshit-detecting, aurally pornographic, neanderthal-pervert band of patriarchy-smashing snatchlickers" (Breedlove qtd. in Wiese) caught an impressive amount of attention from fans, other musicians and many scholars from all over the world. In particular, singer Lynn

album *Dookie* sold over 10 million copies in the US alone. Their songs "American Idiot" and "Boulevard of Broken Dreams," released in 2005 have each been downloaded more than 100,000 times according to the Recording Industry Association of America (Web. 9 May 2012. <http://www.riaa.com/>).

Breedlove[42] and guitarist Leslie Mah, the only constant members of the band (which disbanded around 2005), were important figures in various queer-feminist scenes and punk movements. Mah began her punk career around 1984 with the band ASF (Anti-Scrutiny Faction) in Boulder, Colorado (Al Flipside), before she moved to San Francisco. Mah's strong connections to the queer-feminist punk movement can be seen in G.B. Jones' film *The Yo-Yo Gang*, where she and ASF member Tracie Thomas participated side by side with other early queercore musicians like Bruce LaBruce, Donna Dresch, and Deke Nihilson. Mah was not only a founding figure of queercore, but also one of the scene's important critics. She pointed to the whiteness of queer-feminist punk circles, where self-identified Asian-Americans—like Mah herself—were severely underrepresented. Together with her New York-based friends Margarita Alcantara-Tan, editor of the long-standing zine *Bamboo Girl*, and fellow queer-feminist punk musician Selena Wahng, she thematized the issues of race blindness and racism within queer-feminist scenes (Alcantara, Mah, and Wahng). In addition, Mah served as a role model for other bisexual and feminine punks within the general climate of rejecting femininity as well as heterosexuality.

One point of political consensus among all of these very diverse cultural products, as well as the broader queer punk rock scene, was a disagreement with assimilatory gay and lesbian politics, as well as the all too often lifestyle-oriented gay and lesbian subcultures. "Gay culture had gotten very boring and bourgeois, so they needed an alternative," as Bruce LaBruce (qtd. in Thibault) put it. In an interview for the gay magazine *Oasis*, Bruce LaBruce

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42 Lynn Breedlove continued her/m queer-feminist punk politics in her/m books and the stand-up comedy show *One Freak Show: Less Rock, More Hilarity*. S/he also hosted Kvetch, a queer open mic night, and a radio show called *Unka Lynnee Show*, "a two hour cavalcade of queer hits throughout the ages, liberally sprinkled with Breedlove's comic feminist and trans theory" (Breedlove), on the community radio PirateCatRadio in San Francisco. In 2003, s/he organized The Old Skool New Skool Project, "monthly events teaming first and second generation women's music stars" (Breedlove).

recalls why many young people could relate to punk politics in the late 1980s:

> It was a very active and political movement […] very much based on style […]. It was a way for kids to express their difference in more ways than just the sexual act. […] Punk came from a very gay-identified place to begin with (punk was the prison slang for a passive homosexual, and then later became associated with juvenile delinquents), and the early days of punk in the seventies were very much about sexual revolution and difference. (LaBruce qtd. in Thibault)

As LaBruce mentions in this quote, one important feature of punk rock for queer feminists was its style, especially punk's rhetoric. Punks used a particularly extreme language to reject the existing sociopolitical systems and culture surrounding and supporting them. The lyrics from Destroy's[43] song *Burn This Racist System Down* "Anarchy, Punk, Chaos, DESTROY! / Louder, faster, louder, faster […] Fuck you I'm punk, Fuck you!" are a good example of punks' anti-social style. The "Fuck you" rhetoric represents the typical language conventions of punk, and "louder, faster," speak to the musical style, the high energetic performances, the screamed vocals, emphasis on drums, etc.

2.1.1. "Let Me Dirty Up Your Mind":[44] The Politics and Language of Negativity

Tavia Nyong'o ("Do You") and Judith Jack Halberstam ("The Politics"; "The Anti-Social") have demonstrated in various examples ranging from the Sex Pistols to Patti Smith that expressions of

43 Destroy! was a punk band from Minneapolis from 1988 to 1994. Their song "Burn the Racist System Down" was first released on the 7-inch EP of the same title on Havoc Records.

44 Garbage. "Queer." *Absolute Garbage*. Limited Edition. Geffen, 2006. CD.

negativity have always been a signifier of punk rock. While the Sex Pistols used strategies of rejection and insult, Patti Smith "ream[ed] the subject position of 'antisocial rebel' and its associated death drive; and, rather than accept the guilt with which the pervert and the rebel are saddled by the social order, she assert[ed] her radical innocence"—reformulating "childhood innocence" into "adult perversity" (Nyong'o, "Do You" 105). Nevertheless, negativity was at play in both cases. The public media certainly jumped on this particular aspect of punk rock, thereby ensuring that the negativity associated with punk would endure in the social memory until today. Punk historians like Greil Marcus have documented the public outcry and moral panic that bands caused, with the Sex Pistols leading the way. In *Lipstick Traces* Greil Marcus recalls that the Sex Pistols were debated as a danger to British culture and society in the newspapers as well as in the British Parliament (16). And the British public was right: it was exactly British society and culture at which the Sex Pistols were aiming their critique, the "shitstem" as Johnny Rotten from the Sex Pistols called it (Malott and Peña 26). THE signifier for the rejection of society and its norms was "No Future," which was first used by the Sex Pistols in *God Save The Queen* and influenced generations of punks. Interestingly, the theorist best known for anti-social queer theory today, Lee Edelman, used this punk phrase for his popular book *No Future*. Although he rejected Halberstam's linkage between his book's title and punk's central phrase, this reference is nevertheless very useful. Moreover, as the following example from the early 1990s punk band God Is My Co-Pilot[45] shows, queer-feminist punks sometimes used the same language that Edelman used in his famous book years before he did. God Is My Co-Pilot's lyrics in their song *Queer Disco,* "We're here we're queer we're going to fuck your children," and "I kill kids" from their song *I Kill Kids* show remarkable similarities to Lee Edelman's rhetoric in *No Future.* Indeed, the most famous expression from his book,

45 God Is My Co-Pilot's productions and politics are discussed in detail in chapter three.

"Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; […] fuck the poor innocent kid on the Net," (29) would make a pretty good punk song.

Before discussing the direct relations between queerness—especially in Edelman's work—and punk rock, I will briefly elaborate on punk's negativity going back to the origins of the punk movements of the late 1970s. According to Halberstam, the Sex Pistols "used the refrain 'no future' to reject a formulaic union of nation, monarchy, and fantasy" ("The Politics" 824). Addressing Halberstam, Edelman argues that the Sex Pistols' expression of negativity is, in fact, not negativity at all. Their phrase "No Future," he argues, actually means "We're the future" (Edelman, "Antagonism" 822). However, while Edelman disqualifies this expression of "material political concerns as crude and pedestrian, as already a part of the conjuring of futurity that his project must foreclose" (ibid.), scholars like Judith Jack Halberstam and José Muñoz acknowledge punk's negativity and ascribe a certain surplus value to it. The political background nurturing punk rock's negativity in the late 1970s and early 1980s, specifically in a US-American context, were the Cold War and neoconservatism. Under Ronald Reagan's presidency (1981–1989), governmental politics shifted from being democratic and human rights oriented to social neoconservatism and economic neoliberalism[46] (Harvey 9). While public and state discourses produced images of US superiority, progress and freedom, the country's severe energy and economic crisis started to affect middle-class US-Americans. The contradiction between the political propaganda of US futurity and progress and lived experience enraged many punks, as Jon Ginoli, founder of one of the first homocore bands Pansy Division, describes in his autobiography

46 Neoliberalism is "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. […] The state has to guarantee […] the integrity of money. It must […] set up those military, defence, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets" (Harvey 9–10).

Deflowered about his high school experience (8). Reagan's politics, his anti-communist language and actions, his hard line against labor unions, as well as his massive investments in the US military made non-conformist thinkers feel alienated from the US state, culture and society. Moreover, the shift of wealth distribution through Reagan's politics affected the social architecture of many US cities. In Washington, DC, or Los Angeles, for example, the city centers became increasingly poorer as the white middle-class moved out to the suburbs. Poverty, no-tolerance policies against crime and a renewed US patriotism supported white hegemony, xenophobia and racialization (Spade 34). Many young people, especially in urban centers, became increasingly angry and did not see a positive perspective or future (Armendariz, *Violence* 45). Punk rock, and the scenes and circles it emerged from, offered a valve for anger and frustration.[47] Queer non-conformists were inspired by punk ideas and ethics, aesthetics and performative formats. In particular, the signification of cultural rejection and the anti-social aspect of punk made queer feminists adapt punk style for their activism. Moreover, early punk's damnation of social norms and values not seldomly included an explicit rejection of heteronormativity. Queer-feminist punks, like Jones and LaBruce ("Don't Be Gay"), as well as Vaginal Davis (*Yes, Ms.*), actually built their queer-feminist punk politics on references to 1970s punks, building an amazing archive of early punk rock through their zines and lyrics. They refer especially to the New York punks or pre-punks performing in the late 1970s like The New York Dolls, musicians like Patti Smith and Lenny Kay, Jane County from Wayne County and the Electric Chairs, as well as the famous Ramones and of course the Sex Pistols. An important role model for queercore as well as for riot grrrls were London's X-Ray Spex.

To understand the negativity associated with punk rock, it is important to emphasize that the musicians as well as historians of punk tend to see the emergence of punk aesthetics, style and cultural politics as a very loud and aggressive, anti-social statement

47 See Armendariz, *Violence* 7; Spitz and Mullen 48.

by outsiders of society. The Jewish punk theorist Steven Beeber, who documented the Jewish origins of New York City's early punks, describes the punk scene of New York as follows: "It was a celebration of the degenerate (as Hitler termed Jewish art), the sick […], and the alienated […], not to mention the socially outrageous […]" (8). Statements like Beeber's influenced musicians' and fans' self-understanding, other theorists' perception of punk rock, as well as the take on punk in more mainstream cultures. José Muñoz, for example, documented that the general cultural meaning of punk as a self-empowering strategy and a repulsion of mainstream society through verbal, visual or sound-related forms of negativity, aggression, or anger inspired him to adapt punk music. "Punk made my own suburban quotidian existence radical and experimental," Muñoz explains, "—so experimental that I could imagine and eventually act on queer desire" (*Cruising* 105).

2.1.2. "This Faggot Could Beat Your Fuckin' Ass":[48] The Becoming of Queer-Feminist Punk Politics

The embrace of the outsider status conveniently fits into queer activists' rejection of a politics of victimization as well as of a neoliberal tolerance or assimilationist minority policies (Driver 5). Hence, queer feminists saw multiple and very concrete intersections between the terms and concepts queer and punk, in addition to the general association with "otherness" or "difference," as referred to by Muñoz or Beeber. While queer meant odd or unusual and was used for homosexuals and others with non-normative genders and sexualities, in the twentieth century punk signified "the bottom in a male-male sexual relationship," and later on "a worthless person," or "a juvenile delinquent, young petty criminal or trouble-maker" (Colegrave and Sullivan 11). The tactics of shocking, getting even with the rules of good taste and self-references using (former) terms of abjection was a punk tactic

48 Scott Free qtd. in Shapiro (capitalization added).

long before queer emerged on the scene. Such tactics, as well as the cultural productions as such, were understood as political activism.

Before delving further into the history of queer-feminist punk rock, it is necessary to show in detail which forms and expressions of negativity punk rock communicates both aesthetically and politically, and how they relate to the term and concept of queerness. I will do so by briefly tracing punk's and queer's negativity back to the origin of both concepts and by giving a short overview of how queer-feminist punks at various historic moments referred to those roots and queer-punk intersections themselves. Furthermore, I will look into some theorizations on punk rock and queerness by queer theorists to place my research within the broader theoretical field and talk about my background.

Queer-feminist punks started using the term queer around 1985, when mainstream "[p]eople weren't saying 'queer' quite yet. It was just coming together, as far as language and what totems were invoked," recalls Steve LaFreniere, member of Toronto's queer-feminist punk community (qtd. in Rathe 2). Queer-feminist punks played a key role in defining the term queer within radical countercultures and activism. They did not just start to use queer, but provided their community with their personal definitions of the term. Editor Craig Flanagin, for example, gives a short definition of queer and queercore in the form of a dictionary entry on the cover of the second issue of *Homocore NYC* from 1992: "Queer/'kwer/adj 1 a: fabulous; fierce (cf. fierce pussy); b: admirable; Homocore n 1: Queer Punk Rock; adj 1: punker than fuck; fucker than punk". Interestingly, Flanagin defined queer in close relation to the term punk. One reason for defining queer as such was to appeal to his primary readership: other punks. His amalgamation of the terms queer and punk, however, also goes back to the previously mentioned documentation of the queer-feminist punk alliance of the 1980s, the *Maximumrocknroll* article by Jones and LaBruce in 1989. Jones and LaBruce introduced a dictionary entry for the word punk, emphasizing its former use to describe homosexuals as well as its meaning of prisoners in their article.

"[P]unk is," they propose, "also an archaic word for dried wood used as tinder, the original meaning of the word 'faggot' as well. Homosexuals, witches, criminals, all denounced as enemies of the state, were once burned at the stake. The word for the material used to set them on fire became another name for the victims themselves" (Jones and LaBruce, "Don't Be Gay"). Regardless of whether their explanation of punk's etymology is accurate or not, it emphasizes punk as a derogatory term. Moreover, their view of queer with punk both as "enemies of the state" is relevant, and not only because their article came to be seen as a foundational act among later queer-feminist punks (Ciminelli and Knox 7). Reacting to the maleness of the hardcore punk scene as well as to the commercialized and totally segregated gay and lesbian scenes, Jones and LaBruce redefined, or rather particularized the term queer to appropriate it for their politics. For example, by emphasizing the sexual qualities and meanings of the word "punk," they draw attention to the anti-social meanings of the word "queer."

A more recent example of the use of the linguistic references between the word queer and punk can be found in the songs of the Canadian band Skinjobs.[49] I will analyze some of Skinjobs' songs in detail in the following section because they are a very representative example of anti-social queer punk politics. Moreover, they exemplify the continuation of the anti-social meaning production of the terms queer and punk under changing economic, political and social conditions. Throughout the song "Burn Your Rainbow" the Skinjobs emphasize the violating and pejorative qualities of both the word queer as well as punk. Although queer continues to be used as a derogatory term, such uses are ignored within the gay and lesbian subculture as well as in large parts of the new millennium's queer movements. Moreover, parallel to its derogatory use, queer is used as an affirmative identity category for LGBT by an increasing number of people today. With

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49 The Skinjobs were a Canadian band belonging to the *Queer Punk Collective* of Vancouver. The band existed from 2001 to 2006 and included singer Mitch Fury, Mason Newlove on guitar, and drummer Lee Hendon. They released their only album *Burn Your Rainbow* in 2002.

passages like "We're punk as fuck and fuck like punks" the Skinjobs, however, draw a line between the formerly negative use of the word queer to that of the word punk, which was or still is used for instance to insult someone, e.g., like "gay" in African American slang according to Tavia Nyong'o ("Punk'd" 21). Moreover,

> [a]s James Chance bluntly informs viewers of Don Letts's recent documentary "Punk: Attitude" (2003), "originally punk meant, you know, a guy in prison who got fucked up the ass. And that's still what it means to people in prisons." […] That Chance could announce his definition as a ribald revelation suggests […] that the subterranean linkages between punk and queer are as frequently disavowed as they are recognized. This suggests that […] there is also a […] furtive set of transactions between queer and punk that is hidden […] in plain sight. (Nyong'o, "Do You" 107)

The Skinjobs take up these discourses. They understand the affirmative appropriation of formerly pejorative words and the conscious use of anti-social behavior as an important intersection between queer and punk. Understanding that punks as well as queers chose terms as self-designation from a repertoire originally used for their defamation, they translate this knowledge into their songs. The Skinjobs' lyrics mark the intersection between punk and queer on a semantic level. In addition, they identify processes of resignification throughout history. The Skinjobs emphasize that the term punk, as well as queer, went through a semantic change throughout the decades, a quality that makes it perfect for the appropriation by individuals and groups who are looking for a term to mark their identities and at the same time stress identitarian flexibility. Nyong'o stresses, however, that the meanings of the term got "frozen" in specific contexts at certain times and it became used as a tool to oppress individuals or groups. At these historic moments, the surplus meanings of the term were eclipsed in favor of one single meaning. Furthermore,

these discriminatory meanings never fully vanished. They are still part of the term punk (or queer) even though they are no longer as common. In specific contexts, these surplus and "derogatory" meanings appear quite visibly as Nyong'o has shown according to Afro-American slang use where punk(ed) designates male homosexuality "associated with extreme forms of unfreedom [...] imprisonment, slavery and rape" (Nyong'o, "Punk'd" 22).

When the Skinjobs sing "we fuck like punks," they refer to those meanings of punk. They address the derogatory meanings of the terms punk and queer to provoke. The politics of provocation has always been used by punks. Similarly to punk, the emergence of the queer movement in the US was first and foremost a provocation and not a social movement fighting for civil rights. That an affirmation of queer might still have the potential to provoke is indicated by the derogatory use of the term queer today. Most terms denoting non-normative sexualities or genders within the English language—gay, faggot, queer, sissy, etc.—are still used with derogatory or hateful meanings and in derogatory or hateful ways. In addition, drawing on queer as a negative term places contemporary queer-feminist punk in the tradition of queer activism and politics of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Queer activism arose in the mid-1980s as a reaction to assimilationist gay politics that focused exclusively on "the rights of gays to fit in, shop, marry, and join the army" (Shepard 513). "Queer activists challenged this line of thinking, railing against the cultural erasure of assimilation" (ibid.).[50] Moreover, it was a reaction to a new production of queer-identified individuals as political targets within mainstream culture. Homosexuality and queerness within mainstream culture was assigned new meanings through some popular anti-gay advocates during the HIV/AIDS crisis.[51]

HIV/AIDS was first mentioned in the public press in 1981 under the name GRID, which meant "gay-related immune disease" (Brown and Perry 34). Medical institutions, experts and officials

50 Cf. also Ritchie 263.

51 See Murphy, Ruiz, and Serlin 1.

concerned about HIV/AIDS focused exclusively on gay men back then. The media happily adopted this sentiment of homosexual men as the only carriers of the virus, and orchestrated a worldwide panic around HIV/AIDS. These one-sided discourses in the public media and institutions led to the stigmatization and pathologization of gay men in the public eye, regardless of whether they were deceased or not (Padilla 39). Furthermore, the "federal government inaction on that crisis dramatized the oppression of homosexuals" (ibid.). Newspapers and neoconservatist advocates fostered a new wave of gay-hate rhetoric that had previously been restricted to conservative hardliners. An early, but significant example of such gay-hate rhetoric was Anita Bryant's[52] "notorious 1977 "Save Our Children' campaign"[53] (Murphy, Ruiz, and Serlin 1). Bryant became a "pop icon" (2) for her anti-gay propaganda and the new, very exclusionary version of American nationalism. "The brand of antigay politics perfected by Bryant and practiced by her followers in the late 1970s has proven more resilient perhaps than even Bryant herself could have imagined," Kevin P. Murphy, Jason Ruiz, and David Serlin note. "Three decades later, the homophobic rhetoric that Bryant's campaign catapulted into public discourse in the United States remains immensely influential among social conservatives and their constituencies" (Murphy, Ruiz, and Serlin 2).

Although Bryant may stand for many groups and politics during the late 1970s and early 1980s, I want to focus on her specific rhetoric. It is exactly this rhetoric that queer activists, theorists as well as queer-feminist punks reacted against. Furthermore, as Murphy et al. suggest, Bryant's famous assertion "I know that homosexuals cannot biologically reproduce children, […] therefore, they must recruit our children" (Bryant qtd. in Murphy, Ruiz, and

52 Anita Jane Bryant is a US-American pop-country and folk singer, and former Miss Oklahoma beauty pageant winner. She had multiple hits during the late 1950s and the 1960s, and used her popularity and public attention for her anti-homosexuality propaganda.

53 Bryant's campaign "led to the repeal of a civil rights ordinance protecting gay and lesbian employees from discrimination in Dade County, Florida" (Murphy, Ruiz, and Serlin 1) in the late 1970s.

Serlin 2) epitomizes the neoliberal and conservative political discourse, "influencing everything from Bill Clinton's 1996 signing of the Defense of Marriage Act to the bully pulpit tactics of Rev. Fred Phelps and his organization Focus on the Family to the meager allocation of federal dollars and local resources for HIV/AIDS education and prevention" (Bryant qtd. in Murphy, Ruiz, and Serlin 3).

The increasingly homophobic and xenophobic public discourse around HIV/AIDS, the fundamental disagreement with assimilationist lesbian and gay identity politics, as well as the experiences of homophobia and misogyny within punk circles motivated people and groups to pick up punk's politics and appropriate its aesthetic forms to articulate their anger and frustration.[54] "All of the horribleness of Toronto compelled us to react against it in every possible way. It pushed us to this breaking point" says G.B. Jones about that time (qtd. in Krishtalka). Interestingly, they took up the anti-gay rhetoric and hate speech to foster their politics.

I want to emphasize again that the notions of sexuality and gender that queer-feminist punks used for their activism were anti-identitarian and explicitly directed against sexuality and gender politics within gay and lesbian communities, gay rights movements, lesbian-separatist autonomous groups as well as mainstream discourses. Like the activist groups Gay Activist's Alliances (ACT UP) (Ritchie 262–263) and Queer Nation (Klapeer 30), queer-feminist punks appropriated the term queer as a provocation or intervention of gay and lesbian assimilationist politics as well as hardcore punk. Like queer theorists, they understood the concept of sexuality and gender as a socially constructed "activity performed" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 1), rather than naturally determined.[55] Accordingly, gender as well as sexuality were understood as fluid and changeable and as categories that cannot describe a person's entire identity. The derogatory term queer[56]

54 See Ginoli; Jones and LaBruce, *J.D.s* 1 to 5.

55 See Butler, *Gender Trouble*; *Bodies That Matter*; *Undoing Gender*.

56 For the derogatory usage of "queer" during the 1980s and 1990s see Halperin 339; Shepard; Brontsema 2.

seemed culturally defined enough to distinguish between the different non-normative sexualities, identities, sexes, and genders. Additionally, it seemed fluid enough to become redefined as a critique, as well as to question social norms and values. Queer, in other words, seemed appropriate to intervene and communicate criticism, while simultaneously giving non-normative sexualities and genders visibility. During the late 1990s, however, the term queer increasingly lost its derogatory meanings within the mainstream and became used for gay and lesbian identity politics. Groups like the Human Rights Campaign in the US, indiscriminately used queer as an "umbrella term" for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgenders (Ritchie 264). Queer-feminist punk communities tried to work against this usurpation and hold on to a more provocative and radical notion of queerness.

Queer-feminist punks underscore the flexibility of the term queer and its anarchic character as a paradoxical reference. Moreover, the meaning of queerness within many queer-feminist punk lyrics is negativity. This negativity corresponds with the word punk, as well as with its aesthetic forms: the shouting, high volume, speed and emphasis on drums. This negativity is also reflected on the social and sociopolitical level in the form of criticism and rejection. A reflection on all these factors in their combination—the multiple negative connotations of queerness in the lyrics, the aggressiveness of the performances and sound, as well as the often unspecific or universal signification of punk as *anti-everything*, suggests that the label queer itself is an "anti-label" (Ritchie 270) for queer-feminist punk activists. The queer theorist Judith Jack Halberstam described this encounter with queer as an "anti-social turn" ("The Anti-Social"). The notion of politics in queer-feminist punk activism was not limited to institutions or the public sphere. Appropriation of the negative notion of the term queer and punk also came with a general rejection of politics within any existing institutionalized social or political system, hierarchical structured organization, the nation or state.[57] For

57 Cf. Dreher 42; Ritchie 270.

example, in issue 5 of *J.D.s*, Mark Dreher states that "Homosexuals ARE enemies of the state!" (42). Queer-feminist punks like Dreher rigorously reject hegemonic power. However, they also analyze this form of power closely from an intersectional perspective. In addition, they understand their own entanglement within oppressive power structures. Accordingly, a single focus on sexuality for their politics and action was seen as counterproductive because it reproduced the exclusions of (other) oppressed groups. Instead, queer-feminist punks focus on the connections between homophobia, transphobia, sexism, racism, and discrimination on the grounds of categories like class. Examples of such an intersectional analysis can be found in every issue of *J.D.s*, but also in most other queercore zines, like *Outpunk*, *Homocore NYC* or *Yes, Ms. Davis*, which include autobiographical reports from prisoners as well as analyses of racism and homophobia.

However, queer-feminist punk did not and still does not have a firm political agenda in the strict sense. Its methods are fluid and playful. A representative example is the song "Recruiting"[58] by the Skinjobs. In their song, the Skinjobs play with fears and myths about queers: "Put the fear back in queer tell all your friends that we're recruiting!" "Recruiting" as Mitch Fury explains,

> is a kind of a sarcastic jest for people who are living in fear in this world—the conservative right wing of society—and who are saying that, […] their sons and daughters are going to get recruited by whatever queer culture they imagine is out there. We figure, if they think that way, let's give it to them—let's put their worst fears into a song and make them cringe. (Fury qtd. in Ciminelli and Knox 89)

Fury's comment emphasizes the negative connotations of the words queer and punk. In addition to self-identification with the

58 The song was inspired by a poster of the Vancouver-based lesbian activist group Lesbian Avengers announcing the slogan "Lesbian Avengers. We're Recruiting" (Ciminelli and Knox 89).

derogatory meaning of queer, in "Recruiting" it is used as an insult as shown in the lines "I'm queer, you're queer / and your brother's so queer / I saw him after the football game sniffing jock-straps!" This quality is also emphasized by Mitch Fury's lascivious and moaned pronounciation of the word.

In the song "Hands In The Air," which is a montage of Jesse Heiwa's essay "In Defense of 'Queer'" (Ciminelli and Knox 91) published in 1998, the Skinjobs address punk rock as a musical style. With this very energetic song, they once again draw on on the connection to early punk icons and the roots of punk when they sing, "the heavy metal dude into Clash and Motley [sic] Crüe gave a little advice to me: He said 'anyone can meddle with the bass and the treble but sex will make them Stop and stare.'" The message that "anyone can meddle" alludes to punk's rejection of the rock'n'roll and glam rock style of the 1970s, which was seen as being too spectacular, sophisticated and arty. Moreover, it also hints at the DIY character of punk. Once again, this passage also mentions sexuality and its shock value. By referring to Mötley Crüe's giving of punk "advice," although the band was clearly a glam-metal band, adding the line "Everybody's talkin' 'bout the new sound, funny but it's still rock'n'roll to me," the Skinjobs also bring up the intensely debated issue of whether punk rock is an offspring of rock'n'roll. In their song "Peep Show Love," they refer to the "shocking" potential of sexuality once more. They use the image of gay sex work and "dirty language" and relate this to punk in the lines "under the red neon Glory holes, buddy booths / punks unite as one Latex, and leather." By connecting punk to sex work, they not only question the heteronormative model of "true love" and satirize gay male culture but also relate the term punk to the meaning of sexuality as a destructive force and negativity again. This is also emphasized by the very fast tempo of the song, which is more screamed than sung.

As these brief analyses of some representative queercore examples have shown, queer-feminist punks do stress and visualize a notion of punk that, like queerness, signifies a deviation from the social norm. Both terms—queer and punk—represent

negativity and their negative cultural meanings are emphasized. Accordingly, the historic or contemporary uses of the labels as discriminatory are referred to. In so doing, queer punk activists really participate in what queer theorist Judith Jack Halberstam described as the "Anti-Social Turn in Queer Theory" ("The Anti-Social"). Appropriation of the negative notion of the terms queer and punk goes hand in hand with a general rejection of a political stance that seeks inclusion in hegemonic social or political systems, like hegemonic organizations, nations or states (see Ritchie 270). With respect to such civil rights oriented politics, queer punks' definition of politics is similar to that of the Second Wave Women's Movement, which views all of life (or everyday life) and every action as political. Queer-feminist punk music, style and performances are understood as political activism on two levels: "It is at once destructive (actively resisting and subverting the dominant system) and creative," producing alternative forms of belonging, as Jen Angel, editor of the early 1990s zine *Fucktooth* and of *Maximumrocknroll*, explains (qtd. in Screams 36).

2.1.3. Anti-Social Theory and/in Punk Rock

It needs to be emphasized again that the experience of homophobia and hatred against non-normative individuals and groups addressed in the concept of queer was the reason for queer activists and theorists to take up the term in the first place. When Queer Nation decided to use the term queer, they did so because it was "the most popular vernacular term of abuse for homosexuals" (Dynes 191). For queer activists, using the term was "a way of reminding [queers] how [they] are perceived by the rest of the world" (Kaplan 36). Taking up the term queer was a provocation against assimilationist and identitarian gay and lesbian politics as well as activism against homophobia. The aim was not to win support or approval through heteronormative hegemony or to fight for equal rights for an oppressed minority, but rather a rejection of a civil rights model of political activity (Duggan 16).

A decade after the initiation of an emancipatory use of the term queer, anti-social queer theory academics and activism echoed this initial motive by taking up psychoanalytic concepts of sexuality. Leo Bersani's publication *Homos* in 1995 was crucial for the extensive corpus of work on anti-social queer theory that exists today. Following queer psychoanalytic approaches, Leo Bersani suggested in his book that sex in general and "homosex," in particular, need to be understood as anti-communicative, anti-identitarian and destructive (cf. Bersani, *Homos*). Moreover, "the value of sexuality itself […] is to demean the seriousness of efforts to redeem it" (Bersani qtd. in Halberstam, "The Politics" 823). The theorist who most significantly influenced this discourse with his understanding of queer as a negative, anti-social term that goes beyond borders and disciplines is Lee Edelman in his book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Edelman takes up Bersani's psychoanalytic assertion that the sexual instinct is distinct from sexual desire. The sexual instinct is seen as a converging force towards destruction of the self, which is described as the death drive. Edelman argues that sexuality can only get "saved" from its self-destructing, irritating qualities and integrated into the symbolic order by attaching its meaning and purpose to reproduction. One effect and certainly a consequence of this "rescue project" is that queerness according to this logic can only signify the opposite of creation and reproduction, "the place of the social order's death drive" (Edelman, *No Future* 3). Interwoven with this argument is the concept of "futurity" (ibid.). The future of society, which is the meaning and goal of every political action, according to Edelman, is always visualized through the imaginary "child" (ibid.). Therefore, "the queer subject […] has been bound epistemologically to negativity, to nonsense, to antiproduction, to unintelligibility […]" (Halberstam, "The Politics" 823).

Though Edelman took the title of his book from the repertoire of early punk rock, he repudiates any correspondence between punk and his thesis, despite the insistence of his colleagues, like Halberstam ("The Politics"; "The Anti-Social") or Nyong'o ("Do You") that queer was always a part of punk from the beginning. Moreover, he

ignores the existence of a relatively broad scene of queer punks today, who perform a negative, irritating, self-destructive, aggressive and paradoxical aesthetic. Although the examples presented here focus on sexual politics, it needs to be emphasized again that queer-feminist punks focus on the connections between homophobia, transphobia, sexism, racism, and discrimination on the grounds of categories like class. Moreover, they foregrounded explicitly feminist politics, as the following collection of queer-feminist punk examples will show.

2.2. "Feminists We're Calling You, Please Report to the Front Desk":[59] The New Wave of Queer Punk Feminism during the 1990s

Although queercore and homocore included feminist politics from the time the anti-patriarchy band Fifth Column and *J.D.s* came on the scene, I want to emphasize that around 1991 a new wave of radical feminism emerged within and outside the queercore punk communities. The term for these decidedly radical feminist punk politics was riot grrrl. I will explain the feminist politics as well as the connection between riot grrrl and other queer-feminist punk groups in chapter five in detail. However, I want to briefly analyze the connections between riot grrrl and queercore at this point to contextualize the sociopolitical structures and micropolitics of the broader queer-feminist punk context during the 1990s. Moreover, the intersection between the two helps make sense of the specific punk politics at play and their use of terminology and labels. Young female-identified punks came up with the term riot grrrl during the 1990s as a reaction against the misogyny within hardcore punk scenes. Many self-identified riot grrrls, like Donna Dresch, for example, also used the term queercore as a

59 "Feminists we're calling you, please report to the front desk" is a line from the song *FYR* by Le Tigre released on Mr. Lady records in 2001 (capitalization added).

self-referent. This does not mean that the two terms were interchangeable, but the alternating use of both terms rather speaks to the refusal of queer-feminist punks to understand identity as stagnant or based on one single category. Self-identification as riot grrrl or queercore, I argue, needs to be understood in the context of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls "strategic essentialism," "a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (Spivak, "Subaltern Studies" 214).

Musicians like Gina Young[60] explain their use of the labels queercore and riot grrrl as a form of self-empowerment. "[I]f I don't take the power of definition into my own hands, other people will do it for me," Young emphasizes. "They then have the power to assume I'm a lesbian and comment on it in a derogatory way, or to assume I'm straight because heteronormativity prevails, and then silence [me] repeatedly and violently. I won't give away the power to define myself" (qtd. in Ciminelli and Knox 119). The political context that provided the background for use of the particular term riot grrrl were national debates around abortion that provoked a new wave of feminist actions, as Sara Marcus (73) emphasizes in her analysis of the emergence of the term riot grrrl. The Supreme Court had decided to continue "banning federally funded clinics from discussing abortion" (S. Marcus 73) in May 1991 and thousands rallied at the pro-choice March for Women's Lives in April 1992. Bill Clinton's candidacy for president and his decidedly pro-choice campaign fueled the media debates around women's rights. Queer-feminist punks discussed these topics extensively.[61] They understood misogyny and homophobia as structurally created and made a connection between national politics and their

60 Gina Young, Kathi Ko, Tracy Dicktracy and Kelly Addison started the queer-feminist band Gina Young and the Bent in New York in 2002.

61 Cf. Kaia Wilson qtd. in Ciminelli and Knox 182. Wilson, who played in Team Dresch and later in The Butchies, is another very significant example of a person transgressing the boundaries of political labels. Wilson is best known for riot grrrl politics, despite the fact that her politics were always radically queer. One of those examples is the Butchies' recent NC Pride show at The Pinhook in Durham, NC, where they performed with local bands like Pink Flag in September 2011.

personal experiences in the early 1990s. Misogyny and homophobia within the mainstream as well as punk communities made them angry and they started to look for places where they could articulate their dissatisfaction (S. Marcus 78). A good example of intersectional, angry queer-feminist punk writing that makes the connection between national politics and structural oppression that influences her own experience is Anna Joy Springer's[62] most recent publication, in which she documents some of her personal letters from the year 1992:

> [T]his [is a] fucked-up country. I don't care about Clinton and all his promises. He's a benign smiling self-seeking wannabe patriarch, which may be even worse than being an outright disgusting creep like Bush. I want to move someplace where everyone gets to go to the doctor when they're hurt and everyone gets to go to school and where the people think art is important. (Springer 87)

Springer connects national politics, from the president to the welfare system and the education complex, to social structures and the struggles of everyday life.

Coming back to the intersection between queer and riot grrrl politics, I want to emphasize Donna Dresch's key role in queer-feminist punk rock as a whole. Dresch was very significant for the emergence and especially the dissemination of the term queercore and riot grrrl in San Francisco and later in Olympia, Washington, and Portland, Oregon. She started publishing the queer-feminist punk zine *Chainsaw* in the late 1980s and created an independent record label with the same name in 1991. *Chainsaw*

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62 Springer used to be lead singer and songwriter for the influential punk band Blatz that came out of the 924 Gilman Street Project in Berkeley, CA. Her records were released on Lookout! alongside other queer-feminist bands like The Yeastie Girlz. She also participated in the bands The Gr'ups and Cypher in the Snow. Today she works as associate professor of literature at the University of California at San Diego.

Records produced bands like Heavens to Betsy, Excuse Seventeen and The Need, who became popular as riot grrrls. In addition, *Chainsaw* produced records by bands like Sleater-Kinney and Third Sex that were most influential in queer communities. Moreover, Dresch's own musical punk politics, although definitely feminist, were also outspokenly queer. Team Dresch's lyrics deal predominantly with the topics of coming out, lesbian relationships and societal homophobia. Dresch also played in G.B. Jones' queer-feminist band Fifth Column, as well as in Screaming Trees, Dinosaur Jr., and Dangermouse, before she grouped with Jody Bleyle and Kaia Wilson to form Team Dresch.

The fact that most of the early queer-feminist punks—riot grrrls and queercore identified—were well-connected and very mobile meant that these individuals transported the political atmosphere from places like Washington, DC to politically more quiet areas like Olympia, WA, or Berkeley, CA.[63] Moreover, within this widespread network of politically interested punks, other outraged people, like LaBruce and Jones in Canada, found punks willing to engage in discussions and punk politics. These discussions took place through meetings like festivals, workshops or concerts, but also through lyrics and, most importantly, in zine writings, which were distributed through mail. Frequently, police and national security investigations, or customs regulations, especially in the case of mail orders between Canada and the US, complicated these distributions as numerous issues of *Homocore*, *J.D.s* and autobiographical writings report.[64] The public's increased interest in riot grrrl feminism and similar movements drew attention to the possibilities of DIY music as a means of feminist and queer political activism and the different riot grrrl-identified groups provided spaces and distribution to queer-feminist punks. I want to emphasize again that for some parts of the early 1990s riot grrrl and queercore not only emerged from the same spaces but were actually mostly one and the same movement.

63 See Ginoli; Ciminelli and Knox; S. Marcus.

64 See Ginoli.

Jody Bleyle, for example, expressed this view saying that "[i]n the '90s queercore and riot grrrl scenes were so intertwined," and that riot grrrl was really "a very strong part of where queercore came from" (qtd. in Ciminelli and Knox 142). Bleyle's bandmate Donna Dresch, for example, was not only playing in queercore bands and releasing riot grrrl albums but also working with Jon Ginoli from Pansy Division at the record store Rough Trade (Ginoli 17). Ginoli's bandmate Chris Freeman was friends with Lynn Breedlove (ibid. 44), and most riot grrrl and queercore bands shared stages or hosted each other in their hometowns. One of the most important distributors of queer-feminist punk knowledge and the best-connected person today is Matt Wobensmith. When Wobensmith came to San Francisco in 1991, he started participating in Jennings' *Homocore* zine and continued to connect queer-feminist punk bands and ideas through his own zine project *Outpunk*. Again, the role that zines like *Outpunk* played at that time in terms of connecting people and bands from all over the US and beyond cannot be overestimated. Wobensmith's declared aim was to provide documentation about the fluid and steadily growing scene (Wobensmith, *Outpunk 6*), especially its politics. "It became an attempt to define what the whole queercore scene was politically," he recalls in an interview (Ciminelli and Knox 15). He continued this effort not only by donating material to The Fales Library's *The Riot Grrrl Collection* but also by running *Goteblüd*, a vintage and back issue zine archive in San Francisco. With his column in *Maximumrocknroll*, he introduced queer-feminist punk to a broader audience, while addressing homophobia and sexism in punk communities. Besides his writing, Wobensmith provided an additional support network for queer musicians with his record label *Outpunk*, which released songs and albums by a variety of queer-feminist bands and riot grrrls like Fifth Column, Bikini Kill, Lucy Stoners, 7 Year Bitch, Tribe 8, Pansy Division, Sister George, God is My Co-Pilot, Sta-Prest and Mukilteo Fairies, among others. In 1998, he started another queer label called *a.c.r.o.n.y.m.*, which released various queer musicians from dance, rock and electronic as well

as punk and homo-hop[65] (Ciminelli and Knox 16). He continues to release independent publications, with the most recent one being a vinyl 7-inch single featuring members of queercore bands like Limp Wrist and Needles in collaboration with the comic zine *Wuvable Oaf.*

It is important to point out again that this short historical overview of queercore productions and protagonists is by no means an exhaustive list. Bands, artists, zinsters, fans and locations, which can be subsumed under queer-feminist punk, were not only numerous, but their attempts were sometimes too brief or simply not documented. The collection I provide must therefore not be mistaken as an absolute representation of the most important protagonists and cultural productions. Sister Double Happiness, an all-gay band (Ciminelli and Knox 59), was another one of the many early queercore trailblazers who influenced hundreds of queer-feminist punks. Larry-bob Roberts has been enriching San Francisco's queer-feminist punk scenes with his zine project *Holy Titclamps* from May 1989 until today. Another Bay Area influence was Glue, with singer Sean "De Lear, known as Sean Dee, [who] is [still] one of the enduring fixtures of the L.A. nightlife scene going back to the 1980s and 1990s" (Hernandez). In Austin, Texas, dyke-centered feminist punk rock music was made by Gretchen Phillips, Laurie Freelove and Kathy Korniloff through their band Two Nice Girls from 1985 to 1992 (Phillips). In 1995, DJ Miss Guy formed the Toilet Böys in New York City and they are still performing today. And Mike Bullshits irritated the broader punk scene with his gay-centered *Maximumrocknroll* column during the 1980s (Ciminelli and Knox 89).

65 Homo-hop: queer hip-hop.

2.3. "For Once, We Will Have the Final Say, […] Cause They Know We're Here to Stay":[66] The Queer-Feminist Punk Explosion

SPEW: the Queer Punk Convention was crucial for bringing together far-flung queer-feminist punk scenes from all over the US and Canada. The first *SPEW* was organized at Chicago's Randolph Street Gallery in 1991, where zines, merchandise, videos and performances were presented. Most of the major queer punk zines were represented, from *J.D.s,* to *Bimbox* and *Fertile LaToyah Jackson*. People that were unable to attend themselves sent recent issues of their zines for display. "Chicago's ACT UP and Queer Nation both had tables" (Hsu 5). Performances included "Joan Jett Blakk, Vaginal Crème Davis and Toronto all-female post-punk band Fifth Column" (Hsu 9). Although the convention had been a success, the end was rather unfortunate when "Steve LaFreniere, one of the main organizers, was stabbed in the back by passing gay-bashers" (11). The first *SPEW* was soon followed by other events in the US and Canada. Journalist Rob Teixeira documented in the music journal *Xtra* that "[a] second Spew, organized by Dennis Cooper and others in Los Angeles in the spring of 1992, attracted even more people than the first one. There was also a *SPEW* in Toronto. An 'anti-convention' Spew 3 was held in May 1993 at Buddies In Bad Times Theatre and attracted about 300 people over the course of two days" (Teixeira).

Other events like *SPEW* soon followed all over the US and beyond. In 1994, Olympia, WA, hosted the first *Yoyo a Gogo Festival* at the Capitol Theatre, followed by similar events in 1997 and 1999. The last *Yoyo a Gogo 2001* was a six-day festival and featured more than 50 bands, among them *Bratmobile*, the *Need* and the *Gossip* (vanHorn). In 1996, the *Dirtybird Queercore Festival* was held in San Francisco and Berkeley, CA. The performers included

66 Lyrics from the Gossip song "Pop Goes the World," released on their album *Music for Men* by Columbia Records in 2009 (capitalization added).

Sleater-Kinney, Tribe 8, Sta-Prest, The Need, Third Sex and Vaginal Crème Davis (Larry-bob).[67]

Club Sucker, hosted by Vaginal Crème Davis from 1990 to 1995 (Ciminelli and Knox 107), the weekly queer punk night *HARD* at leather bar Faultline from 1995 to 1997 (ibid. 9), and a club night called Freak Show at the Gauntlet II in Los Angeles, are other examples of smaller, but no less important events that supported queer-feminist punk acts. In addition, a monthly showcase offered queer-feminist artists a floor to perform at the lesbian bar Que Sera in Long Beach, CA (ibid. 110). Around 1999, the vibrant Queer Punk Collective emerged in Vancouver. The lively local scene included the Skinjobs as well as Kim Kinakin's zine *Faggo*, which collaborated with US-based musicians like members of Pansy Division and Bruce LaBruce.[68]

Joanna Brown and Mark Freitas organized *Homocore Chicago*, an all-age concert night from 1992 to 1997.[69] A very active queercore band from Chicago was Three Dollar Bill.[70] The band appears in Scott Berry's documentary movie *Gay Shame '98* and contributed the soundtrack to the 2005 film *Hellbent*, together with queercore bands like Best Revenge and Pansy Division. Band member Jane Danger also played in G.B. Jones's film *The Lollipop Generation* (2008) alongside Vaginal Crème Davis and Jena von Brucker. Three Dollar Bill's music was not only characteristically aggressive and emotional, their lyrics were also outstandingly frank in their politics. Addressing the gay community, Three Dollar Bill shouted

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67 Other performers were The Vegas Beat, Behead the Prophet No Lord Shall Live, Dirt Bike Gang, Dyke Van Dick, Cypher in the Snow and The Potatomen (Larry-bob).

68 Other bands participating in the collective were CHE, Chapter 127 and the Stunts (Ciminelli and Knox 90). Today's local queer-feminist punk bands are Nation of Two, the Screaming Queens and Velvet Fist.

69 The two of them briefly revitalized Homocore Chicago to benefit ladyfest Midwest in May 2011.

70 Three Dollar Bill was founded by Jane Danger and Chris Piss in 1998. Their 2005 recording, "Parody of Pleasure," garnered public attention beyond the gay press when it was nominated for the 2006 Out Music Awards (Three Dollar Bill, Web site).

"Kids, let's get political / We're generation critical / Don't let them piss on your leg and tell you that it's raining / D.I.Y. T.C.B. 3DB will set you free!" ("Never Stop," qtd. in Ciminelli and Knox 125)

In New York, drag queen Mistress Formika organized the weekly *Squeezebox*, "a gender-bending drag-rock party" (ibid. 107) from 1994 to 2001. The most recent New York City-based queer-feminist punk club is *QxBxRx (Queers, Beers, and Rears)*, a monthly queer-feminist concert at the Cake Shop. Originally held at the Cyn Lounge in Brooklyn in 2007 and 2008, the now Manhattan-based club still hosts a number of Brooklyn-based bands like Inner Princess and the Homewreckers, and connects Brooklyn's queer-feminist punks with the Manhattan crowd. In addition, the club also gathers quite an impressive number of people from different queer-feminist punk chapters and generations, by hosting the latest riot grrrl bands that formed at recent Rock Camp for Girls, as well as some of the first queercore musicians like Luis from Pansy Division and his new band the French Letter and the band Goonsquad featuring Miss Guy. New York's queer-feminist punks uphold sex positive politics, by continuing to reject institutional and religious ideologies as well as the promotion of abstinence. A crucial figure for sex positive queer-feminist punk rock and activism was Dean Johnson, who co-organized the already mentioned *Rock'n'Roll Fag Bar* around 1988. As a reaction to the ignorance surrounding HIV/AIDS among the participants of the *Rock'n'Roll Fag Bar,* Johnson started to raise awareness about the danger of infection, which he continued until his AIDS-related death in 2008 (Downey 24). From 2000 to 2003, he organized Homocorps, a monthly concert night at the legendary punk location CBGB in New York. Johnson never made a secret of his HIV positive status, as his bandmate Mary Feaster recalls.[71] His own

71 Feaster emphasized Johnson's unapologetic politics of representation and irony in an interview. Johnson directed his critique against mainstream society as well as queer scenes and countercultures equally. Homocorps intentionally featured a range of queer (and not queer) artists who where rejected by mainstream and independent labels due to misogyny and homophobia (Downey 25).

band the Velvet Mafia was a punky glam-rock ensemble with very humorous and provocatively unapologetic queer lyrics. Johnson, who always performed as a drag queen and was extremely well-connected throughout New York's drag, music, and queer scenes, also influenced and supported an impressive number of queer performers. Another queer artist who has expressed his anger about HIV/AIDS through fast, loud and edgy music is Scott Free. Although his style has been influenced by many different music genres, the rage that his music and lyrics expresses are very punk. Furthermore, Free has continued to support the queercore movement by curating and hosting the performance series *Homolatte* in Chicago since 2000 (Free, *Homolatte*).

Far from the coastal queercore centers, the band Fagatron performed in Lincoln, NE, and in Denton, TX, and Denton's lesbian bars Mabel Peabody's Beauty Shoppe and Chainsaw Repair featured bands like Radio Berlin, Evil Beaver, and Bonfire Madigan. The monthly queercore event *OUT Cast Inclusion* has been providing local and traveling bands with a stage in Minneapolis since 2003 (Ciminelli and Knox 110). Lipkandy, the "pop rock electro indie grrrl punk post riot trash" (Lipkandy) band from Kentucky, performed from 1996 until around 2006.[72]

Tammy Rae Carland and Kaia Wilson started producing queer-feminist musicians on their record label *Mr. Lady* in 1996 in Durham, North Carolina. In 1990, Amy Ray, a member of the popular folk rock band Indigo Girls, started her grassroots label *Daemon Records* in Decatur, GA, to produce and support queer-feminist musicians, including quite a few punk rock bands. In addition to Dresch's *Chainsaw Records*, the label *Heartcore Records*, as well as *K Records* and *Kill Rock Stars*, started releasing queer-feminist punk in Olympia, WA. Angela Tavares supported queer-feminist punk with her label *Agitprop! Records* during the 1990s in Boston, and Ian MacKaye and Jeff Nelson continue such efforts with their

72 Lipkandy songs are featured on the *Agitprop!* compilation *Stand Up and Fucking Fight for It: Queers in Hardcore and Punk* from 2001, among other bands (Lipkandy, Web site).

label *Dischord Records* in Washington, DC. Today, the record label *Queer Control Records* supports queer-feminist punk musicians in and around San Francisco. The grassroots, low budget, queer-centered record label *Riot Grrrl Ink* releases radical and political productions in New York and Brooklyn.

2.4. "After This in the USA They Say You're Dead Anyway":[73] Queer-Feminist Punk Recurrences after 2000

Towards the end of the 1990s, some of queercore's most important figures seemed to have lost faith in queer-feminist punk politics. God Is My Co-Pilot disbanded in 1999, Matt Wobensmith quit his zine *Outpunk* in 1997, leaving the punk rock scene for quite some time, and Bruce LaBruce raised concerns about the future of queer activism in an interview in 2000. "I find that a lot of today's youth culture is less political and based more purely on fashion as opposed to style," LaBruce said about the contemporary countercultures (qtd. in Thibault). "Gay youth culture today seems a lot more conformist and accepting of the new commodification of the gay identity," he further notes (ibid.). Asked how he evaluates the legislative gains that the gay rights movement had made since the late 1970s and the sociopolitical climate of the year 2000, which seemed more tolerant than in earlier decades, Bruce had this to say:

> I think the new "acceptance" is merely a kind of seduction in which gay youths are courted by the media and the corporations in order to sell them a prescribed, fabricated image of themselves. The world is extremely conformist right now, and gay culture is no different. [D]eveloping your own tastes and aesthetics and style

73 This subtitle is a line from the song "Graffiti Tent" by the band My Parade (capitalization added).

> and political point of view are more essential than ever. Gay youth should be writing manifestoes and committing civil disobedience and forging movements which are below the radar of the mainstream media and marketing campaigns, not patterning themselves after corny gay images in glossy magazines. (qtd. in Thibault)

LaBruce calls for a radicalization and repolitization and, moreover, a politics of "refusing to participate in identity politics whatsoever" (qtd. in Thibault). What LaBruce did not mention in his negative take on younger generations of queers, however, was that the queer-feminist punk scene at the time was enjoying a new lease on life through various initiatives. The increased use of the Internet to connect with each other and promote their ideas and efforts led to the emergence of local and cross-regional efforts.

The first Ladyfest, held in Olympia, WA, in 2000, was pathbreaking for a worldwide revival of queer-feminist groups and bands. The festival featured "such bands as Bangs, Sleater-Kinney and Bratmobile, as well as workshops on feminism, activism, music, and art" (Angell, "Feminist Archives" 18). Other festivals were soon to follow. Another festival that originated in Olympia, WA, around 2002 was Homo A Go Go: Queer Music, Film, Art, Performance and Activism Festival. Homo A Go Go 2009 was held in San Francisco. Girl in a Coma and Erase Errata were just two of the more than 40 bands that performed at the festival (Homo A Go Go, Web site).[74]

Another queer-feminist DIY festival was Scutterfest, a week-long lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth artist benefit festival that ran from 2001 to 2003. Organized by Rudy Bleu of the zine *Scutter* from Los Angeles, CA, Scutterfest awarded scholarships to young artists from the money raised at the previous festivals in 2002 and 2003. It was a huge event that united queer-feminist punks of various generations and politics. In 2002, the

74 Among the 40 bands included were Athens Boys Choir, as well as the local Berkeley band Hunx and His Punx.

performing bands included Pansy Division, Best Revenge, Brian Grillo and Allen Bleyle.[75]

In Seattle, WA, queer-feminist musicians played at the monthly concert series Team Bent, and the Bent Festival provided queer counterculture space throughout Pride Parade Weekend in 2002 and 2003 (Maerz). Since 2003, Seattle's Bend-It Collective has been organizing a non-corporate, queer-feminist punk-spirited DIY art festival during the Seattle Pride Parade (*Bend-It Collective's Blog*). In spring 2004, the New York City-based band manager and music promoter Anna Jacobson-Leong created the Queercore Blitz Tour (Ciminelli and Knox 114). New York's Gina Young and the Bent, the Dead Betties, and Portland's Davies vs. Dresch, among others, played at the first Queercore Blitz Tour in Boston (ibid.).

"The camaraderie and community of homocore music fests like the Queercore Blitz Tour apparently [left] a lasting impression on fans and musicians alike," Ciminelli and Knox note in their historic review of queer punk rock (115). Many participants were encouraged to become musicians and writers themselves and new bands emerged in the wake of these festivals, such as the Gossip. The Gossip[76] is arguably the most popular queer-feminist punk group in the long history of punk rock. After releasing three full-length albums on independent record labels like *Kill Rock Stars*, the Gossip signed to *Music With a Twist*, a subsidiary of *Sony Music Label Group*, in 2007. During the summer of 2007, Gossip was part of the multi-artist *True Colors Tour*, which traveled through

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75 Scutterfest also presented the queer-feminist punk rock bands Deadlee, The End of the World, I am Loved, Maps to Great Speed, The Blood Arm, Boy Skout, Clint Catalyst, Feelings on a Grid, Pleasant Gehman, Gravy Train, Hot N Heavy Loudboy, Operation Kitty Project, Radio Vago, Running Ragged, Squab, $3 Puta, The Klutz's, Los Chunky's, the Mollybolts, Resist and Exsist, Rizzo, and 14yrd old Girls (Scutterfest, Web site).

76 Formed in 1999 in Olympia, WA, the band originally included vocalist Beth Ditto, guitarist Nathan "Brace Paine" Howdeshell and drummer Kathy Mendonca. Situated in one of queer feminists' most flourishing punk communities, their first EP was released on K Records and they also played at Ladyfest in Olympia in August 2000 as well as toured with Sleater-Kinney. In 2003, Kathy Mendonca left the band and was replaced by Hannah Blilie.

fifteen cities in the US and Canada.[77] Ironically, the tour was not only corporately sponsored by the Logo channel, its profits also went to the Human Rights Campaign, which many queer-feminist punks reject because of their single-issue focus on gay marriage.[78] Despite their participation in projects that queer-feminist punks reject because of their identity- and gay rights-focused politics, contemporary queer-feminist punks view the Gossip's migration to the mainstream as mainly positive. Whereas bands like Le Tigre were often harshly criticized for selling out for cooperating with mainstream labels, the Gossip continues to be praised for their community- and queer-oriented lyrics, as well as for Beth Ditto's fat positive activism.[79] Other bands forming around 2000 were the previously mentioned Dead Betties and Girl in a Coma, a punk rock band from San Antonio, Texas. In 2002, Super 8 cum shot was created in Chicago and queercore musician Ray Revenge, from the band Best Revenge, started *Spitshine Records* to release queer punk rock music.

Gina Young from Gina Young and the Bent points out that touring and performing alongside other out queer musicians was not only about self-empowerment and representation, it was also a way of creating a safe place free from homophobic harassment. Moreover, on tour, musicians could develop their music skills by teaching each other in a DIY style, exchange political ideas and

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77 The tour was headlined by Cyndi Lauper and included many world stars like Debbie Harry and Rufus Wainwright.

78 In May 2013, the band MEN published a statement on their Web site http://www.menmakemusic.com/ distancing themselves from the politics of the Human Rights Campaign. They had been asked and agreed to play a benefit at Le Poisson Rouge for The LGBT Center of New York City, only to find out that the beneficiary of their support was changed to The Human Rights Campaign. They felt shocked and tricked, but instead of cancelling released a statement explaining their misgivings about The Human Rights Campaign and donated half of the proceeds from the entire event to The Ali Forney Center, an organization that gives support to homeless LGBT youth in the NYC area.

79 Queer-feminist punk musician and comic artist Cristy Road, for example, mentioned Beth Ditto as a major role model for the queer-feminist punk scene in a personal interview in March 2012.

views and communicate them to their audience. After many years of touring and experiencing different kinds of audiences, Young concluded that "[music] seems to open people up more and make them more generous and willing to listen to a different point of view." To her it seemed that she encountered "far more homophobic violence in [her] day-to-day life than […] as a musician" (Ciminelli and Knox 121).

Queer-feminist punk opened up spaces for many sociopolitical and cultural discourses and topics beyond homophobia and misogyny. Queer-feminist punks of color in particular intervened in the predominantly white queer punk and riot grrrl scenes with their analysis of the xenophobic and racist sociopolitical climate after 9/11, as well as their critique on the queer-feminist punk scene itself.

2.5. "Punk May Not Be Dead, but It Is Queer …":[80] Intersectional Approaches in Contemporary Queer-Feminist Punk Rock

Queer-feminist activists like Nia King and Mimi Nguyen started challenging queer-feminist punk movements and groups with their zines, blogs and through their music long before 2001. Nguyen published the zine compilation *Evolution of a Race Riot* in 1997 and *Race Riot II* in 2002, which featured articles by queer-feminist punks of color like Helen Luu, Lauren Martin and Vincent Chung. Their articles criticize their peers' tactics of punk provocation by asking questions like, "What does it mean to look at the photographs of Third World suffering on the covers of grindcore records? What does it mean to talk about 'pride'? Where was the 'color' in Seattle/WTO? What comes first—'being brown or being famous?'" (Nguyen, *Race Riot II* 36).

Other critical efforts were the already briefly mentioned writings by Selena Wahng as well as Lala Endara's zines. In her zine

80 Christian Vargas qtd. in Queer Control Records (capitalization added).

Chop Suey Spex from 1997, Endara chronicles her experiences of racism, sexism, homophobia and the exploitation of Asian culture in mainstream society and culture, as well as within the punk counterculture environments she feels attached to. A sustainable critique of and influence on queer-feminist punk scenes were Margarita Alcantara-Tan's New York-based zine and blog *Bamboo Girl*. Alcantara-Tan started a zine "that speaks from [her] point of view as a queer mixed-blood Asian girl who confronts issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia in an in-your-face kind of way" ("The Herstory" 159) in 1995. While her tenth and last zine issue was released around 2001, her blog continued until November 2010. *Bamboo Girl* is a very salient example of decolonial politics within queer-feminist punk as I will show in chapter five. Moreover, it is also a remarkable engagement with national politics as well as sociopolitical historic events[81] in relation to the cultural, social, economic and structural oppression of people of color.

I will be discussing anti-racist and decolonizing activism within queer-feminist punk in great detail in chapter five, however, it is important to note that cultural products and the political activism of individuals like Alcantara-Tan and Nguyen not only influenced the scenes of their time but also had a lasting impact on later generations of queer-feminist punks. They inspired people like Osa Atoe to not only produce a zine and the blog *Shotgun Seamstress* but also create a queer-feminist punks of color scene in New Orleans and a US-wide network connecting like-minded punks and DIY artists.

Atoe, who has played in the band Firebrand since around March 2011, has been part of queer-feminist anarchist collectives and riot grrrl inspired scenes in DC, Oakland, Portland and other cities throughout the US. She started her zine *Shotgun Seamstress* in 2006 and contributes a column by the same name

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81 In the final issue of the print version of *Bamboo Girl*, for example, Alcantara-Tan reflects on the city of New York after the attacks on the World Trade Center in September 2001. Her online blog provided necessary information about where to find or provide help for New York locals and offered a documentation of media reports.

to *Maximumrocknroll*. Atoe's writings provide a rich resource on women, feminism, queer and people of color in punk rock history, past and contemporary musicians, as well as trends, schools of thought in punk politics and the social dynamics of punk scenes. Moreover, her writings can be seen as one of the profoundest examples of an intersectional analysis of social, political and economic power structures. In 2009, Atoe started playing in the band Deny It and putting up shows for local and visiting queer-feminist punks of color in New Orleans. New Orleans used to have a small lesbian punk scene centered around the Girl Gang Productions collective and the band Tragic Girls End Up Like from 2002 until 2005. The scene became disorganized, however, after Hurricane Katrina. The hurricane especially affected poor blacks who could not afford to rebuild their houses and were forced to move. Anarchist punks from all over the US started to squat the abandoned buildings, leading to the revitalization and creation of a punk scene, which had become predominantly white and male dominated (Bentley 1). Ironically, these anarchists and punks supported the continuing gentrification of New Orleans through their art and cultural projects, which in turn have made the region attractive to bohemians and hipsters (ibid. 12). Atoe, though a migrant herself, needs to be understood as a figure who moves between these new white leftist scenes and the groups and initiatives organized by native people of color. She started No More Fiction to empower "queer punks and lady punks to create their own events and spaces in this city. Combining ideas about anti-authoritarianism with feminist ideas about redefining power" ("Feminist Power") and people of color politics, she intervenes in the local white punk culture. She is well-connected with different queer-feminist punk inclusive projects like the *Bloody Rag Collective* in Chicago, which organizes shows for women and trans bands, and the *People of Color Zine Project* in Brooklyn, New York.

Providing support and an alternative perspective for non-conformist thinkers is and always was as important an aim of queer-feminist punk rock as challenging society through fierce criticism. Bands like Spitboy in the 1990s and zines like Atoe's

Shotgun Seamstress or Alcantara-Tan's *Bamboo Girl* reflect on national events, like the worldwide recession in the 2000s (Atoe in *Maximumrocknroll*, Web site), which started in December 2007 and continues until today, Barack Obama's 2009 election (Atoe, *Shotgun Seamstress 3*), the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Alcantara-Tan, *Bamboo Girl 10* and *Bamboo Girl Zine,* Web Site) and the processes of ideological and social transformation following them. An equally important social critic and queer-feminist punk influence was and still is the singer and writer Martin Sorrondeguy. Sorrondeguy, who used to be the vocalist for the band Los Crudos, "has long stood out for singing in Spanish and essentially representing for Latino punk" (Chen). Moreover, he is a strong supporter of queer anti-racist initiatives. His queercore band, Limp Wrist, started performing in 1998. Currently, he works for *Maximumrocknroll* and has collaborated with musicians like Alicia Armendariz[82] and Matt Wobensmith.

These political efforts are continued by many non-white queer-feminist punks through contemporary bands like Seattle's NighTraiN, Stage Bitten and My Parade; Portland's New Blood; and New York's Inner Princess, The Homewreckers and Royal Pink. Some other queer-feminist punks of color bands that also challenge their surroundings with their stage presence and political lyrics are the Negro Hippies from New Orleans, Mariam Bastani's Chicago-based band Condenada and Brontez Purnell's Former Lovers as well as Alabaster Choad from Oakland and Hey, Girl! from San Francisco. Hey Girl!'s drummer also produces a zine called *Punk Is Ladies* in Berkeley, CA.[83] A festival held in Portland in 2007 that was especially dedicated to critical whiteness,

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82 Alicia Armendariz was one of the first punk performers in the 1970s in Los Angeles. She became well-known as Alice Bag from the band Bags. She performed with Vaginal Crème Davis in several band projects. Her art and politics will be discussed in chapters four and six in detail.

83 Other contemporary queer-feminist punks of color bands that need to be mentioned as well are Magic Johnson from Portland, Forever 21 from Olympia, Mika Miko from Los Angeles, Black Rainbow and Eggs on Legs from San Francisco, Abe Vigoda from LA, Hornet Leg from Portland, and Talbot Tagora from Seattle.

antiracism and decolonization within queer-feminist punk was B.A.B.E. (Breaking Assumptions and Barriers to Equality) (Irwin).

A particularly thriving group supporting not only queer-feminist punks of color but queer-feminist, anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-violence efforts in general is the For the Birds Collective,[84] a women and transgender-only group from Brooklyn, New York. For the Birds aims to empower radical women through their DIY feminist cultural activism. For the Birds member Lauren Denitzio stated in a recent interview that an important reason for starting the For the Birds Collective was to create a space for female punks because New York's punk scenes and the groups around ABC No Rio[85] in particular, did not offer many possibilities for girls. Since their founding around 2004, one major aspect of their work is to connect different New York-based feminist groups with each other. Every year, For the Birds organizes the *Big She Bang* festival in New York, which features queer-feminist bands, arts, crafts, discussion groups and presentations. During the year, they also host many punk shows in DIY spaces like *The Loft* or *Silent Barn* in Brooklyn, which are often benefits for feminist and queer-feminist projects like the anti-violence initiative *Support New York* or the sexual health group *Fucking (A)*. Moreover, they release compilation CDs with contemporary queer-feminist punk bands.[86]

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84 An analysis of For the Birds' feminist politics, especially their connection to riot grrrl politics is provided in chapter five.

85 ABC No Rio is a squat and "gallery, a zine library, a darkroom, a silkscreen shop, and a community computer center, as well as providing space for projects, meetings and events" (Hall-Bourdeau) in New York City. The building at 156 Rivington Street was occupied by an artist collective in 1980 and has been used as a community center ever since. In 1996, the city of New York donated the building to its occupiers.

86 For the Birds concerts featured the Brooklyn-based Handjobs, Each Other's Mothers and Zombie Dogs, among others. Kathi Ko from the two latter bands produced the CD compilation *Gimme Cooties* to document ongoing band projects from the East Cost fronted by women (Varriale, 15 March 2010).

2.6. "Don't Put Me in a Box. I'll Only Crush It":[87] Writing and Archiving a Movement

Giving an overview of the countercultural movement of queer-feminist punk throughout history is very challenging. The artists, writers and musicians that identify with queer-feminist punk are mobile, flexible and mostly not very interested in engaging with mainstream media or institutions. Furthermore, like their advocates, queer-feminist punk politics change, not only over time but also between countercultural spaces, cities and states. Accordingly, an overview of queer-feminist punk rock, punk politics and their practitioners can only be presented in a fragmented, biased form based on the researcher's interests and world view.

Having stated the obvious challenges of countercultural history writing, it also needs to be emphasized that such difficulties must not become an excuse for a reproduction of the existing whitewashed, ableist, middle-class centered narratives. I want to reflect critically on my own position as an archivist, arranging and analyzing my material throughout this book in such a way as to avoid the oblivion of non-white, anti-racist, decolonial, working class, underclass, gender-queer punk politics and protagonists. Furthermore, I will reflect on the exclusions and biases by closing my overview of the last thirty years of queer-feminist punk rock with a reflection on the current state of queer-feminist punk archives and documentations. First, I give a brief introduction of some important popular and scholarly documentations of queer-feminist punk, such as *Homocore* by David Ciminelli and Ken Knox. Second, I introduce and problematize some archive collections, such as the recently opened *Riot Grrrl Collection* at New York University. In addition, I want to shift the focus from the topic of representation—who gets included and analyzed under the

87 This subheading is a quote from the Blog *The Crunk Feminist Collective,* an online platform for feminists of color to discuss and raise consciousness (The Crunk Feminist Collective, "[Sigh] … I Am So Tired") (capitalization added).

term queer-feminist punk—to the question of access, by analyzing academic work and archives. I want to problematize the incorporation of radically queer cultures and politics into normative institutions like academic fields, as well as places and sites of institutionalized, collectively shared memories in general, like history books, anthologies, libraries and archives. My critical approach is inspired by works on hegemonic discourses, white dominance and homonormativity through the processes of archiving, such as the work of Judith Jack Halberstam (*In A Queer Time and Place; The Queer Art*) and especially Roderick A. Ferguson's critical analysis of the institutionalization of queer theory and activism in the context of the university in his essay "Administering Sexuality."

In the final part of my analysis of queer-feminist punk attempting to document the movement, I present a selection of countercultural writings, documentations and archives. I argue that countercultural forms of preserving history are better equipped to account for the intersectionality of queer-feminist punk politics, as well as for the diversity of queer-feminist punk musicians, writers and artists. Moreover, countercultural historians and archivists make their material and documentations as accessible as possible on the level of language as well as in the distribution of the actual material.

2.6.1. "There's Nothing Left to Give That They Commodify":[88] Queer-Feminist Punk, Institutionalization and Academic Research

Soon after the emergence of riot grrrl politics and groups, journalists started reporting on them, very much to the chagrin of the musicians and writers themselves.[89] More recently, professional writers have started publishing historical review books, like Sara

88 This subtitle is a line from the song "Boom, Boom, Boom" from the band MEN. "Boom, Boom, Boom" was released on the album *Talk about Body* (Iamsound Records) in February 2011 (capitalization added).

89 See, e.g., S. Marcus 97, 160.

Marcus's *Girls to the Front*. Soon after queer-feminist punk reached mainstream attention through journalistic work, academic analysis on queer-feminist punk cultures followed. Some examples of scholarly analysis can be found in Halberstam's *In A Queer Time and Place* and Stephen Duncombe's and Maxwell Tremblay's anthology *White Riot*. In addition, queer-feminist productions became incorporated in university libraries like New York University and Columbia University. Considering these trends, I am concerned with the reinstallations of white dominance and classism in historic representations of queer-feminist punk rock. Moreover, I am worried about the incorporation of queer-feminist punk material from counterculture to traditional and elitist venues because such a transfer might set new boundaries for accessing the material. While appreciating the efforts that were made by queer-feminist academics and established authors to provide those places of knowledge and memories, and acknowledging the queering of their institutions and fields by doing so, it is necessary to ask how the material becomes appropriated by analyzing and arranging it within the limits of conventional spaces like academic and non-academic books published by mainstream publishers.

Historian and queer theorist Roderick Ferguson argues that the implementation of critical theory and the politics of gender, ethnicity, race and queerness in US universities since the 1970s has had the effect that "critiques of the presumed benevolence of political and economic institutions [became] absorbed within an administrative ethos" and were used "as testaments to the progress of the university and the resuscitation of common [...] culture" (163). Moreover, the inclusion of some critical efforts allowed for the silencing of other critiques. Ferguson emphasizes in particular the absorption of queer counter-voices into institutions, which often became "the engine for a series of exclusions and alienations, particularly around class, gender, and race" (165). Ferguson draws attention to "administrative realms and protocols" (165) that signify the production of books, publishing economies, library systems and traditions of teaching and learning to discipline subjects and critical accounts that support white privilege.

Although these administrative realms and protocols certainly empower certain queer-feminist individuals and groups, it is indeed important to look at their disciplinary function as well as to the new exclusions and boundaries they produce, particularly in the concrete case of documentations of queer-feminist punk.

As I have already mentioned, around 1993 journalists started publishing articles and books documenting and analyzing the riot grrrl and queercore movements. Such journalistic work, like Ciminelli and Knox's first attempt to write a comprehensive overview called *Homocore,* reproduced whitewashed histories of middle-class existences and cultural productions, which virtually ignored all non-white, working class identified politics and personae. Sara Marcus's recent historic overview of riot grrrl's emergence, *Girls to the Front,* is less ignorant of exclusions with regard to the categories of race, class and sexuality. Nevertheless, although the book emphasizes the participation of queer women within riot grrrl and rightly thematizes the whiteness of some riot grrrl circles, to a large extent it ignores the participation of women of color in other places. Even if bands like Tribe 8 are highlighted, their anti-racist and working class politics as well as Leslie Mah's self-identification as Asian American and Tantrum's self-identification as African American are not mentioned. What makes this omission even more relevant is that the book's subtitle claims to tell *The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*.

In the mid-1990s scholars started documenting and analyzing queer-feminist punk rock. While at first carried by upcoming researchers,[90] well-established scholars like Halberstam (*In A Queer Time and Place*), Muñoz (*Disidentifications*) and Angela McRobbie picked up the topic of queer-feminist punk around the year 2000 and queer-feminist punk productions, especially riot grrrl projects, became a frequent topic within academic conferences. Today, classes on riot grrrl can be found within humanities and social sciences at many universities around the world. Interestingly, although queercore, homocore and other forms of

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90 See, e.g., Schwandt; Ritchie; Wilson.

queer-feminist punk entered the universities and scholarly discourses through this trend, they were rarely ever addressed as queer. Moreover, the focus on queer-feminist punk politics was mostly a singular one and categories like race, class or ableism were ignored. Scholarly work that focuses on queer-feminist punk rock from a critical whiteness and decolonial perspective like Muñoz' or Michelle Habell-Pallán's ("¿Soy Punkera, Y Qué?") was often not included in such discourses. Thus, more and more academic writings try to intervene in whitewashed academic discourses on punk rock. Besides José Muñoz' and Habell-Pallán's work, Tavia Nyong'o's essays "Do You Want Queer Theory (or Do You Want the Truth)?" and "Punk'd Theory" need to be mentioned. The most recent example of academic work on race, gender and queer within punk is Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay's anthology *White Riot*. Although their collection of archival material, essays, zine articles and journalistic work is considerable and diverse, their claim on the back cover of the book of giving a "definitive" study of punk's racial politics and offering an "ultimate collection on punk and race" is highly problematic. Moreover, although they present an important collection of criticism on white punk cultures, they mostly ignore queer-feminist punk bands, scenes and their cultural productions by punks of color within the US as punk musicians and writers like Gordan Nikpour of *Maximumrocknroll* have pointed out.

I now want to shift the focus from hegemonic discourses within historiographies to the question of accessibility. Academic language conventions are challenging for people with different knowledge traditions or educational backgrounds, and the dominance of English language accounts also limits access to such publications. Moreover, economic factors have to be considered because academic books are expensive. Similarly, many recently established archives are also inaccessible, ironically often especially for punks themselves.

Recently, both Columbia and New York University established elaborate collections of queer-feminist cultural productions within their libraries. Interestingly, both universities silenced the queer

content of the materials through the titles of their collections. Although, their queer-feminist punk collections frequently include anti-racist, decolonial, working and underclass queer-feminist punk material, they paradoxically create exclusions in terms of accessibility especially for working and underclass individuals. Columbia University hosts the "Barnard Library zine collection [that] currently houses over 1,400 zines in its archive" (J. Freedman 53). All of these are feminist zines and many are queer-feminist punk zines. In addition, the collection also includes an impressive number of anti-racist, critical whiteness, fat-positive and anti-ableism zines. Although Columbia University restricts access to most of its libraries and materials, curator Jenna Freedman tries to make access as easy as possible. Nevertheless, entering Barnard College requires carrying valid identification and looking appropriate enough to fit the conventions of a university setting, two requirements that punks do not necessarily fulfill.

The factor of passing as an appropriate member of academia, student or researcher is even more relevant concerning the Fales Library at New York University, which opened its *Riot Grrrl Collection* in fall 2010. The collection not only hosts zines, but assembles the personal papers of people involved in the riot grrrl movement with a special focus on the years 1989 to 1996. It includes correspondences, artwork, journals and notebooks, audio and video recordings, photographs, and flyers. The collection contains Matt Wobensmith's *Outpunk* archive as well as Joanna Fateman's personal papers, to name but a few donations by queer-feminist musicians and fans. A visit to the Fales Library requires an official invitation by a sponsoring faculty member of New York University and an appointment for every single visit to consult the collection. The zines and documents must always be read in view of the librarian in charge and need to be set on a small book rest. Although the library's efforts to preserve those rare and important documents must, of course, be respected and valued, it feels extremely odd to put xeroxed punk zines and writings, designed in typical DIY style, on a book rest. Thus, of concern in the latter two cases are the required procedures for consulting the

materials, which indeed are contrary to punk styles and require an elaborate degree of knowledge of academic cultural rituals and norms. However, the overriding issue about the inclusion of queer-feminist punk material in private university libraries is that they—and their archives—limit entrance to certain visitors and excludes many others, in accordance with very elitist, normative mainstream standards. People without valid identification, university affiliation or a visitor's pass, are not allowed to access the material. Although punk culture is certainly not devoid of implicit boundaries and mechanisms of exclusion, accessibility has been a goal of queer-feminist punk cultures since their emergence. Private universities, on the other hand, are defined by their explicit boundaries, especially with regard to economic factors and education.

2.6.2. Guerrilla-Style History Making

Queer-feminist punks make great efforts to document the history of their movement themselves. Before the introduction of the first web browser in 1993 and the Internet boom that followed, handmade and xeroxed zines and independent film productions documented the queer-feminist punk movement. Films—from the previously mentioned *The Lollipop Generation,* to *Rise Above: The Tribe 8 Documentary*; *Pansy Division: Life in a Gay Rock Band*, or the recently released *Who Took The Bomp? Le Tigre on Tour*[91]—guaranteed that some queer-feminist performances and politics would remain accessible beyond its oral history. Furthermore, starting with *J.D.s*, zines like *Homocore* San Francisco and New York, Donna Dresch's *Chainsaw* and Matt Wobensmith's *Outpunk* set out to document their newly emerging scenes and political efforts.

In addition, many queer-feminist punks have started publishing their autobiographies in the last few years. The first was

91 Cf. *From The Back Of The Room.* Dir. Amy Oden. From the Back of the Room Production, 2011. DVD; and *Don't Need You: The Herstory of Riot Grrrl*. Dir. Kerri Koch. Urban Cowgirl Productions, 2006. DVD.

Lynn Breedlove's *Godspeed*, followed by Michelle Tea's *Valencia*, Rhiannon Argo's *The Creamsickle,* and *Deflowered* by Jon Ginoli. The most recent examples are the aforementioned *Violence Girl* by Alicia Armendariz and *The Vicious Red Relic, Love* by Anna Joy Springer. Beth Ditto's biography was released in 2012[92] and Sleater-Kinney and Wild Flag member Carrie Brownstein was recently reported by *The New York Times* to be working on a memoir (Bosman).

Books like *Godspeed, The Creamsickle* and *Deflowered* give "complex record[s] of queer activity," (*In a Queer Time and Place* 170) and must therefore be valued as historic writings, as Judith Jack Halberstam has argued. Moreover, they make queer-feminist punk history accessible to a broad audience and readership through their language conventions. In other words, such histories are understandable to most English speakers, in contrast to academic writings, which are only understandable to a limited educated minority. Through their language, narratives and poetic style, such historic writings intervene in the conventional processes of documentation and historic writing. Springer's *The Vicious Red Relic, Love*, in particular, blurs the conventions of autobiographies as such. Her documentation of her experiences and cultural contributions to the queer-feminist punk culture of the 1990s is an eclectic bricolage of letters, handwritings, drawings, newspaper articles, photos, and reflections. In addition, the book transgresses the usual ableism of queer-feminist punk narratives by telling the story of the narrator's ex-girlfriend, a bipolar lesbian drug abuser who died of AIDS. Similarly, Myriam Gurba's *Dahlia Season* documents the story of a disabled queer-feminist punk. Moreover, like *Violence Girl, Dahlia Season* is written from a Mexican-American perspective.

Another relevant and easily accessible documentation of queer-feminist punk activity for queer-feminist punks and fans is provided by punk lyrics. Bands like Team Dresch in their song

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92 Ditto, Beth. *Coal to Diamonds: A Memoir*. New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2012.

Uncle Phranc or Le Tigre in *Hot Topic* "create an eclectic encyclopedia of queer cultural production" (*In a Queer Time and Place* 170), as Judith Jack Halberstam notes. *Uncle Phranc* refers to the queer punk musician Susan Gottlieb, a.k.a. Phranc, who played in the band Nervous Gender in the early 1980s and the feminist all-girl band Castration Squad together with Alicia Armendariz. Le Tigre's "Hot Topic" urges feminists to continue their political interventions with "don't stop." They give an exhaustive list of past and contemporary feminist thinkers, including the queer-feminist punk bands The Butchies, Sleater-Kinney, Vaginal Crème Davis and the record label Mr. Lady. Other bands pick up other bands' themes and lyrics to name themselves, like the Skinjobs, whose name refers to a song by God is My Co-Pilot, or Sistas in the Pit, whose "name comes from lyrics by the now-defunct Los Angeles black-girl outfit, Strange Fruit" (Swan).

Documentations of queer-feminist punk history in zines, books and on records are supported through grassroots zine libraries, one of which is located in the community house project ABC No Rio in New York. A similar grassroots example is Matt Wobensmith's DIY vintage and back issue zine archive and store called *Goteblüd* in San Francisco. *Goteblüd* has over 3,000 zines on display and for sale, and holds "exhibits [like the most recent] You Are Her: Riot Grrrl and Underground Female Zines of the 1990s" (Logic). In 2009, the non-profit, feminist community project, Lesbian Herstory Archives, in Brooklyn, New York opened a small zine archive due to the initiative of one of its librarians who used to be part of a riot grrrl New York chapter. Such radical zine archives include many radically queer, feminist, anti-racist, critical whiteness and decolonial countercultural productions. Moreover, entrance to those just mentioned grassroots zine archives is not bound to economic or class factors. Thus, access to the archives only requires an existing knowledge of punk culture and knowing where to find it, with the exception of the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

The most accessible catalogues of queer-feminist punk histories are web-based projects. Many blogs and online journals document queer-feminist punk productions for a broad audience.

Some of the many blogs contributing easily accessible queer-feminist punk historiographies are the aforementioned *Shotgun Seamstress* blog, *Rock and the Single Girl* (Varriale), *Soul Ponies: A Home for Lost and Wayward Queercore & Riot Grrrl Music* (Konkiel), *Total Trash: Girl and Queer Music*, and the *International Girl Gang Underground* zine project (Wadkins, *International*). Although access to new technology is, of course, bound to economic factors, as well as to knowledge and education, web-based projects attempt to reach the largest audiences possible. They "provide a home for wayward queercore and riot grrrl recordings that would otherwise be lost to time," as Stacy Konkiel states in her blog *Soul Ponies*. In addition to these blogs, Austrian queer-feminist grassroots and riot grrrl activist Elke Zobl started the *Grrrl Zine Network* in 2001, which provides titles and short descriptions of numerous historic and contemporary queer-feminist zines, blogs, discussion groups and interviews with zinesters and bands from around the globe. Since 2003, *The Queer Zine Archive Project* preserves queer zines and makes them available through an online database. The DIY publications featured are from various fields and periods of queer counter-communities, many of them queer-feminist punk productions. The zines are in PDF format and can be downloaded for free. According to its mission statement, the aim "of the Queer Zine Archive Project (QZAP) is to establish a 'living history' archive of past and present queer zines and to encourage current and emerging zine publishers to continue to create."

2.7. To Be Continued …: A Preliminary Conclusion

Queer-feminist punk rock, as my brief analysis of some writings, lyrics, interviews, and performances has shown, is a form of political activism. It has distinct sociopolitical and cultural agendas as well as strategies. Two of those agendas could be identified as a rejection of homophobia and misogyny. However, queer-feminist punk cannot be reduced to a critique on homophobia

and misogyny. In particular, by highlighting the critical voices of queer-feminist punks of color, I show that queer-feminist punk critique targets social and political oppression from an intersectional perspective. Moreover, by highlighting bands, writers and their cultural output, which put forward anti-racist and anti-ableist politics as well as the politics of people of color, the intention was to complicate and, if possible, irritate the common view of queer-feminist punk culture as whitewashed, self-celebratory, middle-class, and ableist.

This chapter covers the queer-feminist punk politics of the last thirty years. It documents the ways that queer-feminist punk politics were continued by various bands, zines and other forms of art from around 1985 to the present. The continuation of the specific aim of queer-feminist punk bands and zines to reject homophobia, binary gender systems and misogyny shows that queer-feminist punk rock can be understood as a political movement. Like any other movement, queer-feminist punk has changed over time and manifests differently depending on the place and scene. However, a significant commonality between all the queer-feminist punk chapters, productions and politics is the use of the term queer as anti-social. Moreover, I argue that the choice that politically interested individuals made for the specific genre of punk rock was motivated by punk's signification through negativity. I explain this punk negativity by tracing back queer-feminist punk politics to some of the origins of punk in the 1970s. The negativity of punk is signified through anti-social verbal expressions, like the use of derogatory terms and the rejection of social norms. This negativity on the verbal level is mirrored or complemented through the music and sound. The fast, mostly simple, loud music and the emphasis on drums, needs to be understood as anti-social, and moreover as a political action or expression. Such punk negativity becomes aligned with anti-social queerness within queer-feminist punk rock. Through a brief discussion of a selection of analytical works by queer theory scholars, I provide an explanation of why punks chose queer negativity for their political activism. Moreover, reference to the "anti-social turn" in queer

theory suggests that queer-feminist punk rock produced anti-social queer theory even before the concept was introduced to the academy.

By providing fragments of the broader historical background, I help give a framework for queer-feminist punk's politics, strategies and reactions. As demonstrated in reference to some examples of 1980s' neo-conservatism, right-wing fundamentalism, and the HIV/AIDS crisis, as well as natural catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina, queer-feminist punks reacted to sociopolitical events, emerging political movements and national crises through their cultural productions. By highlighting the connections between queer-feminist punk and other countercultural movements like ACT UP as well as other anarchist and feminist movements, I show how queer-feminist punk politics was spread. On that note, I also want to mention that many contemporary bands, organizers and writers also participated in the most recent Occupy movements, a grassroots social uprising and mass movement that emerged in October 2011 in New York, Portland, Oakland, San Francisco and many other cities throughout the US. Queer-feminist punks like Cristy Road and the For the Birds Collective supported the movement with their attendance, art and critical thinking. Such involvement emphasizes that queer-feminist punks are receptive to the social surroundings beyond their small circles and communities. Moreover, it shows that they are engaged in political activities that exceed the limits of their sociocultural spheres.

Another important aspect of queer-feminist punk politics is its accessibility. This is reflected through queer-feminist punk's preference for DIY methods, like the production of self-published zines as well as the musical style. Moreover, it is reflected through queer-feminist punk's attempts to not only preserve its own history but also make these historical records as easily accessible as possible. The artistic forms of queer-feminist punk documentations ranges from zines and films to autobiographic books, lyrics and online blogs. In addition, such efforts have been supported by grassroots zine libraries and online archives. By including a critical discussion on the accessibility of academic and other

institutionalized forms of the documentation of queer-feminist punk, I have problematized the strategies and attempts to safeguard countercultural productions for future generations. Finally, in contrasting such institutionalized documentations with grassroots initiatives, I was able to show the specific queer-feminist DIY politics of queer-feminist punk rock.

3. "We're Punk as Fuck and Fuck like Punks":[93] Punk Rock, Queerness, and the Death Drive

In this chapter, I attempt to frame radical punk theory using the admittedly (incredibly) complicated language of psychoanalytic queer theory, especially Lee Edelman's theorization of the death drive. I use and misuse psychoanalytic theory, break its rules by combining different "schools" of psychoanalytic thought—upsetting Edelman's structuralist "No Future" theory with the help of Judith Halberstam's critique and aligning both with Elizabeth Povinelli's postcolonial account—and bring the discourse of queer negativity into a dialogue with the materialist concepts of emotionality and affect of José Muñoz. Certainly, this chapter is most appealing to academic nerds like myself, who have a love/hate relationship with the headache-producing Eurocentric models of explaining the human mind and gain pleasure from disrupting well-established academic concepts. While not necessary for understanding the following chapters four to eight, I encourage everyone to venture a trip to and through psychoanalytic theory to get a glimpse of the radical potential of queer punk negativity. In addition to hardcore theory, this chapter presents fun examples of dissident language that associates queer sexuality and desire with negativity. A delicious sample of such anti-pc language is the song "Homosexual Is Criminal" by Pedro, Muriel and Esther on the album *The White to Be Angry* from 1998:

93 The line "We're punk as fuck and fuck like punks" is from the song "Burn Your Rainbow" by the band Skinjobs, released on the *Burn Your Rainbow* album in 2002.

> A homosexual
> is a criminal
> I'm a sociopath, a pathological liar
> Bring your children near me
> I'll make them walk through the fire.[94]

Throughout this chapter, I present many more examples of queer-feminist punk lyrics, such as the ones above by the performance artist Vaginal Crème Davis and her queercore band Pedro, Muriel and Esther, that include representations of queerness, queer sexuality, desire and bodies as negative, as well as anti-social, violent or provoking messages and connotations. I show how and why queer-feminist punk musicians comment on and produce meanings of queerness as anti-social through a close reading of representative queer-feminist punk lyrics. I suggest that punk's anti-gesture—which is often understood as nihilism—aims at something specific that is meant to irritate or violate, or at least be a critique of normative systems and hegemonic societies. In addition, it aims at creating a form of collectivity or community, e.g., at a concert, while listening, etc. Moreover, I argue that although irritation is the most noticeable aim of queer-feminist punk, the creation of social bonds and communities is the most noticeable gain.

To gain an understanding of the different forms of queer-feminist punk rock with respect to their content, strategies, sociality and politics, I analyze textual representations of queerness, queer sexuality and desire in song lyrics and other forms of writing and situate them in the social contexts from which they emerged and circulated in. I establish the contours of the political and social discourses of queer-feminist punk by placing them within the realm of the social. These representations are then read against contemporary psychoanalytically informed queer theories, as well as against or alongside other philosophical works. My decision to use accounts from within queer theory that follow a

94 Qtd. in Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 107. Cf. Pedro, Muriel and Ester, "Homosexual Is Criminal." *The White to Be Angry*. Spectra Sonic Records, 1998. CD.

psychoanalytic, mostly Lacanian, understanding of identity formation, sexuality and desire "acknowledges the usefulness of a psychoanalytically derived vocabulary […] [that] allows a language for the complicated inner life that undergirds sexual experience," as Hala Herbly (430) puts it. Moreover, psychoanalytic theory offers a whole world of explanation for notions that equate queer desire and sexuality with negativity. Furthermore, a useful relation to Lee Edelman's Lacanian-oriented concept of queerness as an anti-social, always disturbing identity seems adequate, considering that some punk-affiliated queer-feminist activists, like the producers of the zine *Pink and Black Attack*, refer directly to Edelman's work in *No Future* (Anonymous, "Preliminary" 26–27).

3.1. "Pseudo Intellectual Slut, You Went to School, Did You Learn How to Fuck?":[95] A Bricolage of Psychoanalytic Theories

What constitutes and structures queerness as a meaningful term according to Lee Edelman is not its relation to queer desire, but something that psychoanalytic theorists who follow Lacan call jouissance or enjoyment. Jouissance can be understood as "the painful pleasure of exceeding a law in which we were implicated, an enjoyment of a desire […], that is the cause and result of refusing to be disciplined by the body hanging from the gallows of the law" (Povinelli, "The Part" 288). The law that Povinelli refers to is not necessarily a juridical law. "[T]he Law, in Lacan[ian oriented psychoanalysis] refers not to a particular piece of legislation, but to the fundamental principles which underlie all social relations" (Evans 98). Jouissance breaks free of these social relations, rules and norms. It also transcends relation to the object, regardless of whether it is another person, fetishistic object, thing, or even the individual's imagination of an object. If queerness is understood

95 Tribe 8. "Neanderthal Dyke." *Fist City*. Alternative Tentacles Records, 1995. Audiocassette.

as something shaped through or for jouissance—the pleasure of exceeding normativity—then it is a force, the "death drive," which appears in the sexual act. This death drive necessarily results in a pleasure (jouissance-like experience) that destructs (or at least harms) the self or ego.

A psychoanalytic concept of sexuality and sexual desire, especially as represented in Edelman's notion of queerness, seems like an interesting starting point to analyze punk's use of queerness as negativity[96] because it is able to account for the violence, aggression and anti-social aspects of punk—punk's acoustic and performance style like shouting, screaming, swearing and jumping into the mosh pit[97]—in reference to sexuality. The usefulness of Edelman's concept reaches its limit, however, at exactly the point where punk's negativity becomes a communal political effort, rather than the singular expression and pleasure of an individual. Thus, two of the theoretical questions that this chapter tries to answer are whether it is legitimate to understand queerness within queer-feminist punk as jouissance and whether the performances of this queerness can be understood as a striving to (or brief moment of) embodied jouissance. If the answer is yes, do we need to view such queerness/jouissance as something that can be shared, as Elizabeth Povinelli suggests? If, on the other hand, it

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96 It is necessary to address two points in Edelman's theory that are problematic from a feminist perspective and therefore require an intervention. First, Edelman builds his theory on a psychoanalytical account of sexuality and sexual desire that is rooted in a highly patriarchal discourse, which understands women as fundamentally subordinate to men—symbolically as well as psychologically. Consequently, the usage of Edelman's work within queer-feminist subcultures as well as queer-feminist theoretical approaches can be problematic. In relation to this point, it is important to note that according to his theory queerness is bound only to male sexuality, thereby excluding female or any other sexuality. The female body does not come up in his considerations. Second, Edelman's limited view of sexuality does not consider factors like race, class, gender or able-bodiedness as intersecting to form queerness as negativity.

97 To mosh or moshing is a dance or movements in which the dancers push and slam into each other. The mosh pit or pit is the area in front of the stage where the audience performs these dances.

is not exactly jouissance that becomes shared, "can one […] share a disposition (drive, or Trieb) toward enjoyment (jouissance)" (Povinelli, "The Part" 288)? Community is definitely something queer-feminist punks desire, as the following lyrics by the band Agatha from Seattle show: "All we want is a little community space / cause you've got your shit on every corner" (Agatha, "Community Space"). Agatha's demand for a community space can be seen as a political aim to create queer sociality that can actually be experienced. In addition, it can also be understood as an aim to produce shared political discourses. The strategy and rhetoric that Agatha uses to address or create their community are representations of queer as negativity and the negative aesthetic of punk rock.

Queer-feminist punks like Agatha, according to my hypothesis, refer to the anti-identitarian and anti-social meaning of the term queer in their lyrics not only to criticize normativity but also to create social bonds and political alliances. To put this differently, anti-social meanings are not contradictory to aspects of punk rock that involve social responsibility and community, as well as the social environments—networks of bands and groups, the subculture—that produce them. It is rather that the lyrics and zine writings of punk rock, as well as the physical and emotional qualities that entail forms of negativity, enable individuals to connect with and enjoy each other, as well as create or at least collectively imagine a social sphere more appropriate to their needs and desires, which is partly realized through this negativity. But how are the social bonds created by a shared drive based on queer negativity to be understood? If "jouissance […] undermines all normative orderings of the social" (Povinelli, "The Part" 289), what kind of community can be built on that?

The answer to this question is that queer-feminist punks envision a community where recognition and social responsibility are not based on group or any other identity or mutual origin. Anti-social and anti-relational queer theory seems to categorically reject the idea that any sociality or social form could emerge through jouissance. Furthermore, accounts like Edelman's negate the possibility of making politics through jouissance. Contrary

to Edelman's notion of the political as well as—at least partly—his understanding of the relation between the social and jouissance, I understand the diverse forms of networks and communities around queer-feminist punk rock as produced or enabled through jouissance. This endeavor requires a notion of jouissance that understands its enjoyment as political. Theorists like Elizabeth Povinelli and Slavoj Žižek see the political in jouissance in "its nonrelationship to all normative social orderings" (Povinelli, "The Part" 289). Accordingly, the social relations produced by jouissance "must be a queer sort of social bond, one that is the effect of the disruption of the given time of the social contract (heteronormativity), yet creates at a secondary level a new social ordering (queer sociality)" (ibid.). Moreover, such an approach requires an understanding of jouissance as distinct from desire, but always occurring in union with it. Taking the psychoanalytic concept of desire as the twofold desire of a subject for autonomy and recognition (cf. Butler, *Undoing* 131–151) into account can help elucidate the multifarious meanings that queer-feminist punk rock has for its actors. It helps to seriously consider the negative meanings of queerness within punk and still take into account that queerness, when translated into actual politics and the social realm, does not represent jouissance alone.

The relationship between sexual desire (which, according to Edelman, is relational) jouissance (which is anti-relational) and queer needs to be questioned when considering queer-feminist punk's use of queerness as negativity to relate through jouissance (or a disposition in the meaning of jouissance). This is because, according to Edelman, real negativity is only possible through the erasure of all relationality; relationality is only possible by erasing the death drive of sexuality by connecting it to reproduction. Rather than seeing the desire for recognition or sociality and jouissance as two mutually destructive forces, it seems appropriate to suggest that we should understand queerness and jouissance as always appearing together with a desire for recognition. We should further understand that these seemingly independent forces are in a violent relationship. In terms of a punk aesthetic, the metaphor of

a battlefield could be an appropriate one for the different drives, desires, meanings and aims that shape queer-feminist punk rock and where it is often hard to differentiate between battling parties. Moreover, punk music and performances are ambivalent on every level: the vocal presentation is singing and screaming at the same time, the sound floats between noise and melody, the lyrics, if comprehensible at all, are hard to interpret because of their confrontational and ironic tone. Accordingly, punk can be understood as engendering ambiguity on the semantic as well as the embodied, emotional and aesthetic levels. This ambivalence could be understood not as a particularity of punk alone but indeed as a significant marker of queerness when analyzed phenomenologically. Although queerness might "mean" negativity, a "death drive" in a cultural register, this negative meaning does not translate into social experience in this absolute form. Experience and embodied practices as well as individuals or groups are never signified by only one singular cultural marker. Accordingly, language or embodied practice can never become limited to one meaning or even to one set of meanings. While theorists like Lee Edelman, and their notion of queerness as anti-futurity, exclude additional coexisting significations, other contemporary scholars like Judith Jack Halberstam and Elizabeth Povinelli show that queerness within queer-feminist punk is schizophrenic, multifarious and only temporarily fixed. Queerness, as will be shown, is anti-social, irritating, creative and aims to create a sense of community.

It is necessary to stress the political and theoretical aim of this chapter again, which is first to acknowledge that queer-feminist punk's negativity is political because it acts as an irritant against normativity, and second, to value the creation of a queer sociality as different from normativity and normative sociality. Such a non-normative social form or connection arising from negativity can be seen as "beyond the contractual agreements between autonomous, positively defined subjects as presumed in liberal theories of the social" (Weiner and Young 223). A reconceptualization of "community" in reference to queer desire and jouissance is necessary to appropriately describe the interplay between queer

negativity, queer relationality and queer politics within punk. This reconceptualization needs to be considered alongside the relational effects of cultural productions like queer-feminist punk, while acknowledging the disharmonic, irritating and subordinating reinstitutionalizations of inequality and hegemony within communities or countercultures. This needs to be thought of in relation to the irritating effects that the conjunction of desire for recognition and jouissance produce. An appropriate theory for imagining a non-normative version of community and sociality is offered by José Muñoz in his Marxist-oriented utopian hermeneutics in *Cruising Utopia*.

Muñoz' account of queer utopianism does not follow psychoanalytic thought in any way and might seem contradictory to the anti-social Lacanian approach to sexuality. However, his work frames the concept of "ecstasy," which shows many features of jouissance-like experiences, while offering—in contrast to the latter—an alternative way to think about politics, futurity and community other than according to a binary logic of life/death or future/no future. It proposes a perspective that is open to the many facets of meanings and aims that queerness carries within punk lyrics and environments. These meanings and aims of queerness are located mostly but not necessarily on a conscious level. They are collectively shared as well as individually different. Considering its intentions as well as the target audience, this is to say that queerness within queer-feminist punk mainly becomes signified and verbalized in relation to and addressing hegemonic discourses, however, this is not the only way. For example, speaking, singing or screaming queerness can also establish relations between members of a community. In this case, the relation to hegemonic discourses may not be the demand to be heard by the dominant entity in the context of a political action, but to signify the differences from the dominant entity and embrace social exclusion as desirable. Following this line of thought, it could be surmised that one meaning of queerness might be negativity, however the paradox lies in the fact that this negativity might be a crucial factor for relationality. In turn, this relationality can be understood as

something emancipatory and enabling, which evokes visions of a (brighter) future. Consequently, this future might be very different from the normative future Edelman has in mind.

The variety of different, sometimes contradictory, meanings and effects of queerness is neither just a result of the complexity of the symbolic order—which needs to be overcome to be understood—nor an unconsciously produced inconsequence of this particular counterculture. In fact, it is a political strategy, the "anarchy of signification" as Judith Jack Halberstam ("The Anti-Social" 142) calls it, which has a long history within queer activism and becomes very explicit in queer-feminist punk environments. Before dealing with the theoretical questions that queer-feminist punk raises, I will take a closer look at queerness, queer desire and bodies as represented in queer-feminist punk rock.

3.2. Queer-Feminist Punk and Negativity

Queer-feminist punk lyrics, like those from the song "Homosexual Is Criminal" at the beginning of this chapter, play with negative connotations of sexuality. Another example of such negative connotations is the song "Not gay as in happy, but queer as in fuck you" by the band Agatha. This song addresses, in a relatively straightforward way, some of the politics behind the use of sexuality as negativity. The first line of the song, which is "Not gay as in happy, but queer as in fuck you," indicates the negative connotations of queer through the particular use of the word "fuck you" as an insult. This negativity corresponds with the punk aesthetic of the music and performance, the shouting, the high volume, the speed, and the emphasis on drums. Although "fuck" is clearly used as an insult, Agatha also holds on to the meaning of "fuck" as a sexual activity, which is signaled through the line "Your legs are wide and I'm inside." The first line's relatively undirected or unspecific display of rejection—the "fuck you"—becomes a very concrete criticism or rejection of heteronormative culture as well as lesbian and gay politics and scenes in the lines that follow:

> I wanna sing about liberation but I can't
> do that without talking about your lips
> […] Your legs are wide and I'm inside
> and if this is freedom, and if this is liberation
> I'm gonna fuck about queer liberation
> we'll take these scraps of faith, and we'll make
> a feast and stuff our face
> and we'll be happy and we'll never be the same
> (Agatha, "Queer as in Fuck You").

The word "liberation" is a reference to gay and lesbian liberation politics. The line "I'm gonna fuck about queer liberation" as well as the often repeated part "queer as in fuck you" can be understood as a rejection of gay and lesbian liberation politics. The lines "we'll take these scraps of faith, and well make / a feast and stuff our face" can be seen as establishing a connection between gay and lesbian politics and consumer culture, which Agatha repudiates. Moreover, they question the gay rights model of sexual freedom. It seems as if Agatha were asking if freedom—and hence lesbian and gay activism—can be limited to individual sexual freedom. In addition, the lines "I wanna sing about liberation but I can't / do that without talking about your lips" seem to criticize gay and lesbian liberation politics for their single-issue politics and exclusive focus on sexuality. Contrary to gay rights groups, Agatha seems to be calling for a more radical liberation movement that is not only intersectional in its approach and analysis but also more rigorous in its rejection of the sociopolitical and economic system.

Many queer-feminist punks like Agatha take up negative, derogatory and insulting notions of sexuality and appropriate them in their music to criticize gay and lesbian politics as well as lifestyle-oriented gay and lesbian subcultures. Moreover, their representation of anti-social queerness on stage is meant as a rejection of the heteronormativity within and outside punk rock's macho-dominated scenes. In part, these representations of negativity were meant to carve out a place for non-normative desires

or bodies. To some extent, this is a rejection of lesbian and gay identity politics and consumerism. The term queer, which is frequently used in queer-feminist punk rock, is used as a criticism, as well as representationally when used as a self-reference. Nevertheless, queer-feminist punks usually try to keep the label as fluid as possible. They question social norms and values, binaries and hegemonies through strategies that can be summarized as anarchical. Mostly, but not always, they reject the term queer as an "umbrella term" for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender, which can be seen as an anti-identitarian strategy. Moreover, the paradoxes and ambivalences that emerge when using queer as a reference are stressed. A good example of a fluid and ambivalent understanding of queer is Craig Flanagin's definition of the term in the 1994 edition of the zine *Homocore NYC*, in which the band member of God Is My Co-Pilot wrote:

> This is what [queer] means: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual. […] includ[ing] Bicycles as well as Dykes and Fags [which] comes from its universal use, as helpful playground? Or was it in gym class? who said to me: if you fuck men, you're not a fucking Queer. … or a fucking woman. Obviously, another citation will be required to include usage referring to Lesbians. (Flanagin, *Homos*)

What Flanagin refers to in this unserious, playful way is the understanding of queer as what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has phrased as "open mesh of […] gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (8). Despite or in addition to the emphasis on such fluidity, queer punk rock reverts to pejorative meanings of queer. Moreover, they understand queer as being in opposition to society or anti-social and stress this "anarchic character to the word queer" (Ritchie 270). Hence, their use of queer in punk lyrics and other writings can be interpreted as an anti-social or anarchist strategy.

Queer punks approached sexuality as a society-shattering force years before Leo Bersani published *Homos* in 1995. Therefore, it is not an overestimation to point out that queer punk rock anticipated what queer theorists like Judith Jack Halberstam call the "Anti-Social Turn in Queer Studies" ("The Anti-Social") as early as 1985.[98] Hence, it seems appropriate to read anti-social queer punk rock against anti-social queer theory, especially Lee Edelman's work. A necessary step for a productive theorization and analysis of punk with the help of Edelman's work, however, is one that moves away from an implicit equation of the symbolic place of queerness with an ontological status. As Tim Dean argued at the 2005 MLA conference, "queerness is structurally antisocial, not empirically so" (Dean 827). Nevertheless, as Edelman emphasizes in his book, the symbolic meaning of queerness is the point of reference for right-wing politics, which occasionally becomes deadly for living individuals identified as queer. In response to Halberstam's suggestion of valuing punk's negativity as instantiations of his (unrealizable) rejection of futurity, Edelman argued that the affirmation of "punk pugilism" in Halberstam's account "strikes the pose of negativity while evacuating its force" (Edelman, "Antagonism" 822). Halberstam, according to Edelman, confuses "the abiding negativity that accounts for political antagonism with the simpler act of negating particular political positions" (ibid. 822). He explains that the negativity of punk does not have any potential at all because it "does not [...] dissent from reproductive futurism" (ibid.). In contrast, he reads punk's embrace of violence, shock, anger and rage not as negative (according to his accounts) or radical because punk holds on to "the seeds of potential renewal" (ibid.)—to hope and a belief in a different future. However—according to Edelman—a different future is not possible. "Such a path [as queer-feminist and other punks see it] leads us back to the Futurch,[99] where spurious

98 G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce published their first edition of *J.D.s* around 1985 and introduced queer negativity to the broader punk community, which is described in detail in chapter two.

99 Neologism: Future and Church.

apostles of negative hammer new idols out of their good, while the aim of queer negativity is rather to hammer them into the dust" (ibid.).

Although anti-social practices of queer-feminist punk surely always and necessarily run the risk of resulting in the same mechanisms as their objects of critique, such practices should, nevertheless, be considered politically productive. What if the negativity of punk fails in its own purposes but still does not result in the same heteronormative futurity? What if a surplus value emerges that actually changes something? My attempt is to stress the value that the embrace of negativity within punk might have. The value of queer-feminist punk rock might lie precisely in the surplus meanings of a place in between the rejection of futurity and society as it is today, and the realization or creation of a different future through queer politics. This surplus value might have educational effects, create emotional bonds or just feelings of pleasure. A valorization of such a temporal sphere as the political might not only help to understand the productiveness of actual punk politics and aesthetics, it could also be a useful contribution to the corpus of anti-social queer theory. Furthermore, such an anti-social queer-feminist punk theory might be better equipped to acknowledge the differences among queers and experiences—something the anti-relational queer theory, like the one that Edelman proposes, fails to address adequately (cf. Muñoz, "Forum" 825).

Queer-feminist punks refer to the negative place of queerness within the symbolic order, which Edelman so pointedly describes, and the violence that this symbolic meaning can lead to. They extract this cultural meaning of negativity and the anti-social from the neoliberal language of inclusion and tolerance and express it in their lyrics. By taking on this negative, anti-social meaning of the term queer to signify their own cultural location, queer-feminist punks reject futurity in Edelman's terms. Furthermore, when their anti-social lyrics are performed on stage, it sometimes comes very close to what Edelman, in reference to Lacan, termed jouissance. However, despite the violence and self-destructiveness of

these lyrics and performances that appropriate and display the anti-social in queerness, they also are extremely community conscious and political.

Ironically, but not coincidentally, Lee Edelman's book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* happens to be frequently read and discussed among contemporary queer punk activists. As already mentioned, the producers of zines like *Pink and Black Attack* (Anonymous, "Preliminary"), refer to the book in their productions and translate Edelman's complicated arguments to their peers. These queer-feminist activists share Edelman's understanding of queerness as signifying the rejected and necessarily negated. Moreover, queer-feminist punks and queer-feminist radical anarchists share Edelman's repudiation of two principles of ethical practices: his rejection of the concept of humanity and compassion (*No Future* 67–89). Edelman presents these as systems of oppression and regulation, and implicitly asks for a reevaluation of the very basis of political action. The compelling quality of Edelman's work thus does not lie exactly in the rejection of benevolence, compassion and humanism—he already shares that view with queer postcolonial theorists like Gayatri Gopinath and others—his texts are frequently read by radical queer-feminist activists because of the rigidity of his definition of queerness to mean the opposite of conservative values and his "no future" rhetoric.[100]

Edelman's stance on the position of queerness within the social is mirrored in God Is My Co-Pilot's[101] song "Replicant," which

100 I want to emphasize that not all queer-feminist punks and queer-feminist anarchists appreciate academic anti-social queer theory. Some writers, like Fray Baroque and Tegan Eanelli for example, understand academic anti-social queer theory as "recuperation" (Eanelli 427) of their activism, and as "appropriation of the activity of insurgents towards the ends of strengthening their own careers" (ibid. 428). Moreover, his appropriation of the phrase "No Future" [If this is a phrase, perhaps lowercase would be better.] is much criticized by radical queer-feminist activists (ibid. 427).

101 The choice for focusing on God Is My Co-Pilot and the Skinjobs was inspired by the anti-social lyrics of both bands, which indeed reflect many of Edelman's elaborations on the epistemological position of queerness, and the bands' high popularity among their communities and beyond.

contains the lines "This is a song for closet cases / this is a song about your parents / sending you to a concentration camp / it's called / Skin Job." The name "Skin Job"[102] is a derogatory term for a "replicant," a bio-robotic from the science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick, which became the basis for the 1982 film *Blade Runner*.[103] The bio-robotic replicants or "skin jobs" in the film and comic look like adult humans, but have superior strength and are more intelligent. Their only weakness—compared to humans—is their lack of emotion. The skin job became a popular figure among queers and it is not a coincidence that in 2004, a queer-feminist punk band from Vancouver took the name for their own.[104]

The name "skin job" in "Replicants," connotes the exclusion of queers from the social sphere and therefore from futurity, symbolically and socially. Moreover, the name connotes a rejection of compassion and benevolence because of Dick's bio-robots' inability to feel emotions. Rejection of the Judeo-Christian values of benevolence, love and compassion through the name "skin jobs" is further emphasized in the song "Replicants" with the lines: "You can be their best friend / You can be the best worker / Be their son or their daughter / When the round-up comes / It's not gonna matter." God Is My Co-Pilot views benevolence and compassion

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Moreover, Skinjob's reference to God Is My Co-Pilot's song "Replicant" is a good example of the conscious continuation of core themes and knowledge in queercore (as already addressed in chapter two).

102 God Is My Co-Pilot musician Craig Flanagin discusses some queer theory approaches and works, and offers a queer reading of the Marvel's comics action figures "Skin Jobs" in the fourth issue of *Homocore NYC* entitled "*Girl-Love Can Change le Monde.*" The band Skinjobs from Vancouver also refers to the film *Blade Runner* when asked about their name (Ciminelli and Knox). It is also very likely that they knew the song "Replicants" by God Is My Co-Pilot.

103 It was also adapted as a comic book by Archie Goodwin, published in the same year as the film with the title *Marvel Comics Super Special*.

104 Considering Edelman's unwillingness to acknowledge punk as anti-social politics, it seems rather funny that Edelman shares the same archive as the queer-feminist punk icons God Is My Co-Pilot, who referred to *Blade Runner* long before he did in *No Future* (100).

as repressive and rejects them as political or personal strategies. The next lines "Hey Skin Job / Wake up! / Skin Job / Ask. Tell" (God is My Co-Pilot, "Replicants") can be read as suggested reaction to the unavoidable place of queerness as signifying the anti-social is a radical consciousness of queerness within the social and symbolic order and a loud and visible embrace of this place. They sing.

This embrace of negativity can indeed be found in Edelman's *No Future.* God Is My Co-Pilot decided to communicate the negativity of queerness through a fairly popular (and at that time in history probably extremely well-known) figure of popular culture, rather than call queerness by its name. The fact that queerness is still easy to decode could mean that this strategy serves to stabilize a social bond with other queers through a shared social code and cultural history. The reference to the "don't ask, don't tell" policy of the US military in the line "Ask. Tell." lends itself to such an interpretation as it also draws on the specific cultural and social location of the US. In other words, although God Is My Co-Pilot certainly embraces negativity and suggests a rejection of mainstream politics, the band's lyrics relate not only to the US sociocultural mainstream but also to some of its counterpolitics, namely gay liberation movements and queer activism. In addition to educating and consciousness raising, such references also aim to create social relations. It can therefore be argued that through informing and rejecting contemporary cultures and politics, the lyrics enable individuals to imagine some kind of future.

It is necessary to imagine forms of futurity and politics that are not heteronormative in order to account for the countercultural activism of queer-feminist punk. Nevertheless, Edelman's theorization of The Future—with a capital F—is helpful to understand the social criticism of queer-feminist punk rock. He argues that The Future is a heteronormative concept and stresses that it is the most important motivator, goal and meaning of all individual and collective political actions in Western societies. The collectively shared signifier for this Future, according to Edelman, is The Child. Indeed, the whole logic within which the political and social rest

within the symbolic order is shaped by the fantasmatic image of The Child, a figure that all real politics pay tribute to in fighting for its future. The Child is not to be confused with actual living children. Actually, some children are decidedly excluded from the concept of the future that politics "fight[s]" for, as Juana María Rodríguez explains. Rodríguez recently criticized the concept of futurity within anti-relational queer theory, like in Edelman's theory, for its "inability to recognize the alternative sexual practices, intimacies, logics, and politics that exist outside the sightlines of cosmopolitan gay white male urban culture" (Rodríguez, "Queer Sociality" 333). She emphasized that

> this denial [of a different futurity] colludes with a neoliberal rescripting of identity politics that animates political agendas based on individual grievances against the state, as it obfuscates regimes of visibility that leave some bodies, practices, and violations unmarked. [...] Futurity [as Edelman conceptualizes it] has never been given to queers of color, children of color, or other marginalized communities that live under the violence of state and social erasure, a violence whose daily injustices exceed the register of politics organized solely around sexuality, even as they are enmeshed within a logic of sexuality that is always already racialized through an imagined ideal of citizen-subject. (Rodríguez, "Queer Sociality" 333)

Rodríguez's critique makes clear that the meaning of The Child is always attached to the non-white non-heterosexual other and that we are in desperate need of an alternative way to speak about politics and perspectives. Nevertheless, Edelman has a point when he suggests that transfer of The Child from the terrain of the symbolic to the possibility of actual living and breathing children within the realm of the social and the political and the imagination of a livable future becomes attached to reproduction. Following this logic, queerness, on the other hand, is not only excluded

from the purpose of politics, but indeed "The Anti-Social" per se. It signifies what society fears most, its own Death. "[Q]ueerness names the side of those not 'fighting for the children,' […] the social order's death drive: a place, to be sure, of abjection expressed in the stigma, sometimes fatal, that follows from reading that figure literally" (Edelman, *No Future* 3).

Following Edelman, in a society like contemporary North American society, where politics, morals and ethics are strongly attached to what he calls "reproductive futurism," queerness must necessarily embody the meanings of negativity, inhumanity and death within the symbolic order. While this place within the symbolic order does not become incorporated in individual or collective morals or actions towards living humans uncontested, it does nevertheless have consequences for lived experience. Judith Jack Halberstam shares this view with Edelman. Nevertheless, s/he—like Rodríguez—strongly criticizes Edelman for the homogenous picture of North American societies depicted in his theories (Halberstam, "Low Theory"). Halberstam maintains that North American society is not one homogenous entity. S/he also argues that some core institutions, like kinship systems, are more diverse than psychoanalytic accounts suggest and that social norms and values have changed according to the new kinship patterns. Thus, Halberstam asks for a reevaluation of contemporary social forms in the service of designing queer politics. Nevertheless, it seems necessary to emphasize that the normative system of "humanism" and "compassion" are still bound to heteronormativity, The Future as well as The Child. Halberstam's objections are one important starting point in envisioning a form of politics and sociality that are able to resist humanism and compassion.

Before discussing aesthetic and verbal negativity, and the jouissance-like drive of punk rock, it is necessary to elaborate on the oft-mentioned psychoanalytic concept of jouissance. I will first explain Edelman's notion of jouissance in some detail and highlight its punk rock qualities and relations. After that, I discuss various problematic features of Edelman's concept, especially when applied in phenomenological sociopolitical contexts, like

queer-feminist punk rock. I explain how the concept of jouissance, if slightly reworked, can become a crucial instrument in analyzing specific cultural productions and contexts.

3.2.1. "Come Ride with Me, Come Ride with Me":[105] Through Punk Rock to Jouissance

I want to emphasize again that Edelman's psychoanalytic concept of jouissance is helpful in understanding the place and politics of negativity in queer-feminist punk rock because he views queer negativity as radical or extreme, which queer-feminist punks do as well. Hence, I will start with Edelman's conceptualization of the negativity of queerness and jouissance and complement them with other queer theory accounts to develop an anti-social queer theory that allows for a vision of a non-normative form of politics and sociality. Edelman's representation of queerness as negativity, as already mentioned, is built on the highly theoretical Lacanian account of sexuality. Very briefly summarized, this theory posits sexuality as the most significant factor in the process of becoming a psychological self and subject. This sexuality is less structured by desire[106]—which is always in relation to an object, although this object is always imaginary (i.e., never real in terms of a co-acting subject)—than by a drive. The drive signifying sexuality is "the death drive,"[107] a disposition towards jouissance (Povinelli,

105 "Come ride with me, come ride with me" is a line from the song "Tiara MC" by Inner Princess.

106 Butler argues that desire is always the desire for autonomy and recognition (Butler, *Undoing* 131–50). "[O]ur sense of personhood is linked to the desire for recognition, and that desire places us outside ourselves, in a realm of social norms that we do not fully choose, but that provides the horizon and the resource for any sense of choice that we have" (ibid. 33).

107 Sigmund Freud was the first to develop the psychoanalytic concept of the "death drive." He conceptualized the death drive, which is in opposition to the life-ensuring forces, as one of the two binary drives crucial for the motivations of the human mind. According to Freud, the death drive was not essential to the life of an organism because its nature is

"The Part" 288). It is a pleasure or enjoyment without any purpose other than its own existence. Sexuality, according to this theory, is a disruptive activity that always runs the risk of violating the integrity of the subject and making the formation of a coherent identity impossible. The only possibility of saving the subject and guaranteeing a coherent identity is to tame sexuality by binding it to a socially accepted purpose. This purpose is reproduction, and—according to Edelman—a future child.

In queerness, the ultimate danger entailed in every sexuality surfaces, and the anti-identitarian, anti-communicative and destructive quality of sexuality becomes visible. Although desire motivates sexuality (like every other political action), it is also driven by a disposition toward enjoyment, especially when the signifier guaranteeing futurity (the Child) is absent in queer sex. What becomes produced then is "a constitutive surplus" (Edelman, *No Future* 10), an undefined, uncontrollable excess. Edelman, referring to Lacan again, understands this surplus as "an excessive, unreal remainder [...]." "This surplus, compelling the Symbolic to enact a perpetual repetition, remains spectral, 'unreal,' or impossible insofar as it insists outside the logic of meaning that, nonetheless, produces it" (ibid.). This surplus is a placeholder, something outside the logic of meaning, "the meaningless substrate of signification that meaning intends to conceal" (ibid.). The Queer symbolizes the self-destructive quality of sex, while the imaginary Child saves the subject from its destruction through sexuality and the final death of identity (ibid. 26). Both symbols inhabit a particular set of meanings, with queers signifying the meanings that the system of meaning forbids. A person can never fully identify with these meanings because a full identification would ultimately lead to the subject's destruction, to the end of the social subject

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the longing for the anorganic. A sane human mind has overcome this inhuman force. The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan reworked Freud's death drive as something that is not in opposition to, but indeed part of every human urge or drive. Moreover, Lacan conceptualized the death drive not as a regression to a precultural or natural state, but as part of, and culture itself. The Lacanian death drive is no longer a biological term, but part of the symbolic order (cf. Evans 32–3).

as such (ibid. 6). "For queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one" (ibid. 17). The threat that homosexual acts and homosexuals themselves pose is "the violent undoing of meaning, the loss of identity and coherence" (ibid. 132). Edelman calls this interruption of meaning, and irritation or disruption of coherence, jouissance.

Jouissance or "enjoyment" is the immediate satisfaction of (especially) a sexual desire (ibid. 25). It is not to be confused with desire or lust, or with sexuality as such. Jouissance does not follow any symbolic laws. It is obscene, violent and paradoxical. It is a manifestation of the death drive (ibid.), negativity and queerness. Although the possibility of freeing sexuality and jouissance from desire, even from a theoretical standpoint, needs to be questioned, the focus on sexuality's negativity independently from desire, is nevertheless very productive.

The destructive qualities of sexual acts are most obvious—of course—in accounts of rape and other forms of sexualized violence. Violent sexual acts are often depicted in queer-feminist punk rock, such as in the song "Destroy" by The Homewreckers[108] (2009):

> Darling, there is a crack in my self esteem,
> made up of your sick words and gasoline;
> […]
> "Fuck me over" is, I guess, what you must have heard,
> when I asked you to go "fuck yourself"
> […]
> your selfish hands, they certainly ran free,
> without much regard to me
> (The Homewreckers, "Destroy")

The sexuality depicted in the song "Destroy" interrupts or opposes the romantic vision of love and sexual relationships. Sexualized

108 The Homewreckers are a contemporary queercore band from Brooklyn, New York.

violence harms the integrity of a person to the severest degree and should not be mitigated by comparing it to consensual sex. Nevertheless, from a psychoanalytic point of view, consensual sex also irritates feelings of autonomy and control, and thereby the basis of the self of the speaker. The danger and violence of consensual sexual encounters can be seen in lyrics like "Taking me into your world / taking me execution style" ("High World") by the band I Am Loved.[109] In the sexual encounter, the twofold desire—for relationship as well as autonomy and domination—interplays with the drive towards jouissance. In this case, the sexual act not only suspends communication but also poses the threat of "execution" to the self. The song creates a picture of romantic love and sexuality in an interesting way with lines like "Taken under the stars, like under a blanket of light," and "High on the sand but off the ground," only to destroy this stereotypical picture of love and romance when the song reaches the point of the sexual act itself "execution style." In other words, the actualization of romantic love, as distinct from the desire for love, is characterized as messy and destructive, an affect that does away with the autonomy of the self, as described in psychoanalytic theory (see Rodríguez, "Queer Sociality" 340; Povinelli, "Notes" 228).

The queerness that I Am Loved refers to signifies this collision of contradicting meanings and the irritation or disruption of coherence and identity, which anti-social theorists describe. What queerness signifies, then, is also jouissance: "a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinction of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law" (Edelman, *No Future* 25). Queerness may appear in the form of identity, but this is just an illusion produced by its attachment to a specific object or end. In addition, sexual and emotional satisfaction or fulfillment through queerness can only ever be fantasmatic and illusory. Both are effects of the "fetishistic

109 I Am Loved was an L.A. queercore band from the early 2000s. They frequently played at the monthly queercore club called "The Freak Show" and were friends with other queer punk bands like Best Revenge.

investments" (ibid.) in the object, which jouissance dismisses. Moreover, jouissance rejects the very foundations of such "imaginary identifications" (ibid.), the coherence of social reality and the symbolic order. In other words, queer sexuality, as Edelman suggests, makes visible that identity and a sovereign subject are not just an illusion but also an impossibility. It "[…] mark[s] the gap in which the Symbolic confronts what its discourse is incapable of knowing, which is also the place of a jouissance from which it can never escape" (ibid. 26). Within the logic of the social order, queerness must then be understood as the ultimate threat because it would destroy the Child, reject the future and therefore put an end to society (as we know it).

Queer-feminist punk music alludes to the threat of queerness more often with references to its danger to the coherence of society rather than to the self. The already mentioned 1990s band God Is My Co-Pilot can be seen as a prime example of queer-feminist politics with a version of queerness that is opposed to the imaginary Child. It seems worth emphasizing again that queerness and queers in God Is My Co-Pilot's songs, album titles and zines are strongly connected to negativity, but with an ironic undertone. Besides connoting fear, as in the title of their 1993 7-inch vinyl "My Sinister Hidden Agenda," queerness is diametrically opposed to the future and the imaginary Child. In 1995, for example, they released the song "Sex Is for Making Babies." The song's lyrics consist of only one line: "Sex is for making babies 1000000 times." On their EP *How I Got Over* (1992), they feature the song "I Kill Kids":

> I kill kids
> better keep hid
> I kill kids don't look under the bed
> you'll wake up dead
> I'll [cut up] your head and grind you up for bread.
> (God Is My Co-Pilot, "I Kill Kids")

In "Queer Disco Anthem" the threat of queers to children was picked up again:

> We’re here we’re queer we’re going to fuck your children
> Privacy is a punishment / Privacy is not a reward /
> Publicity is a human right
> Live in the light / don't die by a word / Speak up / Don’t
> put up with it
> I came out upside down and they had to turn me around
> […]
> We’re here we’re queer we’re going to fuck your children.
> (God Is My Co-Pilot, “Queer Disco Anthem”)

God Is My Co-Pilot addresses the issue of prejudice by making a connection between the term queer and right-wing hate speeches against queers with the lines “we’re going to fuck your children,” and the issue of queer desires with “don’t die by a word.” They refer to the subordination of queers in the dominant hegemony and embrace the negative symbolic position by taking pleasure in expressing it. They depict the discourse on the public/private dichotomy as an oppressive system which can be understood as, among other things, a reference to feminist politics if interpreted as affirmative references, or the failure of gay liberation politics if interpreted as negative ones. The references to coming out narratives with phrases like “Speak up” and “live in the light” draw on the historic lesbian and gay civil rights movement. By putting such references next to the well-known and too often commercialized slogan “We’re here we’re queer,” they position themselves within the history of political movements. God Is My Co-Pilot takes a critical stance against self-positioning and criticizes the politics of those movements by turning the phrase “We're here we’re queer get used to it” into “We’re here we’re queer we’re going to fuck your children.” Thus, God Is My Co-Pilot anticipates what Edelman suggests in *No Future*. Yet, the queer-feminist punk band does not propose to take the symbolic place of queerness (i.e., its negativity) literally (Edelman, *No Future* 5). In contrast to Edelman, God Is My Co-Pilot does not reject politics per se.

Edelman argues that politics is always bound to the future and therefore to the Child. In other words, embracing negativity and

rejecting the symbolic Child would imply a rejection of any future and of politics as such. His concept of queer theory is meant to "mark[…] the 'other' side of politics: the 'side' where narrative realization and derealization overlap, where the energies of vitalization ceaselessly turn against themselves; the 'side' outside all political sides, […]" (*No Future* 7). Besides the point that human beings constitute their identity not only through their sexuality, a full identification with the anti-communicative and anti-relational is hardly possible because there is no way to imagine the self outside of the social. However, this does not mean that actual living people, who self-identify or are identified by others as queer, are not fatally bound to the meaning of queerness within the Symbolic. Since queerness, the symbol within the symbolic order, is the surplus, "both alien and internal to the logic of the Symbolic, as the inarticulable […] that dismantles the subject from within, the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability" (ibid. 9). The condition of queerness seems to be a dead end indeed. But what if we think of politics, futurity and society differently. What if the surplus, the opposition to all meaning, and the negative, do produce meaning after all—a different meaning that is ambivalent to the point where it can never become frozen or attached to any one meaning, not even for a moment.

The fact that it is impossible to be outside the sphere of meaning, as well as the social, is the point where theorists like Judith Jack Halberstam and Elizabeth Povinelli offer a connection to Edelman's accounts. Considering the paradoxical situation of queerness as the place of impossible existence within the social, inhabiting the place where there is no place, this impossible existence might be the basis for a collectively shared form of resistance. Such a new formation of sociality could be a social bond, which is a temporal togetherness and recognition that is not based on full understanding (where intention and reception share the same content) or identification.

Queer-feminist punk rock, as depicted in the examples of lyrics by God Is My Co-Pilot, The Skinjobs, Agatha, I Am Loved and The

Homewreckers suggest that an embrace of queer's negativity as political action or politics is not only possible but locatable. They deploy an anarchy of signification—their textual negativity can never be fully decoded or understood. The irritation they produce in doing so should be understood as doing a politics of negativity. It is necessary to rework the concept of politics to account for such irritation as political.

3.2.2. "Yes It's Fucking Political"[110]

Edelman's concept of politics as being in opposition to queerness, is again bound to Lacan. Politics within the Lacanian symbolic order determines the "framework within which we experience social reality" (Edelman, *No Future* 7). However, this reality is always bound to the collective fantasy or illusion of "coherence" and a "recognizable form" of "identities as subjects" (ibid.). The static of the ego coerces the subject of politics, regardless of whether it is conservative, liberal, reactionary or revolutionary, "to endorse as the meaning of politics itself the reproductive futurism that perpetuates as reality a fantasy frame intended to secure the survival of the social in the Imaginary form of the Child" (ibid. 14). If politics are bound to and motivated by a desire for the future, and this future can only ever be identified with the figure of the Child, then queerness, as the Child's diametrical opposite, can only ever be the opposite of politics as well. This is a very crucial point in Edelman's theory because it opens up the possibility of translating his notion of "impossible" to the context of lived political and artistic agency.

Within a feminist framework, where even, and most importantly, the private sphere must be understood as genuinely political, even the thought of a position outside the political is not possible. However, when Edelman's meaning of "the political" is interpreted according to a definition of politics that is very narrow,

110 "Yes It's Fucking Political" is a song by the British band Skunk Anansie (*Stoosh*. One Little Indian, 1996. CD).

conservative and bound to legislation, law and participation in hegemony, a rejection of politics and the political then becomes possible, as can be easily observed in the practices of various grassroots communities. A different kind of politics from Edelman's version can not only be imagined but also (at least rudimentarily) experienced, as proposed by queer theorists like José Muñoz, Judith Jack Halberstam and Elizabeth Povinelli. This different kind of politics could be a politics of queer negativity or jouissance. In order to envision a different kind of politics, however, it is necessary to acknowledge that not all forms of political action aim for full recognition by or participation in hegemonic structures.

Three points of Edelman's theory need to be mentioned before moving on to engage with the possible aims that such a politics of jouissance could have, and that could be called the futurity of negativity. First, his understanding of the symbolic order is a very static one, which does not leave room for ambivalence or inbetweens. Second, his assumption is that jouissance cannot become a disposition capable of being shared between two or more people or the foundation of a social bond. And third, the concept of the drive needs to be questioned. What if the surplus of the drive, the "constitutive surplus" (Edelman, *No Future* 10) that disrupts meaning and is meaningless, is not so meaningless after all? To imagine a possibility for political action and a politically active social group, community or counterculture built on a disposition of jouissance is not the same as asserting that jouissance can be shared. Nevertheless, sexual acts or equally ecstatic experiences like dancing in a mosh pit or shouting, screaming, and ranting in a crowd might actually come very close to a shared experience of jouissance, a pleasurable as well as violent experience that has the potential to undo the singularity of the individual.

As already mentioned, some psychoanalytic theorists like Slavoj Žižek consider jouissance to be a factor in politics (Žižek, *For They* 231).[111] Žižek's point of view seems to disagree with other psychoanalytic theories that position sexuality as the thing that

111 Cf. also Povinelli, "The Part" 289.

"interrupts our attempts to make sense" (ibid. 234). To make sexuality productive to the acknowledgement of queer-feminist punk as political, what counts as making sense as well as the relationship between sense and politics need to be questioned. I suggest that ambivanlent, incoherent and irritating meanings make sense insofar as they produce meaning. To make sense not necessarily entails a logic in any conventional sense. Politics, on the other hand, do not necessarily have to make sense. The political can be found in sexuality's disturbing quality, not necessarily in the translation of sexuality into a normative language system.

Building on Žižek's estimation of the political in jouissance, Elizabeth Povinelli suggests that the self becomes vulnerable and available to the Other within such political situations of enjoyment. This happens when mind and body are loosened from "the gallows erected by the Law" (Povinelli, "The Part" 290), the normative social order, by embracing the undoing of the self within the social order. This state of vulnerability is a precarious condition, bearing the danger of literally being harmed or undone. However, it is also a situation where enjoyment can be shared. Povinelli argues that such moments of "availability of intensified potential, like the […] availability of enjoyment" (ibid.) not only emerge within "specific social orderings" but also necessarily within them, "even if they cannot be contained within any particular social ordering" (ibid.). "Every moment of enjoyment emerges from the specific and differential way that a social order apprehends bodies and subjects," Povinelli explains. Furthermore, such "[e]njoyment is separable from the social order only from an analytic point of view—which does not mean that it is the same as the social order. The same is true for potentiality and actuality. The differential spacings that are enjoyment and potentiality emerge within specific social orderings" (ibid. 291). Accordingly, Povinelli suggests that we understand queer not only as a sign or "an empty signifier" but also as an affect and element that makes us able to relate to others. By accepting or simply focusing on the blurry line between the subject and its social surroundings, most individual experiences (such as enjoyment) can be understood

as "divided by [individual] displacements" (ibid. 300) in the world and social order and signifying difference through different social conditions or regulations. At the same time this very same enjoyment can become, or rather produce, the "social bond" that joins individuals. "Our social bond is a willingness to reside at the immanent nowhere of being within and beyond these multiple, partial, and distributed divisions. We meet where we are divided. But we are divided in a way that we can never meet" (ibid. 301).

Following Povinelli's suggestions requires a reconceptualization of affect and recognition. Furthermore, it requires a version of sociality or social bonding that is neither built on identitarian similarity or difference, nor on a shared experience of discrimination or privilege. It is rather the basis of an experience of closeness when the singular being is lost in a place where nothing can be shared, expressed or otherwise translated into the symbolic order. It requires acknowledging the person at their most vulnerable, a place of negativity, which could indeed be called jouissance. Tavia Nyong'o recently offered an explanation of what such a politics of mutual jouissance or a disposition to jouissance could look like in an analysis of a scene from the documentary *The Filth and the Fury*, in which the Sex Pistols give a charity concert as a Christmas benefit for strikers:

> In the film, the Pistols are seen smearing themselves and the children with cake, and then performing, almost unbelievably, 'Bodies'—an intensely graphic song about an illegal abortion—as the children and their parents bop around deliriously. Such a truly shocking conflation of the sentimental and the obscene, the perverse and the innocent, produced a moment of saturnalia that served as an outright rejection of the manufactured consensual fantasy of the queen's jubilee year. (Nyong'o, "Do You" 109)

The politics of this scene, again, does not lie in the act of giving a benefit for strikers. It emerges in the moment of bonding with

the kids and their parents through their very negative and indeed very offensive songs, which are directed not only at the system outside, but the people inside the very circle of dancers as well, thereby deconstructing their very selves in the process. The surplus value that this scene produces (i.e., the shock value) was documented on film (fortunately for the researcher), and will continue to have this quality as long as the existing hegemony does not radically change. Only when the Child, in Edelman's terms, is no longer at the center of the symbolic order that determines our understanding and knowledge, would this scene lose its shock value and become apolitical because it shows the embrace of negativity by the very ones addressed in the song—parents and children—at a point in time where a different sociality becomes possible through a new social form.

Applying Povinelli's concept to this and other scenes would also mean to acknowledge queer as carrying social responsibility. This includes the responsibility to not focus exclusively on sexuality as crucial for achieving a position within the social. While most anti-relational queer theories tend to neglect the differences among queers and focus only on the negative place of queer sexuality within the symbolic order, contemporary queer-feminist accounts in the tradition of black feminism, post-colonial theories and Chicana feminism offer a more differentiated analysis. Before moving on to further investigate the consequences of a queer theory that understands negativity and sexuality as relational, anti-relational or utopian in its anti-futurity, examples of queer-feminist punk politics will be presented to show the theoretically outlined possibilities of jouissance.

In the song "We Signify," God Is My Co-Pilot shifts their focus from sexuality to gender, but holds on to the negativity of their sexual self-positioning to articulate their aim of educating and thereby assert their political strategy of using the negativity of sexuality through ambivalence and irony as shown in the following lyrics:

> We're co-opting rock, the language of sexism, to address gender identity on its own terms of complexity. We're

> here to instruct, not to distract. We won't take your attention without giving some back.
> (God Is My Co-Pilot, "We Signify")

The use of "instruct" and the phrase "giving some back" could be understood as the attempt to educate, but could also be meant as a (queer) threat. On a textual level, the audience that God Is My Co-Pilot wants to address seems to be hegemonic societies or right-wingers, but the audience attending their concerts, buying their CDs and trading their zines are LGBTIQ communities, as well as queer and not so queer punk groups. The negativity against mainstream society is not so much a message to hegemonic societies as it is a signifier to form a bond among a group of people at a concert or a community of listeners of their LPs and CDs. The meaning of negativity is neither simply a rejection of norms nor a recognition of queers, but both and neither—it is a passage that occurs along with the fast rhythm, the simple melody, the violent dance—a transition to something else. Therefore, it can be suggested that what becomes shared at such concerts is the disposition of jouissance, the pleasurable embrace of negativity, aimed to entertain and possibly educate as an additional benefit.

With regard to the embrace and enjoyment of negativity, the issue *Homos Invade Punk Rock* of the zine *Homocore NY* deserves mention. In this issue, Flanagin, a band member of God Is My Co-Pilot, (through ironic exaggeration) declares 1994 to be "the year that Queer Core fucks shit up." He mentions God Is My Co-Pilot's visit to Chicago's queer punk scenes and predicts that "the Homocore scene is just starting to take off. More bands are forming every day. Instead of making a little carbon copy of the indie rock scene, Homocore is launching the next evolution of music! […] We are moving forward in all directions" (Flanagin, *Homos*). This quote clearly implies a threat that draws on the meaning of queerness as something destructive, but it also demonstrates a sense of utopianism and a feeling of community. The clear reference to queerness or homosexual acts, besides its relative shock value, which again can be seen as a strategy of negativity, was consciously blurred by

Flanagin and Topper in the same issue of *Homocore NYC* as well as on other occasions. In an interview for UCLA's gay magazine from 1995, the vocalist of God Is My Co-Pilot said that she and her band-mates "[…] spent a lot of energy 'holding the line' to this issue; not pretend we're not Queer, and at the same time, not pretending that we fit into someone else's Queer category" (Topper qtd. in Flanagin, *Girl-Love*). What can be seen here is that God Is My Co-Pilot addresses the fluidity or surplus meanings of queer, rather than reducing or fixing it to a negative meaning. Furthermore, their attempt at keeping queerness undefined and in flux while holding on to it can be seen as using queer as something that enables affect. In other words, queer becomes something that, although it might and should mean different things for different people, can produce social and political bonds.

In the remaining two subchapters I explore some significant aspects of different queer-feminist punk socialities. Such an examination necessitates a reflection on contemporary queer theoretical designs of sociality and futurity.

3.3. "Fantasies of Utopia Are What Get You Hooked on Punk in the First Place, Right?":[112] Queer-Feminist Punk Rock, Sociality and the Possibility of a Future

I tried to throw a brick through a window
but I built this house instead
I hope you like it
(Agatha, "Queer as in Fuck You").

These lines from the already quoted song, "Queer as in Fuck You" by Agatha, can be understood as a disposition of jouissance because the urge to throw a brick through a window does not smash or

112 Atoe, Osa. "Feminist Power." *Maximumrocknroll 327* (August 2010).

destroy but rather builds the foundation for a social bond, a house for the two subjects engaged in a net of desires. This bond does not follow normative regimes. Such a social bond is a different sociality that embraces its otherness. Therefore, Agatha's statement needs to be read as one that counters anti-social theories that understand jouissance as the other side of sociality and politics. Furthermore, the concept of politics underlying their statement also seems to contradict what feminist theorists of psychoanalysis like Teresa de Lauretis frame as political. Although they might agree with de Lauretis that queer theory, as well as sexuality "do […] not map out a program of political action" (Lauretis 259), they would certainly understand every theory and sexuality in general as fundamentally political since they are effective—producing effects. One effect of a negative sexuality, which is sympbolized through the metaphor of throwing a brick, could be a form of queer sociality. A vision of such a queer social form can be understood with the help of José Muñoz' concept of "concrete utopia," as developed in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*.

3.3.1. The Perspective of Anti-Social Futurity

Muñoz criticizes anti-relational theory for its one-dimensional focus on (male, white) sexuality. Moreover, he criticizes contemporary psychoanalytically informed queer theory for its exclusive focus on the individual. Such accounts, he argues, fit neatly into neoliberal celebrations of individuality and uniqueness, and furthermore foreclose the possibility of political activism. As a response, Muñoz provocatively focuses on the social, relational and hope, and in so doing counters Edelman's statement that "[q]ueerness […] is never a matter of being or becoming but […] of embodying the remainder of the Real internal to the Symbolic order" (Edelman, *No Future* 25) with his version of queerness as "longing" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 1) and becoming. While Edelman implicitly argues that appropriation of the derogatory term queer was never translated into the social realm or, to put it differently,

never led to a view of queerness as "livable" (Butler, *Undoing*), to borrow Judith Butler's term, Muñoz, although not claiming that queerness would mean something positive or livable, nevertheless argues that queerness can enable social bonds, politics or a different future. Muñoz's concept, and his use of Bloch's concept of "concrete utopia" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 2–18), can be understood as acknowledging the entanglement of queerness with hegemonic discourses and the social, which is similar to the entanglement that Povinelli speaks of.

Bloch's utopianism centers on hope as its motivator, Muñoz explains. This hope, or hopes, which can be the shared hopes of a collective or single person, are always relational to a group, a collective or the human population in general (Muñoz, *Cruising* 3). Bloch understands "concrete utopias" as necessary motivators for social and political change. Concrete utopias are the hope for a future based on the present, but a better version of it—a future that is "not-yet-here" (ibid. 12), but can potentially happen (ibid. 3). Referring to Bloch again, Muñoz understands the idea of hope as "both a critical affect and methodology" (ibid. 4). Taking up the concept of "concrete utopias," Muñoz argues not only in favor of the idea of hope and futurity within queer countercultures but also for an understanding of queerness as such that is bound to futurity. Although his account seems to be in opposition to Edelman's work at first glance, Muñoz repeatedly explains that his account is nothing like that. Nevertheless, he criticizes "the celebration of negation in antirelational queer critique," as "participation in […] a binary logic of opposition." Instead of the "antirelational," he prefers an understanding of negativity and the negative as "the resource for a certain mode of queer utopianism" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 13).

With regard to queer-feminist punk rock, it seems worthwhile to consider Elizabeth Povinelli's concept of a shared disposition towards jouissance ("The Part" 288) alongside Muñoz' concept of utopianism. If negativity can become "the resource for a certain mode of queer utopianism" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 13), then maybe this utopianism is no more utopian than Povinelli's vision of a different kind of social bond, one in which individuals are able

to recognize each other without identifying with each other. Accordingly, such a bond may be able to build a foundation for a different kind of queer resistance against ongoing racialization, heteronormativity, classism, misogyny and ableism. In other words, a coalition through queer negativity might create communal awareness of multi-issue structural oppressions and encourage people to occasionally resist their participation in them as well as act against hegemonic power. Furthermore, it might help to understand the entanglement of desire and jouissance—the battlefield on which the drive is never obliterated in desire for the object or desire for recognition, and desire never becomes ousted in favor of jouissance, but where the jouissance and desire(s) can never be freed from each other. Juana María Rodríguez alludes to such a place when stating that sexuality is "an attempt at recognition," thus, "[a]s with all attempts at recognition, in sex we always risk failure" (Rodríguez, "Queer Sociality" 338). This risk of failure in the desire for recognition might be grounded in its emergence along with jouissance, in the violence of pleasure. However, in contexts where "social bodies that exist outside the logic of gendered, racial, and embodied normativity" (ibid.) are involved in sex, maybe a different form of recognition can emerge through jouissance. Sex in such contexts might "produce[…] a performative abyss" where a new form of social bond "can step into and resignify" (ibid.). Such effects, further following Rodríguez, are not planable in terms of a narrow understanding of political activism. Yet, they can be very productive:

> [T]hrough […] real and imagined sexual encounters, queers enact the possibility of disentangling bodies and acts from preassigned meanings, of creating meaning and pleasure anew from the recycled scraps of dominant cultures. Through eroticization and pleasure, we are thus presented with the possibility of remarking and remaking the pain and refusal of social intelligibility that constitute our daily lives, and sometimes the promise is enough. (ibid.)

The promise that Rodríguez refers to can be understood as a political act of a different kind, which might produce a queer form of sociality. It offers a connection to José Muñoz's approach to hope as "a critical methodology," which critically analyzes the past and present to picture a future (Muñoz, *Cruising* 5). This methodology seems to be an appropriate response to Povinelli's call to give up the only existing theoretical distinction between the singular psyche and the social, and instead acknowledge their entanglement. Such an approach might qualify as a recognition of queer's negativity and keep its potential to assist "in dismantling an anticritical understanding of queer community," while not "quickly replac[ing] the romance of community with the romance of singularity and negativity" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 10). The challenge, however, is in "finding ways to politicize these differentiated sexual postures and write them into new forms of social bonds, that [permanently] recognize and engage, rather than deny or pathologize, the untamed erotics of multiply infected power relations" (Rodríguez, "Queer Sociality" 339), to use Juana María Rodríguez's words again. Because sex is "a coming undone predicated on a coming together" (ibid.), the politics it lays bare as well as the new social bonds it creates, are as fluid as the encounter. Queer-feminist punk rock is a way of containing both the queer politics of jouissance and of queer sociality, even if the latter is a risky one. Risky insofar as the ambivalence that desire and the drive create makes failure not only possible but also eminently likely.

Before continuing with the concept of potential sociality through queer negativity, I will take another look at the Canadian queer-feminist punk band the Skinjobs to highlight the need for a theoretical recognition of negative queer political strategies within countercultures. The titles and themes of the Skinjobs' songs like "Burn Your Rainbow," "Transister," "Recruiting" and "Gender Bender" clearly mark their political strategy of using queerness as negativity. Yet, when asked why he chose the genre of punk rock for his band, musician Mitch Fury answered, "It appealed to the intellectual, political side of me that needed to be nurtured. And through punk rock I developed a certain level of self-confidence because

it's all about doing what you want to do and being who you are and not always trying to fit in" (Mitch Fury qtd. in Ciminelli and Knox 88). Fury's answer and his emphasis on enhancement and identity seemingly contradict the aforementioned negative song titles, which refer to popular stereotypes of queers. For example, the title "Recruiting," and "Burn Your Rainbow" imply a rejection of the gay and lesbian liberation movements. Similarly contradictory statements can also be found in the lyrics "Stop trying to fit in. If everyone looked like everyone, tell me: Just who would you fuck?" ("Burn Your Rainbow"), in which they ask for a rejection of social norms and affirmation of their non-normativity. The Skinjobs voice their critique of society without offering any concrete positive countermodel or suggestions for improvement. This, once again, places them in the tradition of punk in terms of a destructive and negative force, however, it also connects them to a younger movement of queer critique that is marked by a refusal of the ideology of productivity, efficiency and optimization. Accordingly, the band also chooses simple, and sometimes vulgar, brutal or even violent words and codes to express their critique. Four-letter words like "fuck" as well as other swear words are part of their repertoire, which is supported and ironized by their aggressive playing, through rhythm and melody. Applying the concept of jouissance to lyrics like "We're gonna burn your rainbow and we're having fun, oh yeah!" ("Burn Your Rainbow"), the Skinjobs' emphasis on playfulness and fun can be interpreted as painful enjoyment or a kind of pleasure-taking in negativity and destruction. Hence, their anti-social desire always comes with a clearly identifiable political strategy, namely, their critique of the gay and lesbian subculture as well as of a fun-oriented culture that lacks political awareness. The occasional use of more melodious expressions reminiscent of the specific aesthetic of camp, like "wooho" ("Burn Your Rainbow") or "du-du-du" ("Transister") between the text passages, underlines this embracing of fun. This is contrasted with rather vulgar outbursts like "yeah" ("Burn Your Rainbow")—song in a very deep voice, like a guttural sound, which can be seen as (a persiflage of) a stereotypical "male" expression.

The Skinjobs' lyrics, language and performance embrace queerness as negativity. Nevertheless, they express a longing and desire for sociality at the same time. Lines like "I want a boyfriend, who's just a boy and friend" ("Might As Well Be You") can be understood as such a desire for relationality. Moreover, the dominant modes of rejection and negativity in the Skinjobs' songs always seem to be in relation to a person, community or group. Other examples of the simultaneous juxtaposition of the concepts of rejection and bonding can be found in "Burn Your Rainbow" in the album of the same name, as well as in "Go Away before I Change My Mind." In both songs they reject gay and lesbian culture. In "Go Away before I Change My Mind," they sing:

> You said you cared
> But where was I? […]
> Hey Hey baby, where did you get that rainbow smile
> Wait, you are wasting my time just
> Go away before I change my mind
> One step forward, two steps back.
> (Skinjobs, "Go Away before I Change My Mind")

Although the song can be interpreted as the negotiation of a personal relationship between two lovers, it can also be interpreted as a rejection of gay and lesbian politics. The signifier for the gay and lesbian movement that makes such a gesture of rejection apparent is the "rainbow." Moreover, the songs are presented along with others that are outspokenly critical of gay and lesbian movements, as well as the politics of compassion in general. The concept of compassion is brought up here with the word "care" and can be read in reference to Edelman's extremely critical stance on compassion (*No Future* 67–89). The line "You said you care But where was I?" signals the questioning of such politics of compassion, and "you are wasting my time just Go away" can be interpreted as a rejection of this compassion. Furthermore, they show the battle between the desire for recognition—on the personal level in terms of romantic relationships, as well as on the more

general level of political activism and community—and the pleasure in destruction and rejection as modes of critical jouissance. Echoing the hegemonic discourses on progress and enhancement, the Skinjobs respond with destructiveness, violence and negativity.

The jouissance or pleasure in destruction is again apparent in the song "Burn Your Rainbow." The Skinjobs address the LGBT movement again with their reference to the rainbow flag. Moreover, they create the metaphor of a house for the LGBT movement with the line "We've built this up so let's tear it down, brick by brick let's burn it down." Interestingly, they do not exclude themselves from the mainstream or the concept of hegemony, as can be seen in the use of "We" in "We've built this up." Therefore, the Skinjobs' anti-social attitude and expressions of anti-futurity, as well as their rejection of conservatism and (neo)liberalism, and their validation of (re)production and creation are also forms of self-critique. The Skinjobs make a clear statement against an ideology of "building" and "creating." This could be understood as a rejection of the meaning of the Future within the symbolic order as Edelman depicts it. However, the Skinjobs also acknowledge and appreciate their necessary investment in the realm of the social. In other words, they acknowledge the impossibility of a sphere outside the social and try to negotiate a different engagement with others. Thereby, the Skinjobs are able to resist giving in to feelings of superiority or self-pity about their social position as queers and thus reaffirm it. Furthermore, these lyrics make a connection between the gay rights movement and politics, queer countercultures and neoliberal mainstream culture in general. By placing themselves within queer countercultures that are entangled with the broader neoliberal mainstream through the word "We," their embrace of anti-social queerness can also be interpreted as a call to embrace negativity within the realm of the social. In other words, their lyrics can be understood as a desire for a different form of relationality and social bonds. A further indicator of the Skinjobs' longing for social bonds is that they group themselves around political agendas in the social form of a community, which

they call "collective"—the *Queer Punk Collective* in Vancouver.[113]

Further theorizing the possibility of a queer sociality based on queerness as negativity once more requires a deviation from anti-relational queer theories and an orientation towards accounts of queer sociality. José Muñoz's concepts of utopianism and hope as well as Elizabeth Povinelli's vision of a different social bond also enable us to think of "queerness as collectivity" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 11). Furthermore, they allow for an analysis of contemporary queer-feminist punk music, groups and their political actions, where anti-relational queer theories like Edelman's cannot be applied. Such a theory is able to account for statements that value gradual enhancement, like Craig Flanagin's expression "I like the word Homocore, [be]cause I've been going to punk rock shows for a long time, and I've been sexing with men for a long time, and Queer Punk Rock makes me one notch less schizophrenic" (Flanagin, *Girl-Love*).

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this analysis, it needs to be clarified that referring to concepts like those of Muñoz is by no means an argument for futurity per se. Muñoz himself argues that

> Futurity can be a problem. Heterosexual culture depends on a notion of the future: as the song goes, 'the children are our future.' But that is not the case for different cultures of sexual dissidence. Rather than invest in a deferred future, the queer citizen-subject labors to live in a present that is calibrated, through the protocols of state power, to sacrifice our liveness for what Lauren Berlant has called the 'dead citizenship' of heterosexuality. This dead citizenship is formatted, in part through the sacrifice of the present for a fantasmatic future.
> (*Cruising* 49)

113 It can be assumed that the choice of queer-feminist punks to use the term collective, like the *Queer Punk Collective*, or the F*or the Birds Collective* from Brooklyn, which is also a group of queer-feminist riot grrrls and other punks, is motivated by the word's emphasis on shared politics or aims, rather than equal identification.

In other words, although Muñoz seems to agree with Edelman that the meaning of future in the contemporary symbolic order is oppositional to the place of queerness, he rejects the conclusion that this implies that queers cannot have both political and social bonds that are bound to a version of futurity. Muñoz's theory considers the possibility that queer strategies that embrace the meaning of queerness as negativity may not result in the anti-relational and anti-political.

Muñoz's reference to the negativity of the meaning of queerness focuses does focus exclusively on Edelman's work. He draws on feminist theory, the works of women of color and the concept of the performative by J. L. Austin to suggest a rethinking of queerness' negativity. Muñoz maintains that the negativity of queerness is produced through culture and its performatives. In contrast to Edelman, who understands the production of queerness as necessarily negative, Muñoz argues that because queerness is socially constructed, the outcome of the social production of queerness could be different. Furthermore, in following Paolo Virno as well as feminist theories of radical negativity, like Shoshana Felman's, he suggests that radical negativity, negation, rejection, etc. must not be understood as oppositional to the positive. Rather, queer radical negativity must be understood as belonging to the scandalous "nonopposition" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 13), a term he borrows from Virno. Muñoz argues that gay white males did not invent queer negativity and that concepts of queer negativity do not necessarily reduce themselves to the category of sexuality alone. He draws on the work of Virno, Felman and others to consider the possibility of a different future for anti-social queer theory and establish a different archive of queer negativity.

Muñoz argues that it is necessary to rethink the concept of time to formulate a new kind of politics and futurity, in order to reconceptualize anti-social queer theory as utopian. He suggests a transgression of the linear past-present-future time model (ibid. 17). According to Muñoz, such a move needs to be attempted because the contemporary concept of time is "straight time" (ibid.

22).[114] Accordingly, the contemporary time narrative does not allow for a vision of a queer present or future, or a present and future for queers. However, that does not mean embracing queerness as anti-social while simultaneously imagining a future is impossible. These elaborations are surprisingly similar to Edelman's approach, which argues that queerness inhabits the "impossible, insofar as it exists outside the logic of meaning that, nonetheless, produces it" (Edelman, *No Future* 10). The important difference in their notions of queerness, however, lies in its quality and purpose. Edelman interprets queerness as a reminder of that which is forbidden, neglected or rejected by the social order, which necessarily leads to social death. Muñoz, on the other hand, understands queerness as a process of emerging while also confronting its contemporary negativity. What emerges, according to Muñoz, is a non-normative sociality, as well as a political activism that disrupts the present/future binary to realize "a future in the present" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 49). With such a non-normative future/present model, the possibility of a queer futurity becomes less likely to result in a futurism in the name of the Child.

In considering queer-feminist punk strategies, another aspect of Muñoz's work is relevant. By criticizing the present oppression as well as the assimilation of queerness and queers into mainstream society, Muñoz suggests that we mistrust the temporal "manifestations" of queerness' meanings in the present, "especially as embodied in the pragmatic debates that dominate contemporary gay and lesbian politics" (ibid. 22). Following the concept of performativity of J. L. Austin, Muñoz believes that meaning and being are never static but need to be performed to become. As a doing that is always a process of futurity, performativity and utopia both reject the present, "the ontologically static," which "is indeed, by the measure of homonormative codes, a maniacal and oddball endeavor. The queer utopian project addressed here

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114 He draws on the work of Judith Jack Halberstam, as well as Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Carolyn Dinshaw, Gayatri Gopinath and Jill Dolan to explain straight time.

turns to the fringe of political and cultural production to offset the tyranny of the homonormative" (ibid. 26). An evaluation of the present needs to be informed by the hope for something "more" (ibid. 27). By bringing in queer-feminist punk's negativity again, it could be suggested that such a performative could take place in

> a zone between the living and dead in which language is not addressed or responded to but simply enjoyed. Thus while there was something in excess of pleasure in these conversations—an enjoyment in being and an incitement to be beyond the grammatical enclosures of meaning, a thing whose existence is so incredible that one incessantly questions its reality—the thing always threatened to enclose and envelop [the] self.
> (Povinelli, "The Part" 304)

Maybe this is a form of experience, where the Real in the form of the queerness of jouissance disrupts meaning and something new emerges.

Muñoz proposes that an appropriate method for queer politics is to keep the meaning of queerness in a "humble state" (*Cruising* 27), and thereby intervene in the reproduction of queerness as impossible. This liminal state of queerness would prevent the possibility of ever fully knowing queerness, and thereby resist a fixation of queerness by normative ideology as well as the incorporation (and thereby degradation) of queer politics by mainstream popular culture. In terms of a political strategy, this means that Halberstam's "anarchy of signification" ("The Anti-Social" 142) also aims at a similarly fluid queerness. Muñoz's queer strategy and Halberstam's anarchy of signification appropriate the contemporary meaning of queerness as negativity or impossibility and produce meanings that go beyond those connotations at the same time. Muñoz exemplifies his queer strategy by calling our contemporary time a "sex panic" and calls on other queers "to map our repression," "our fragmentation, and our alienation—the ways in which the state

does not permit us to say 'the whole' of our masses" (*Cruising* 55).[115] His reference to the present as a time of "sex panic" and the queer population as "our masses," is a rhetorical reference to aspects of queerness as negative, a threat or a danger to the symbolic order. Moreover, referring to queers as masses and the present as sex panic signals hope, insofar as this suggests the possibility of a queer collectivity and the political value of an appropriation of anti-social queerness. Thus, queer negativity as a social and political practice or jouissance, could temporarily actualize the desire for recognition and community.

I want to stress that the experience or performance of queer negativity in queer-feminist punk rock can be understood as a disposition to jouissance. Queerness—"the impossible existence in the world as it is now organized," (Povinelli, "The Part" 304)—becomes actualized, felt or experienced in the context of a concert. Moreover, it can become experienced together with others, enabling queerness to become a "part that can have no part in the common world—the thing that cannot be, yet is, concretely, before us" (ibid.). This queerness is never fully actualized or "not-yet here," to use Muñoz's words. It can never be fully here because queerness within the contemporary symbolic order of meanings is indeed defined through its own impossibility. However, queerness is not fully rhetorical or theoretical either. It is a doing or performing that can only be partly actualized and experienced in some theatrical, musical and political performances. It is "an anticipatory illumination of a queer world, a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility within a stultifying heterosexual present" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 49).[116]

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115 His use of the term "sex panic" for the present indirectly refers to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and early 1990s and radical scholars like Gayle Rubin.

116 Muñoz sees the actualization of queerness in moments of "ecstatic time" (*Cruising* 25). Such moments can occur during concerts, performances or other social gatherings. Ecstatic time is signaled at the moment one feels ecstasy, "when one looks back at a scene from one's past, present, or future. Opening oneself up to such a perception of queerness as a manifestation in and of ecstatic time offers queers much more then the

The (partial) actualization of jouissance can be seen in the following lyrics by the contemporary queer-feminist punk band My Parade:

> Hand Jobs on the Freight Train
> It all keeps traveling away
> Aint got love
> Aint no purpose
> Aint found home
> I'd rather be traveling too
> But since I got some bills to pay
> And learning to do
> I'll just stay and jack off all of you
> (My Parade, "Hand Jobs on the Freight Train")

My Parade tells the story of someone's ride on a freight railway wagon in "Hand Jobs on the Freight Train." This setting, a railway wagon, suggests the imagery of a homeless person. The title "Freight Train" is not only a reference to both homelessness and freedom but also to the popular folk song of the same title written by the black US-American blues and folk musician, singer, and songwriter Elizabeth Cotten from North Carolina in the early 1900s.[117] Drawing on Cotten's song about a black person fleeing on a night train, who is anxious about getting discovered, the song evokes feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and danger. Furthermore, by placing the sexual act of a handjob into such a setting, the sexual act itself carries a very specific meaning. Rather than drawing on positive images and feelings, these lyrics refer to sexuality as negativity. I suggest that they elucidate the two-fold violence of jouissance, the irritation it poses to the outside as well as the self. Given the history of black Americans, as well as the fact

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meager offerings of pragmatic gay and lesbian politics (ibid. 32). Muñoz's theoretization of ecstatic time comes very close to my reading of jouissance. Accordingly, I relate to his account, but continue to use the psychoanalytical vocabulary of jouissance and the death drive.

117 The reference to Cotten in My Parade's song "Freight Train" will be analyzed as an example of queer-feminist decolonial politics in chapter five.

that the song is actually performed by queer punks of color in Seattle's (predominantly white) queer-feminist punk subculture, the lyrics can also be interpreted as a reference to the hostile environment of contemporary US-American society towards people of color and the influence that this setting has on both the perception and construction of sexuality. According to Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (358), My Parade draws on "the murderous fantasies of an antiblack [and antiqueer] world, the traumatizing effects of racial representations, and, most importantly, the violence embedded in our own fantasies and pleasures." My Parade establishes their place within their community and broader society, a place where there is no place, as their community is supposed to be homogeneously white. Moreover, by singing about sexual acts that have a negative connotation—the handjob—along with the music's fast rhythm and edgy sound, they once more produce a jouissance-like experience meant to irritate the normative system (which also produces them), their place in the world, as well as their pleasures and desires. This irritating practice, their angry reference to sexuality, is a very emotional kind of political activism. Furthermore, with this type of activism, something that could be termed a queer social bond with the audience emerges. This social bond is very fluid and temporary, but nevertheless very much experienced and very political. An additional and longer lasting outcome of such temporal bonds is a Pan-American project by queer punks of color. It is a loose political coalition that organizes concerts and zine conventions in Seattle, Portland, New Orleans, Oakland and other places.

The queer bond that becomes actualized through My Parade's anti-social queer lyrics is at the level of meaning. The meaning of queerness, however, is also reflected in the music, the sound and the performance. Moreover, the social bond is also created through those channels. Jouissance is never only experienced on the cognitive level, it is also experienced on the emotional level. Similarly, the social bond that emerges is felt as well as understood. Numerous queer theorists like José Muñoz and Sara Ahmed argue that emotions like pleasure and anger function as tools for

communication and connecting with other bodies beyond sexual intimacy, and therefore also involve queer activism in some contexts. Ahmed identifies the goal of "bringing us closer to others" as the hope of queer politics, which brings with it the possibility of introducing "different ways of living with others," and the way to reach this goal is through emotion (Ahmed 165). Ahmed claims that the possibilities of connecting to each other through emotionality "are not about being free from norms, or being outside the circuits of exchange within global capitalism." "It is the nontranscendence of queer that allows queer to do its work. A queer hope is not, then, sentimental. It is affective precisely in the face of the persistence of forms of life that endure in the negative attachment of 'the not'" (ibid.). Emphasizing the emotions of anger and sexual pleasure is crucial for understanding the social bonds that jouissance might create. We must understand anger and sexual pleasure as two drives that are always partly accessing jouissance and the death drive. Hence, their motivation is a desire for autonomy as well as recognition. These desires are hopeful desires. Thus, the political quality of sexual acts, especially when transmitted through performances like punk rock, lies in this dual character where desire and jouissance, destruction and emergence are interwoven to the point of unrecognizability. The effect that such politics of jouissance have are social bonds fucked up beyond recognition, far beyond normative concepts of society. By implication, such an account also enables us to think of the affect of politics beyond compassion (Muñoz, *Cruising* 97). Referring directly to punk rock, Muñoz states that "[the] rejection of normative feelings" and "negative affect" need to be considered as well (ibid.) in order to imagine a different form of radically queer futurity. I will come back to this aspect of negative affect and emotionality by analyzing queer-feminist punk as an expression of anger in chapter seven.

3.3.2. "We're Different but the Same / Just One Big Game":[118] Queer-Feminist Punk Rock, Bonds, and Communities

The social bonds that jouissance produces, in terms of a one-time occasion, are certainly not enough to form a stable social form like a political coalition or community. To build a more permanent coalition or community, those politics of jouissance need to be repeated, to contain this "modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups" and foster what José Muñoz calls "modes of belonging" or "queer collectivity" (*Cruising* 99). Besides the already mentioned term collective, queer-feminist punks use the term community to signify their sociality, as exemplified in the already cited lyrics "All we want is a little community space" by Agatha. It seems that the terms community and collective carry the least objectionable connotations of social groups for queer-feminist punks. They consciously distance themselves from words like scene or subculture. While scene seems to carry too much of a livestyle meaning or is not considered political enough, subculture implies a subjugation to a hegemonic culture which, although it might reflect someone's experience, is not critically reflected by the term per se. Moreover, it includes an implicit notion of culture that is tightly bound to nationality. Queer-feminist punk bands reject notions of culture and nationality with lyrics like "[America] land of the free never got rid of slavery" and "hold your hand to your heart and watch the world on the news fallin' apart" by the Dead Betties (qtd. in Ciminelli and Knox 115). However, they do refer to their fellow queer-feminist punk rockers, fans and allies as community. Another term that they frequently use is "movement" (ibid. 117).

Although queer-feminist punks use the terms community or collectivity in reference to their gatherings, they hardly mean a harmonious gathering of equals among equals. On the contrary,

118 "We're different but the same / just one big game" are lines from the unreleased song "Different like Everybody" by the queer-feminist punk band Triple Crème.

the embodiment of togetherness within punk, the shouting, ranting, jumping, head banging, is very violent or anti-social. The performances and dances emphasize that every form of recognition of the other "must pass through self-loss, and when it passes through, it will never be returned to what it was" (Butler, *Undoing* 147). In other words, to be a subject among other subjects involves a lot of violence towards the self and other, forcing the involved parties to change. This threat of violence that the social always carries becomes even more precarious in the battlefield of sexuality, where different desires, the desire for autonomy and the desire for recognition intersect with the disposition to jouissance and the drive. On the level of meaning, the violence of togetherness is reflected through political critique and questioning.

The new social forms that queer-feminist punks create are never entirely new or non-normative. They recreate or reproduce hegemonic oppression because oppression in relation to the categories of sexuality, gender, race, class, ability, etc. is already integrated into the symbolic order. Hence, every social encounter reproduces hegemonic structures to some degree. Nevertheless, they are social forms that have the potential to resist normativity to a large degree.

These forms of belonging and recognition are neither naturally emerging gatherings nor created through any identification of similarities. Thus, queerness is not the basis for a group identity, but it is a signifier that every single person can relate to some degree. Another of these signifiers is punk music. This does not mean that queer-feminist punk communities share one definition of queerness or punk. On the contrary, they share some core ideas about queerness and punk and, moreover, a notion of both terms as something in flux, flexible, and which varies from person to person.

Queer scholars like Antke Engel, Julian Graham and Katherine Gibson often draw on the work of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy to theorize social forms that are not based on a common identity, origin, nation, etc. Nancy's concept of community is also very helpful for understanding queer-feminist punk groups

and their social bonds. In his book *Being Singular Plural* Nancy argues that the very meaning of being (as an ontological status that carries meaning) is always a being singular plural. Western (heteropatriarchal) models of society (e.g., states, nations, families and even humanness itself) are only able to address this ontological status of being singular plural through attachment to a communality of single parts by assuming the same origins and subscribing to a generic (cultural, national, gender, class, etc.) identity. The term community is thus able to address a being together without having the same origin or identity (Nancy 23). Politics based on concepts of sociality that refer to an origin are, according to Nancy, never able to go beyond the logic of exclusion and inclusion (e.g., the politics of sociality such as equality under the law, human rights, etc.). It is clear that such politics are highly selective with regard to the very definition of what the communality of such a being-in-common or equality is. Furthermore, such politics are not able to conceive of being singular plural to the full extent—they can only ever focus either on the individual—as in neoliberal societies—or on the masses—as in communism (ibid. 59).

Queer-feminist punks, on the other hand, mostly reject tracing their community to a shared origin or a form of generic identity. They emphasize their differences and embrace their social formation at the same time (e.g., in pairs, groups and crowds). What certainly binds them together is negativity. However, the shared negativity is not a simple identification with each other in terms of seeing oneself in the other. It is rather what Nancy envisions as a possibility in the social form of community, a form that could be thinking sociality as simply co-appearing at the same time in the same place (ibid. 61). Such a model could account for the contingency of the co-appearance (e.g., during a concert), as well as for the shared aim against normativity. It could account for the well-documented but rarely cherished expressions of the impact that queer-feminist punk rock has had and continues to have on individuals all over the US and beyond. This impact might not have resulted in the formation of a new band, local scene or movement,

but it might be visible in the personal life stories and personal development of individuals, the building of self-esteem and feeling more comfortable with oneself, and the elimination of prejudices (see Ciminelli and Knox; A. Davis; S. Marcus).

Thus, the "we" that such a form of community produces does not extinguish the single parts, but rather enables the individuals to relate to each other. Nevertheless, this "we" as well as the politics that connect the single parts become signified. Frequently, this mode of being together is negativity, as can be seen with the terms queer, punk, feminism, etc. Hence, such signifiers are never meant to refer to an origin or identity as something that has a fixed meaning or a single definition. On the contrary, the significations, through which individuals can relate to each other, are produced through a drive of endless production of meanings, or as Halberstam calls it, through the anarchy of signification. The use of significations to establish community, even beyond the here and now, through an anarchy of signification, are references to contemporary and especially past movements and subcultures. One example of such efforts to write a queer-feminist punk genealogy was already given with the band Skinjobs and their choice of name. As previously explained, the name Skinjobs not only draws from a gay archive but moreover also refers to one of the earliest queercore bands known, God Is My Co-Pilot, who used the name in their song "Replicants." Although the name draws on past movements and groups, it is never clearly stated in what relation they position themselves to them. They leave it to their audience to interpret their references as mockery, honest references or rejection (or all three).

This ambivalent strategy was already used by two of the very first queercore musicians, Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones, who worked on several queer-feminist punk projects at the end of the 1980s. They established a view of punk that already included feminist ideas and a rejection of heteronormativity (Jones and LaBruce) by referring to punks from the 1970s and 1980s like X-Ray Spex, The Raincoats, The Slits, The Nervous Gender, and Siouxsie and the Banshees. While establishing this view on punk rock, and

thereby creating a queer punk community, they also clearly offended some punk communities as well as some queer scenes. Through their zine, *J.D.s* and contributions to *Maximumrocknroll*, Jones and LaBruce established a queer-feminist punk archive of knowledge, but always on the edge of what they actually found as historic evidence. It was never clear if their queer punk examples were meant to offend those who believed in early punk as something pure, like using queer as a derogatory term against early punk, or embracing early punk's queerness as something they could relate to. Clearly, their aim was to build a queer punk community as well as establish a queer critique of hardcore punk scenes. Ironically, the offensive quality of queer-feminist punk, which in a way mimicks the history of the term queer itself, almost got lost in the process of historization. Through their connection to and communication with various generations of queer-feminist punks—from Vaginal Crème Davis to riot grrrls like Johanna Fateman—LaBruce and Jones became positive role models for younger queer-feminist punks. This led to the partial establishment of a normative model of origin, generations and linear time concepts. Nevertheless, ambiguity is still effective within queer-feminist punk and anarchy of signification is still its favored strategy (i.e., ideas of a definite origin are mostly rejected). The communities produced for, through and around queer-feminist punk rock accordingly can and do not trace themselves to a fixed origin, identity or even identity marker.

For example, the Skinjobs use negativity and express the death drive as a political strategy to reject mainstream society, embrace their queer negativity and relate to their peers. However, because their lyrics contain so much irony and sarcasm, all of their messages are ambivalent and cannot be easily reduced to one interpretation or fixed to one of these multiple aims. When they refer to the queer punks within their communities who want to become famous, they sing "Future celebrity / You'll shine so bright in New York City" ("N.Y.C."). The way the Skinjobs address the targets of their critique—the future celebrities—is clearly sarcastic because of the way the lyrics are sung. That this sarcasm needs

to be understood as a critique becomes clear with the line that comes before "And when you're rich and famous, I hope you don't forget us All us punk and all us queers." The tone in which the line is sung makes clear that the meaning of the words is ironic. The Skinjobs suggest that even the most outspoken "allies" sacrifice queer-feminist punk politics for mainstream success. In addition, the song is a critique of some of the New York City queer scenes that are relatively well-known in mainstream culture. The sarcastic take on New York City is a critique as well as a rejection of apolitical party cultures. The aggressiveness with which this rejection is sung—the punk sound—can be understood as the embrace of a queer counterposition that is marked by negativity. As mentioned before, such an embrace of negativity is in line with the negative place that queerness holds in the social realm as well as with its association with playfulness, celebration and having a good time. They do this through sarcasm and irony, and alternating aggressively and vigorously played parts with very melodious segments that almost sound sweet and soft, elements which are reminiscent of a camp aesthetic. No part of their songs can be analyzed without doubt or be reduced to only one interpretation. What intensifies this ambiguity even more are some of the references to historical events and movements that cannot be considered in the context of the aforementioned critique, but in a more positive way. By using the phrase "We're recruiting" as the title and theme for the song "Recruiting," they refer—knowingly or not—to Harvey Milk's famous opening for his speeches (Shilts 363) and therefore to the gay rights movement of the 1970s. The very well-known and popular gay rights activist Milk used to open his public speeches with the phrase "My name is Harvey Milk and I want to recruit you" (ibid.). At first glance, the lyrics of "Recruiting" are a reference to the fears and dogmas of right-wing conservatives with regard to queers, however, they also reference an earlier form of political activism.

The jouissance-like mode of the Skinjobs' music manages to keep the queer tradition of fluidity and the production of multifarious meanings alive. In addition, this ecstasy opens up the

field of the relational. Queer punk spaces and performances take up Muñoz's suggestion of "let us take ecstasy together" on many levels. Through their queer-feminist punk performances and writings, queer-feminist punks manage to go "beyond the singular shattering that a version of jouissance suggests or the transport of Christian rapture" as Muñoz puts it (*Cruising* 187).

Another example of the establishment of a queer-feminist punk community can be found in the aforementioned case of God Is My Co-Pilot. In the fourth issue of their zine *Homocore NYC* titled *Girl-Love Can Change le Monde*, they place themselves in dialogue with the riot grrrl movement as well as other feminist movements. Furthermore, they refer to other queercore scenes within the United States.

> Sharon and I started doing this zine to give away at shows […]. I picked the name in tribute to Homocore Chicago; when we did the first issue of this, I knew that there had been a Homocore zine in San Francisco in the ancient past (8991?) but I'd never seen a copy (…finally I did see it; Fly gave them to me, and they're cool).
> With this zine we take the "Here's some stuff we like; here's some stuff we've been thinking about, hope you're interested in this too" approach. My favorite zines, from Outpunk to Dishwasher, to Bad Seed, are all of this type.' (Flanagin, *Girl-Love*)

References like these claim that the queer punk rock scenes were not only very well connected, and that their protagonists shared quite a bit of knowledge about queercore's history and productions but also that had a connection to feminist movements. Such strategies suggest that queer-feminist punk rock was meant to actively build community in terms of a political movement. Furthermore, Flanagin and Topper give a reflection of the broader punk movement through their zine.

However, the movement they depict is never clearly delineated. It is fragmented enough to pose a threat to hegemonic regimes,

as well as build a foundation for variously identified individuals to recognize themselves within their politics and practices. To quote Juana María Rodríguez,

> [T]hese scenes of polymorphous eroticism enacted in language, in fantasy, in film, on stage, and in sexual play work to make queer sense of our lives as the subjects of power, a sense that begins to become comprehensible only within the frames of queer sociality. Yet it is a sense that is never fully legible or knowable, even to ourselves, a sense that is always just a sense, a gesture toward a way of knowing that betrays its own desire for futurity. ("Queer Sociality" 345)

3.4. "So Fuck That Shit / We're Sick of It":[119] Conclusion

Representations of queerness and queer sexuality in queer-feminist punk rock are negative, destructive and anti-social. These negative representations of queerness in lyrics and other forms of writing illustrate the heteronormativity of current hegemonic societies in the US. Thus, the embrace of this negativity can be viewed as a political strategy against normativity. Beyond a simple critique of social structures and hegemonic systems, queer negativity in queer-feminist punk rock illustrates the cultural and symbolic meaning of queerness from an etymological perspective. Punk is always already implicated within this etymology of queerness—however accurate this etymology may be with regard to Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones.

It seems important to emphasize that queer-feminist punks understand the intersection between queer-feminist activism

119 "So fuck that shit / we're sick of it" was one of the lines of a song by the queer-feminist punk band Gina Young and the Bent (qtd. in Ciminelli and Knox 114).

and punk rock—punk's musical forms as well as its politics—as (sexual) negativity. On the level of the symbolic, this (sexual) negativity is queerness, a symbol for the irritation caused by addressing sexuality explicitly or arousing conservative fears. Moreover, this negativity draws on the negativity involved in any sexual encounter that irritates the romantic illusion and always collides with the desire for relationality. This is why it is appropriate to apply the term jouissance to the negativity in queerness. Taking the loud and fast sound, dancing style and verbal articulations (e.g., shouting and screaming) of queer-feminist punk into account, shows that queer-feminist punk rock can be a potential drive or disposition towards enjoyment or jouissance, a violent passage towards the deconstruction of self.

The fact that queer-feminist punk negativity is the point where individuals relate to each other suggests that what becomes shared through queer-feminist punk rock is a disposition towards jouissance. The relation that such a shared drive allows is not an identification of a common identity, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or class. On the contrary, it is a shared understanding of the negative place of queerness within the hegemonic social order and a mutual embrace of this place. It is also a shared critique or politics against hegemonic oppression based on categories like sexuality, class, gender, racialization or ability. The social forms that such a social and political relation yields do not have a describable group identity. Moreover, such social forms do not rely on established forms of social contract. The communities that emerge from and around queer-feminist punk rock are mostly anarchistic in that they reject hierarchies and hegemonies. Nevertheless, such communities show a high degree of social responsibility towards each other as well as their broader environment. Moreover, such communities are not necessarily bound to a specific territory or a certain group of people in terms of membership. Individuals might feel a sense of belonging to the queer-feminist punk community even if they have never actually met any other queer-feminist punks. Furthermore, queer-feminist punks might feel very attached to other movements and activists from the past

and present despite the fact that the agents of these movements might reject such a relation.

Contradiction, as addressed in terms of belonging and community, is a very important factor in queer-feminist punk rock. Queer-feminist punk produces multiple meanings simultaneously and consciously, which creates ambivalence and ambiguity. This production of ambiguity in queer-feminist punk is as important as its political strategies of negativity. Moreover, the production of ambiguity—which can be termed the anarchy of signification according to Judith Jack Halberstam ("The Anti-Social" 142)—is a negative strategy insofar as it refuses fixation. This political strategy aims at the irritation of normativity. Irritation is also what makes jouissance political. In order to call queer-feminist punk a form of politics, the political needs to be thought of as something unpredictable or uncontrollable, but nevertheless productive in various spheres of the personal and collective. Such a politics would encompass every aspect of life. Furthermore, it would not aim for participation in hegemonic societies or a social contract in terms of laws and rights. The productiveness of such politics lies simply in its ability to irritate; at the same time, however, it is also productive because it enables the creation of social bonds and forms of community.

In the next chapter, I pick up the concept of queerness as a threat to society within queer-feminist punk music again and read it against anarchist theory.

4. "Challenge the System and Challenge Yourself":[120] Queer-Feminist Punk Rock's Intersectional Politics and Anarchism

In this chapter, I come back to the concept of queerness in queer-feminist punk music as a threat to society and relate it to anarchist theory. I consider anarchism a political concept because queer-feminist punks frequently refer to it or identify themselves as anarchists. Moreover, looking at anarchism as a decidedly negative politics helps to understand how queer-feminist punks theorize the use of anti-social queerness as a political strategy. As shown in the previous chapter, the strategy of anti-social queer-feminist activism is an appropriation of the anti-social meanings of the term queer as well as the term punk in lyrics, zines, and performances that have the potential to irritate or deconstruct social norms. This strategy is centered on negative meanings of the terms queer and punk as well as the rejection of homophobic and transphobic social norms and structures. However, such a rejection is seldom articulated as a singular topic in queer-feminist punk productions. Besides, queer and punk musicians and writers appropriate the anti-social term anarchy. From a theoretical perspective, the reference to anarchism helps to understand queer-feminist punk as intersectional politics that go beyond sexual politics. Moreover, anarchism offers ways to validate strategies to maintain non-hierarchical queer bonds. And last but not least, anarchism offers a concept of theory that is inseparable from political action. Such a concept helps make sense of the do-it-yourself and activist-centered approach of queer-feminist punk rock.

120 Limp Wrist. "Limp Wrist." *Limp Wrist*. Lengua Armada Discos, 2001. CD.

The following lyrics of the song “Reject All American” by Bikini Kill are a good example of the anti-social as well as anarchist activism of queer-feminist punk rock:

> Regimented / Designated / Mass acceptance / Over rated
> LIP SYNCH / Apology / LIP SYNCH / Salutations
> LIP SYNCH / Teen anthem / LIP SYNCH / Obligation
> If you work hard / You'll succeed / Reject all American.
> (Bikini Kill, “Reject All American”)

Bikini Kill's rigorous rejection of everything “American” can be understood as a queer-feminist politics of negativity. Their use of the phrase “all American” represents a rejection of social norms, structures and normativity as such.

Musicians and writers address oppression within and through their social and political environment—“the system,” as in the Limp Wrist lyrics used as the title for this chapter—based on various intersecting categories. Thus, they reflect on homophobia and transphobia at the junction of racism, colonization and classism as well as nationalism and xenophobia in general. Moreover, “the system” is not viewed as one single oppressive entity. Queer-feminist punks realize that social, political and economic oppression intersect and depend on various different categories, however, they also understand that there is not just one source of oppressive power. Hegemonic power, queer-feminist punks argue, can be located in various different places and institutions, such as the state, its administrative complex, law enforcement, health services, the prison industrial complex and corporations. In addition, they identify social relations and structures, like contemporary forms of kinship, as oppressive. Accordingly, such texts direct their criticism and rejection of normativity and oppression toward internalized power structures—social structures and norms—as well as societal (capitalist) institutions and their regulatory apparatuses. Hence, they establish a connection between everyday experience on the private and public level and real

politics, administrative regulations and capitalism. Through their focus on internalized oppression and the production of knowledge, they also point to the entanglement of cultural meaning, social structures, state power, administrative power and the influence of the capitalist market.

The following analysis shows how queer-feminist punks make the connection between economic exploitation, capitalism, institutionalization, homophobia, sexism and racism in society in their music and writings. I will start by giving some examples of anti-capitalist, anti-institutional, anarchist, queer-feminist punk bands and their cultural productions of the past and present. I analyze these examples to show how anti-social queer-feminist punk politics are connected to the politics of decolonialization, anti-racism, anti-homophobia and anti-sexism activism. In addition, I show how and why anti-capitalist and anti-institutional ideas fit into the concept of the politics of negativity and rejection described in detail in chapter three. In other words, I explain why queer-feminist punks consider the rejection of capitalism and institutions as vital for their queer-feminist politics.

Anti-capitalist and anti-institutional politics within queer-feminist punk lyrics are closely intertwined, however, I disentangle this connection for the sake of clarity. First, I start with anti-capitalist ideas within queer-feminist punk. Second, I give some examples of anti-institutional politics and show how queer-feminist punks necessarily view anti-capitalist politics as being aligned with anti-authoritian, anti-institutional and anti-state politics through their use of anarchist ideas and concepts to understand and communicate the intersections between capitalism, neoliberalism, and various forms of oppression. The anti-capitalist, anti-institutional and anti-authoritarian are anti-social insofar as they reject the existing social and political make-up of the US as a whole. Nevertheless, as already explained in the previous chapter, such politics are not anti-relational. On the contrary, the anarchic, anti-institutional and anti-capitalist aspect of queer-feminist punk rock in particular demonstrates punk's commitment to community. In reference to the anarchist discourses and theories circulating within

queer-feminist punk, I address the concept of community that my punk protagonists envision and (at least partially) realize through their activism.

4.1. "Anarchy Is Freedom—People before Profit":[121] Queer-Feminist Punk Approaches to Capitalism

Punk rock's critique of capitalism has a long history. Punk "has always been about fighting capitalism," explains Conor Crockford, "member of the [Bay Area] local punk band Deadset," in a recent interview published on *punks!punks!punks!.com*. In reference to punks' involvement in the recent social uprising known as Occupy Oakland, he further stated that he "feels that both Occupy and punk are about fighting the oppressive forces around you." Many other Bay Area punks, like John Eppard, also known as "John The Baker" from the East Bay band Fucktard, agreed with him in the same online interview. "For me the best part of punk is the political message of revolution and anarchy. And these are the places that (sic) occupy and punk are related," he points out. Queer-feminist punks like Mariam Bastani (personal interview) and Cristy Road (personal interview) express similar views. Both have participated in the Occupy movement, with Bastani in San Francisco and Road in New York.

The history of anti-capitalist politics in punk began in the late 1970s. Numerous bands wrote songs with anti-capitalist lyrics. The Sex Pistols produced a single called "Anarchy in the UK." Moreover, they addressed the connection between state politics and capitalism in their 1976 song "No Future" (also known as "God Save the Queen") in the lines "God save the queen cos tourists are money," and "Oh God save history God save your mad parade / Oh lord God have mercy all crimes are paid." The Los Angeles-based band The Dils were singing "Class War and I Hate the Rich" (qtd. in

121 *Bitter Pie* 4. Zine. San Francisco, 1999.

Sheppard) in 1977. Another example is the song "Society's Tease," which denounces mainstream consumerists as "the lost souls / Consuming what they're told / Taking their money / Leaving them cold / Minds dead before they're old" by Black Flag from 1985. Punk researcher Oliver Sheppard gives a brief overview of some examples of anti-capitalist punk songs from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s in his article "Anti-Capitalism in Punk." He mentions the four-volume anarcho-punk "CD series on Overground Records, the final volume of which was titled Anti-Capitalism and featured a 24-page booklet written by Crass's Penny Rimbaud" produced by Sean McGhee (ibid.), the LP *Class War* "[w]ith tracks like 'Smash the State,' 'Race Riot,' 'Slumlord,' and 'General Strike,' by the Canadian DOA, the song 'To Hell With Poverty' from the Gang of Four, [which is] a song about getting wasted on cheap wine and dancing the night away to forget the misery of living in poverty" (ibid.). Furthermore, he mentions MDC, "the most queer-positive, cop-hating, and anti-capitalist punk rock [band] from Texas" (ibid.).

Feminist and queer-feminist punks, like MDC or the British X-Ray Spex made the connection from capitalism to social oppression early on. X-Ray Spex sang lyrics like

> When I put on my make-up / In a consumer society /
> That's the way a girl should be / My existence is illusive
> […]
> I wanna be a frozen pea / In a consumer society
> ("I Am a Cliché")

which influenced many riot grrrls and queer-feminist punk bands. "For the punk, [queer-feminist punk,] post-punk, and hardcore movements as a whole, racism, nationalism, sexism, warmongering, and cultural conservatism were the main topics and primary villains. Economics seemed bound up in the whole rotten deal […]" (Sheppard).

Queer-feminist punks criticized capitalism, but they did not just reject it as a system of oppression; they realized their entanglement and collaboration with it. Quite a few made the connection

between their consumer choices and the exploitation of low wage labor within the US and beyond. An example of such awareness is the writing of Dominique Diana Davison from the anarcha-queer[122] band Spitboy. In the booklet of the Los Crudos / Spitboy split LP, Davison wrote:

> I'm realizing […] how interlinked with and responsible I am for things that happen all over the globe. NAFTA,[123] GATT,[124] the products I have the option to buy as a citizen of this country have an impact on workers from places I might never see with my own eyes. […] I'm learning through research and the outreach efforts of others. […] I don't want them to keep me ignorant of wages you earn, conditions, hours and benefits you are denied. I want to make an educated choice when I go to the grocery store and buy something that might have meant your death. (Los Crudos and Spitboy)

Davison rejects US consumerism because she sees it as an exploitation of labor within the US and beyond. Furthermore, she wants to raise awareness within her community and educate them about anti-consumerism. Another example of anti-capitalist writing are the lyrics of the contemporary band Erase Errata. The queer-feminist punk band from San Francisco and Oakland makes the connection between politics, low paid labor and gentrification in their song "Wasteland." The lyrics of "Wasteland" show a distinct anti-futurity approach with the lines "Future is always near but it's never really here / it's just a promise that will

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122 I use the term "anarcha-queer" instead of "anarcho-queer" to take into account the feminist politics of anarchist and queer groups and individuals.

123 NAFTA is short for North American Free Trade Agreement, which is an agreement between the governments of Canada, Mexico and the United States on the conditions of import and export. Since 1994, two supplementary agreements have been added to NAFTA to further regulate labor and environmental conditions.

124 GATT is short for General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Signed in 1946, it was replaced by the World Trade Organization in 1995.

keep our false hopes alive." Moreover, such lyrics connect an ideology of positive thinking to capitalism and politics.

Erase Errata identifies positive thinking as a US-American ideology. Barbara Ehrenreich also defines positive thinking in the same way in her seminal book *Bright-Sided: How Positive Thinking Is Undermining America*, as "the idea that our thoughts can, in some mysterious way, directly affect the physical world" (9). "Negative thoughts," according to this American ideology, "somehow produce negative outcomes, while positive thoughts realize themselves in the form of health, prosperity, and success" (ibid.). Ehrenreich argues that positive thinking is a form of national self-disciplining (ibid.). Furthermore, it is a "false hope" and delusional as Erase Errata point out in their song "Wasteland" (ibid. 13). Another queer-feminist activist who recently pointed to the fatality of this US-American ideology was J.D. Samson, musician, DJ and member of the queer-feminist pop-punk bands Le Tigre and MEN. Samson wrote the following in the *Huffington Post*: "Like so many teenagers, I believed in the 'American Dream,' that I would achieve both fame and success, and I would never have to think about money." What Samson addresses here with the "American Dream" is the idea that freedom means the opportunity for prosperity and success (among other things). Moreover, such a mindset suggests that upward social mobility can be achieved by anybody through hard work. Samson rejects these ideas and uses her personal career as an example of the untruthfulness of such an ideology. Despite her hard work and mainstream success with her music, Samson is struggling financially.

She reflects on her financial crisis on the latest records of her band MEN. Their song "Be like This" indicates their financial struggles with lines like "we are getting too poor we are getting too rich." Furthermore, "we are getting too rich" can be interpreted as a criticism of the queer-feminist punk community for selling out by becoming popular within the mainstream, playing at commercially run venues, etc. Lines like "global markets demand big guns and we have to supply" ("BOOM BOOM BOOM"), can be understood as a criticism of the music industry and MEN's struggle to

satisfy the market's demand for novelty. Other bands with similar lyrics are "Spank Rock, Das Racist and the Drums" (Samson). A queer-feminist band that goes further than just criticize is Agatha. In their song "Cut the String," they call for a clear and complete rejection of the existing social and economic order with the lyrics "cut the string / kill the dream."

The financial situation of many queer-feminist punk bands like Agatha and others gives Samson "Another reason to come together. Another reason to occupy Wall Street" (Samson). Like Samson, Agatha and Erase Errata, Ehrenreich also points out the connection between the national ideology of positive thinking and capitalism. "American capitalism," she explains, "is […] depending […] on the individual's hunger for more and the firm's imperative of growth. The consumer culture encourages individuals to want more […] and positive thinking is ready at hand to tell them they deserve more and can have it if they really want it and are willing to make the effort to get it" (10). According to the logic of capitalism, "the companies that manufacture these goods and provide the paychecks that purchase them have no alternative but to grow" and "steadily increase market share and profits." (ibid.) Eherenreich continues with the following explanation:

> Perpetual growth, whether of a particular company or an entire economy, is of course an absurdity, but positive thinking makes it seem possible, if not ordained. In addition, positive thinking has made itself useful as an apology for the crueler aspects of the market economy. If optimism is the key to material success, and if you can achieve an optimistic outlook through the discipline of positive thinking, then there is no excuse for failure. The flip side of positivity is thus a harsh insistence on personal responsibility: if your business fails or your job is eliminated, it must because [sic] you didn't try hard enough, didn't believe firmly enough in the inevitability of your success. (ibid.)

Erase Errata suggests that the ideology of positive thinking triggered by the false promises of institutions makes Americans dismissive of disturbing facts. The greatest of such self-betrayals "has so far been the financial meltdown of 2007 and the ensuing economic crisis" (12), Ehrenreich notes. Erase Errata's album *Nightlife* is dominated by lyrics that urge listeners to stop positive thinking and believing in a bright future, and start facing the economic and social crisis. Another issue that comes up in several of their songs on the album is the gentrification of San Francisco, the huge gap in income between white males and women, queers of all colors and ethnic minorities. Their song "Beacon," for example, can be interpreted as a criticism of the rich areas of San Francisco, especially Pacific Heights, but also the gay-dominated Castro district. Although they do not mention a specific part of town, it can be assumed that "Beacon on the hill" is a metaphor for those rich areas, where the wealth and capital that is displayed by private individuals is in stark contrast to the poor areas of the city like the Tenderloin, where homelessness and poverty are part of everyday experience. The implied criticism of the Castro district and gay culture in general voiced by Erase Errata questions gay liberalism as well as gay consumer culture, which is so prevalent in San Francisco. Queer-feminist punk Mariam Bastani also supports this critique. She feels that people in San Francisco are more comfortable with non-normative sexuality than with issues of color and race (personal interview). Bersani points out that "even white male straights know what insider terms like cisgender etc. mean, and if they don't, the punk community teaches them very quickly." In contrast to this queer-friendly attitude is the fact that "the migrant population is so segregated there and a lot of white punks who migrate to San Francisco do not get in contact with other minority groups besides gays." Bastani, as well as Erase Errata view the gay politics represented in San Francisco as "homonormative" (Duggan, *The Twilight*). Homonormativity, queer theorist Lisa Duggan explains, "is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of

a demobilized gay constituency and privatized depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (ibid. 50). The queer-feminist punk of Erase Errata and Bastani is intended to intervene in such politics.

I want to argue that the angle or mode of such anti-capitalist politics, like Erase Errata's, can be understood as a politics of negativity. Moreover, such politics can be understood as anarchism. Such politics rigorously reject social structures, the economic system and the state as well as liberal gay rights politics and futurity. Furthermore, especially through their problematization of legal systems, institutions and their anti-capitalist aspect, they can be identified as queer anarchism. They agree with theorists like Judith Butler that queer anarchism is an important countermovement to gay liberalism ("On Anarchism" 93). In a recent interview, Butler explained the usefulness and importance of queer-anarchist strategies as interventions in gay neoliberalism, using the example of queer Pro-Palestine activism in the Gaza Strip (ibid.). Although Butler talks about the involvement of the body as a crucial component of queer-anarchism, I argue that the anti-capitalist writings of queer-feminist punk need to be seen as queer anarchism as well. Before engaging further with queer-feminist punk as an anarchist intervention in homonormativity and gay liberalism, I want to explain the connection of anti-capitalism and anti-state politics in queer-feminist punk rock a bit further.

Queer-feminist punks, like Jerry Bomb—a queer trans man, sexual-abuse survivor and self-identified anarchist—make the connection between social structures and meanings, state politics, laws and capitalism by referring to the prison industrial complex. He and his fellow editors of the anthology *Survivors in Solidarity with Prison Abolition* point to the intersection of economic status, race, class, gender and sexuality, sexual abuse and incarceration in their call for papers on *survivorsinsoli.blogspot.com*. They emphasize that "people who are perceived to be white, straight, able-bodied, [...] settlers who are legal residents/citizens, and/or financially stable are not only less likely to experience violence

but also less likely to encounter the criminal injustice system than those who are not accorded the privileges associated with these positions." They emphasize the role of capitalism and corporations within a prison industrial complex that is increasingly corporately owned and profit oriented.[125] Like many scholars, Eric A. Stanley, Nat Smith, Michelle Alexander and Dean Spade argue that the prison industrial complex is an industry that exploits the labor of incarcerated individuals who predominantly belong to minority groups.

Queer-feminist punks reject the prison industrial complex and point to the entanglement of state politics and corporate interests. However, they point to their own collaboration with it as well.

Erase Errata, for example, point to their own complicity and that of American citizens in general through ignorance, silence and the indulgence of state power in their song "Tax Dollar," on the previously mentioned album *Nightlife*. The lines "What did we get away with? / See us punish what other folks do," addresses state violence and the citizens' involvement in state actions stressing the "we." Moreover, they condemn US foreign policy as hypocritical. They elaborate on this in the following lines:

> When we do what they're not supposed to / See us
> inure, see us steal
> See us talking on about another kill / I got away
> Yes, really got away / With murder, manslaughter
> All funded by my Tax dollar
> American bastard, murderous bitch / Traitor to humans.
> (Erase Errata, "Tax Dollar")

At the end of the song, they call for action against national politics with the cry "rebel!" Their way of rebelling is to point out injustices with their punk rock.

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125 By 2006, private companies in the United States were operating between 260 and 270 correctional facilities, housing almost 100,000 adult convicts, according to Frank Schmalleger and John Smykla (*Corrections in the 21st Century*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007).

Erase Errata's song "Another Genius Idea from Our Government" criticizes the federal laws regulating surveillance, the prison industrial complex and national ideologies of security. The following lines are a sarcastic statement on the national paranoia around terrorism and other criminal activity:

> Spend $20k on a listening device
> No, the sounds on the street really fascinate me!
> Aim the satellite down from a penthouse bubble
> Cause we're afraid of being robbed
> or catching something
> (Erase Errata, "Another Genius").

The last line "or catching something" carries the double meaning of detecting a crime through surveillance and the perception of the criminal other as diseased. The line "while you're too broke to not commit a crime" refers to the connection between poverty and criminalization of the poor. The line "your federal government knows that this is true" refers to the production of knowledge and truth in society through the state-run propaganda of mainstream media. The emphasis on "true" suggests that the things we read or hear in mainstream media news are not necessarily facts or "true" at all. Implicitly, such lines refer to the creation of Blackness as marker of criminal activity or intentions, drug abuse and so forth and, most importantly, to the fictitious character of such productions. In the book *The New Jim Crow*, the scholar Michelle Alexander also challenges such narratives by arguing that media representations of increasing criminal activity stand in stark contrast to the actual decrease in criminal activity, especially among African Americans. In spite of this decrease in criminal activity, however, the incarceration rates among black men are higher than ever, a consequence of racism and practices like racial profiling, as well as harsher sentences for minor crimes. In fact, as Alexander points out, the majority of black men in urban areas are under correctional control or have criminal records. Erase Errata's line "More prisons / more people have to die" ("Another Genius") addresses

mainstream discourses on crime and punishment again, and furthermore draws a parallel between the prison industrial complex and the military industrial complex. A song that addresses legal issues on the state level in relation to social homophobia is Erase Errata's "Rider." The lines "They've got a law in the desert / they've got a law to protect their children / they've got a law to help each other / where everybody has a gun / where everybody has a knife," addresses laws that allow certain concealed firearms to be carried in public. In 2012, about 49 US states had passed such laws allowing their citizens to carry weapons like firearms or knives without a permit or after obtaining a permit from the local government or law enforcement. The Spitboy song "Wizened" (1995) addresses the death penalty.[126]

The Berkeley-based queer-feminist all female anarcha-punk band Spitboy start their song by addressing the convicted individual as a person shaped by his social environment. His or her "past and [...] pain," however, means nothing to the legal system. The legal system recognizes only the deed, which is interpreted as "Senseless killing," so Spitboy, without asking about the (psychological, environmental, social) reasons for becoming a murderer. "Now," as the song states, "it's your turn to die / Sentenced to death / It's our prerogative / We the people / sentence you to death." The "we" in the song again refers to the complicity of US citizens in state executions. Furthermore, the "we" also stands in contrast to the "you," the person on death row addressed in the lyrics. This emphasis on the opposition between the collective "we" and the individual shows the double standard in the legal system, which views the individual's deeds as a free and personal choice, thereby ignoring the social structures and other circumstances influencing a person's choices. This point is further emphasized with the lines "Your guilt / Your consequences / We are justified." However, the lines

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126 As of spring 2011, only 15 of the 50 US states had fully abolished the death penalty. They are as follows: Alaska, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington D.C., West Virginia and Wisconsin.

> we've chosen not to look deeper / into the root of this problem
> For if we did, / our eyes would be gouged out
> by the blinding ugliness / that our system has created
> (Spitboy, "Wizened"),

take a clear position against the ideology of personal choice and personal freedom. Crime is not seen as just a personal choice, but rather as socially constructed. The deed, nevertheless, is not excused by Spitboy as a result of social structures and circumstances. On the contrary, killing—whether executed by an individual or a legislator—is condemned. In a comment on the song, Spitboy musician Todd Michelle Christine Gonzales talks about the emotional quality of the song. She writes:

> I have no idea what it feels like to be rotting away on death row. I do have some idea what it feels like to want to hurt someone—maybe not kill—but to release my rage on who is the source of it all. Anger wells up like fire—burning hot. [...] The lyrics were written in what I see as the voice of our justice system. Midway into the song my perspective acts as the conscience of the system. Look at the statistics, explore the punishment, an eye for an eye, is not an effective deterrent to murder. Why do we perpetuate violence in our society with more violence? (Los Crudos and Spitboy)

Gonzales' words once again highlight the relationship between the personal and the structural or legal component. Her words address the issue of the death penalty on the cognitive as well as emotional level. Thereby, she implicitly emphasizes that punk rock—the format of her discourse—floats between meaning production, the cognitive, the bodily and the emotional. According to this liminal status, punk rock is always also a doing or activity.

Punk music as queer-feminist anarchist direct action tactics are in line with punk's do-it-yourself ethos and the use of cultural forms,

like music and artistic forms of writing. Queer-feminist punks draw on anarchism in the search for actions and theories that oppose concrete regimes of power, especially institutional power. In their songs and writings, queer-feminist punks address legal systems, economic issues and state politics. They point to the violence that legal systems exercises. Queer-feminist punks agree with scholars like Jamie Heckert that queer anarchism "is simultaneously about interrupting or halting the institutionalization of the state in favor of popular sovereignty and subverting everyday disciplinary identities and hierarchical relationships" (96). "The point is not to achieve anarchism as a state or as a final form for the political organization of society" (Butler, "On Anarchism" 95), as Judith Butler pointed out in reference to queer anarchist activism in the Gaza Strip.

Moreover, anarcha-queer politics correspond with queer-feminist punks' rejection of futurity insofar as they do not necessarily aim at a concrete social, economic model or legal system meant to replace the corrupted old one. "It is a disorganizing effect which takes power, exercises power, under conditions where state violence and legal violence are profoundly interconnected. In this sense, it always has an object, and a provisional condition, but it is not a way of life or an end in itself" (Butler, "On Anarchism" 95). Thus, anarchist accounts within queer-feminist punk rock not only question state violence but the legitimacy of the state as well. They reject contemporary state politics and position themselves against hegemonic concepts like states and nations in general. As queer-identified punks, they refer to the anti-social meaning of queerness to argue that queers are ideologically as well as structurally (and empirically) excluded from the benevolence of the state.

Queer-feminist punks make a connection between queer and punk politics of negativity and anarchism. It is therefore no coincidence that quite a lot of queer-feminist punks have identified themselves as anarchists. One example of a queer-feminist punk writer who wrote her zine from a decidedly anti-capitalist perspective is Carissa Screams, editor of the punk zine *Screams from*

Inside from the 1990s. Another example is Cindy Crabb, a queer-identified anarchist, punk musician, and editor of the long running zine *Doris*.[127] Crabb's reason for being an anarchist is her "belief that people have the capability to organize themselves and live without domination and oppression" (Crabb qtd. in Screams 28). Crabb gives a comprehensive definition of and reason for her anarchism in her book *The Encyclopedia of Doris* (7–13). Crabb believes in anarchism because it helps her to understand the intersectionality of the forms of oppression and gives her a tool to work on multiple issues at the same time (ibid. 10). To the question of why she considers herself an anarchist, Jen Angel, anarcho-punk, *Maximumrocknroll* editor, and founder of *Fucktooth*, one of the first queer punk zines, answered: "Mainly, I believe in the autonomy and personal responsibility of all people. I believe you have responsibility for yourself, your community, and the world around you […] and the inherent unfairness of hierarchies and certain structures […]" (Jen Angel qtd. in Screams 36). One of the most pointed statements about the intersectionality of capitalism and social oppression was made by Stina, radical educator and queer-feminist punk fan from New York City in the recent zine *My Feminist Friends* by Katelyn Angell. Stina stated that "so many of the problems we face, from gay bashing to global warming, are firmly situated within the complex of government and business." The Government, she continued

> is not "by the people, for the people"—it's for a rich minority with substantial business interests. Politely asking the government to regulate problems or businesses to monitor themselves isn't going to work. All we end up

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127 Cindy Crabb is a zine writer, publisher, and punk musician based in the Bay area, who started her zine *Doris* around 1991 and continues to publish, write and organize within various queer and punk communities today. In *Doris*, Crabb "interviews, profiles radical discourse, draws cute comic versions of what she is talking about, and shares her take on making a life worth living. Included also are new writings interspersed with interviews other people did with Cindy about playing music, being an anarchist, being a feminist, being a punk over thirty, and more" (Ullrey).

> with is hate crime laws which throws even more people in prison, cap-and-trade measures that legitimate the idea that the environment can be bought, and corporate philanthropy programs that donate a cent or two of every dollar we spend on bottled water. Anarchism looks at all that and says "wait, something's wrong, let's dig deeper." […] By combining anarchism with feminism, anti-racism, queer activism, eco-justice, crip rights, we can hopefully create a truly anti-hierarchical movement. And we can see how different oppressions are linked, and work together with, instead of against, each other. (Stina qtd. in Angell, *My Feminist* 30)

Interestingly, Stina also emphasizes that anarchist activism appeals to her mostly because of its playfulness and integration of artistic forms of action. She expresses that "[w]hether Emma Goldman ever really said that she wouldn't be part of the revolution if she couldn't dance, that spirit is still part of so much anarchist activism. Instead of being very serious and very upset and working for a revolution way off in the future, anarchists try to live the revolution every day" (ibid.). Stina, like so many other queer-feminist punks, emphasizes that activists produce theory, knowledge and meaning through their activities. She rejects the strict binary of politics (i.e., activism and theory), as well as the binarism of art and politics, arguing for a hybrid understanding of politics as art and theory. Furthermore, she rejects the ideology of futurity. Stina sees most of her points reflected in anarchist ideology and action. Queer-feminist punks have made this connection since the emergence of the terms queercore and riot grrrl in the 1980s and 90s. A very exhaustive discussion about the intersection and relationship between anarchist theory and queer punk negativity published around 1992 can be found in the zine *Anarcho Homocore Night Club*. In the following sections I will discuss the intersections between anarchist thinking and what I have identified in chapter three as the specific queer-feminist politics of negativity in *Anarcho Homocore Night Club* from Toronto.

4.1.1. "Hitler Was Right,—Homosexuals ARE Enemies of the State":[128] Queer-Feminist Politics of Negativity and Anarchism

In *Anarcho Homocore Night Club*, the author Robynski draws attention to the public outcry that the Sex Pistols' song "Anarchy in the UK" (1976) provoked. Moreover, he claims that their musical performance, lyrics and movement in the eye of the public "looked like perfect examples of what most people in Western society are brought up to believe Anarchists are supposed to be" (11): chaotic, destructive and negative. Although many anarchists of that time might have rejected the idea that the Sex Pistols subscribed to a politics of anarchism—and Robynski is well aware of that—he sees a strong "cultural connection" (ibid.) between the Sex Pistols' version of punk and anarchism. This connection is the negative stereotype mainstream that society offers for both movements. Conservatives, mainstream newspapers, commentators and politicians used anarchism frequently as a derogatory term in 1976 when the Sex Pistols introduced their song and they continue to use the term that way today as well (cf. Squibb 175). Journalist and theorist Stephen Squibb argues that "[t]he charge of anarchism has always been a filthy smear on the lips of the ruling class" (ibid.). Squibb made his remark to a Globe editor, who asked if "the [contemporary Occupy Wall Street] movement had been taken over by anarchists" (Squibb 175). The word anarchists is used by the Globe editor to refer to senseless violence, destruction and chaos, ignoring the fact that Occupy Wall Street "has been anarchist from the start" (ibid.), as Squibb as well as the scholar David Graeber argue.[129]

Queer-feminist punk Robynski points to the "cultural" or symbolic negativity and anti-social meaning of anarchism. Moreover,

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128 Dreher 42.

129 The key features of all Occupy Movements within the US, such as the general assemblies, the emphasis on participatory and direct democracy, the intention to create horizontal power relations and direct action, are the values and strategies of anarchism.

he makes a connection to the symbolic meaning of punk rock, arguing that punk was associated with similar negativity and anti-social meanings. Stressing the fact that the negativity of punk and anarchism are stereotypes, or structural rather than empirical, he nevertheless refers to them because he understands that there is a "grain of truth in stereotypes" (Robynski 13). What Robynski grants as "truth" can be understood as symbolic core or shared meaning, which influences verbal and social discourses as well as the formation of the inner psyche. He also notes that one social effect which the symbolic meanings of anarchism and punk have or have had in the past are stereotypes.

Robynski emphasizes that the symbolic meanings of punk and anarchism both pose a threat to what he calls "the establishment" (ibid.). The establishment in this context can be understood as cultural norms, social structures and political institutions. Pointing out the connections between the symbolic meanings of punk and anarchism again, he draws a further connection to the symbolic meaning of queerness:

> Army-booted, leather jacketed, black-clad, crude, rude, lewd and tattooed, broken-toothed, pierced, foul-mouthed, poor, unwashed, ragged, matted, stubbled and safety-pinned, antisocial, Nihilistic and violent, the Punk has almost every feature of the stereotyped Anarchist—only the proverbial bomb is missing. Add gaudy make-up and androgyny and there you have the stereotyped image of the Queer (as any Punk who has been bashed can painfully testify. (ibid. 11)

Like Lee Edelman, Robynski points to the symbolic meaning of queerness. He refers to the negative place of queerness within the symbolic order, which Edelman describes so pointedly, and to the violence that this symbolic meaning can lead to. He sees this cultural meaning of negativity and the anti-social displayed in queer-feminist punk lyrics and other forms of writings, such as in the seminal *Maximumrocknroll* article "Don't Be Gay: Or How

I Learned to Stop Worrying and Fuck Punk up the Ass" by G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce. Following Jones, LaBruce and numerous other queer-feminist punks, Robynski embraces the negative or anti-social meaning of queerness as signifying the cultural location of queer identified people. In doing so, Robynski inexplicably refers to the potentiality of Lacan's jouissance in queer-feminist punk rock, "the painful pleasure of exceeding a [cultural] law in which we were implicated, an enjoyment of a desire […], that is the cause and result of refusing to be disciplined" (Povinelli, "The Part" 288). Like Judith Jack Halberstam ("The Anti-Social"), and in contrast to Lee Edelman, he sees the negativity of queerness directly interlinked with the negative meaning of punk. Robynski embraces queerness, as well as punk's structural negativity, as the rejection of futurity. In other words, such queer-feminist punk writings see queerness and punk as negative forces, or a jouissance-like drive that has the potential, if embraced, to reject, irritate and finally destroy "[t]he Law, […] the fundamental principles which underlie all social relations" (Evans 98) in Lacanian terms. Moreover, Robynski understands queer-feminist punk performances and the production of meaning as political activism that is able to reject society's ideologies and aims, and resist what Edelman calls futurity. Edelman rejects punk as "punk pugilism," a "pose of negativity," or "abiding negativity that accounts for political antagonism with the simpler act of negating particular political positions" (Edelman, "Antagonism" 822), as already mentioned in chapter one. Robynski's article proves, however, that queer-feminist punks draw on punk and queerness as symbolically negative on a much broader level then just political opposition.

Interestingly, Robynski sees the same potential in the term anarchism (11–12). He analyses the terms queer, anarchism and punk on the level of symbolic meaning, as already explained. Moreover, he addresses the political concept of anarchism and suggests that such strategies are useful for queer-feminist punk activism. Robynski shifts his focus of queer-feminist activism away from irritating "the Law" in terms of meanings and social

relations to state laws and other political instruments of realpolitik of regulation and normalization. Again, in contrast to Edelman, Robynski does not consider this real political aspect of punk, anarchism and queerness as "the seeds of potential renewal" (ibid.) of heteronormative structures or a reaffirmation of the ideology of futurity. Robynski does not outline the definite future that he wants to achieve with his anarcha-queer punk. "The point is not to achieve anarchism as a state or as a final form for the political organization of society," says Judith Butler ("On Anarchism" 93). "It is a disorganizing effect which takes power, exercises power, under conditions where state violence and legal violence are profoundly interconnected. In this sense, it always has an object, and a provisional condition, but it is not a way of life or an 'end' in itself" (ibid.).

Robynski emphasizes the destructive qualities of queerness, punk and anarchy. His queer-feminist references to anarchism describe the process of irritating or deconstructing social power relations and meanings rather than envisioning a concrete future. Nevertheless, like the scholars Judith Jack Halberstam ("The Anti-Social"; *The Queer Art*) and José Muñoz (*Cruising*), he does not reject futurity per se. Quoting work that analyses Bakunin's anarchism, Robynski points out that "[t]he passion for destruction is a creative passion too!" (Sam Dolgoff qtd. in Robynski 13). He suggests that a politics of negativity might have a surplus value. Such value, I want to argue, along with scholars like Halberstam (*The Queer Art*) and Povinelli ("The Part"), could be the formation of different social relations. In other words, the surplus effect of queer-feminist punk rock lies in the new meanings and social bonds created in the liminality between the rejection of futurity and society as it is today, and the realization or creation of a different future through anarcha-queer punk politics. Accordingly, the negativity of queer-feminist punk is considered politically productive insofar as it potentially deconstructs heteronormativity and other systems of oppression, while at the same time establishing a queer social sphere that differs from heteronormativity, racism, classism and ableism in its meanings and power structures.

Robynski undergirds his analytical argument of the relations between punk, queerness and anarchism based on a rereading[130] of *Catechism of a Revolutionary*[131] by Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin. He makes his argument in connection to the love affair between Bakunin and the anarchist extremist Sergei Gennadyevich Nechaev (16–18). Robynski argues that the threat Bakunin and Nechaev posed towards society was reflected in their illegitimate relationship, which he calls "a Man/Boy S/M relationship" (18). His emphasis on the alleged relationship between Bakunin and Nechaev can be seen as a queer reading (or queering) of some of the origins of anarchism. It undermines his argument that the relations between queerness and anarchism both constitute threats to hegemony. "[T]he construct of the terrorist," or threat to hegemonic orders, Robynski argues, "relies on a knowledge of sexual perversity (failed heterosexuality, Western notions of the psyche, and a certain queer monstrosity)". In their article "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots" Puar and Rai analyze media and popular culture discourses in the US after the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. They argue that the symbol of the terrorist became increasingly constructed as sexually and racially other

130 Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin was a socialist Russian revolutionary and theorist of anarchism. Bakunin called his socialist theory "collectivist anarchism." Collective anarchism means that workers have full control over their labor and manage production collectively. Furthermore, as he explained in his Revolutionary Catechism 1866, every person should have equal opportunity, support, education and resources. Bakunin, although married, appears to have had a sexual relationship with Nechaev, as the letters they wrote to each other suggest (see Kennedy 88–9; also Young14).

131 The authorship of the *Catechism of a Revolutionary* is the subject of a long-standing controversy among anarchist scholars. "The Catechism was found by the Russian police and published in the course of prosecuting the Nechaevists. It had long been assumed that Bakunin was primarily, if not wholly responsible for the composition of the document. Subsequently discovered evidence, however, indicates that Nechaev was the more likely author, though some contribution by Bakunin cannot be precluded" (Shatz xxiv). Robynski, however, proceeds on the assumption that Bakunin was the author.

(ibid.) and show that the "normalization" of culturally and racially sexually signified "other" into the register of meanings reaffirms established systems of oppression, like "aggressive heterosexual patriotism" (ibid.). I argue that the analysis of discourses around the love affair between Bakunin and Nechaev in the late 1800s shows a similar construction of the terrorist as sexually and culturally other. Although I am aware that the racialization in the case study by Puar and Rai are not the same as the culturalization in the case of Nechaev and Bakunin, I want to emphasize that the symbol of the terrorist today is also constructed as culturally other. Hence, the theoretizations of Puar and Rai help to gain an understanding of the connection between queerness and the construction of a symbol of national threat that Robynski makes.

In addition, the reference to Bakunin and Nechaev's love affair that Robynski makes adds a scandalous quality to his exhaustive analysis, which might prevent his readers—other punks—from losing interest. Moreover, such an argument is meant to provoke reactions from the anarchist scenes. I have analyzed this strategy of using queerness in its derogatory form as an intentional provocation in the previous chapters in reference to the reading of 1970s punk by queer-feminist punks. Hence, this strategy has been one of the most significant strategies of queer-feminist punk throughout its history.

The reference to the *Catechism of a Revolutionary*,[132] and the version of anarchism that Bakunin and Nechaev represent, however, primarily supports an understanding of anarchism as nihilistic. "For Bakunin," Robynski argues, "anarchy could only [mean that] the current social order and all of its institutions—physical, cultural, ethical,

132 Robynski claims that *Catechism of a Revolutionary* was a foundational text for the anarchist movement. He argues that "[i]ts continuing relevance is attested to be the fact that, a century after it was written, it was republished by The Black Panther Party […], which used it as their model of revolutionary organization. Panthers Eldridge Cleaver, George L. Jackson, and Huey Newton all sang its praises (which is ironic in Cleaver's case, considering his virulent homophobia; […]). It was, as well, the basis for the Italian revolutionary Renato Curcio's organization, Brigate Rosse (Red Brigades) in October, 1970" (12).

spiritual—[need to be] completely and utterly destroyed" (13). And indeed many theorists regarded *Catechism of a Revolutionary* as "a horrifying credo of the revolutionary as nihilist, a cold-blooded individual who has severed all the personal ties and human feelings binding him to conventional society the better to destroy it" (Shatz xxiv). Robynski, through his rereading of *Catechism of a Revolutionary,* makes the argument that the homophobia within anarchist circles during the 20th Century as well as their diversion from anarchism's original nihilism were both fatal concessions to established heteronormative systems. He states that

> [t]he document is less a list of rules for radicals, however, than a testament of rage, hatred and bitter alienation from the entire established social order. Here we have the pure Nihilism of original Anarchy, expressing all the destructive sentiments of Punk (indeed, some band should set it to music), only strategically targeted in a specific direction. (Robynski 12)

Robynski suggests that the nihilistic meaning of anarchism should be appropriated as a strategy for queer-feminist punk. In addition, the reference to Bakunin and Nechaev allows Robynski to view anarchism as a movement rather than a theory. "It was left to Nechaev and Bakunin," he writes, "to begin the network of conspiratorial cells, working to overthrow the government by violent means, to found Anarchism as a Social-Revolutionary movement based on *activism*" (13, emphasis in the original). Treating anarchism as activism as opposed to theory is interesting because it supports Robynski's argument that the cultural activity of punk rock is anarchist activity. Furthermore, it supports my initial thesis that queer-feminist punk rock was understood and performed as a form of political activism.

Robynski implies that successful queer-feminist politics need to aim at a revolution. In reference to Nechaev in *Catechism of a Revolutionary,* Robynski states that a revolution can only be made to happen through revolutionary action, not words alone. Nechaev

argued that "[t]he word is of significance only when the deed is sensed behind it and follows immediately on it," (qtd. in Confino 28). Similarly, Robynski explains, that "[p]unks always gave greater weight to action, thus maintaining the [relation between theory and action] that Nechaev and Bakunin indicated, and sharing the two men's Nihilistic obsession with 'merciless destruction'" (Robynski 23). For Robynski, "[i]t was not important that the Anarchist Punks may never even have heard of Nechaev and Bakunin; the salient features of their Anarchy were the same" (ibid.).

Both anarchism and punk activism emphasize action rather than theory. Moreover, both promote collective forms of action and activism rather than individual deeds. Thus, they create discourses that are simultaneously anti-social and envision (non-normative forms of) collectivity. In other words, they create and maintain queer social bonds. In his discussion of *Catechism of a Revolutionary*, Robynski argues that while anarchism must be leaderless, it also needs facilitators who provide the movement with the necessary infrastructure and organization. He suggests that punk communities reflect this ideal of leaderlessness with their rejection of the star cult, as well as any other form of (social) authority, and their do-it-yourself ethos. Accordingly, the references to prior punks as well as activists, feminists and thinkers within queer-feminist punk countercultures have to be understood as references to role models, which is nevertheless always critical. It is a validation of prior efforts and at the same time a reflection on hegemonies and social power relations. Moreover, Robynski suggests that queer-feminist punks should broaden their view by looking for role models in spheres that are not necessarily related to punk. His reference to Bakunin and Nechaev can be interpreted as such a search for alternative role models and new forms of activism. Drawing on *Catechism of a Revolutionary* again, Robynski argues that queer-feminist punks should look for role models among all oppressed racial and sexual minorities, the "déclassé intellectuals, the insane, prisoners, street people, squatters, sex-trade workers, 'outlaws' and antisocial elements, the so-called criminal class" as well as in "the underclass below

the working class who were not 'producers', […] the unemployed and the unemployable, unskilled and poor workers, poor peasant proprietors, landless […]" (24). Moreover, queer-feminist punks should try to build alliances with those who are oppressed. He emphasizes that such new alliances need to be built under the condition that queer-feminist punks reflect on their own privileges and take responsibility for their entanglement with hegemonic power structures. Robynski stresses that they need to reflect on their own entanglement in oppression themselves to successfully deconstruct existing hegemonies (ibid.). Queer-feminist punks must see their own position as a facilitating position and not as a leading position. Such an account asks queer-feminist punks to support the broader community according to their needs and wishes, rather than act out of compassion or benevolence. This position is described as the facilitating position in anarchist theory. Queer-feminist punk projects often show such facilitating activism. These projects include the *Girls Rock Camps* all over the US, which support young girls and women in making music as well as the *Home Alive* project in Seattle that teaches women and queers self-defense skills.[133] In addition, festivals like *Ladyfest* and *Queeruption* can be seen as facilitating projects because they offer musicians and music fans a platform for their activism.

To sustain anarchist projects, however, queer-feminist punks have to resist the cooptation of their movement by their oppressors, Robynski argues (ibid.). Resistance against cooptation can only be established if the violent aspect or destructiveness of anarchism and punk are preserved. "The downfall of Anarchism," he writes, "was that it became intellectually respectable; the downfall of Punk was that it became aesthetically respectable. As long as they were scorned by the establishment, they maintained their integrity; they lost it once they lost their lack of respectability. [T]he Patriarchy has totally assimilated Punk. […] Anarchy has likewise been coopted" (27). Robynski again emphasizes the

133 I will analyze the Home Alive project as well as the Grrrls Rock Camps in detail in chapter five.

role of language and meaning in the realm of the social. He traces the downfall of anarchism back to the theorist Peter Kropotkin, who defined the term anarchy as signifying "without authority" (29). Highlighting the anti-authoritarian in anarchism, the original meanings (according to Robynski) of "chaos and disorder" (ibid.) were lost. He implies that anarchists started efforts to assimilate themselves to the existing symbolic order and thereby lost the radical potential of their activism. Since then, "[a]narchy became almost the exclusive domain of journals and publishing houses and thus the focus of petty bourgeois intellectuals, [a] welcome addition to any breakfast table in AmeriKKKa" (ibid.). "Yet," he points out, "chaos and disorder were precisely what Bakunin used the word to mean," and this is what it should mean to escape the constant perpetuation of a system that denies them.

The same mechanism that Robynski outlined for the history of anarchism can be seen in gay culture. Once queers started aiming for social integration, queerness become structurally integrated into systems of law, and (at least partially) socially accepted. "Gone are the days when perverts were pervert—the most hated of the hated, the lowest of the low. Now Queers are fine, upstanding, moral citizens […]" (30). Robynski argues that the assimilation of white male queers, and to a lesser extent white lesbians, into hegemonic orders, not only deradicalized the potential of the term queer but also shifted the line of social unacceptability to different groups. He describes the victims of the normalization of some queers in the following passage:

> The cost of assimilation has been borne by those who are still perverts, the Queer lumpenproletariat:[134]

134 The term lumpenproletariat was first defined by socialist Karl Marx, meaning a vicious underclass or low working class. Marx saw no political or revolutionary potential in this part of the population. Mikhail Bakunin opposed Marx's view. He defined the lumpenproletariat as the "educated unemployed youth, assorted marginals from all classes, brigands, robbers, the impoverished masses, and those on the margins of society who have escaped, been excluded from, or not yet subsumed in the discipline of emerging industrial work" (Thoburn "The Lumpenproletariat";

> sex-trade workers, drag queens, S/Mists, leather and other fetishists, fist-fuckers, and Boy-lovers. As with Anarchism, a dichotomy has been created, separating the "good" Queers from the "bad" Queers, with the "bad" Queers taking all the heat because they threaten establishment moral values and prevent assimilation. The very fact that Punk, Anarchy and Queers have the capacity to be assimilated is testimony to [the fact that] that Capitalism has an almost limitless ability to adapt itself to the demands of any given situation. (ibid.)

Like Erase Errata, Agatha and MEN, Robynski points to the complicity of gay culture in capitalism and shows the pitfalls of contemporary gay politics. Today gay liberals "invariably do the bidding of the state, supporting anti-immigration efforts, and defending forms of nationalism or Eurocentrism that are patently exclusionary and racist. In this way, gay[s] befriend the state, are even recruited by them, and help to sustain state violence against other minorities," as Judith Butler ("On Anarchism" 94) pointed out recently in reference to Israel's national politics. Like Robynski, Erase Errata, MEN and so many other queer-feminist punks, Butler sees an adequate counterpolitics in queer anarchism. Although Butler might not necessarily agree that an effective queer-feminist punk anarchism should be "[i]ntellectually disrespectable, immoral, […] and anti-bourgeois, Nihilistic and passionate," she would definitely share Robynski's view that it should be "anti-liberal" and "lawless" (Robynski 30). The only way to resist assimilation and the cooptation into capitalism, Robynski concludes, is to appropriate the

> stereotype, because it is a caricature painted by the establishment of what threatens it most […]. It has been possible to show a cultural continuity between Classical

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cf. also Thoburn "Difference") He saw the most potential for a socialist revolution within this group.

> Anarchism and Punk only because I have been deliberately stereotyping. By equating it with Nihilism, […] I have so severely marginalized Anarchy that it can only fall together with other marginals, […] with whom it shares identical stereotyped attributes. (ibid.)

Again, Robynski emphasizes that the anti-social meanings of punk, queer and anarchism are crucial for queer-feminist resistance. Moreover, he points to the intersectionality of classism, gender binaries, racialization and ableism, as well as cultural and economic oppression.

4.1.2. "Agitate for That Class War? / Or Agitate for the Class War's End?":[135] Anarchism as an Intersectional Approach

I want to again mention the factors of economic oppression and classism as crucial aspects of queer-feminist punk activism. Like Robynski, many queer-feminist punks argue that a focus on economic systems is necessary to resist oppressive power structures. They view economic oppression as a multi-issued concern. Thus, in addressing economic exploitation, they identify and denounce categories related to color, racialization, sexuality and gender more than just the mere category of class. Nevertheless, queer-feminist punks do address the category of class. However, as the next two queer-feminist punk examples show, class and its intersections with sexuality, gender and racialization is considered one of the many categories of oppression.

The first example is a performance of the song "Class War" by Alicia Armendariz Velasquez at Amoeba Records in Berkeley on 12 January 2012. Armendariz, better known as Alice Bag and former singer of the Bags and

135 Agatha. "Poverty vs. Pride." *Agatha*. Self-release, 2012. LP.

> Cholita!, played together with queercore musician Martin Sorrondeguy at Amoeba Records. They performed "Class War" in support of the Occupy Movements in the US. Velasquez expressed her support for these contemporary movements in various recent interviews as well as in every reading of her autobiography *Violence Girl* in winter 2011/12.

The song "Class War," originally written by the Dils, calls for a war "between the rich and the poor," "a class war / in New York and LA," where "City Halls are falling down." These lyrics fit the contemporary historical context well. The Occupy Wall Street movement as well as the occupations in Los Angeles, Berkeley, Oakland and San Francisco are movements of "the 99%" of economically struggling Americans against the "1%" (the rich), at least according to their chants and statements at rallies, pamphlets and online.[136] The song "Class War" by the Dils, performed by Armendariz, is a strong reference to the 99% percent.

However, the song's lyrics go further in terms of characterizing the revolutionary subject of class wars, with references ranging from economic issues to racial ideology and state violence (abroad). The lines "if I'm told to kill / a Cuban or African / There'll be a class war / Right here in America" is a direct criticism of capitalism and American foreign policy. "Class war's gonna be / the last war / I'm not talking about a race war" calls for a realization of the connection between capitalism, white hegemony within the US and abroad, and racial oppression. The lines suggest that racialization and economic struggle are closely intertwined in the United States. They imply that racialization and the more general "othering" of certain parts of the population provide the ideological basis for perpetuating social, political and economic white hegemony in the capitalist system, as scholars like Stuart Hall and Cornel West point out. The signification of the racialized other,

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136 Cf. Kroll 17; also Occupy Oakland. Web site. 17 April 2012. <http://occupyoakland.org/our-general-assembly/>.

such as slaves (West 90), Native Americans and, in more recent times, illegal Mexican American immigrants (S. Hall 45–6), as inferior has served as legitimization for the creation of a cheap labor force. Capitalism needs cheap labor in order to constantly increase profit (61).

Othering of the cheap labor force not only provides the justification for their exploitation but also manages to shift the focus away from the economic level to the social and biological level. In other words, the battle for resources among the population, especially in economically difficult times, can be labeled a (unjustified) race rebellion if the worker that is struggling the most is predominantly identified or marked by race first and class second. At the same time, the belief that capitalism is colorblind creates a class system where poverty and economic struggle is a sign of laziness rather than a structurally created phenomenon. If the poorest population is racialized, it follows then that this population is lazy and by extension the racial other as well. Thus, capitalist discourses shift the attention from the failure of capitalism as a system back to those who have difficulties with the system. In the case of the struggling working class, it manages to blame the racialized other for "stealing" the jobs of white working class men, rather than blaming the system itself.

The relevance of the connection between class, racialization and the capitalist system, here exemplified by Armendariz and the lyrics by the Dils, is not the self-identification of the performers as working class or racialized, but the production of awareness of the intersectionality of categories of oppression. Furthermore, it emphasizes the necessity of alliances between different movements and discourses in order to empower each other in the struggle against oppression. The appeal for alliances is further exemplified through the collaboration of Armendariz and Martin Sorrondeguy. While Armendariz embodies the early punk rock movement that sprang up in Los Angeles as well as contemporary Chicana feminism, Sorrondeguy represents Latina punk politics and the queercore movement in the eyes of the audience. The intersectionality of oppression as well as a call for alliances is

also central to the already mentioned queer-feminist punk band Agatha.

Agatha questions the rhetoric of "class war" as well as the concept of working class among leftist activists in Seattle. In their song "Poverty vs. Pride," Agatha asks their community: "Agitate for that class war? / Or agitate for the class war's end?" It can be assumed that the community that Kaelen addresses includes the Occupy Movement in Seattle.[137] However, the band's critique is directed towards political activism in general. In their LP booklet, singer Kaelen of Agatha comments on the lyrics of "Poverty vs. Pride." Kaelen notes that she encountered a sign with the slogan "no war but class war" at an anti-cop march. She expresses her anger at the message and explains that the reason it made her feel alienated was the one-dimensional focus of the slogan. She further explains that such a single-issued approach to poverty is significant for the political left community she is involved with. Kaelen argues that this focus on poverty often neglects or ignores oppressive power structures among the poor, as well as the connection between oppressive social structures and poverty. The differences between the oppressed become erased and white, male and heteronormative power structures are not addressed in the protest cultures. Referring to her own upbringing in a poor working class bi-racial environment, Kaelen argues that racism and pro-working class politics are not contradictory. "[W]hen I was growing up I was taught to have pride in where I came from and be ashamed at the same time," Kaelen explains.

> I was taught to have pride in the white, working class history of my family and to be ashamed of the Chicano field-worker side of my history. To not trust rich people […] but to be die-hard republican. It was okay to be sad about my mom getting sicker and sicker with little to no healthcare, but not to connect her lack of healthcare

137 Though not explicitly referring to the recent Occupy Movement, they mention the slogans that are frequently seen at Occupy actions in the liner notes to the song.

> and health in general to a larger world that is racist, classist, ableist and homophobic. […] There is already a class war going on, no need to call for one. I would instead call for the class war to end. And irrevocably tied up to the end of that war would be the end of ableism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, border policing (of any kind) and all other oppressions. (Kaelen, liner notes to "Poverty vs. Pride")

Kaelen argues that a reflection on structural "ableism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, border policing (of any kind) and all other oppressions" (ibid.) is necessary. Moreover, she reflects on the meta-level or ideology behind working class politics in the US. Furthermore, she points to the patriarchal structures and misogyny of socialist working class rhetoric and concepts. She points out that most working class politics follow a capitalist logic and do not strive for equality for all people in the US. Moreover, she connects conservative ideologies of class to countercultural practice, arguing that class war rhetoric in the US paradoxically reestablishes a neoliberal logic and economic exploitation because it is based on the individual and individual success.

Connecting the rhetoric of calling for a class war to other phrases that she had come across at recent rallies and protests, like "all or nothing," or "no cause but my cause," she identifies the focus and goal of leftist politics—individual freedom—as the major problem. By referring to the history of her family, Kaelen shows that the same goal of individual freedom is the key aim of conservative and neoliberal ultra-capitalist politics. Furthermore, she argues that liberal and even leftist politics end up reestablishing heteronormative, ableist and racialized structures because they focus on individual freedom, which is the basis for capitalism to work. The same capitalism is, on the other hand, dependent on the othering of exploitable groups to maintain growth. Queer-feminist punk resistance movements, according to Kaelen, cannot be focused on individual freedom, but need to be centered around collectivity or community. Instead of focusing on

the individual and one category of oppression, the focus of critique has to be social structures, hegemonies and their connection with economic issues. In other words, Kaelen asks for a questioning of the ideology behind every social interaction, and every social, cultural and political form of disciplining and regulation, including the state. Kaelen and her queer-feminist punk band Agatha distance themselves from US-American working class ideology and other forms of politics that focus only on individual freedom (e.g., gay liberalism). They agree with Judith Butler that gay liberalism "imagines it is defending the rights of individuals, but fails to see that individualism is a social form which, under conditions of capitalism, depends upon both social inequality and the violent power of the state. This last becomes clear in anti-immigration politics" (Butler, "On Anarchism" 94). Furthermore, Agatha calls for a politics that reflect society from an intersectional perspective, which illustrates Butler's point that "any minority has to make allies among those who are subject to arbitrary and devastating forms of state violence" (ibid.). Like many other queer-feminist punks, Agatha favors queer-feminist punk anarchism because it "is 'smarter' about state power, and legal violence in particular" (ibid.), especially compared to gay rights movements. Anarcha-queer punk politics can be interpreted as an intersectional criticism of power structures and hegemonies. Moreover, the members of Agatha reject a politics of representation in favor of a politics of cooperation and alliances.

4.2. "Fuck the System / We Can Bring It Down":[138] Gay Assimilation, Capitalism and Institutions

I want to come back to the connection between gay assimilation, capitalist systems and administrative institutions (e.g., states) made by the band members of Agatha as well as Robynski. Both examples show that queer-feminist punks understand the connection between assimilatory politics (e.g., struggle of gays for the right to marry) and the reaffirmation of oppressive systems (e.g., state laws). Furthermore, they argue that the actual integration of formerly excluded subjects (e.g., gays) allows for the production of a racial and queer other, and the legitimization of their oppression, as shown in *Anarcho Homocore Night Club* by Robynski. Scholars like Dean Spade and Lisa Duggan have argued that gay movements have contributed to the vulnerability of many queer subjects—such as transgenders, people of color, undocumented immigrants, sex workers, homeless people or drug addicts—by advocating for legal and social inclusion in a system signified through neoliberalism. Capitalism and the neoliberal politics of the US government have forced "privatization, trade liberalization, labor and environmental deregulation, the elimination of health and welfare programs, increased immigration enforcement, and the expansion of imprisonment" (Spade 34) during the last 30 years. The incorporation of resistance movements, like gay liberation movements, into neoliberalism has increasingly "become legitimizing tools for white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal, ableist political agenda, […] undermining the effectiveness of their resistance," Spade argues (ibid.).

Jasbir K. Puar and Amit S. Rai point to a fatal by-product of the acceptance or assimilation of gays in American society in the 21st century in "Monster, Terrorist, Fag." While gay assimilation allowed the US nation to be "depicted as feminist and gay-safe by

138 Exploited. "Fuck the System." *Fuck the System*. Dream Catcher Records, 2003.

this comparison with Afghanistan" (Puar and Rai 126), it did not prevent the construction of a queer cultural and racial other. In other words, while the US presented itself as a feminist and gay-friendly country in order to reject Afghanistan, they produced the concept of the nation as patriarchal, masculine and heteronormative, and furthermore legitimized the punishment of those not included in the white and heteronormative nation. Consequently, violent language and measures were no longer taboo as Puar and Rai point out. They note that "the US state, having experienced a castration and penetration of its capitalist masculinity, offers up narratives of emasculation as appropriate punishment for bin Laden, brown-skinned folks, and men in turbans" (ibid.). The resulting and newly affirmed patriotism was not only the legitimation for Osama bin Laden's state-ordered assassination in April 2011 but also for declaring war on Afghanistan, as well as for the introduction of a series of anti-terrorist laws[139] in the United States restricting traveling, immigration and communication, while allowing increased surveillance and incarceration.

Queer-feminist punks reflected on the integration of gays and lesbians into hegemonic systems and their collaboration in processes of othering as early as 1986, as can be seen in the examples of the zine *J.D.s* by G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce. Their focus on the production of the cultural and racial other through partial integration of the former other into neoliberal societies, however, was not limited to queerness. On the contrary, they drew a connection

139 Significant for the increasing regulation, surveillance and persecution of US and foreign civilians was the inauguration of the USA PATRIOT Act. This "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act" was passed by the US Congress and signed into law by President George W. Bush in October 2001. It dramatically reduced the legal restrictions for law enforcement agencies to gather intelligence within the United States and allow law enforcement and immigration authorities to detain and deport immigrants suspected of terrorism-related acts. It also expanded the definition of terrorism to include domestic terrorism, thereby opening the door for a number of human rights violations in the name of national security.

between the issue of queerness and class, gender, racialization and ableism. The song "Tierra de Libertad?—Land of the Free"[140] by the band Los Crudos,[141] for example, reflects on immigration. The band, which is well-known for their anarchist, feminist, Chicana and Latina politics, as well as for their queer singer Martin Sorrondeguy, criticized national politics through the example of personal experience. The lines "As a boy they tried to control me / My language, they tried to steal / We all know that children are born free / And my roots can not be erased" in "Tierra de Libertad?—Land of the Free" address the role of the US school system in labeling non-English speakers as un-American. Los Crudos criticize the educational system for not providing sufficient instruction for school kids to learn the language of their origin. Furthermore, they describe institutionalized education as the domain of white hegemony and oppression. This oppression is further illustrated with the lines "We've come from many lands / We've brought our cultures and traditions / But as children they try to brainwash us." Education as portrayed in these lines is labeled as "state programs" that are "sponsors of state violence," to use Spade's words (21). In addition, Los Crudos see themselves in alliance with all immigrants—those with citizenship and those who remain undocumented. The passage "They use us only when it is convenient" draws a parallel between state enforced institutional oppression and the legal sphere of labor. The "us" in those lines does not differentiate between citizens and non-citizens. It implicitly asks migrants with a citizen status to reflect on their own participation in forms of othering by not speaking out against such politics. Furthermore, it addresses the US history of employing foreign workers in low-income jobs and exploiting their labor.

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140 Los Crudos and Spitboy. *Los Crudos / Spitboy*. Ebullition Records, 1995. LP.

141 Los Crudos was a hardcore punk band from Chicago, IL that existed from 1991 to 1998. The band was one of the Spanish-speaking punk bands that was influential in the increasing participation of Latinos in the predominantly white punk movements. Moreover, they initiated discourses on racialization, homophobia and economic oppression.

The lines "We're many, and now they want to get rid of us / With their laws recently enforced / They escort us out of the doors / Of the famous land of the Free!" address recent legal changes that are meant to prevent new immigration. The refrain of the song "Land of the Free!—Who knows you? / Land of the Free!—Where are you?" connects institutional and legal violence to the production of knowledge and creation of meanings. It reflects on the cultural signification of the US as "land of the free," and implicitly addresses the subject of this freedom and its other, the migrant laborer and migrant school children. Moreover, it questions the politics of personal freedom, arguing that such ideologies and politics are complicit in the production of a racialized other. A similar statement can be seen in Los Crudos' song "No te debo nada—I Don't Owe You Shit."[142] The lines "They say we're milking the system / But the system has milked me dry" address false perceptions about exploitation of the healthcare system and other privileges by immigrants. The following lines, "They always say they're doing us a favor / They just want to own it all / Greedy is what they are," address ideologies of benevolence which are propagated to cover up the actual exploitation of migrant workers. Anti-racist and queer-feminist punks like Los Crudos identify the US legal regime as a regime of violence. Hence, a political intervention cannot be a legal intervention. In the booklet of their 1995 LP, Los Crudos wrote "We will not be fooled by two-faced lies of equality and fairness [...] we cannot waste our energy hoping for their acceptance". They further argue that

> [d]efense is vital. While some try to convince the lawmakers that we deserve equality [t]hey are desperately passing laws to get rid of us, separating us, and attempting to destroy us from every side. It's not just the "damn immigrant" anymore, because they have found a specific target, a new victim to point the finger at. The American lawmaker is still in denial of their history of migration.

142 Los Crudos and Spitboy. *Los Crudos / Spitboy*. Ebullition Records, 1995. LP.

> Quick to forget that they too came from somewhere else without any documentation. It is too common of them to ignore the past, but we won't let them, we will remind them. We have few defenses, and it is becoming harder everyday for us all. Turning our backs and ignoring what will eventually catch up to each and everyone of us will not end anything. No one is spared. Your brownness, your color, your accent will give you away.[143]

The "defense" that Los Crudos are talking about is punk rock, which translates to anarchist action. One aspect of such anarchist activism is, again, critiquing the "reminder" of the "history of migration" of Americans with European ancestry. The second aspect is the rejection of the US state and its legal and educational apparatuses as well as any complicity with it as stated in the lines "We will not look down anymore, we will not passively stand by and watch. Our throats are cleared, our minds focused, and we are ready to respond." They use offensive and confrontational language, and reject a politics of integration. Thus, Los Crudos' politics can be seen as queer anarchism because it "contest[s] and oppos[es] the violent operation of the state" to use Judith Butler's words ("On Anarchism" 94). I want to emphasize again that by pointing to the connection between cultural meaning, the ideology of freedom and state violence, Los Crudos are criticizing punks for their complicity in oppression. The criticism of complicity is important because it offends and therefore intervenes in punk communities. It does so insofar as it irritates the collective identity in terms of its opposition to the state and its ideological apparatus. Los Crudos' performances of such oppositional and critical lyrics at punk venues can be interpreted as direct anarchist actions.

Queer-feminist punks like Los Crudos, Spitboy, Robynski and many others clearly characterize their music and writing as an activity

143 Liner notes in the booklet of the *Los Crudos / Spitboy* Split LP (Ebullition Records, 1995).

and use anarchist theory to explain the punk aspect of activity and its relationship to theory and ideology. One nexus of the multiple and inseparable aspects of punk theory, ideology and activism is the 'anti-' posture—a general attitude of rejection that includes the anti-social, anti-institutional and anti-capitalist discourses. A second one, however, is the collective or community. This seemingly paradoxical double signification for the same intersection is no coincidence. It can be explained—as I have laid out in detail in the past chapters—with the help of psychoanalytic theory, which suggests that new social bonds are created through jouissance. In psychoanalytic theory, jouissance is usually understood as the "pleasure of exceeding [a] Law" (Povinelli, "The Part" 288) that is the symbolic order of meaning, "the fundamental principles which underlie all social relations" (Evans 98). The legal system and juridical law, however, are included in this broader understanding of social norms and regulations. The reference to anarchist theory allows queer-feminist punks to address the legal system, the state and their entanglement with capitalism from an anti-social queer perspective.

Anarchism, like queer-feminist punk, rigorously rejects and criticizes contemporary social systems, like the state and its administrative apparatus. Explicit or implicit references to anarchism allow queer-feminist punks to address economic issues in particular, and open up their anti-social queer-feminist approach to a more nuanced and intersectional approach to oppression. Moreover, anarchism allows for an emphasis on rejection and anti-social politics while simultaneously enabling community efforts.

Queer-feminist punk rock creates jouissance-like experiences that can, despite the fact that they are anti-social, create queer forms of relation. They create queerness as negativity that is never fully actualized because it is an "impossible existence in the world as it is now organized," (Povinelli, "The Part" 304), but that is nevertheless felt or experienced in the context of a concert (cf. Muñoz, *Cruising* 49). Paradoxically, when such anti-social queerness becomes experienced together with others, people relate to each other on the basis of this anti-social queerness (Povinelli, "The

Part" 304). The bonds or relations that become created through the jouissance-like experiences of queer-feminist punk are queer bonds that differ significantly from normative social forms. One important difference from normative social forms or models for society—like states, nations, families and even humanness—is that queer bonds are not based on the assumption of a shared origin or generic (cultural, national, gender, class, sexual, etc.) identity. If such queer bonds are sustained through time, they can be understood as community as Jean-Luc Nancy explains in *Being Singular Plural* (see chapter three). I want to reiterate Nancy's assessment that social forms based on equality—equality under the law, human rights, etc.—are necessarily highly selective, exclusive and hierarchical. Furthermore, such concepts are not able to recognize the individual and collective at the same time (ibid. 59). Queer-feminist punks understand this, which is why they turn to anarchism in search of models of community that are based on solidarity and shared politics rather than on identity or similarity. Anarchism provides tools and methods to sustain communities that are not hierarchically organized on a structural, intellectual and economic level.

This makes anarchism and anarchist methods of assembling and communication an integral part of their queer-feminist punk politics. One of the many explicitly anarchist community projects was DUMBA—the *Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass Collective*. DUMBA was a collective living space, anarcha-queer community center and music venue in Brooklyn, New York, from 1996 to 2006. It held film screenings and featured many punk shows with groups, such as God Is My Co-Pilot, Los Crudos, Limp Wrist, The Need, Three Dollar Bill, Tribe 8, and many more. Moreover, it housed the *Fuck the Mayor Collective*, a queer direct action organization that initiated actions against the homophobic, racist, sexist and classist administration of then mayor, Rudy Giuliani. Such actions included a concert by Three Dollar Bill and a speech series in cooperation with anti-consumerist anti-assimilationist Gay Shame projects in June 1998, a counterevent to the annual Gay Pride celebrations. The speaker line-up included various

radical thinkers, theorists and artists, like Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, Eileen Myles, and Kiki and Herb (Justin Vivian Bond and Kenny Mellman).[144] Another example of a radical project that partly emerged from and was housed by DUMBA was Queerruption in 1999.

Queer-feminist punk scenes are radical and anarchistic "because of the way that art is created—in DIY style. And that the events are also done to support each other—there are so many benefits, like get this person out of jail, get that person surgery, … there's a lot community support," Cristy Road explained in a personal interview as she described the contemporary scene in New York. Moreover, such spaces try to be as inclusive as possible, offering concerts for free or asking people to give as much as they can (Road, personal interview). "And also at concerts and festivals, there is a lot of tabling and vendors of radical organizations and you know … there is not just people selling stuff—but there's a lot of education. It's not only about making spaces safe from sexist bullshit, or racist bullshit, or whatever … but to actually deal with that bullshit," Road continues. She emphasizes that the queer-feminist punk community tries to educate each other about external and internalized oppressive power structures. One such recent queer-feminist and anarchist punk space, Road mentions, is The Fort in Brooklyn (ibid.).

However, queer-feminist groups do not always live up to their intention to be self-reflective and non-compliant in the reproduction of social hierarchies or exclusions. Thus queer-feminist anarchist spaces and scenes are by no means utopian zones of equality, solidarity and mutual understanding. "Although New York's queer-feminist punk shows feel diverse, there are still the same challenges," Road points out. Structural racism, sexism, homophobia, classism and white privilege need to be constantly addressed at their intersection to work against the reproduction of oppressive power structures and hierarchies within queer-feminist punk

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144 The event was documented by Scott Berry in his film *Gay Shame 98*, USA 1998.

activism and communities. Naturally, those power structures become unknowingly repeated within queer-feminist punk. However, it needs to be emphasized that queer-feminist punks understand and theorize the logics of hegemonic power structures and make great efforts to work against them. Moreover, queer-feminist punks collaborate with other movements to challenge hegemonic power.

4.3. "Rebels of Privilege"?[145] Queer-Feminist Punk Hegemonies and Interventions

Two of the numerous examples of an intervention in queer-feminist anarchist punk communities from within the same communities were the zine *Ring of Fire* from 1996 to 1999 and the more recent zine *Nothing about Us without Us: One QueerFatGimpResponse to Ableism and Fatphobia in Queer Communities*. Both examples eloquently point to the influence and continuation of hegemonic power structures within queer-feminist punk.

The zine *Ring of Fire* by Hellery Homosex discusses the continuation of hegemonic power structures within her own queer-feminist anarcha-punk community in Seattle and questions the community's commitment to fight exclusion. Homosex lost her legs while train hopping[146] in 1996. After the accident, she was forced to use a wheelchair and later learned to walk with prostheses. At this time, she also realized how inaccessible the punk spaces she used to frequent were. Homosex points out that she does not "feel

145 Gay Panic. "Rebels of Privilege." *Too Sensitive*. Self-released, 2012.

146 Train hopping, which is also known as freight hopping, describes the act of furtively hitching a ride on a railroad freight car. Train hopping's significance is closely connected to the period following the American Civil War, when poor freed slaves tried to move north and westwards to find work. During that time, train hopping became a symbol for freedom and liberation. Train hopping is forbidden by law in the US. It is extremely dangerous because the best chance of getting on as well as off a train undetected is by jumping on and off a wagon while the train is moving. Today train hopping is popular among anarchists and punks.

like the punk community tries to make itself an ally to the disabled community" (*Ring of Fire* Issue 2, 63). "Most shows are in basements, most punk houses are crowded with lots of steps," she continues. Homosex's writing is full of anger and rejection of her community's ignorance. However, *Ring of Fire* issues two and three are both guidelines on how to become an ally to disabled punks. The zines address the issues of accessibility and call for a reflection on the privilege of being able-bodied. Moreover, Homosex challenges beauty norms and desirability among her queer-feminist punk scenes. In both issues of her zine she gives sex tips for disabled people and reworks what others might see as injuries and weakness as strengths. For example, using the term crip as empowering, Homosex explains that she and her lovers appreciate her "fabulous" (*Ring of Fire* Issue 3, 19) new limps during their sex play.

A similar approach on ableism in anarchist queer-feminist punk communities can be found in the zine *Nothing about Us without Us* (2007) by Tranny Gimp. Tranny Gimp wrote his zine while organizing the queer-feminist anarcha-punk and radical activism festival Queerruption 10 in Vancouver. The zine was meant to challenge the organization of Queerruption during the organization process. Tranny Gimp denounces the ignorance of his queer-feminist anarchy-punk co-organizers. He writes that he is "angry. Angry that this shit is still happening. Every day. All day" (1). He angrily calls out to his peers and asks them to "challenge" themselves like they "try to on other kinds of things. […], the kinds of things radical queer communities talk so much about working on" (1). His language is decidedly harsh and sarcastic. He questions the rhetoric of the Queerruption organizers to understand and work against their privileges and hegemonic structures. "There's nothing radical about allowing this kind of power dynamic to continue to poison our communities" (3) Tranny Gimp claims, provocatively. He prompts his peers to "think ableism beyond a lack of wheelchair access, beyond access period. Inaccessibility is ONE of the results of an ableist society, but certainly not the only one" (3).

Tranny Gimp as well as Hellery Homosex have nothing but offensive words for the ableism of their community. Nevertheless,

they constantly remind the reader that they are part of these communities and do not intend to leave them. Moreover, the ableism of their peers is viewed as the result of an ableist society in general and as something that is intrinsically interwoven with other oppressive power structures. Tranny Gimp explains for example that his writing "isn't about calling out just Queerruption 10, or Queerruption in general" (7). On the contrary, he argues that "this stuff"—ableism as well as fat phobia and racialization—"is part of literally every corner of our queer communities; it's just one opportunity among many to bring this stuff up; in fact a perfect one, Q10 apparently being about changing & creating & challenging ourselves, our various communities; coming together to exchange ideas and experiences" (7).

4.4. "Spit and Passion":[147] The Queer-Feminist Punk Version of Anarchism

Queer-feminist punk rock as presented in this chapter includes a variety of anti-capitalist and anti-corporate politics. Queer-feminist punk lyrics question the logic of capitalism as an economic and ideological system that influences every aspect of society. Moreover, they make a connection between capitalism, state systems and administrative oppression. Such anti-capitalist politics are not a response to politics against homophobia, sexism and racism but inextricably connected to them, as seen with the examples of lyrics by Agatha, Erase Errata, and Spitboy. Furthermore, as could be shown in reference to multiple queer-feminist punk writings, especially *Anarcho Homocore Night Club* by Robynski, the preferred mode of such politics is a politics of negativity, which is often referred to as anarchism. For queer-feminist punks, anarchism means first and foremost to criticize hegemonies as products of various intersectional forms of oppression. Moreover,

147 *Spit and Passion* is the long-term zine project and comic book by queer-feminist punk musician and artist Cristy Road (New York: Feminist Press, 2012).

anarchism to many self-identified anarchists means to emphasize community and collectivity, which are defined through the collective fight against hierarchies and anti-authoritarianism rather than a similarity of sexual, racial or class identification.

Queer-feminist punks do understand the intersectionality of racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ableism and white supremacy in capitalism. Moreover, they understand the complicity of the state and its institutions with them. They argue that "US law has been structured from its inception to create a racialized-gendered distribution of life chances that perpetuates violence, genocide, land theft, and exploitation," as scholar Dean Spade (27) puts it. Thus, this form of activism does not allow them to advocate gay rights. On the contrary, queer-feminist punks criticize gay rights movements as well as gay consumerist cultures for their complicity in the reaffirmation and reconstruction of a heteronormative, racist, ableist and classist state.

Queer-feminist punks argue that gay rights-oriented politics that focus on inclusion in today's neoliberal and capitalist social structures necessarily results in the affirmation of the same old power structures and hegemonies that excluded individuals with non-normative sexualities and genders in the first place. This can mainly be attributed to the fact that gay rights politics focus on individual freedom and liberty, concepts which are in keeping with the capitalist logic of individuality, exceptionalism and steady progress. At the same time, it requires individuals to compete against each other. This logic is based on the binary of the self and the other in a hierarchical order. Many queer-feminist punks distance themselves from such politics and center on community and collectivity. At the same time, they also understand that communities are gatherings of individuals with very different needs and desires. Therefore, supporting each other must also mean that they understand the intersectional forms of oppression. "The punk/hardcore community is meant to be a place where diversity and communication are encouraged," leslie states in the popular zine *Heartattack*, "[a] place to feel comfortable expressing the ideas [...]. I know that it does not always live up to

its potential, but that is where I see a large part of the value and inspiration in punk coming from. Each and every person in the punk community has a voice" (25). Queer-feminist punk-inclusive collectives, like the *For the Birds Collective*, the *Langhoul* collective, and the *Queer Punk Collective* in Vancouver provide knowledge and education for each other, in addition to food and other necessities. Like other anarchist movements, queer-feminist punk communities emphasize action over theory, but also see them as intrinsically connected. They use music and other performative forms of protest such as activism. Moreover, they refer to anarchist ideas when they define art, including music and other performative forms as activism.

Queer-feminist punk communities "challenge the system," to borrow the lyrics of Limp Wrist one more time. However, more often than not, the rejection of hegemonic power does not exceed the criticism of mainstream society, institutions and capitalism. Even though internalized power structures are addressed theoretically and rhetorically, they still lead to the familiar exclusions and hierarchies within the queer-feminist anarcha-punk communities. This can be seen in the lack of representation of disabled people within queer-feminist punk, as noted critically by Hellery Homosex and Tranny Gimp, as well as in the prevalence of white hegemony in these communities.

In the following chapters, I will address the countermeasures taken by individuals from different queer-feminist punk scenes against the reproduction of internalized power structures within their communities.

5. "There's a Dyke in the Pit":[148] The Feminist Politics of Queer-Feminist Punk Rock

Resist, Resist,
Shout it out …
There's no one telling us where to stand
or where to be,
We're just this huge strong mass of feminist fury.
(Le Tigre, "Dyke March 2001")

This chapter focuses on the feminist themes and politics in queer-feminist punk lyrics and writings, as well as the female and feminist-identified musicians in queer-feminist punk movements. Queer-feminist punks frequently purposely use the term feminist as a self-reference, as the lyrics from the song "Dyke March 2001" by the popular pop-punk band Le Tigre show. Music with lesbian-centric lyrics and members that self-identify as lesbians or dykes was often referred to as "dykecore" from the mid-1980s until around 2000. In more recent years the term has hardly ever been used anymore.

The main questions I attempt to answer are which feminist politics, agendas and strategies are represented in queer-feminist punk or dykecore. I want to find out why queer-feminist punks

148 *There's a Dyke in the Pit* was a compilation CD produced by Matt Wobensmith on Outpunk Records in 1994. It exclusively featured bands that either identified with the term dykecore (e.g., Spitboy) or bands with members that identified as dykes (e.g., Bikini Kill).

self-identify as feminists and what they are trying to achieve by foregrounding feminist topics in their music. Moreover, I want to analyze the concepts behind the use of terms such as lesbian, women and feminism. I start my analysis of feminist politics in queer-feminist punk rock by going back to the zines and other cultural productions of the 1980s, especially the work of G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce. I begin with their examples to argue that queer-feminist punk rock was decidedly feminist from the time of its emergence in punk discourses. Afterwards, I refer to various queer-feminist punk examples to show that feminism continues to be a core concept in queer-feminist movements. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that the feminist politics within queer-feminist movements are not dogmatic ideologies, but are rather characterized by change in response to the broader social structures and sociopolitical discourses of the time. Besides offering an analysis of the production of meanings in relation to feminism in queer-feminist punk music and writing, I explore the place, value and influence that such outspokenly feminist accounts had within queer-feminist communities or scenes, as well as the broader punk movement. Furthermore, I investigate the specific relationship that queer-feminist punks have to (other) feminist, queer-feminist or lesbian movements, activisms and agencies. In addition to a semiotic analysis of the material gathered from lyrics, zines, magazine articles, interviews and observation, I incorporate my findings in academic discourses on queercore, dykecore and riot grrrl.

Feminist academics often situate queer-feminist punk rock within a broader discussion of or in an attempt to describe "third wave feminism" (see Freedman; Lewis; Habell-Pallán). They understand third wave feminism as a feminism "that challenges the idea of dualism itself while recognizing diversity, particularity, and embodiment" (Mack-Canty 154). While the linear time narrative implied in these "new wave" or "third wave" discussions seems highly problematic because it fits nicely with a neoliberal rhetoric of progress and optimization and/or conservative concepts of "generation(s)," two points of these discussions nevertheless

seem useful for an investigation of queer-feminist punk rock and subcultures. First, these discussions do not doubt that queer-feminist punk is a political movement and theory (i.e., feminism). Second, feminists who consider themselves part of the "third wave" criticize binary gender and sex systems and question the culture/nature duality in general (Mack-Canty). Both of these features can be found in queer-feminist punk rock as well.

5.1. "Not Gay as in Happy, but Queer as in Fuck You":[149] Dykecore and/as Feminism

I will now introduce very early examples of queer-feminist punk writings to show the feminist themes and agendas in the first queer-feminist punk scenes of the late 1980s. In addition, I look at the development of feminism throughout the history of queer-feminist punk until today.

The "homocore" (later "queercore") movement of the mid-1980s first garnered attention from the broader US hardcore punk scene and other places due to the very provocative article "Don't Be Gay: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Fuck Punk up the Ass" by G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce published in the widely distributed punk magazine *Maximumrocknroll* in April 1989. In this article—which is arguably the most frequently quoted queer-feminist punk article ever—the artist, filmmaker, musician, and zine editor G.B. Jones and the musician, theater, and filmmaker Bruce LaBruce criticize the hardcore punk scene as well as the gay and lesbian club culture of their time. "Let's face it," they wrote,

> going to most punk shows today is a lot like going to the average fag bar […]: all you see is big macho dudes in leather jackets and jeans parading around the dance floor/pit, manhandling each other's sweaty bodies in

149 Agatha. "Queer as in Fuck You." *Panic Attack*. Rumbletowne Records, 2009. Audiocassette.

> proud display. The only difference is that at the fag bar, females have been almost completely banished, while at the punk club, they've just been relegated to the periphery, but allowed a pretense of participation (i.e. girlfriend, groupie, go-fer, or post-show pussy). In this highly masculinized world, the focus is doubly male, the boys on stage controlling the "meaning" of the event (the style of music, political message, etc.), and the boys in the pit determining the extent of the exchange between audience and performer. (Jones and LaBruce, "Don't Be Gay")

Jones and LaBruce's evaluation of contemporary gay politics is not any less critical than their estimation of the punk scene: "The gay 'movement' as it exists now," they conclude, "is a big farce […]. [I]ronically, it fails most miserably […] in its sexual politics. Specifically, there is a segregation of the sexes […], a veiled misogyny, which privileges fag culture over dyke, and a fear of the expression of femininity, which has led to the gruesome phenomenon of the 'straight-acting' gay male" (ibid.).

I want to emphasize the participation of G.B. Jones in this article, which is frequently referred to as one of the most important influences in the formation of the queer-feminist punk movement, because it supports my argument that female-identified punks and their feminist politics played a crucial role in the emergence of queercore. However, the vital role that female identified punks, dykes and their feminist politics have played in this process is severely underrepresented by historians and academics who write about queercore or queer punk rock in general—with the exception of Tribe 8. One of the few mainstream articles that accounts for the significant contribution that Jones has made to the queer-feminist punk movement is the *SF Weekly* interview "Riot Biiitch: G.B. Jones" (1994) by journalist Johnny Ray Huston. Huston notes that "Jones's efforts have certainly influenced a younger generation of female artists and performers" (13) and adds that "it's hard to imagine the existence of phenomena like riot grrrl

and 'queercore' without her pioneering efforts" (ibid.). To illustrate the importance of Jones's work, I will briefly mention some of her political strategies because they are continued by queer-feminist punks even today. Huston points to the appropriation of derogatory terms for women within the work of Jones in his article. "Jones has provided gay women with the choice to identify themselves as bitches" (12), he jokes. He further notes that Jones "also has other strong messages in her work, and those are to be guilty about homosexuality, to have lots of fun with hair dye … and to experience torpedo bras with other women" (ibid.). To be "guilty about homosexuality" refers to the appropriation of lesbianism as an anti-social strategy. The emphasis on "fun with hair dye" can be understood as an appreciation of femininity as well as the empowerment to become a political agent. During the interview, Jones "lovingly calls" her work "D.I.Y. Feminism" (13). Jones explains that her zine writing in particular and her music in Fifth Column constitute her form of political activism (ibid.).

While Jones absolutely deserves recognition as a crucial figure for the emergence of a queer-feminist movement around the year 1986, it is important to mention that she was certainly not the only one who initiated it. Equally important was Jena von Brücker, who played with Jones in Fifth Column and collaborated with her on the zine *Double Bill* in addition to publishing her own project, *Jane Gets a Divorce*. The latter project in particular is interesting because it used the "explosive rants" that became so significant in queer-feminist punk writing in reference to "Valerie Solanas' SCUM manifesto" (Huston 12). However, the queer-feminist scene in Toronto was not the only one that showed strong participation of queer, female and feminist-identified punks. Similarly important for the dissemination of queer-feminist punk politics were musicians like Sharon Topper, Laura, and Tanja from the groundbreaking band God Is My Co-Pilot in New York and the already briefly mentioned Leslie Mah from the band Tribe 8 from San Francisco. Considering their role in the movement, it is not an exaggeration to propose that queercore was not only a movement where lesbians and other female identified queers played a

major part, but indeed a (queer-)feminist project as such. Therefore, it is appropriate to refer to punk rock that has queer-feminist lyrics as "queer-feminist punk rock." Such a designation refers to the politics of the bands, the lyrics, and other writings but not to the gender and/or sex of the band members, writers or artists. Nevertheless, it is a fact that the individuals who produce queer-feminist punk rock and writings are often referred to as "women" by society, regardless of what their self-identification might be, and that they often experience misogyny.

One of the pioneers of explicitly feminist politics within queer-feminist punk scenes during the 1980s and 1990s were the already mentioned Fifth Column and Tribe 8. Another very important example was Team Dresch. Their politics and style were adopted by bands from all over the US, such as The Butchies (which actually included members of Team Dresch), Sleater-Kinney, The Need, The Gossip and—just recently—New York's Inner Princess and Seattle's Agatha and My Parade. All of these bands have produced their records through feminist independent labels such as Mr. Lady, Kill Rock Stars and Chainsaw Records.

The feminism of queer-feminist punk rock, however—as well as the social structures of the movement—is not uniform in its politics. It varies significantly from scene to scene, and sometimes from band to band. Nevertheless, the influence of feminist politics and queer-feminist critique in queer-feminist punk should not be underestimated. Queer-feminist punks use various labels to identify themselves, such as women, female, grrrl, gender-ambivalent, gender-queer, man, trans, not identified, lesbian, dyke, etc. Nevertheless, queer-feminist punk musicians view contemporary societies as constructs that are structured through a binary and hierarchical gender system, and as sexist. They maintain that society's sexism results in suppressing and discriminating against individuals on the basis of the assumption of their female sex, regardless of how the person identifies her/himself. Furthermore, they argue that such oppressive power is a form of injustice that needs to be resisted. Oppression is not an individual habit or problem, but a structural one. Although most queer-feminist

punks do not consider the binary gender system to be naturally given but socially constructed, many of those musicians and writers experience discrimination through structural inequalities based on this imaginary binary sex/gender distinction. Furthermore, bands, zine writers and artists express solidarity with individuals who want to identify as women and fight for the right to have an abortion and against domestic violence, as well as other issues.

The use of the term "queer" by queer-feminist punk bands and writers is no less multifaceted than their understanding of feminism. Moreover, queer is used in its negative or anti-social form, such as in the song "Not gay as in happy, but queer as in fuck you" by Agatha. Although queer-feminist punks acknowledge and use the term queer not as a simple substitute for the terms "gay" or "lesbian," but in a more open and critical way that includes ambivalence and a critique of fixed identity categories, they often decide to use other terms and labels like dyke, lesbian or feminist. This is because the term queer has the potential to reinforce male hegemonies by making feminist politics, inter- or trans-politics and individuals invisible. Similar to their use of derogatory meanings of queer, queer-feminist punk rock also appropriates the derogatory use of other words like "bitch," "slut," "lesbian" and "dyke." An early example of such appropriations of oppressive language had already been introduced with the work of G.B. Jones who "provided gay women with the choice to identify themselves as bitches" (Huston 12), and the band Fifth Column with song titles like "All Women Are Bitches." Another example was "I love Amy Carter," an L.A.-based zine by Tammy Rae Carland (cover artist of Bikini Kill's *Pussy Whipped* LP), according to Jena von Brücker (qtd. in Huston 12). Von Brücker, who appropriates misogynist language herself in her writing, particularly appreciates Carland's "lesbo-shock" (ibid.) style as powerful feminist politics. Central to such queer-feminist politics is an embrace of the "anarchic character to the word[s] queer" (Ritchie 270), lesbian, dyke and bitch. Their anarchic character is a certain fluidity or ambivalence. While these words are recognizable as carrying negative and anti-social meanings, they

also signal a linguistic feminist strategy and a validating reference to female and lesbian-identified people.

The embracing of negativity is typical of queer politics as well as the genre of punk rock itself, as I explained in detail in the previous chapters. The strategy of appropriating derogatory terms can also be traced back to earlier feminist movements. Using negativity and anger shows that the explicit feminism of queer-feminist punk rock is not a break with the past, but a strategic adoption and reappropriation of other past and present feminisms. Before I delve further into the relationship between queer-feminist punk movements and other feminist movements, I want to come back to the position of feminist punk politics within the broader punk movement and history. Queer-feminist punk rock must be understood as a clear commitment to feminism, as well as a statement and commitment to punk. In particular, but not exclusively, female-identified punks like Alice Armendariz Velasquez argue that early punk rock was decidedly feminist in the 1970s. Armendariz used to be singer with the Bags, one of the first punk bands in Los Angeles, in around 1976, and performed in queer-feminist punk projects like The Castration Squat and Cholita! Like her, quite a number of first generation punks consisted of strong female band members, who promoted feminist politics. Since its very emergence, female punks like New York-based Patti Smith or Poly Styrene (Marian Joan Elliott-Said) of the British band X-Ray Spex were not only very fierce and loud front women, they also influenced punk's politics for generations to come. Their rejection of society and the affirmation of this negative status performed through punk music was not just a reflection of their standpoint of any outcast, but a reflection of their social place as a female-identified person. And "[i]t was certainly feminist when women punk musicians got up in front of hostile crowds to both prove they could play well and, for bands like Crass, X-Ray Spex, and the Raincoats, to offer salient feminist politics in lyric form," observes contemporary punk musician Lee Frisari (Frisari, personal interview). Bands and performers like Patti Smith, X-Ray Spex, Siouxie and the Banshees, The Raincoats and The Slits inspired several countercultural

and political movements with their music, and established punk rock as a form of feminist activism. One particularly inspiring and attractive feature of those "old" examples of female-fronted punk rock was, besides its aggression, an outspoken anti-social behavior, a liberating verbal violation of the rules and an embrace of the outsider status, as well as their frank and unashamed use of sexuality. Patti Smith, for example, "was all about sex," according to punk historian Steven Beeber (74). He recalls an interview with Smith where she announced that "she didn't mind the idea of teenage boys masturbating to her picture since she masturbated to her picture herself" (ibid.). Beeber interprets this anecdote as a demonstration of the use of hypersexuality as a shock tactic of punk rock. I want to suggest, however, that it also proves the emancipatory aspect of punk rock for women. Smith is not only self-confident enough to talk about masturbation publicly, her statement can also be seen as a reappropriation of society's sexualization of women—as an object of male desire—and embrace of themselves, their bodies and their own desire. Another band that dealt with the societal demands placed on women as well as female stereotypes was X-Ray Spex. Although they were less blatant on the topic of sexuality, they also played with sexual connotations, fetishism and sexuality in their famous song "Oh Bondage! Up Yours!," which was mainly about consumerism. Other songs, like "Identity," address the norms and regulations that women are expected to follow in a patriarchal capitalist society. Poly Styrene as well as Patti Smith rejected such norms and regulations through their lyrics and attitude, and further contradicted expectations through their style. For example, Styrene's look with her short stature, dark skin and braces, and above all her youth, all marked her as a real outsider within the music market and beyond. That a girl like her was so self-assured and able to form a band, write songs, sing, create a very unique style and become famous was indeed very inspiring. While Poly was rebelling against gender roles by being loud, showing self-esteem and engaging in bodily practices like shaving her head, Patti Smith became an icon by embracing androgyny. According to G.B. Jones

and Bruce LaBruce in their *Maximumrocknroll* article, her "[…] initial image, decked out in leather jacket, man's shirt and tie, jeans, and wrestling boots, set the standard." Others who participated in this gender fucking were "Nervous Gender, Catholic Discipline, and the Dicks" (Jones and LaBruce, "Don't Be Gay"). Siouxsie of the Banshees also sang love songs to women or songs which can be interpreted as having lesbian themes, such as "Sin in My Heart" on the 1981 album *Juju*. There were hardly any lesbian themes in punk rock at that time. Though androgyny was common and bisexuality was not taboo, after Patti Smith came on the scene, lesbians who were out and open about their sexuality were still rare.

However, these strong females—regardless of whether they were lesbian-identified or not—made excellent role models because they were brave enough to go on stage even though they were young, untrained and above all female. Tragically enough, today's female-identified or musicians read as female, still describe entering the stage as itself a political move because it violates gender roles and norms. In interviews conducted in the process of this project, a common response to the question of whether queer-feminist musicians see their music as political at all was that the mere fact of producing music as a female-identified person was a political act in and of itself. The same response was voiced by members of early riot grrrl groups such as Glynis Hull-Rochelle, members of queercore groups such as Mary Frazer from the 2000s, the queer pop-punk band Velvet Mafia, and contemporary musicians such as Emily Rems from the band Royal Pink and Lauren Denitzio from the *For the Birds Collective*. Glynis Hull-Rochelle had this to say about the early 1990s: "So I think that when girls got together and made a lot of noise and didn't care if they couldn't play so well and just wanted to get some messages out, I think it was very much a feminist act of gender rebellion but active gender rebellion and also political and class act […]." And Emily Rems, drummer of the contemporary pop-punk band Royal Pink said: "I think any women who pick up instruments and dare to enter the NYC rock scene should be viewed as activists and role models, because there are still so few women here […]" (Rems, personal interview).

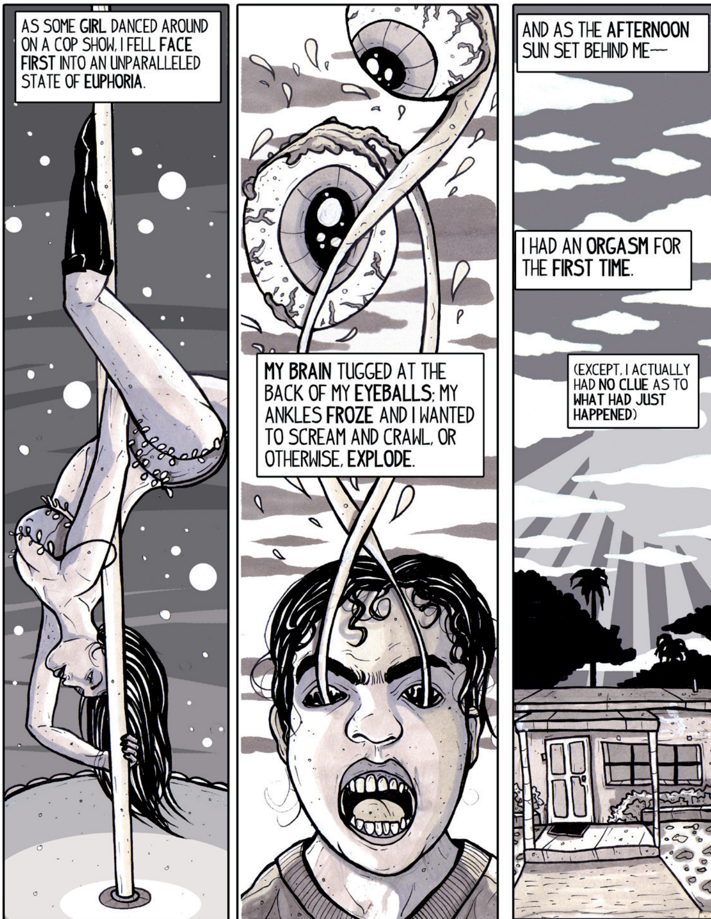
All of my interview partners equally emphasized that the misogyny of mainstream culture as well as countercultures is the reason that strong female- and lesbian-identified role models are so important. Inspired by the politics of early female-identified punks, queer-feminist punks used and use certain strategies of anti-social behavior and language as critique with a definitive political focus. Perhaps more than others, female-identified queers utilize punk rock music as a self-empowering strategy and rejection of mainstream society, as well as an expression of anger. They use punk music to rebel against social norms of behavior for women because punk represents everything that is opposite to female roles in the cultural realm: it is loud, rude, angry, aggressive, energetic and dirty.

A very good example of anti-social behavior and language as criticism, as well as rebellion against female stereotypes, with a definitive political focus, are lyrics like "I don't give a damn where I spit my phlegm" from the song "People Hate Me" by Tribe 8. Another very graphic example are the lines "Gonna drink your blood / gonna eat your shit / gonna a do a little dance / gonna fart in your face" ("Drink, Eat, Dance") by Pedro, Muriel and Esther or Agatha's constantly repeated slogan "Not gay as in happy, but queer as in fuck you" from their song "Queer as in Fuck You" recorded in 2009. In Agatha's song, queer indeed carries the aforementioned negative connotation, but also a very multifarious (sexual) connotation. They certainly sing about queer as political activism and action, but it seems to be of great importance to also reconnect queer with deviant sexualities, to make queer sexy and dirty again, probably to differentiate it from the neoliberal appropriation of queer as a term for a fashionable gay lifestyle. The line "I wanna sing about liberation but I can't do that without talking about your lips" (Agatha, "Queer as in Fuck You") draws on all these connotations and questions the subcultural meaning and use of the term queer as such. Through the performance of a female- and lesbian-identified singer, these lyrics also make lesbian desire and sexuality visible. On a different level, the lines also address gay and lesbian liberation movements. They question gay

rights-oriented politics and appropriate the term queer to reject such assimilationist politics. Interestingly, they only mention the term "gay" in combination with liberation and not lesbian, bi, or trans—like in the mainstream acronym "LGBT." The absence of l (lesbian), bi (bisexual) and t (transgender) could be interpreted as an implicit critique of mainstream activism for its dominance of cis-gendered males.

Both Tribe 8 and Agatha have a female- and/or lesbian-identified band member: Leslie Mah in the former and Nein in the latter. Pedro, Muriel and Esther is fronted by the lesbian-identified drag queen Vaginal Crème Davis. The three decidedly feminist bands write lyrics about gender inequality, violence against women, and lesbian sex and desire, among others issues.

The participation and visibility of female- and/or lesbian-identified queers did not happen without recognition of the broader queer punk scenes and their antecedents. In the fourth issue of their zine *Homocore NYC* titled *Girl-Love Can Change le Monde*, Craig Flanagin and Sharon Topper of God Is My Co-Pilot discuss their politics in reference to the riot grrrl movement and other feminist movements. Flanagin and Topper clearly characterize their politics as feminist starting from the cover page of their zine: "mostly girl stuff. Homocore NYC or always remember to keep categories pointed away from your body, they." Another documentation of the strong visibility of female- and lesbian-identified punks during the 1990s was the seventh and last issue of the very popular zine *Outpunk* from 1997. This documentation is very significant because San Francisco-based Matt Wobensmith produced *Outpunk* as a means of communication between the diverse, often isolated queercore bands and zine makers all over the globe. Furthermore, he aimed to document the movement. However, in the final issue Wobensmith points out the important role of female or lesbian-identified musicians and writers in his scene: "Queer punk—or whatever you call it—has always been, […] a scene 'driven by dykes' (as rock critic Jim Fouratt has correctly stated)" (Wobensmith, *Outpunk 7* 46).



Cristy C. Road: Excerpt from *Spit and Passion*
(Ink, Marker) 2012

ALEX WAS A **NOTORIOUSLY CELEBRATED CLASS CLOWN** AND THE OTHER KIDS TALKED ABOUT HER LIKE IF SHE WAS **EROTICA-ERA MADONNA**. BUT FOR MY OWN SAKE; I WOULD **ENTERTAIN** HER POTENTIAL **INSECURITIES** AND CREATE AN **IMAGINARY MIDDLE GROUND** BETWEEN US .

SO, I WONDERED IF SHE WAS AS **TORTURED** AS THE REST OF US— WHO REPRESENTED REBELLION ON THE **OUTSIDE**, BUT TOILED **DEEPLY** ON THE **INSIDE**?

Cristy C. Road: Excerpt from *Spit and Passion*
(Ink, Marker) 2012

Ladyfest*East

OCTOBER 14-16, 2005

Friday October 14, @ UNION POOL
7:30 PM, MUSIC $8
Modrocket-The Vibration- The Assault-
Broadband-Lady Unluck

Saturday October 15, @ Northsix
1:30-4:30 PM - FREE WORKSHOPS
Self Defense-Sex Toys 101 by Toys in Babeland-Tampaction!-Self Publishing & Zine Making-Lo Fi Recording-Ladies Bicycle Repair
6:00-8:00 PM - FILM SCREENING, $5
Girl Wrestler-P.R.I.D.E-Spring in Awe Breached-A Film about Ladies on the Mic-City of Mermaids
9:00 PM- MUSIC+ FASHION $12
The Anabolics-Au Revoir Simone-Good night Gunfight-Kin-Fur Cops for Teeth- DJ Rekha
-Fashion show featuring 12 DIY Designers!

Sunday October 16, @ UNION POOL
5:30-8:30 PM -
Craft Fair featuring great DIY Crafters- FREE
6:00 PM - MUSIC, BURLESQUE, + BBQ, $10
Drag Duo Buckshot & Bebe Gunn-The Maybelles-The Roulette Sisters-Ida. Burlesque, By Tangerine Jones, El Teresa, & The Glamazons

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Ladyfest*East defines woman as past, present, and future female identified and/or bodied person.

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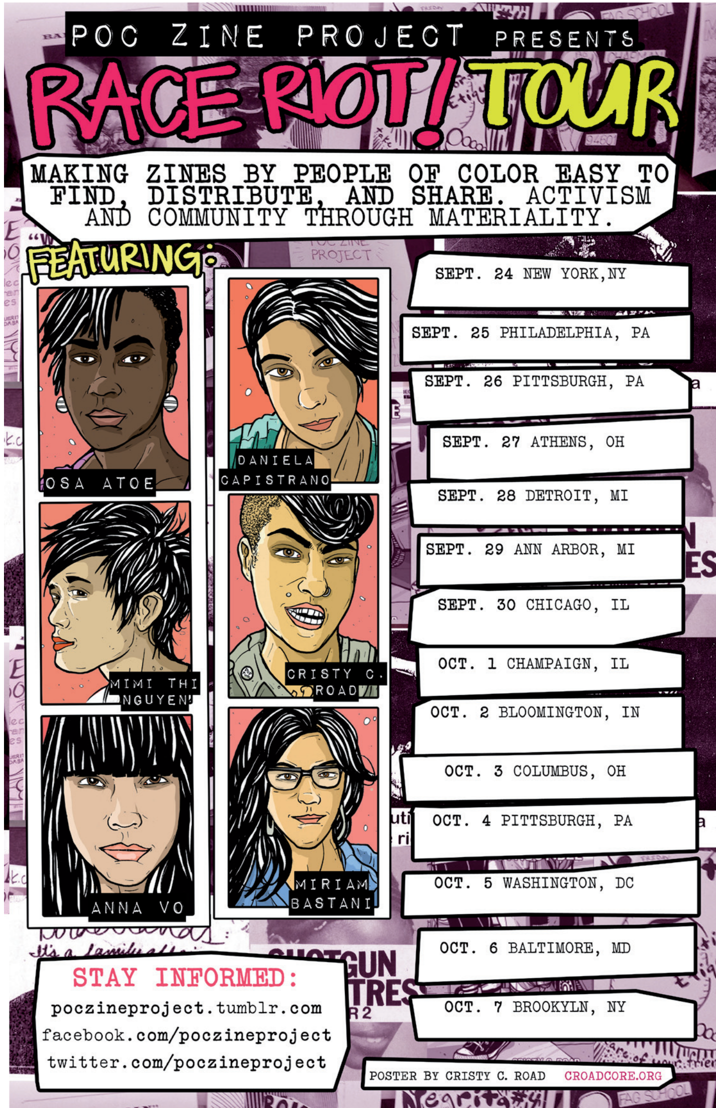
Poster Design By Cristy C. Road, http://www.croadcore.org

Cristy C. Road: *Ladyfest*East*
(Ink, Digital Color) 2005

Cristy C. Road: *Occupy Wall St. General Strike*
(Ink, Marker, Digital Color) 2011

Cristy C. Road: *THE HOMEWRECKERS Quake 'N' Bake Tour*
(Ink, Digital Color) 2010



Cristy C. Road: *Race Riot! Tour* poster
(Ink, Digital Color) 2012

THURSDAY DECEMBER 13TH
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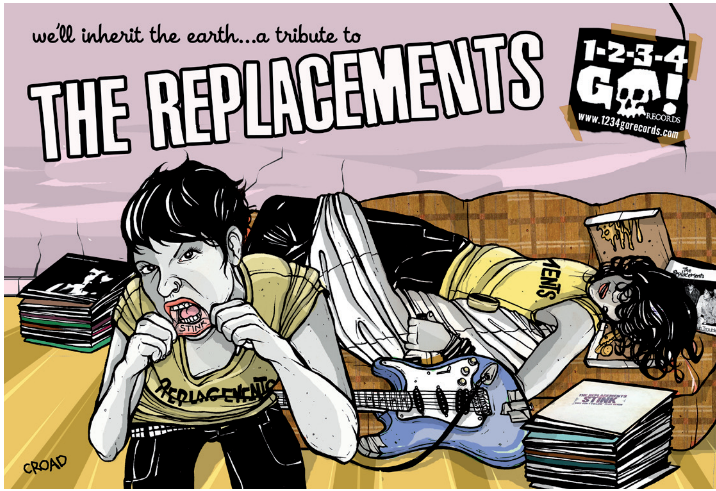
Cristy C. Road: *Spit and Passion* book-release flyer
(Ink, Marker, Digital Color) 2012

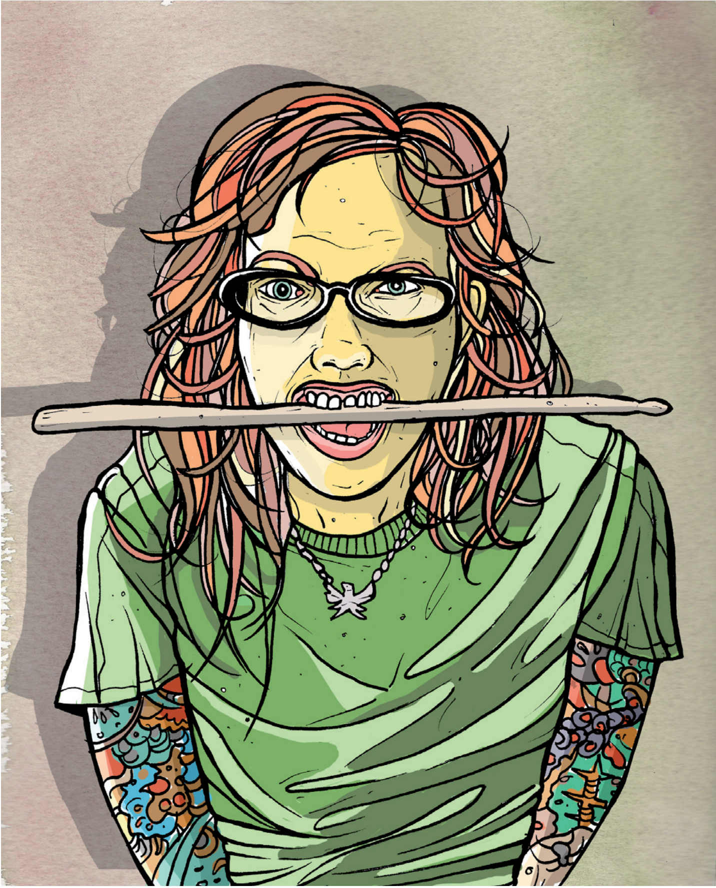


Cristy C. Road: *Replacements Tribute Cover*
(Ink, Digital Color) 2006

Cristy C. Road: *Fuck Showers*—for PunkRadio.net
(Ink, Digital Color) 2009

Cristy C. Road:
Full Moon in Gemini
(Ink, Markers,
Acrylic Paint) 2013

Cristy C. Road: *Another Weekend*—for MRR Queer Issue;
banned Brooklyn Queer Party
(Ink, Marker, Acrylic) 2009



Cristy C. Road: *Crystal Bradley*—for TomTom Magazine
(Ink, Watercolor, Digital Color) 2010

5.1.1. Anti-Social Language, Rejection, Empowerment—The Strategies of Feminist Punk Rock

Female-identified queers—from Tribe 8 in the early 1990s to Agatha in the year 2009—took from punk rock their use of music as a self-empowering strategy and an act of resistance against mainstream society, as well as a vehicle to express their anger. The political strategies of these queer-feminist countercultures and queer-feminist punks are often described with the formulaic expression "promoting the outsider status," to use the words of cultural studies scholar Susan Driver (5). One of the aims in promoting the outsider status is certainly to increase visibility for female-, lesbian-, and transgender-identified individuals in subcultural environments. Nevertheless, the primary aim of queer-feminist punk rock is the rejection of social hegemonies. As suggested in academic accounts such as Susan Driver's, the rhetoric and theoretical concept that underlies and motivates queer-feminist punk productions and activities is a politics of negativity and anti-sociality. Terms like queer, as well as lesbian, dyke, bitch, whore and so forth, are used in a pejorative sense. Despite the visibility of these anti-social meanings, however, they are never free of ambivalence. Words like bitch as well as queer are always used ambivalently to a certain degree. The interpretation of queer-feminist punk music as a politics of the rejection of social norms is encouraged by statements in zines and interviews. Such statements argue against victimization and assimilation (Driver 4), and reject neoliberal tolerance and minority policies. Furthermore, they criticize social norms (e.g., beauty norms) that consider only able and white bodies as beautiful. Instead of giving a clear definition of queer, lesbian, dyke, etc., and associating these terms with non-conforming sexualities as a response, queer-feminist activists use them as a tool for their criticism. In other words, instead of asking who might actually belong to these groups of sexual minorities, queer-feminist activists use the terms queer, lesbian, dyke and whore to urge political activism. As other scholars have already established, queer-feminist punks' use of these sexually connoted

terms, especially, but not only the term queer, suggests that they see identification and desire as constitutive activities (Driver 10) and not as a priori or naturally given.

Queer theorists and historians in the field of lesbian punk rock or dykecore like Judith Jack Halberstam, Angela Wilson and Sara Marcus agree that understanding queer-feminist punk rock as based on a rejection of heteronormativity and a binary gender/sex system legitimizes seeing the genre as an offspring of a feminist tradition, or at least as a phenomenon strongly connected to feminist ideals. Nevertheless, queer-feminist punks' acknowledgement of feminist agendas and methods and the integration of some of them into their own activities has not necessarily been an automatic guarantee for an easy relationship with other feminist movements. On the contrary, queer-feminist punks criticize and sometimes even reject the feminist politics of lesbian separatists or radical feminists. This is especially true depending on the extent to which they disagree with their understanding of gender/sex differences as naturally given and/or a stable binary distinction. Their move away "from the tenets of modernism with this notion of a unified subject" and "a universal (female) nature" (Mack-Canty 158) initiated by (other) lesbians, women of color and "third-world women" (ibid.), like Gloria Anzaldúa and bell hooks, was not viewed as legitimate by all feminist groups. Occasionally, if not ignored entirely, their participation in feminist events (for example in the *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival*) or their self-labeling as feminists was interpreted as a provocation or seen as threat to their feminist cause.

Like other movements, which can be seen as critical interventions in feminist movements, queer punk-driven feminism during the 1980s and 1990s also "move[d] away from foundational theoretical schools [like anarchism or Marxism], often accompanied by a loss of faith in the ability of established socio-political theories to account for women's situations" (Mack-Canty 158). This point is not only interesting with regard to feminist movements but also with respect to punk ideology and subcultures, whose members were not anarchists by accident.

The reason queer-feminist punk rock and dykecore were perceived as a threat to other feminist movements to such a large extent and most likely got noticed by them was because it evolved (at least partly) within the same groups and scenes. However, as already frequently mentioned, the politics of queer-feminist punk were not homogeneous or non-contradictory. One political strand of queer-feminist punk rock, which is also the most popular and academically recognized political (sub)stream, was riot grrrl. I want to emphasize here that numerous academic researchers and historians consider riot grrrl a distinct political movement that needs to be treated separately from other queer punk movements. I, however, disagree with such a view, because riot grrrl-identified musicians like Donna Dresch, G.B. Jones and many others played a significant role in the emergence of the terms and concepts of homocore, queercore, dykecore and so forth. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that riot grrrl foregrounded specific politics with specific aims that could not be covered by the term queer and vice versa. Riot grrrl was a loosely organized network of newly politicized and mostly female-identified punks, who disagreed with the gender relations found in their punk cultures and beyond. As Matt Wobensmith observed in 1997, quite an impressive number of lesbian-fronted or all lesbian bands played the queercore scene(s) and released their albums. Wobensmith gave the riot grrrl movement credit for paving the road for this: "After all, if it weren't for the Riot Grrrl movement in punk, queercore wouldn't have its pro-woman, community-conscious attitude" (Wobensmith, *Outpunk 7* 46). Considering bands like Fifth Column or zines like *J.D.s* by G.B. Jones and *Chainsaw* by Donna Dresch, however, it could be equally argued that the emergence of riot grrrls was brought about by queercore. Riot grrrl and dykecore musicians did not only influence each other and use similar strategies, they also produced on the same labels (e.g., *Mr. Lady* and *Chainsaw Records*), however, some key figures moved back and forth between the two political movements (Wilson 52). As the most recent documentation of the riot grrrl movement—*Girls To The Front* by Sara Marcus—proves, some of the riot grrrl scenes that existed between 1991 and 1993

where almost entirely queer, such as the New York-based riot grrrl chapter, where "[e]asily over half […] identified as dykes, and even many of the apparently straight members came out of the closet within a few months of joining" (S. Marcus 289). Issue seven of the *Riot Grrrl NYC zine* from 1993 is titled *Queer Punk!* It includes a variety of lesbian coming out stories, promotes gender-fuck activism like those of the British anti-social activist group Homocult, and advertises for queercore bands like God Is My Co-Pilot and Tribe 8.

Regardless of whether it is called riot grrrl or dykecore, central to the production of feminist punk music, zines and art is the empowerment of female-identified musicians and artists. The strategy for gaining this empowerment is the expression and visualization of anger as an aesthetic motif as well as the appropriation of aggression, which is usually connected with masculinity. As previously mentioned, this use of punk music to express anger was inspired by earlier female-identified punk rock musicians. Furthermore, they referred to an earlier version of feminist activism such as that represented by Annie Sprinkle, Audre Lorde, and Kathy Acker. Anger, according to those feminists, was seen as a source of energy and strength, the origin of creativity (cf. Juno and Vale 5). Like their predecessors, queer-feminist punk musicians abandon the image of the caring woman and see themselves as rebels instead, a role they are comfortable with. A song that became significant for this self-understanding was "Rebel Girl" by Bikini Kill that includes the line "rebel girl, you're the queen of my world." However, many queer- and female-identified punks distanced themselves from the label riot grrrl, even though they strongly related to some of riot grrrl's politics. The reason that quite a few rebellious female-identified musicians of the 1990s punk scene most likely chose the label dykecore for their music rather than riot grrrl was because they did not feel comfortable with the image of the "girl." Even Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear, two bands often referred to as the founding figures of the movement, no longer felt comfortable with the label and complicated their version of sex and gender by asking for a "Girl Boy Revolution" (S. Marcus 261) in 1992—just one year into the riot grrrl movement.

Riot grrrl had received quite a bit of mainstream media attention by 1992 with the result that more and more groups who wanted to become commercially successful appropriated the label for themselves, often without adopting the feminist politics behind it (see Kailer and Bierbaum; S. Marcus).[150] In her article, "What's Political about the New Feminisms?" scholar Carisa R. Showden correctly observed that musicians who started identifying themselves as riot grrrls were increasingly "focusing on personal choices rather than political action" (Showden 172). Moreover, she points out that the increasing focus on personal experience "coincided with scholarly and media attention to perceived and real shifts in the lives of girls, shifts collected under the label 'girl power'" (ibid.). The media depoliticized riot grrrl politics by equating riot grrrl activism with white teenage rebellion and corporate music productions like the British pop group Spice Girls, who became famous for their representation of "girl power." Such an equation suggests that riot grrrl musicians were just another spectacular music trend in the neoliberal market. It neglects the self-understanding of riot grrrl-identified punks as political agents or feminist activists, and silences their radical sociopolitical criticism. The category "girl," especially as represented in mainstream media from 1992 on, ran the risk of "denoting an unthreatening, submissive, easy-to-control femaleness—as opposed to a fully formed adult subjectivity and political prowess—combined with an emphasis on 'sexy dressing' and 'ironic' participation in women's sexual objectification" (ibid. 177). Thus, the strategy of impersonating the girl aesthetic while irritating the girl role through the aggressive behavior of riot grrrl musicians seemed too limited to most queercore musicians. They

150 In the year 2000, the label riot grrrl became replaced by the term "lady," when the first Ladyfest was organized in Olympia, Washington. The festival took place over six days and featured female bands, artists and speakers, but was "open to both sexes" (Nugent). A lot of queercore bands played at the first Ladyfest, including "Sleater-Kinney, […] the Need, and the Gossip" (ibid.). Since 2000, many Ladyfests have been organized all over the world, surprisingly, however, only very few in the United States.

preferred other performance strategies, such as the concept of drag because it not only questions presumptions about and connotations of gender but also of sex. Bands like Tribe 8 in the 1990s and the more recent Inner Princess show that feminist queercore performances include playing with images of maleness, not only through their obvious aggressive behavior but also more generally through their appearance and attitudes. Both bands include members who identify as gender-queer or masculine and see themselves in a feminist and/or lesbian tradition to some degree. In other words, feminism and feminist politics do not get contradicted by or interfere with their masculinity.

Moreover, queer-feminist punks increasingly noticed that many riot grrrl chapters were participating in the creation of normative power structures through their focus on personal experience without analyzing the intersectionality of multiple social factors except for gender. This led to a lack of self-criticism with regard to the reproduction of exclusionary hegemonies within the scenes and groups. Cooptation of the feminist slogan "the personal is political" by the mainstream as well as the conflation of the individual with the universal in some riot grrrl chapters was reason enough to turn away from the use of the term riot grrrl for some queer-feminist punk musicians.

Mimi Thi Nguyen, for example, argues in her article "Race, Riot Grrrls, Bad Feelings" that through their "re-telling of rape, incest, and girl-girl intimacy," riot grrrl productions also "re-invented an exhibitionist feminist show-and-tell of sexual abuse and complex desire. Riot grrrl practiced an unabashedly embodied polemic, exercising an oppositional body politics that ruptured the foundation myth of punk egalitarianism" (Nguyen, "Race, Riot Grrrls" 1). Drawing on her own experience, Nguyen describes riot grrrl "as a culturally productive, politicized counterpublic," and "—beyond a distinctive musical styling or the mere invasion of young, mostly white women in rock—an informal pedagogical project, a kind of punk rock 'teaching machine'" (ibid.). For some of its members, riot grrrl was indeed not only the most important social network but also the "most meaningful context for the transmission

and production of knowledge," according to Nguyen, assistant professor at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. It was "a space of intimate myth-making, fusing academic and popular cultural discourses to elaborate a vision of potentially utopic feminist futures" (ibid. 2). Because of this double meaning, riot grrrl manufactured theory that directly and immediately influenced their everyday lives. In forming their groups and bands, riot grrrls used "a very specific model of community-building where the political and the personal are collapsed into a 'world of public intimacy,' and citizenship can exact an emotional price. This coupling of public testimony and private trauma is central to contemporary North American feminist politics, and riot grrrl was no different" (ibid. 3). As was often the case in second wave feminist movements, riot grrrl interpreted the slogan "the personal is political" as the recognition of "marginalized grievances as [singular] legitimate revolutionary agenda" (ibid.). Personal life stories, like experiences of harassment or rape, became unquestioned and reread as general phenomena and structurally significant. While Nguyen recognizes this strategy as revolutionary political action, she points to riot grrrls' use of this strategy to create a familiar as well as exclusionary community; this kind of exclusion operated as a means of safeguarding community. According to Nguyen, in their goal to build community and create a safe space as well as their understanding of the personal as political, anti-normative and anti-hegemonic strategies became transformed into very hegemonic and very normative politics. This happened through a notion of sameness, which

> depended upon a transcendent "girl love" that acknowledged difference but only so far. That is, in the process of translating the urgencies of political realities into accessible terms of personal relevance, a fundamental misrecognition occurred that ruptured riot grrrl's fabrication of a singularity of female/feminist community. It was assumed that riot grrrl was, for once, for the first time, a level playing field for all women involved, regardless or

> in spite of differences of class or race. (Nguyen, "Race, Riot Grrrls" 3)

Despite this progressive resolution, "what became painfully clear, […] was this: that the central issue was not one of merely acknowledging difference, but how and which differences were recognized and duly engaged" (ibid.). The result was that the whiteness and heteronormativity of most of riot grrrl groups was simply ignored.

Bands and musicians like Mimi Thi Nguyen and Leslie Mah from Tribe 8, as well as other queer zine writers like Margarita Alcantara-Tan and Selena Wahng (zine *Bamboo Girl*) increasingly disagreed with the politics of these riot grrrl groups, which reinforced essentialist notions of gender and sex differences as well as white hegemonies (Nguyen, "Race, Riot Grrrls"; S. Marcus; Shah). They produced lyrics and zine articles denouncing riot grrrl politics for such exclusionary practices and used other labels, like queercore, yellowcore or dykecore for their politics. It is important to emphasize that such intersectional political activism was not primarily intended to produce a new scene or movement but happened within riot grrrl and queer-feminist punk circles as well as in the broader punk movement. Nguyen, Alcantara-Tan, Wahng and other punks of color and queer activists influenced riot grrrl-identified bands and writers to critically reflect on their own biases. Often, such critics continued to use the label riot grrrl strategically for concrete political purposes and contexts, while at the same time critically reflecting on it. A good example of such awareness-raising about white hegemony is the song "White Girl" by Heavens to Betsy:[151]

151 Heavens to Betsy was a band formed in Olympia, WA in 1991 and active until 1994. The members were fellow Evergreen State College students Tracy Sawyer, and Corin Tucker, who became the vocalist for Sleater-Kinney after Heavens to Betsy disbanded. One of their most recognized performances was at the International Pop Underground Convention organized by independent record label K Records in 1991. At the convention, Heavens to Betsy played in an all-female lineup together with Bratmobile, Jean Smith of Mecca Normal and 7 Year Bitch. The concert

> we should have talked about this / a long time ago
> but i didn't have to think about it / that's what this song is about
> white girl / i want to change the world
> but i won't change anything / unless i change my racist self
> it's a privilege / it's a background
> it's everything that i own
> it's thinking i'm the hero of this pretty white song.

I will come back to such critical accounts of whiteness as well as interventions by punks of color in queer-feminist punk countercultures in chapters six and seven. At this point, however, I want to emphasize again that critical accounts of whiteness and people of color existed within the queer-feminist punk movement. Some of the more dominant themes were anti-patriarchal accounts directed at mainstream culture criticizing, for example, violence against female-identified people, violence against lesbians and violence against transgenders. In addition, queer-feminist critique also targeted lesbian scenes, for example, through the thematization of abuse within lesbian relationships, which was seen as a taboo.

Although critique, including self-critique, of the internal power structures of riot grrrl, queer-feminist, queer punk and punk in general was and is very important, it is also essential to focus and validate queer-feminist punk writing that was less obviously critical. Many queer-feminist punk songs tell lesbian love stories, narrate episodes of breaking up, or speak about lesbian desire, from innocent crushes to pornographically explicit sexual encounters. It is important to understand such lyrics about lesbian experience and desires as important and revolutionary, especially in the context of the early 1990s, but also today. One example of an explicit expression of lesbian desire are the following lyrics of the song "Sex (I'm a Lesbian)" by The Butchies: "you're sexy in my jeans baby

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was called "Love Rock Revolution Girl Style Now" and is widely considered one of the crucial events in the formation of the riot grrrl movement.

/ you're sexy in my jeans / tell me do, do you want me, do you? / Cuz I want you too." Such lesbian desire and life is barely ever represented in mainstream popular culture, and if so, primarily from a male perspective. In cases where lesbian desire becomes articulated in mainstream culture, it is either not serious, such as in the Katy Perry song "I Kissed a Girl" where a straight girl kisses another girl out of curiosity, or it comes at the price of extreme gender conformity, such as in the TV show *The L Word*.[152] The Butchies, on the other hand, present a different kind of female identification, namely a butch one. Moreover, they draw attention to gender representations and thus question identity categories, such as with their album title *Are We Not Femme?*

I want to argue that bands such as The Butchies or Team Dresch are indeed revolutionary compared to mainstream accounts because of their detailed and explicit descriptions of lesbian desire and relationships, and their deviation from heteronormative roles and conventions. Their depictions of lesbian desire differ significantly from more conventional, glorified, or romantic portrayals of lesbian love and sexuality, not to mention pornographic mainstream representations, and therefore remove themselves from the male gaze (cf. Wilson 53). By producing images of this kind, queer-feminist punk bands aim to give their own desires a voice as well as serve as a model to inspire other queer-identified people (ibid.). Besides the emphasis on sexual variance, their narratives also go beyond gender binaries. They suggest that a female identification is not necessarily equated with an hourglass figure, long hair, skirts and lip gloss. They show gender variance by depicting female masculinities as well as fat-positive images, among others. Not all of these themes are necessarily presented as angry

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152 *The L Word* was a US television drama series that ran from 2004 to 2009 on the cable channel Showtime. The series was produced by Ilene Chaiken, Michele Abbot and Kathy Greenberg, and originally portrayed the lives of a group of lesbians and bisexuals, their families and partners. During the six seasons, one transgender and a couple of more fluidly sexual-identified protagonists were added. The cast is made up of exceptionally gender normative, tall and conventionally beautiful, predominantly white, rich people. The location is West Hollywood.

or anti-social. Angry and anti-social attitudes, however, are the dominant modes of queer-feminist punk songs. Moreover, such semiotic significations are reflected on the level of sound within punk rock. I will illustrate the aforementioned anti-social qualities of queer-feminist punk along with some representative bands and queer-feminist zines in the following chapters. Starting with Tribe 8, I explore the appropriation of anger and anti-social verbal expression. Moreover, I show that the target of anti-social queer-feminist punk is often mainstream culture, as well as other feminist movements.

5.1.2. "Feminist Theory Gives Me a Pain:"[153] Anti-Social Interventions in Second-Wave Feminism

Named after the sexual practice of tribadism, Tribe 8 formed in 1990 and was a lesbian-only band from San Francisco, CA. Today, the band is considered to have played a crucial role in the dissemination and popularity of the term and concepts of queercore and riot grrrl. The former band members, especially former singer Lynn Breedlove, who became a popular comedian and novelist, have the status of cult figures and role models and are known in queer scenes all over the world. Until its official break-up in 2005, the band included singer Lynn Breedlove, guitarists Leslie Mah and Lynn Flipper, Slade Bellum on the drums, as well as Jen Rampage, Mama T and Tantrum on the bass. They mostly toured throughout the United States but occasionally played a few gigs in Europe and Canada. Tribe 8 became famous especially due to their extremely controversial performances, which even other feminists and lesbians in the queer-feminist punk movement and feminist circles found objectionable. During their performances, all the band members used to strip off their shirts and underwear, and lead singer Lynn Breedlove, apart from donning countless

153 Tribe 8. "Neanderthal Dyke." *Fist City*. Alternative Tentacles Records, 1995. Audiocassette.

leather belts with rivets and a black "A" for "anarchism" on her stomach, also wore a strap-on dildo, which she encouraged the audience to play with. A comic version of this spectacle is depicted as a drawing on the cover of the album *Snarkism* (1996). The cover shows Breedlove with the her signature "A" for anarchism drawn on her stomach and male genitals exposed through the open fly of her trousers. In the next picture, a person who appears to be female, but who can be seen as a butch representation, cuts the male genitals with a chainsaw. The last picture shows a face expressing relief: the penis was only a plastic dildo. The band's comment on this revelation: "Well that's okay 'cause you can never get enough PRACTICE!" No less provocative than their performances are Tribe 8's lyrics: they sing about fellatio, naked bodies, BDSM techniques, as well as transgender topics. However, they provoke not only by talking about unconventional sexualities and practices but also by pointing out the taboos within these subcultures, such as S&M, abuse in lesbian relationships and even incest—topics that are hardly ever touched upon in autonomous lesbian groups and other feminist environments.

Although these performances caused outrage in the lesbian separatist and other feminist scenes, they do not necessarily signify a break with feminist scenes and strategies. On the contrary, they can be seen as a strong reference to some earlier feminist strategies. The practice of delivering political messages by writing them on exposed body parts, for example, was a common practice used by feminist artists like Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer, as Sara Marcus has shown in reference to riot grrrl politics (146). In addition, Tribe 8's exaggerated or comic performance of a castration scenario is also

> […] in line with some feminist aesthetics and extremist politics of the time. Karen Finley, the performance artist and NEA Four member, had recently published a collection of monologues, Shock Treatment, that was rife with similarly graphic imagery. And Joyce Carol Oates's 1993 novel Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang centered

> around […] a group of girl outlaws taking revenge on abusers and harassers. (S. Marcus 304)

Another example is feminist artist Lynda Benglis who had a famous photo of herself with a giant strap on. Tribe 8 takes up the theme of revenge as used by Oates in their song "Frat Pig", as I will explain later on, in addition to the comic in the booklet of the CD album *Snarkism*.

The reason that Tribe 8's performances garnerned such a huge amount of attention in the independent media (e.g., Wobensmith, *Outpunk 5*) as well as in academic accounts[154] was not only that the band carried these strategies to an extreme but also that they performed at places and stages where other feminist punk performers did not. In other words Lynn Breedlove and the rest of the band left their small communities of like-minded queers and punks and took their playful performance of overtly celebrated aggression to some male macho domains as well as different feminist communities. Regarding the latter, one of the most scandalous incidents was Tribe 8's performance at the *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival* in 1994. The audience at the festival accused Tribe 8 of imitating male behavior, which they criticized as anti-feminist. Some even produced a banner with the slogan "Tribe 8 promotes violence against women" (Juno and Vale 40; also *Rise Above*) and held it up during their concert. Tribe 8's audiences were often split in their reactions: Some saw their show as witty and clever and appreciated the long-awaited focus on taboos within the feminist movement (*Rise Above*), while others judged the performance as too aggressive, too violent and an attack on the safe space the festival provided (for biological women only), where lesbians/women could remain free from assaults, discrimination and harassment (Wilson 60).

The participation of Tribe 8 in the *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival*[155] is significant for my argument that queer-feminist punk

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154 Cf. Juno and Vale; Baldauf and Weingartner; Kailer and Bierbaum; Halberstam, *In a Queer*; Wilson.

155 The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival is an international feminist music festival that has been taking place every August since 1976 near Hart,

bands actively engaged in a dialogue with other feminist movements. As scholars like Ann Cvetkovich and Selena Wahng have remarked, "the festival carries enormous symbolic significance, even for those who have never been there; it often represents 1970s lesbian feminism and all the opinions it generates, despite the fact that the festival itself has evolved and grown over the last quarter century" (Cvetkovich and Selena 131). It can be assumed that Tribe 8 knew about the political importance of the festival and the implications of their performance there. The band's decision to play at the festival must therefore be understood as a conscious, purposeful one. The reactions to their performances were thus significant due to the existing much larger conflict within feminist movements. The core category of feminist action and politics, i.e., "women," was being increasingly questioned in terms of its usefulness because it seemed that white, middle-class privilege was perpetuated under this label, thereby making the differences and hierarchies among women invisible. Women of color and lesbians in particular challenged feminist political and social groups for only focusing on the experiences and political demands of white, heterosexual women. Self-identified lesbians and women of color demanded that white feminists reflect on their own privileges and the continuation of white hegemony. They questioned the assumption of a feminine shared essence and criticized the rhetoric of a universal femininity or womanness used as an argument by white, heterosexual women to erase differences and support their own desire of a universal agenda for feminist movements. They questioned the assumption "that this essential womanness was somehow distinct from the sexual or racial part of one's identity or lived experience; and that this woman

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MI. Event attendance is assumed to be between 5,000 and 9,000 women-identified people and has a womyn-only policy based on biological categories, which is frequently contested by radically queer groups such as Bash Back ("Some Totally Artificial Bitches" 368–71). Although the festival is generally signified by accounts that are based on differential feminism, lesbian separatism and women's spiritualism, the festival also included Tribe 8, The Butchies, Le Tigre, Bitch and Animal and Sister Spit during the 1990s.

part should be the unifying force of feminism" (Showden 193). Not only were the differences between women emphasized, indeed, based on those critical voices as well as theoretical accounts by Judith Butler and Donna Haraway, for example, the difference between men and women—whether understood as historical and/or natural—was increasingly questioned. While essentialists and lesbian separatist groups insisted on the distinction between the two sexes and structured their activism accordingly, deconstructivist activists and theorists questioned the fundamental binary of the gender/sex system. Even though Tribe 8 insisted on being associated with a lesbian-feminist tradition of music and activism like the *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival*, they proudly blurred the gender boundaries and along with this the boundaries of lesbian-feminist music and politics (Wilson 60). This was another hornet's nest that Tribe 8 stirred up with their performance at the *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival*, which is commonly referred to as the "Sex Wars" (see Chapkis 11; also Kailer and Bierbaum 100). Centered around the topic of pornography, this conflict between pro-sex activists or sex radicals like Annie Sprinkle and radical feminists and porNo activists like Andrea Dworkin reached its peak in the 1980s but continues to some degree today. While feminists like Dworkin consider pornography to be a manifestation of patriarchy and tantamount to the suppression of and violence against women, pro-sex activists and scholars acknowledge sexuality as a complicated interplay of different discourses of power as well as the pleasure in and erotics of power.

On their 1995 album *Fist City*, which was released the year after Tribe 8's appearance at the *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival*, they deliver a very undiplomatic commentary on the festival, the reaction of the audience to their performance at the festival and the radical feminist scene in general in songs like "Neanderthal Dyke":

> My political consciousness is fried, I'm not exactly woman identified, I don't give a shit, I just wanna get laid by curvy little hot and sexy eyeliner babes.
> Neanderthal dyke, neanderthal dyke, never read McKin-

> non, I ride a big bike, feminist gets me uptight, get in some heels and lipstick and I'll spend the night.
> Pseudo intellectual slut, you went to school did you learn how to fuck? Did it play at Michigan, is it correct? Does it walk with a swivel, is it willing to neck? That's it. Feminist theory gives me a pain, besides I think you like the fact I'm low on the food chain, don't you.

Tribe 8 clearly judges the lesbian separatist scene's unreflexive middle-class attitude, its blindness to its boundaries and exclusiveness, as well as its rigid understanding of the terms "woman/women" and "lesbian," as the lines above show. Interestingly, the band seems to be very well informed on the academic canon of the lesbian separatists movement. The song addresses the most popular anti-pornography feminists like Catharine McKinnon, Mary Daly and Andrea Dworkin. Moreover, they use the exact same language as these feminists—feminist key words like "political consciousness" and "woman-identified"—with the aim of mocking them.

In addition, the position of Tribe 8 with regard to women-only spaces seems to be very critical. They question the hypothesis that exclusion based on sex and/or gender can really help to avoid hierarchies and create a safe space for all within this framework. The argument that Tribe 8 was actually challenging essentialist notions of gender and sexuality as well as the feminist strategy of creating safe spaces along those binaries is further supported by the fact that Lynn Breedlove and Lynn Flipper (Silas Howard) were reported to have rejected the label riot grrrl because of its reference to gender binarism.[156] The issue of women-only spaces is a controversial subject in many feminist scenes. Unsurprisingly, debates around such women-only spaces are frequent within the queer-feminist scene. Despite the general rather deconstructive view of gender and sexuality of most dykecore and other queer-feminist bands, I was surprised to find discourses on women-only spaces that not only strongly advocated for such spaces but also

156 Cf. *From The Back Of The Room*.

fell back on essentialist and biological categorizations. In "1999 Kaia Wilson [Team Dresch, The Butchies, Mr. Lady Records] spoke out in support of the trans ban on her record label's Internet community discussion website [...] Mr. Lady" (Wilson 62). Needless to say, this statement outraged many fans and Wilson had to face the accusation of being transphobic. "On the internet message board, fans accused Wilson of denying transsexual people's right to self-identification and described her rationale as intolerant and hateful. However, Wilson maintained that while she supported trans-inclusion in the queer community at large, she did not think that women's space need[ed] to include transsexual women" (ibid.). In 2003, however, Wilson (along with Le Tigre) was reported to have pulled out of a prior commitment to play at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival on Strap-On.org, an online forum where a hot debate about the issue was going on—a controversy that former riot grrrls like Gina Young (from Gina Young and the Bent and Team Gina)—who was furious about Wilson's statement—participated in. The whole debate about the festival's politics as well as the point of view of many dykecore musicians is documented on Eminism.org on the site's "Michigan/Trans Controversy Archive." Although Tribe 8 criticized the exclusivity of the lesbian-separatist scene and its notions of gender in the context of the *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival*, their relationship with transgender groups in general is not at all clear. Although at least two members of Tribe 8 identify as transgender themselves today, the band produced many ambivalent political signals on the topic and the audiences were often left to interpret their songs as they pleased. Obviously, the band enjoyed communicating contradictory messages and did little to clarify their intentions. While *Rise Above: The Tribe 8 Documentary* suggests an overall positive and open stance towards transgender, Halberstam mentions that "camp trans protestors" accused Tribe 8 of transphobia (*In a Queer* 181). Moreover, the lyrics on the 1996 album *Snarkism* are very ambivalent concerning the topic of transgender. Lyrics from songs like the following, titled "Wrong Bathroom," for example, depict some of the experiences of women with ambivalent gender identities.

Moreover, the song criticizes gender norms and attributions, favoring gender-ambivalent appearances:

> is that a he or a she—is that a him or a her
> oh excuse me ma'am—uh, sir?
> am i supposed to feel ashamed
> cuz you're confused
> cuz i don't fit in your box you loser
> i'm gonna have a bladder burst
> while you ponder gender!
> (Tribe 8, "Wrong Bathroom")

This attitude also applies to Tribe 8's performances, which blur and irritate traditional images of women as passive and caring with a rough, self-confident representation. This is also portrayed in the picture of Slade in the *Snarkism* booklet, in which s/he sports a big mustache, very short hair, and a very androgynous dress style. In addition, gender roles are confused by the aggressive guitar playing of the highly feminine Leslie Mah and the generally fast and hard-edged version of punk rock performed by Tribe 8. This stance towards gender bending and the transgender-friendly interpretation is further confused in the very controversial song *Tranny Chaser*, which is not easy to understand. The song mentions several well-known drag queens such as Justin Vivian Bond from New York (famous for her part in the film *Short Bus* by John Cameron Mitchell), the black drag queen RuPaul from California, the New York trans punk glam icon Miss Guy and the actress Mistress Formika (who became popular with the documentary *Venuz Boyz*), all of whom Breedlove pretends to admire. However, it is not clear if this admiration is genuine or sarcastic. Is it a mockery when Breedlove sings that the queens "set my heart to racing" or "Lynnee in the house of love"? The end of the song is also very ambivalent:

> I'm a tranny chaser
> it's always a dead end
> they treat me like I'm a dirty old man

Get my girl to strap it on
Come on baby let's pretend
You're a D-R-A-G-Q-U-E-E-N
Silly faggot dicks are for dykes.

The ambiguity of the text is very provocative. Lyrics like those in "Tranny Chaser" make the audience speculate about their meaning, as well as the band's intention, but do not offer a definite answer. While the lyrics can be read as an affirmation of gender-bending and transgender, they can also be interpreted as a mockery of the same. This strategy can be understood with what Judith Jack Halberstam calls the "anarchy of signification" ("The Anti-Social" 149). No less provocative are the more explicit statements regarding patriarchy, machismo and violence against women that can be found in Tribe 8's oeuvre. In the previously mentioned song "Frat Pig," they sing about gang rape (by members of a fraternity, i.e., white upper-class males). They suggest that the reason for the rape is homosexual desire:

Your brothers are lovers
More than friends
You wanna touch them
You wanna hold them
But you can't
So you make her the catalyst
Vicarious object of your homoerotic fantasy.

Tribe 8's answer to rape is as simple as it is violent: "gang castration." Once again, Tribe 8 refers to the aforementioned feminist art conventions, but by using homosexual desire as the cause for the violence against women they also refer to something else. On the one hand, they implicitly reflect on the various psychoanalytic theories of male repression of homosexuality and sublimation, which—in a painfully simplified version—have found their way into common knowledge. On the other hand, Tribe 8 uses homosexuality or queerness to denounce and mock the male gang

members and therefore refer to the common meaning of queerness as something arbitrary, shameful and bad. However, by using homosexuality and queerness in this derogatory way, Tribe 8 manages to draw attention to the error of this practice. They do this through sarcasm, visible exaggeration and emphasizing the contradiction between the derogatory language for queerness and the fact that they are "out and proud" queers themselves.

No less violent are their statements regarding some of the social and political areas considered to be male domains, like the punk rock music genre and Republican Party. One example is Tribe 8's comment on US Republicans "Eat shit—10 billion flies can't be wrong" in the song "Republican Lullaby," and another is the line "knocked yourself off—and did us all a favor" ("Jim, Darby & Sid") in reference to Rock'n'Roll icons like Jimi Hendrix and punk rock legends like Darby Crash (singer of the punk band The Germs) and Sid Vicious (bass player of the Sex Pistols). Lyrics like this portray maleness as something ridiculous that must be rejected and retaliated against. This attitude again places Tribe 8 in the tradition of the lesbian-separatist feminist movement.

A very humorous incident and one of Tribe 8's interventions in displays of patriarchy and machismo was their appearance on MTV'*s Luke's Peep Show* produced by Luther Campbell (aka Luke Skyywalker) of 2 Live Crew in Miami. Luke Skyywalker had heard about this lesbian band that performed topless and invited them for a live interview on his hip-hop porn show.[157] Of course, neither he, his crew nor the female go-go dancer had any clue about Tribe 8's politics and performances. They had a great time making fun of him during the interview and when he asked them to give him a blow job, Lynn Breedlove and the rest of the band displayed their strap-on dildos (Wobensmith, *Outpunk 5* 7).

However, as should be clear by now, Tribe 8's criticism of society goes beyond the rejection of patriarchy. In addition, their aim is much more than just empowering marginalized individuals with non-normative sexualities or genders. Like many other

157 Cf. Baldauf and Weingartner 110; Wobensmith, *Outpunk 5* 7.

queercore bands, Tribe 8 offers a perspective on whiteness, sexuality, gender and class that depicts norms and hierarchies as contrived and far from natural. Also, they do not hesitate to address the often neglected norms and hierarchies within the feminist movement. In their song, "People Hate Me," Breedlove sings about society's outsiders. One by one, she lists characteristics that violate beauty norms or social values in the context of lesbian sexuality, skin color and other racial attributes in the line "People hate me for the color of my skin and the shape of my eyes," and makes a statement about anti-social behavior with "I don't give a shit where I spit my phlegm—castrating bitch—show my tits." The "I don't give a shit" attitude, which can be seen as representative of punk rock in general, is both a political and aesthetic feature of the band. One should also add that this attitude is very significant in the case of Tribe 8 because it also includes ambivalence and ambiguity. Not only do the members of the band not care if their statements produce ambiguity, they actually see themselves as ambiguous figures and identities as well. In *Rise Above: The Tribe 8 Documentary*, drummer Slade explains that s/he floats between the genders, Leslie Mah sees herself between both Caucasian and Asian and hetero- and homosexual, Tantrum between a professional musician and dilettante as well as between Afro-American and Caucasian, and Flipper somewhere between girl and boy. Even more ambivalent than the aforementioned song "Tranny Chaser" is the actual stage performance in which dildos are cut off, and men are chained and forced to "play" with Breedlove's strap-on dildo and stimulate it with their mouths. What makes these ambiguous scenes so extremely provocative is the fact that they are juxtaposed with radically unambiguous statements and positions, as can be seen with the song "Republican Lullaby."

With regard to ambiguity in general, Tribe 8's musical style, the melodies, rhythms, choice of instruments, and verbal articulations need to be looked at. Unlike many other queer-feminist punk bands, Tribe 8 complies very closely with the typical feature of punk rock, which is that the lyrics of the songs are screamed rather than sung, the guitar's range is reduced to only a couple of chords

and the drums are the driving force of the performance. As mentioned earlier, these forms of articulating aggression and rage are usually connoted with maleness. The use of these masculine forms by female identified people can be understood as gender transgression. One difference from the typical punk setting is that Tribe 8 uses two lead guitarists. In referring to the band Sleater-Kinney, Judith Jack Halberstam suggested that using two guitars can be seen as a rejection of the idea of a male "lead" (Halberstam, *In a Queer* 167). If Tribe 8's use of two equally positioned guitars is interpreted as a rejection of the male lead, this contradicts the view of the punk aesthetic as a male musical form. This again produces ambivalence, although admittedly not on the surface. Moreover, another gender-ambivalent factor is Lynn Breedlove's voice, which could be called what Halberstam coined a "butch voice" in reference to Emily's (Sleater-Kinney) manly female voice.

5.2. "You'll Find Your Place in the World, Girl, All You Gotta Do Is Stand Up and Fight Fire with Fire":[158] Queer Bonds and the Formation of a Movement

Another band from the 1990s that definitely deserves mention with regard to the feminist politics of riot grrrl, dykecore and queercore is Team Dresch. Furthermore, singer and songwriter of the band, Donna Dresch, is an extremely good example of the fluid use of the labels queercore and riot grrrl and the intersection between those political spheres. As a lesbian-identified musician and zine maker, she represented both riot grrrl as well as queercore politics, and was crucial in the emergence and development of both movements. Dresch was usually based in Olympia, WA, during the 1990s, where she belonged to the Northwestern riot grrrl chapter. However, she also spent a lot of time in San

158 The Gossip. "Fire with Fire." *Standing in the Way of Control.* Back Yard Recordings and Kill Rock Stars, 2006.

Francisco collaborating with Tom Jennings and Deke Motif Nihilson who published the zine *Homocore*, which was one of the first to use the labels homocore and queercore. Donna was also pen pals with G.B. Jones (Wobensmith, *Outpunk 5* 16) from Toronto, in whose band Fifth Column she played occasionally. Donna is featured on the cover of issue five of G.B. Jones's zine *J.D.s* and appears in her film *The Yo-Yo Gang*. In the early days of riot grrrl, Donna published her queer personal zine *Chainsaw* while working for K Records. In 1993, she started the dykecore band Team Dresch together with Jody Bleyle, Kaia Wilson and Marci Martinez (Ciminelli and Knox 49), as well as her independent record label *Chainsaw Records* soon after. After producing their first album titled *Captain My Captain*, Kaia Wilson and Melissa York left the band but continued to make music with The Butchies. Team Dresch continued with new member Amanda Kelly until 1998 (ibid. 53), however, she continued to release many recordings by newer queer-feminist punk bands on her new label, including The Need and Sleater-Kinney, and stayed closely connected with the broader queer-feminist punk scene. She herself stopped playing music from 1998 to 2004, when she returned to the stage with the band Davies vs. Dresch and went on tour with the *Queercore Blitz* tour, a group of queer bands touring the US together. Also in 2004, Donna, Jody, Kaia, Marci and Melissa reunited Team Dresch to headline the queercore festival *Homo-a-Go-Go* in Olympia, WA, which is "a queer music, art, film, spoken-word, and radical activist festival that is part of a nonprofit organization, Queer Art in Action" (Wilson 58). The songs and style of Team Dresch were less aggressive than those of the previously discussed Tribe 8. Their lyrics were more personal in some ways, but by no means less political. In their song "Don't Try Suicide," for example, they sing very honestly about emotions, personal problems, fear, the comfort of partnership, and the importance of friendship:

> My girlfriend cuddles me and holds me when I cry
> I tell her that I'm scared, ask if she thinks I'll die
> She tells me I'm OK

> I don't believe her but it makes me feel better anyway.
> (Team Dresch, "Don't Try Suicide")

For many young lesbians, Team Dresch was a very important role model that they could easily identify with (Block 248), as can be seen from the *Captain My Captain* booklet, which features letters from fans who are discovering their sexual identities. Moreover, Team Dresch's lyrics once again show that queer-feminist punks were not only well versed in feminist theory and history but also in the history of punk rock and academic accounts of it in the area of cultural studies (S. Marcus 78). According to some dykecore researchers, the outspoken goal of Team Dresch was "to educate" (Wilson 53). "In a direct nod to the earlier generations of lesbians like those involved with Olivia Records, Kaia Wilson's liner notes from Team Dresch's 1996 album *Captain My Captain* stress the importance of remembering the struggles lesbians have faced through time" (ibid.). A crucial part of the knowledge Team Dresch produced was related to gender and sexual nonconformity in the history of punk rock. The band frequently talked about early gender-bending punks and lesbian lyrics in punk rock. In their song "Uncle Phranc" on the album *Captain My Captain*, Donna sings about how Susan Gottlieb, alias Phranc, who started her music career in the Los Angeles punk scene of the 70s and 80s with Nervous Gender, served as a positive queer role model for her and taught her how to get along in life when her mother could not. I want to point out again that queer-feminist bands like Team Dresch as well as anti-social and controversial bands like Tribe 8 actively created social bonds and connections with other lesbians, dykes, gender-nonconformists, and gay- and queer-identified punks through their politics. They created a fluid but very supportive network for the distribution of their artwork and ideas. Looking at some other more recent examples of queer-feminist bands, it seems that queer-feminist punk rock or dykecore is still alive and that the strategies used by bands from the 1990s like Tribe 8 and Team Dresch to promote queer politics are still in use.

A very recent queercore band from Brooklyn, New York that expresses their politics through punk rock music is The Homewreckers. The Homewreckers can be seen as a local "all-star band" with the "Cuban-queer-punk-artist" (Wadkins, "Girl Germs") Cristy Road fronting the band, featuring "Crystal from Party Line on drums and rad-lady Jacki O. as well as […] Frank Unlovable" (ibid.). These well-known community protagonists are quite conscious of their role in their counterculture as well as the politics of representation. "Ferociously psyched to deconstruct who and what is represented in their community, the Homewreckers see no reason in suppressing the incomparable connections between queer pride; broadway [sic] musicals; smashing patriarchy; and sitting around, writing pop-punk songs," the band writes on their Web site *the homewreckers.antiblog.com*. The lyrics on their LP *Daydreaming about Assholes* are "about lost love, cultural identity, imperialism getting in the way of cultural identity, Cuba, cops, gender identity, manic depression, manic salvation, sexual repression, and one night stands" (ibid.). The band's vocalist, Cristy Road, who writes most of the lyrics, has a long history of participation in anarchist punk countercultures (Road, personal interview). Although she has always felt strongly connected to anarcho-punk politics, she has often experienced feelings of alienation because most scenes were very male and very white dominated, she notes in a recent interview. She also remarked that the contemporary queer-feminist punk scene in Brooklyn, which "exploded" (Road, personal interview) around 2008, not only foregrounds queer-feminist and anarchist politics but also focuses on anti-colonial and people of color politics. Kate Wadkins, one of the most active punk musicians, concert organizers and punk theorists today, describes very clearly that what she likes about The Homewreckers is their directness: "One of the most exciting things about Cristy fronting a band is that she talks about shit like sexual assault in a way that's totally raw, shouting, 'Destroy me? I'll destroy you!'" (Wadkins, "Girl Germs"). The elements that Wadkins is referring to, the shouting and directly addressing sexual violence, are not only typical for punk rock but for some feminist strategies as well. Obviously, the

Homewreckers are continuing the queer-feminist punk politics of those who came long before they did, like Team Dresch and Tribe 8. They criticize patriarchal social structures and embrace lesbian desire and sexuality. In addition, they appropriate anger, ugliness and anti-social attitudes through their sound and visual representations. The artwork that Cristy Road creates for the band's CD and LP covers shows women zombies and lesbian sexual activities, with the lesbians often depicted violating each other with knives or razors, as well as landscapes of garbage and run-down houses. Such pictures can be interpreted as a comment on the lesbian scene, as criticism on the anger (caused by socio-economic oppression) turned inward and against each other. Moreover, the band, and especially Cristy Road, connect the queer-feminist punk community with other political scenes through her comic art. Road frequently participates in zine readings and art shows all over the US, where she exhibits her lesbian-themed drawings. Such events are often organized by scholars and held at universities or colleges. Moreover, Road not only transgresses and connects the spheres of academic and countercultural knowledge production but also participates in anti-globalization movements as well as the Occupy Wall Street movement.

5.2.1. "Eat Shit and Die":[159] Grrrls of New York Rioting Again

The contemporary queer-feminist punk rock movement has been continuously active since 1986, and still enjoys the strong participation of musicians and fans today, especially in Brooklyn, New York. Bands like the aforementioned Homewreckers embrace their identification as females on stage and provide strong visibility of lesbian desire through their lyrics. Other bands take up the anti-social strategies of bands like Tribe 8 to criticize mainstream society

159 Handjobs. "Eat Shit and Die." *Cassette Split with Tagora*. Self-released, 2007. Audiocassette.

as well as queer, lesbian and other countercultures. A band with extremely aggressive anti-social lyrics and a fast, edgy punk sound is the Handjobs. For example, in their song "Eat Shit and Die," they repeatedly provoke and insult with the lines "shit, eat and die / eat shit and die." Most of the lyrics of the Handjobs' songs are very anti-social and insulting, and they also use the term gay in a derogatory way, such as in the song "Gay." At the same time, however, the Handjobs create ambivalence because although the lines "shit, eat and die / eat shit and die" primarily suggest an insult, "shit, eat and die" could also be taken as a statement about the fundamental facets of existence since the phrase is followed by the word "lullaby." The production of ambivalent and surplus meanings is a significant feature of queer-feminist punk rock, as already explained in reference to Tribe 8. Furthermore, it can also be understood according to Judith Jack Halberstam's anarchy of signification. In the song "Watch Out," the Handjobs are warning someone with the line "watch out baby, he's right behind you" and create the experience of being chased with the fast tempo of the song, the screamed lyrics and emphasis on drums. However, because the song is performed and experienced in a non-threatening queer-feminist punk environment by outspokenly queer artists, they are also creating a form of queer enjoyment or jouissance.

Another interesting example of a contemporary queer-feminist band from Brooklyn, New York is Inner Princess. The "Queer Punk RAWK Trio" describes its politics on their Web site *www.innerprincessrocks.com* as

> affectionately […] raising a RUKUS at clubs, parties and festivals since 2007. Attracting a broad audience with our lovable, humorous attitude and captivating live shows, Inner Princess throws caution to the tail wind and sweeps in with an original gender-bending genre blending style. Nothing is sacred!

The band members are closely connected to the queer-feminist punk scene in Manhattan and Brooklyn as well as other lesbian

music scenes. Drummer Lee Frisari aka Lee Free also plays in several other queer-feminist punk and pop-punk projects, including the band Bitch+The Exciting Conclusion (formerly of the dykecore band Bitch and Animal), and the Circus Amok Band. In May 2012, she toured with J.D. Samson and her band MEN. Frisari also participated in the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in 2009, playing the drums for several bands performing that year. This fact is surprising because the politics that Frisari represents with the previously mentioned band projects as well as her personal sex/gender politics are in stark contrast to the essentialism of the *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival*. When I asked hir about hir participation, Frisari noted that s/he feels that Inner Princess was still not welcome at the festival because of their politics, but that s/he supports the festival as a feminist cause anyway, regardless of its official bio-politics (personal interview).

In their songs, Inner Princess address conflicts that they have with mainstream society because of their "queerness" as well as other pertinent topics in their countercultures. Their songs have not been released on record thus far but can be downloaded for free from the band's website. Central to the politics of Inner Princess is the topic of gender-nonconformism. In their song "Pink Bits," for example, they embrace non-normative genders with lines like "If you're a boy with a big clit / Girl with small tits […] Let's Fuck." In "Gender Evolution" they shout that "Gender Evolution It's the only Revolution" as well as "Fuck the institution that fills me with confusion." Such lyrics criticize heteronormativity as well as conventional gender roles and question a binary male/female opposition based on biological grounds, all of which clearly illustrates their queer-feminist agenda and rootedness in queer-feminist countercultures. In addition to the oppression of people with non-normative genders through social structures, they also address oppression through institutions as well as the legal and administrative apparatus. The political strategy that they use to express their criticism is the anarcha-punk sound, which is played at a high volume, fast, with shouted lyrics and a strong emphasis on drums. Like Tribe 8, Inner Princess also has a song about

a discriminating and painful bathroom experience that addresses countercultural spheres and environments rather than mainstream culture. In "Inner Princess Anthem" they sing:

> Excuse Me sir
> But I think you're in the wrong restroom
> Oh really let me do the specs
> Ew Child, I left my cock at coat check
> I wish they made a bathroom for people like me
> And I wish they wouldn't harass me when I try to pee e eeeeee.

What Inner Princess describes in this song is a typical everyday life scenario: a female self-identified person whose look and bodily appearance does not conform to the stereotypical catalog of femaleness gets harassed by another female-identified person. This kind of harassment, which can be viewed as gender policing, questions the gender non-normative person's biological sex and ability to define their own gender identity. Hence, gender policing minimizes an individual's agency and capacity to act independently and make hir own free choices. This scene is representative of the everyday struggle of people with non-conforming or ambiguous gender appearances. It is a very simple, understandable example of the fact that most areas and subjects in the Western world are built on or divided according to binary categories of male and female and that there is literally no space for someone in-between. It also clearly exemplifies not only the frustration but also the violence that non-conforming gender appearances can produce. By communicating the harm that gender policing creates through the words of the person being harassed, Inner Princess manages to empower them and somehow turn the situation around in their favor. The song does this by illustrating the violence of and most importantly the assumptions behind a simple statement like "Excuse Me sir, but I think you're in the wrong restroom," thus demonstrating how wrong this form of gender policing is. Tribe 8 described the same

painful bathroom experience thirteen years earlier in the song "Wrong Bathroom."

Interestingly, the strategies used to describe and criticize gender policing by both Tribe 8 and Inner Princess take advantage of the situation's comic potential. This is best exemplified by Inner Princess's slogan and chorus of the song "stand up for your right to peee!," where a phrase associated with the language of protest is combined with the most "private" affair of going to the bathroom. This choice of words is a variation of the feminist statement "the personal is political" and shows the potential of comedy to skillfully express queer-feminist views, a strategy that was introduced by Tribe 8 and perfected by Lynn Breedlove in her new profession as full-time comedian. These examples show that comedy can be viewed as a form of queer-feminist (political) agency.

Another political strategy that Inner Princess uses in their lyrics is the shock value of sexuality and profanity, which also represents their connection to both the punk and queer traditions. In their song "PLS" (panty liner snatch), Inner Princess is using sexuality to shock with the lines "pussy's so hot gotta have it," "LOL lick it out loud" and "her vagina is so big you have to underline it." By using grammatical constructions that are often considered street language, they are actually violating social norms by violating language norms. Clever phrases with multiple levels of meaning, such as "lick it out loud," represent both the violation of norms and the aim to empower the marginalized.

In their song "Pink Bits," which refers to and embraces queerness, gender non-conformity and sexual abnormality, the band makes their political position in the queer scene clear. Moreover, the line "Everybody's pink on the Inside" questions the concept of normality and norms in general. Pink (and black) is also probably the most frequently used color in anarchist queer-feminist do-it-yourself environments, especially in combination with black, as can be seen from Inner Princess's website. By combining the most popular symbol of queerness "pink" with the specific category of bodily non-conformity, Inner Princess broadens the spectrum of queerness, which is still primarily associated with sexuality in

mainstream accounts, and focuses on a specific "group" of queer feminists that is often underrepresented in queer scenes.

Subtler than their reference to the contemporary queer-feminist counterculture by using the color pink, is Inner Princess's criticism of certain aspects of contemporary hip-hop culture. In their song "Tiara MC," they make fun of the attitudes of the so-called "Masters of Ceremonies" (short MCs); these are men who host hip-hop performances, introduce the performers and entertain or motivate the audience. MCs usually exhibit a macho version of masculinity. In addition, in many hip-hop songs and countercultures women are not well represented on stage and often have to deal with sexist treatment. When Inner Princess sings "Come ride with me," they are addressing the fact that cars are a frequent symbol of power and virility in hip-hop culture. To own or show off fast, expensive cars in music videos is very common in the genre. In addition, driving a car or "riding" also has a very strong sexual connotation (i.e., intercourse), which Inner Princess uses. However, by titling their song "Tiara MC," which is either an American Chevy conversion van mainly used as a family car in the early 1990s or an oldtimer built by Toyota and in both versions not sexy at all, they are poking fun at male hip-hop attitudes and values. In looking at the metaphorical connotation of riding as sexual intercourse more closely, the mockery becomes even more pointed because a minivan stands for safety, family and responsibility, which is probably not how a male hip-hopper would want to represent his sexual skills. Inner Princess also ridicules the tendency in hip-hop to use ALL CAPS. In the line "Ladies love hangin' with BLT," which is short for the band members' names (Becca, Lee and Tanisha), they are using a hip-hop metaphor used to describe lesbian desire and practice. The fact that BLT is also an acronym for bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich shows that they are capable of self-irony. Thus, "Tiara MC" can be interpreted as a criticism of gender hierarchies and common forms of maleness, which places Inner Princess once again in the tradition of feminist activism and clearly shows the affiliations between queercore and feminist agendas discussed earlier in the example of Tribe 8.

In light of the context above, another song that deserves mention is "Suburban Angst" because it not only criticizes patriarchy and the exclusion and abuse of women by male-dominated institutions, such as Christian religious groups, but their whiteness as well. As depicted in their song "Tiara MC," in which they criticize a subculture that exists in the States mostly among black Americans (aside from a few famous white Americans, such as Eminem), the issue of color is one to which Inner Princess pays particular attention. By naming their song "Suburban Angst," Inner Princess is addressing both the pressure put on queers in family loving suburban areas, where sexuality is only encouraged for procreation, as Edelman describes it, and the fear of queers in these settings.

It is clear that Inner Princess is strongly connected to the broader queer-feminist punk movement in Brooklyn and other places through their politics and strategies. Moreover, their queer bonds to the movement are also social bonds, as already mentioned. One of the key facilitators of the queer-feminist punk movement in Brooklyn and other places, who connects artists, bands and fans with each other, is Kate Wadkins, co-founder of the *For the Birds Collective*. The feminist punk activist and musician has organized many queer-feminist punk events during the last few years and, in so doing, has built a bridge between new bands, activists, riot grrrl and queercore musicians who started their projects in the early 1990s. In 2009, for example, Wadkins collaborated with Kathleen Hanna and other first generation queer-feminists. In the *Queer Issue* of *Maximumrocknroll* of the same year, Wadkins documented the new emergence of queer-feminist punk activism, which focused especially on the participation of female-identified punk musicians. She wrote:

> New York in general, but specifically Brooklyn, has blown up with lady-bands [between 2007 and 2009]. HAND JOBS are still playing their snotty brand of punk that hearkens to the riot grrrl spirit in a big way. There are countless more girls in bands (INA INA, HEY BABY, PARTY LINE, LOVE OR PERISH!, THE NEW DRESS, TAIGAA!) now

> that we have girls playing in all kinds of bands, it's easier to book and see shows that are more equal gender-wise and more girl-positive. (Wadkins, "Girl Germs")

At the same time, filmmakers, librarians and authors have started to document the history of riot grrrl and queer-feminist punk rock through various projects. Sini Anderson, for example, is producing a documentary film on Le Tigre and Kathleen Hanna (singer of Bikini Kill, who is widely seen as the founder and heroine of riot grrrl) called *The Kathleen Hanna Project a.k.a. Who Told You Christmas Wasn't Cool?* In the course of this production, the Knitting Factory in Williamsburg, Brooklyn hosted the Kathleen Hanna tribute show *Rah! Rah! Replica*! (11 December 2010), where punk legends like Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon, riot grrrl and queercore icons like Kaia Wilson from Team Dresch and The Butchies, and J.D. Sampson from Le Tigre and MEN covered Bikini Kill and Le Tigre songs alongside The Roulettes and others—including the youngest generation of punks and outspoken feminists Care Bears on Fire, who are graduates of the teenage Rock Camp for Girls. In addition, Kathleen Hanna formed a new band and started organizing concerts and hosting various feminist punks from the 1980s like the British group The Raincoats. While such events invite criticism with regard to the production of a certain star cult and sometimes lack the once highly valued anti-capitalist and DIY ethics, they are nevertheless a good example of how generational and age boundaries are being transcended as well as of the emphasis being put on collaborations in the queer-feminist punk movement. With respect to the intergenerational feminist exchange, the Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls also merits mention. Quite a few of the queer-feminist bands currently playing in New York are Rock Camp graduates. Besides Care Bears on Fire, another example is Royal Pink, a band that describes its style as "feminist slut rock" and "punk burlesque" (Pittelman, personal interview). The band members of Royal Pink "connect with [punk] aesthetic and a [punk-]way of looking at the world" (Pittelman, personal interview). The Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls was founded in 2004

as a non-profit music education program that seeks to empower girls and women. It is a one-week summer day camp for girls, which attracts and brings together girls and women from diverse communities in New York City. Every summer approximately 150 girls attend the program, which "consists of instrument instruction (drums, bass, guitar, keyboards, vocals, DJ/turntables, and sound & recording), band practice, and workshops on a variety of topics, from songwriting to self-defense[, g]ames and crafting activities […]," as stated on their Web site *williemaerockcamp.org*. Although the attendees have to pay a participation fee, the organizers try to provide at least fifty percent of the participants with scholarships, "[i]n order to ensure that girls from a broad range of economic backgrounds are served." Besides its core task (i.e., the girls camp), the organization also offers music education for adult women called Ladies Rock Camp as well as other programs. The volunteers who run the camp are rooted in the diverse lesbian, queer, feminist or anarchist scenes of New York, and many are musicians themselves as well as queercore punks and riot grrrls. Among the many guitar, bass, drum, vocal and keyboard teachers, band coaches and counselors is feminist queercore musician Cristy Road from The Homewreckers, who volunteers alongside country, gospel, soul and rock musicians of various ages and styles. Other supporters include Kathleen Hanna, Kaia Wilson, Joan Jett, Tori Amos and Melissa Ferrick.

Interestingly, the (re)emergence of feminist punk bands in the contemporary US scene goes along with the considerable academic attention being given to the historic riot grrrl movement. The book *Girls to the Front* by Sara Marcus, for example, which has been mentioned several times, garnered considerable academic as well as media attention and can be found in any of New York's bookstores. Kathleen Hanna and her queer bandmate from Le Tigre Johanna Fateman recently donated their personal riot grrrl materials (zines, correspondence, LPs) to the Fales Library at New York University, as did San Francisco-based Matt Wobensmith, editor of *Outpunk*. Several other universities in the area have started zine collections, and one of the most interesting with regard to

queer-feminist politics and dykecore is the collection at Columbia University's Barnard Library. The academic attention given to the feminist punk counterculture is not coincidental. Quite many of the earlier riot grrrl and queercore protagonists who show interest in saving their productions and politics for future historians are now academics themselves or have friends in those circles. Moreover, many contemporary riot grrrls and queer-feminist punks either study or work at colleges or universities. I want to emphasize at this point that the relationship between queer-feminist countercultures and academia is not just one way. While many cultural productions become incorporated in the academic institutions, the institutions and knowledge are also expropriated to benefit queer-feminist countercultures. One such expropriation was the *The Message Is in the Music: Hip Hop, Feminism, Riot Grrrl, Latina Music and More*, a *Women's History Conference* at Sarah Lawrence College, organized by Kate Wadkins. Wadkins also used the knowledge and facilities that her university affiliation provides to produce the zine *International Girl Gang Underground*, which is a compilation zine about the influence that riot grrrl has had and continues to have on the (re)production of feminist punk cultures.

The feminist *For the Birds Collective,* which Wadkins cofounded, is another example of the intersections between academics, first generation riot grrrls and contemporary queer-feminist punk groups. This group of well-educated female-identified people is building an alternative space for concerts, discussions and the arts. The collective aims to empower and support radical action and build feminist networks. According to their self-description in a blog entry under the title "Queer Eye for the DIY" on their weblog *forthebirdscollective.org*, they want to "maintain[..] a more inclusive feminist practice while staying true to our DIY roots." Together with other feminist curators and show bookers like the group *Strength in Numbers*, who organizes "all women-run all-ages shows" (Wadkins, "Girl Germs"), this collective is trying "to have a punk show be a safe space" (ibid.). Every summer they organize "The Big She-Bang, an all-day fest of women bands, artists and crafters, as well

as panels and workshops on community issues" (ibid.). While the members of the For the Birds Collective are not exclusively queer, it does include many queer- and lesbian-identified people. Furthermore, it provides queer-identified punks with events and information, and distributes queer-feminist zines as well as CDs. Scholar Jamielynn Varriale, who frequently participates in the shows of the For the Birds Collective, gives a beautiful explanation of why the events are so much more interesting for her than lesbian bars or clubs in her blog *rockandthesinglegirl.blogspot.com*:

> Whenever I go to something like this, I spend the entire time thinking that I'd rather be at a show, seeing someone like my beloved Zombie Dogs or Death First, and preferably at a DIY space like someone's basement or loft. The people I know at those shows are artists, activists, and feminists, and I feel way more connected to them than I do to strangers at a club who happen to share my sexual orientation. Lesbian events never feel socially active or feminist enough for me, and it just bums me out.

5.2.2. "We Make a Pocket of Hope, under the Stars as We Go from Ocean to Ocean":[160] Queer-Feminist Punk Rock from East to West Coast

Contemporary queer-feminist punk, however, is not restricted to Brooklyn or New York. Another center of queer-feminist punk rock and DIY action has always been and still is the Northwest, particularly the cities Olympia, Washington, Seattle and Portland. Riot grrrl emerged in Olympia in the 1990s when Kathleen Hanna was attending Evergreen College and she and her friend Tobi

160 The Shondes. "Ocean to Ocean." *Searchlights*. Exotic Fever Records, 2011. CD.

Vail decided to spread their feminism through loud and aggressive punk music. At this time, she followed the advice that Kathy Acker had given her (given to Kathleen in an interview): "If you want people to hear what you're doing, don't do spoken word, because nobody likes spoken word, nobody goes to spoken word. There's more of a community for musicians than for writers. You should be in a band" (S. Marcus 34). As discussed earlier, the two musicians were surrounded by a strong queer-feminist punk community of friends and fellow activists. One of them was Donna Dresch, whom I have already identified as a crucial figure in the rise of queercore and dykecore. Seattle, Portland and Olympia became home to various queer-feminist punks around 1990 and continue to be home to a lively queer-feminist punk scene today. What makes this region especially interesting in the context of queer-feminist punk is that the queer scenes there seem to identify more with feminism compared to other places and the fact that feminist punk rock plays a crucial role in queer-feminist activism. In addition, various great queer-feminist projects that transcended generational boundaries were established in this geographic area. In her well-known essay about queer countercultures, "What's that Smell," Judith Jack Halberstam says that riot grrrl follow-ups like Ladyfest 2000, which was organized in Olympia, "are also clear inheritors of lesbian feminist music festivals" (Halberstam, *In a Queer* 181).

Another of these projects—whose participants can be seen in the "lines of affiliation with an earlier moment in feminism" and who also "set themselves up against an earlier conception of white lesbian community, which included elements of sex negativity, gender separatism, cultural feminism, and womanism" (ibid.)—which unfortunately died a couple of years ago—was *Home Alive*. *Home Alive* was a community organizing project founded in 1993 in response to the rape and murder of the musician Mia Zapata. The project, which was "committed to creating a broad-based anti-violence movement" (Brokenrekids), offered free self-defense classes and raised awareness about violence against women and queers. *Home Alive* was run by musicians and artists who encouraged other artists to participate in their struggle against violence and

released a couple of CDs to raise money to run their courses. The first compilation *Home Alive: The Art of Self-Defense*, released by Epic (a division of Sony Music), sold approximately 150,000 copies (Kailer and Bierbaum 220). Many well-known artists contributed to the album, including Pearl Jam, Nirvana, Joan Jett and Jello Biafra, among others, but two thirds of it also featured local bands. The following compilation, which was not released on Epic, was a very interesting mixture of mostly indie and punk musicians, including queer-feminist punk bands like The Gossip, The Butchies and The Need (Brokenrekids). *Home Alive* served as an inspiration for numerous other anti-violence community projects initiated by queer-feminist punks. A recent example of a similar anti-violence initiative is *Support NYC*. The Brooklyn-based band The Homewreckers recently played at a Support NYC benefit show to raise money for the "collective dedicated to healing the effects of sexual assault and abuse," as reported on the initiative's Web site at supportny.org. Unlike *Home Alive*, which gave priority to prevention, *Support NYC* mainly focuses on supporting survivors "of all genders, races, ages and orientations" (ibid.) and only secondarily on prevention, visibility and awareness.

Violence against women and queers, sexual abuse, incest and rape are topics that have been and continue to be frequently addressed in riot grrrl as well as other queer-feminist songs. Thus, it is important that these subcultures and bands also refer to feminist theory and establish a connection to older feminist traditions and artists in activities and songs that deal with violence. A good example of this is Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill and Le Tigre—college student in the late 1980s, stripper, intern at "Safespace, a domestic violence shelter" (S. Marcus 38), founder of the first riot grrrl group to initiate feminist activism and girl empowerment—who actually got the first inspiration for her forms and style of activism from Kathy Acker. It is important to point out that although the songs against violence might be graphic and the performances provocatively explicit, both riot grrrls' and queercore's view of violence is never one-dimensional. That is to say that the bands in these subcultures reflect on the different feminist world views in

their lyrics as well as the role that they play in such discourses. In this context, their sex-positive discourse needs to be mentioned again, along with their gender bending performances and styles. Some examples of these sex-positive anti-violence accounts can be found in Bikini Kill's "Suck My Left One," Tribe 8's "Frat Pig" and in The Homewreckers' "Daydreaming about Assholes" from their 7-inch vinyl of the same title as shown below:

> […] social constructs kill our self-esteem.When love perpetually fails, we blame ourselves.When we are abused, we are damaged goods.Hashing out the wreckage, I've learned my defenses were only the product of my experience, and I'm not crazy or "damaged." ("Daydreaming about Assholes")

Before closing this chapter about feminism in queer punk culture, it is worth looking at Agatha again. Agatha is currently one of the fiercest and most political bands out there. Moreover, their music style best represents the anti-social qualities of punk music. Their music is fast and loud, the songs short with shouted or screamed vocals, the guitar parts are played with few chord changes, the emphasis is on drums, and they make little attempt to reduce the feedback of the monitors.

The band members of Agatha are truly committed to DIY principles and punk attitudes on a social and political level. Nein, the guitarist, runs a punk house in Seattle called gay camp with several other lesbian and trans people. They host almost anyone in need of a place to sleep and try to produce their own food in the backyard, most likely for financial reasons but also for political ones. They are all committed to the punk lifestyle and the gay campers are well educated, hold university degrees, and share a great interest in art and theory. Community life is also a very important theme in Agatha's lyrics. In their song "Community Space," they sing about the necessity of having an alternative space and lifestyle: "All we want is a little community space / cause you've got your shit on every corner."

At the same time, they question how alternative concepts have been established and lived. Drawing on the northwestern experience of a flourishing local supply system run by "coops"—cooperative organizations or companies owned by its members—Agatha questions the impact and politics of these coops; at the same time, it criticizes the bureaucratic hurdles that those alternative shops and farmer communities have to face:

> Non-profit paperwork, piles of red tape. It's a fight for grants, two heads of one snake, structure's too corporate, staff's overworked, fundraising's faltering, grass roots growing brown. ("Community Space")

Agatha's lyrics are as anarchist and punk as their lifestyle and sound. The songs on their albums are anti-social, question consumer culture and mainstream as well as countercultural norms.

5.3. "Oh, I'm Just a Girl, All Pretty and Petite":[161] Queer-Feminist Punk Rock and Third-Wave Feminism

Queer-feminist productions and their protagonists, especially riot grrrl-identified individuals, are increasingly being included under the label "third wave feminism" by numerous scholars,[162] as mentioned in the introduction to chapter five. The term "third wave feminism" became popular with an article by Rebecca Walker entitled "Becoming the Third Wave" published in 1992. Briefly summarized, third wave feminism challenges or rejects essentialist notions of gender, and often calls into question existing definitions of sex. Such feminisms are strongly influenced by post-structuralist models of gender, sex and sexuality, which emphasize that gender and sex are performatives, acts or doings

161 No Doubt. "Just a Girl." *Tragic Kingdom*. Trauma and Interscope, 1995. CD.

162 Cf. J. Freedman; Habell-Pallán; Lewis.

produced by discourses and not the effect of particular bodily markers (cf. Butler, *Gender Trouble*). Post-structuralist accounts also draw attention to the dissonances or incoherencies between sexual preferences, gender identities and bodies (ibid.). The emphasis on and embrace of sexuality, including non-normative desires and sexualities (Johnson 13–25), as well as gender ambiguity, became markers of third wave feminism. Accordingly, queer theory is often included in third wave feminisms (Showden 181). Other theories that are occasionally considered third wave feminisms include sex-positive theories, women-of-color consciousness, post-colonial and decolonization feminism, libertarian feminism, and new feminist theory (ibid.), regardless of the fact that they are very different from and often contradictory to each other. Third wave feminists understand the history of feminism as structured through generations. Implicit in such accounts is an understanding of the periods of change between the generations as times of conflict, in which the younger generation overcomes the outdated ideologies of their mothers.[163] Moreover, such models interpret the passing of time in general as progress, which is equally problematic.

Although the significance of the conflation of different theoretical feminist accounts and movements can and should be questioned, some of the implications of such labeling and, most importantly, the assignment of queer-feminist punk rock to third wave feminisms should be taken into account: labelling queer-feminist punk productions with the term "third wave feminism" acknowledges the political aspects of the music and writing; at the same time, it allows queer-feminist punk to be understood in relation to earlier feminist movements while paying attention to variation.

Indeed, the examples of queer-feminist punk rock and writing discussed in this chapter not only illustrate the forms of queer-feminist activism and agency, but also the critical continuation of feminist strategies, styles and structures. Bands such as Team Dresch,

163 Cf. E. Freedman; Henry; Gillis, Howie, and Munford.

Inner Princess, The Homewreckers, and Agatha use the genre of queer-feminist punk rock and dykecore to communicate their queer-feminist positions and criticism—a criticism which is highly aware of the academic discussions in (queer-)feminist theory and grounded in everyday experience. As shown in this chapter—to borrow Judith Jack Halberstam's words—"[…] queer performers like Tribe 8, The Butchies, and Bitch and Animal reference themes of gender bending and sex play while also exploring their proximity to and distance from the women musicians who paved the way for an independent dyke music scene" (*In a Queer* 180–1). References to earlier musicians, writers and artists who were part of second wave feminism were evident in the castration performances and lyrics by Tribe 8, the fierce and angry playing of Agatha or the involvement in anti-violence activism of The Homewreckers, to name just a few examples. Even their use of punk music as such was a reference to earlier feminists, as shown with the example of the article "Don't Be Gay" (1989) in *Maximumrocknroll,* in which G.B. Jones discusses the feminist politics of Poly Styrene.

Dykecore's cultural texts are self-conscious adaptations of punk rock as well as lesbian-separatist language, sex-positive feminism, and what Carisa R. Showden marks as significant for third wave feminism, a "politics of hybridity, postmodern and poststructuralist theories […], emphasizing paradox, conflict, multiplicity, and messiness, and the critiques of essentialism and exclusion within second-wave debates, especially as developed by women of color and lesbian feminists (including contemporary queer theory)" (Showden 181). Furthermore, queer-feminist punk productions emphasize the importance of intersectional analyses of oppression, in terms of formulating critiques or identifying and articulating political aims. In analyzing various examples of queer-feminist punk music and writings, it has become clear that queer-feminist punk rock does not focus exclusively on oppression based on sexual deviance, but rather attempts to see how race, sex, gender and class intersect. By addressing a whole variety of identity categories in an intersectional mode, queer-feminist punk rock manages to make oppressive social structures and norms of social

interaction visible. This allows its agendas to be interpreted in a meaningful way in terms of their close connection to the queer movement as well as earlier forms of feminist movements, while at the same time becoming aware of their blind spots and focusing on transgressing their boundaries. Queer-feminist punk rock rejects the idea of a stable or essential category like "woman" as the basis of their politics or activism. Their politics are based on their issues and goals rather than on their identities. However, emphasizing diversity and questioning categories does not include denying the social reality of gender, heteronormativity, patriarchy and capitalism. Queercore and dykecore also acknowledge and respect the cultural and social necessity of expressing identity. In doing so, they represent what Carisa Showden describes as "a different kind of identity-based politics, that is, a movement that takes intersectionality as its epistemological grounding, using intersectional identities as the subject positions for a feminist politics. Rather than eschewing identity, identity categories in this account could be re-articulated, complicated, and used critically" (ibid. 184). A good example of such acknowledgement is the previously mentioned booklet from the album *Captain My Captain* by Team Dresch, in which fans expressed their personal experiences with regard to forming a lesbian identity. Cultural productions and sexual politics in such intersectional accounts function as the "key sites of struggle seeking to use desire and pleasure as well as anger to fuel struggles for justice" (Heywood and Drake qtd. in Showden 180). Although academic accounts of contemporary feminisms like Showden's acknowledge their theoretical and ideological feminism, they still require models for how to incorporate subcultural productions in a legislative agenda (ibid.).

> It is that the cultural reworking and critiquing that even the best of the third wave provides suggests no clear way to determine where to launch political interventions, the bases on which they are to be launched, or the resignifications that are to be offered. At most, there seems to be a vague hope that cultural acceptance of

> difference will simply somehow lead to better political outcomes. (ibid. 184)

It seems that confronting others with social and cultural critique is not yet a political action for Showden. Even though she admits that "changing cultural narratives and increasing social acceptance are vitally important in making the day-to-day lives of marginalized people more bearable," she criticizes that such politics "[have] not stopped the passage of Defense of Marriage Acts, numerous popular votes for constitutional amendments banning gay marriage, or judicial rulings forbidding gay people to adopt in some states. Popular culture change does not seem to be trickling down to the government" (ibid. 185). According to Showden, third wave feminists need to articulate "a stronger connection between cultural critique and political action, offering up some way of making political judgments that not only engage with staid old political and economic institutions, but also give clear justifications for why some forms of cultural work are more resistant and rewarding than others" (ibid. 185). In denying contemporary (queer-)feminist productions and movements their political value, Showden reduces politics to legislative or electoral politics and expresses a naïve belief in legislative powers—which is certainly not shared by queer-feminist punks. More importantly, her account ignores the fact that queer-feminist punks have already created successful connections between cultural productions and grassroots political power. Projects like *Home Alive* and *Support New York* as well as collective efforts like the *For the Birds Collective* are examples of the successful combination of meaningful cultural productions, political education, awareness raising and the building of grassroots structures. In New York and Brooklyn alone—and those places are not exceptional—countless intersections between cultural productions, especially (around) music, and grassroots community services can be found:

> Drummer Mindy Abovitz (of MORE TEETH, TAIGAA!) recently began *Tom Tom Magazine*, a magazine about

> female drummers, that features DIY guides [...], teaching drumming techniques in the true spirit of the skillshare. [...] other DIY feminist Projects based here: *Willi Mae Rock Camp for Girls, Hola Back NYC, Support New York, Right Riders, Safe Walk, Momma's Hip Hop Kitchen*, and holy shit, so many more. (Wadkins, "Girl Germs")

Members of the bands mentioned in this chapter are political activists because they "are engaged in the world and struggling to work in community and coalition toward the values [they] believe in instead of being complicit with injustice" (Pittelman, personal interview) to borrow the definition of political activism from Karen Pittelman, band-member of Royal Pink.

Showden's critique, however, can be useful as a warning against an all too enthusiastic vindication of queer-feminist punk rock. It exposes the danger of embracing personal experiences within a political context, as Mimi Thi Nguyen has pointed out. This dangerous translation of "the personal is political" into the recognition of "marginalized grievances as [singular] legitimate revolutionary agenda" (Nguyen, "Race, Riot Grrrls") can be avoided through a dialogue between the different movements, generations and social platforms of political action, as well as by taking a critical view of the inherent hierarchies and blind spots of the queer-feminist punk movement. As queer theory scholars like Halberstam and Wilson have stated, queer-feminist punk scenes acknowledge the works of earlier generations of feminists, especially riot grrrl feminists, but also, as we have seen in the case of Tribe 8, The Butchies and Team Dresch, the lesbian communities. However, they do not celebrate their predecessors in blind admiration, at least not the bands discussed here; they "[...] take[...] on the responsibility of educating young fans through discussions on sex and gender. This represents an empowering shift for all queer-identified youth, most especially because it reveals the lifestyle alternatives that arise when a community challenges traditional gender stereotypes" (Wilson 54). Acknowledging earlier forms of lesbian feminism has sometimes created a kind of

dilemma for dykecore and queer-feminist bands—as in the case of Tribe 8 or Kaia Wilson from The Butchies, who, after speaking in favor of playing at the Michigan Womyn's Festival "found themselves lumped into the catchall category of 'transphobic' by camp trans protestors" (ibid.). Although this might be a very uncomfortable accusation to live with, the appearances of Tribe 8 and The Butchies at the festival aroused some very heated and long overdue discussions within and across queer-feminist, transgender as well as lesbian-separatist groups and scenes. In other words, through their thematic as well as social affiliations with feminist groups and movements, queer-feminist punks' critique of norms and power structures not only reaches queer environments but also feminist and/or lesbian subcultures and others. Via their critical stance towards practices and values within subcultures, queer-feminist ideas have challenged many world views and continued the queer-feminist dialogue.

In my detailed analysis of songs by bands like the New York-based Inner Princess and The Homewreckers, Agatha from Seattle, Team Dresch from Portland, and the San Francisco-based Tribe 8, numerous issues and points of critique expressed by queer-feminist punk and especially dykecore musicians have become evident. Some of their goals could be identified as core second wave feminist issues in the area of legal, political and social equality, such as sexual harassment, rape, domestic violence, and reproductive rights, but also include criticizing heteronormativity, HIV/AIDS awareness, sexual health, sexual abuse among sexual minorities, self-mutilation, globalization and anti-globalization movements, and contemporary anti-capitalist elitism.

5.4. "Don't You Stop, We Won't Stop":[164] Conclusion

I want to conclude this chapter with the lyrics from the song "Hot Topic" by the outspokenly feminist pop-punk band Le Tigre:

> So many roads and so much opinion
> So much shit to give in, give in to
> So many rules and so much opinion
> So much bullshit but we won't give in.

In their song, Le Tigre names dozens of historic and contemporary feminists ranging from Gertrude Stein to Angela Davis. They ask their role models to never stop their activism, and assure them that they will never stop their feminist politics either. At the same time, Le Tigre mentions various actors from the different feminist movements, waves and political brands. Their seemingly random enumeration of so many diverse feminists, however, is neither random nor undifferentiated. On the contrary, their lyrics also draw attention to their differences, the endless variations of "so many roads" and "so much opinion" within feminist theory and activism.

References to earlier feminist and queer-feminist thinkers, theories and practices are very common in queer-feminist punk rock, as I have shown in numerous examples, from the writing of G.B. Jones to bands like Inner Princess. Moreover, queer-feminist punk rock emerged as a movement with feminist agendas and themes, and used feminist strategies itself, as my analysis of early queercore by Jones, LaBruce and the band God Is My Co-Pilot has shown.

While outspoken feminists in queer-feminist punk rock revert to the word queer, use it in their lyrics and build their activism on queer strategies, the term is the most important derogatory word that queer-feminist punks feel the need to appropriate for themselves. This is reflected in their queer-feminist politics, as

164 Le Tigre. "Hot Topic." *Le Tigre*. Mr. Lady Records, 1999. CD.

well as their ways of self-identification, which accentuate words like "bitch," "slut," "lesbian" and "dyke." The general strategy of appropriating derogatory terms as well as the raw, anti-social aesthetic of punk is the point of reference for queer-feminist musicians to adopt punk rock for their personal and political agendas. Interestingly, when referring to the history of punk rock and first generation punks, queercore protagonists place great emphasis on the participation of female-identified musicians in first generation punk, as well as feminist agendas, and gay and lesbian themes. In other words, queercore musicians see themselves as part of a continuum of punk's feminism, which is represented by Patti Smith, X-Ray-Spex, Siouxsie and the Banshees and the Raincoats, to name but a few.

During the course of investigating what queer-feminist punks define as the political quality of their music, the most significant result was that past as well as contemporary musicians emphasize that producing music as a female-identified person is a political act in and of itself. In addition, this political quality of self-emancipation, the production of visibility for the female-identified or lesbian, becomes identified with feminist politics. What also makes queer-feminist punk rock political, as my analysis shows, is the use of anti-social verbalizations and behavior as criticism and rebellion against female social stereotypes. Besides its criticism of patriarchy and the oppression of women, queer-feminist punk deplores heteronormativity and binary models of gender and sex. Accordingly, queer-feminist punk rock can be understood as an offspring of feminist discourses and activisms. Indeed, many of the features that connect queer-feminist music and scenes to the broader punk genre are echoes of past feminist strategies. The expression of anger, for example, is also a strategy of people of color and Chicana feminism. Again, this reference is not unintentional, but rather one that is highlighted by queer-feminist punks themselves, as shown with the examples of Nguyen, Mah, Wahng (*Bamboo Girl*) and the riot grrrl New York chapter of the 1990s.

The participation of certain queer-feminist musicians in feminist movements, like the connection between riot grrrl and Team

Dresch, or in sociopolitical events like Tribe 8's and Lee Frisari's attendance at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, further indicate that queer-feminist punk is embedded in broader feminist movements. Nevertheless, queer-feminist punk and dykecore do not simply continue (other) feminist discourses. As the example of Tribe 8 shows, queer-feminist politics challenge feminist movements by drawing attention to the mechanisms of exclusion and normative structures within or through feminism. Some of the points of queer-feminist punk critique deal specifically with essentialist notions of sex as well as class-related and racist structures. Accordingly, it is legitimate to relate queer-feminist punk rock to what has become defined as third wave feminism. The inclusion of queer-feminist punk rock and communities in broader discourses, like a wave, can be useful to acknowledge the political nature of cultural productions and the influence through their local context. Nevertheless, the centralization of different trends, tendencies and discourses within feminisms also leads to a simplification and eradication of difference. In turn, such a leveling bears the presumable danger of resulting in hegemony and normativity. Furthermore, the notion of feminism as emerging in waves carries with it neoliberal connotations of progress, and builds on outmoded ideas about youth and generations.

6. "A Race Riot Did Happen!":[165] Queer Punks of Color Raising Their Voices

6.1. "All We Have Now to Wait to See / Is Our Monochrome Reality":[166] Introduction

Mainstream meanings of punk rock in the US and Europe are structured along the lines of the significations of anger, youth, masculinity, working-class backgrounds or affinities, and white skin. My aim, however, is to challenge these assumptions by focusing on individuals and groups who use punk rock for non-normative gender and sexual politics and their cultural productions. Such queer-feminist punk politics analyze oppression from an intersectional perspective, as I have already frequently mentioned. In this chapter, I focus on anti-racist and decolonial aspects and interventions within queer-feminist punk activism. I especially emphasize the participation of queers of color as part of non-normative gender and sexual politics within punk in order to acknowledge their contributions to and impact on queer-feminist punk rock. However, this acknowledgment cannot be achieved without also considering their position within punk rock in general as well as queer-feminist punk spaces (e.g., riot grrrl and queercore), which is always precarious and compromised by white hegemony and racialization.

165 Atoe, Osa. "A Race Riot Did Happen." *Maximumrocknroll* 313 (June 2009) (capitalization added).

166 Zilla, M.J. "Black & White" quoted in Stinson 291.

To understand the particularity of anti-racist and critical whiteness interventions within the queer-feminist punk context, it is necessary to thematize racialization and white hegemony within punk rock in general as both a set of meanings and a social phenomenon. Hence, I will revisit the origins of punk rock, or rather the origins of the myth of punk's emergence in order to clarify the discourses of meanings around it.

I start my analysis with the first academic research on punk rock by Dick Hebdige. Using his work as well as that of other critics, I explain how punk rock came to signify whiteness. In emphasizing the production of punk as white, I provide a semiotic analysis of the production of meanings and their embeddedness in racist discourses while also highlighting the resistance to such significations and racist social structures at the same time. A review of the rich history of the contributions to punk by people of color from the 1970s on is important in order to understand how punk rock was able to function as a cultural medium for the politics of punks of color while participating in racialized oppression. I focus on bands like the US-American all-black punk band Bad Brains, who are rarely discussed in detail in punk anthologies, despite the fact that they were successful and served as a role model in hardcore punk, to also highlight how punk history writing continues the invisibility of representation and politics of people of color. A crucial point of my analysis is that, although many punk circles can be criticized for their continuation of heteronormativity and white hegemony, the ongoing emphasis on the whiteness and straightness of punk bears the danger of ignoring and silencing anti-racist and queer-feminist politics, as well as queer punks of color themselves.

However, focusing on queer-feminist anti-racist punk productions, their politics and personalities is not an attempt to deny, mitigate or hide racist power structures within punk subcultures or productions. Furthermore, it is not an attempt to incorporate people of color in progressive punk discourses like riot grrrl or queercore to weaken criticism or worse, create the illusion of a space of total equality without barriers or exclusions. Indeed, some queer people of color felt offended by riot grrrl and other

punk scenes, as Karen Tongson has emphasized in her analysis of the East Los Angeles-based butch band The Butchlalis in the early 2000s. The Butchlalis could not relate to riot grrrls' style, especially their fashion. The rebellious appropriation of working class stylistic elements, or markers of poverty like torn or dirty clothes by predominantly white bourgeois college girls, did not correspond to their experiences as working class women of color. For them, riot grrrls' attitude and style symbolized their privilege to choose a lifestyle—a liberty the Butchlalis did not see for themselves (cf. Tongson 357).

It is important to consider such reasons for and examples of the alienation of people of color in punk rock in order to analyze the ambivalent place that queer punks of color occupied within their scenes. By drawing on José Muñoz's concept of "disidentification," I explain how and why queer punks of color nevertheless chose punk rock as a style and medium to foster their politics. Muñoz's concept of disidentification describes an identification with an experience or expression that is not, or not quite, your own but nevertheless, in a useful dialogue with it. People of color cannot fully identify with punk rock because of its whiteness; nevertheless, some individuals are drawn to punk because it also signifies anger, a rejection of mainstream society, oppression and power structures, as well as queer desire or pleasure.

(Queer) people of color gained and continue to gain space within punk rock communities through disidentification. This space, however, is constantly made invisible; it is an un-space or not-space that punk scholar Elizabeth Stinson signifies with the trope of the "black (w)hole" in her article "Means of Detection: A Critical Archiving of Black Feminism and Punk Performance." I refer to the provocative use of the "black (w)hole" by Stinson, as well as the insights into post- and decolonial theory by Adela C. Licona,[167] Laura Pérez,[168] and Muñoz, in which they make visible contributions

167 "(B)orderlands' Rhetorics and Representations: The Transformative Potential of Feminist Third-Space Scholarship and Zines." *NWSA Journal* 17.2 (Summer 2005): 104–29.

168 "Enrique Dussel's Etica de la liberación, U.S. Women of Color Decolonizing

that queer people of color have made to punk culture. Although they draw on different schools and feminist theories, these scholars highlight the precarious status of queer people of color within white (hetero)normativity, using different topoi of uncertainty, ambivalence and negativity to describe it, like "*dis*identification" (Muñoz), "(b)orderland" (Licona) and "black (w)hole" (Stinson).

I decided to refer to these three theories and present their different terminologies because they all disrupt different but intertwined fields of normativity, which are crucial to queer-feminist punks of color, i.e., borders, identity and black female sexuality. All three of these concepts are also interpreted from the perspective of queer-feminist (punks) of color themselves. I present these concepts not to incorporate them in white academic North/Western theory, but to show that queer punks of color not only raised their voices within punk discourses but also that queer-feminist researchers of color created an impressive corpus of punk theory. However, my representation of these concepts is still not unproblematic, especially in the case of Stinson's metaphor of the "black (w)hole." I decided to write about her framework because Stinson's use of the metaphor is a very good example and reflection of the appropriation of derogatory and hurtful language by punk rock, as well as the "anti-social" that is at the heart of punkness and queerness as I described earlier. Stinson bases her concept of the "black (w)hole" on the work of black feminist Evelynn M. Hammonds and punk researcher Dick Hebdige. She argues that the "messy" qualities of this metaphor of "the black hole" "draw" the reader "into a space where [...] performances resonate and shift conversations about gender, race, and sexuality" (276). Furthermore, the metaphor of "the black hole" brings together "black feminism, sexuality, and punk under one dialogic and allegoric relation [through its 'dirty' and derogatory connotations and simultaneously] consider punk's historical erasure" of queer-feminist people of color, signifying a physical (scientific) phenomenon.

Practices, and Coalitionary Politics amidst Difference." *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 18.2 (Spring/Summer 2010): 121–46.

It is a trope that signifies energy and immense power, black females and black female sexuality as source of violence as well as threatened by the violence of their erasure. Presenting Stinson's concept and use of the "black (w)hole" to analyze the position of queer-feminist punk is useful to mark the power and violence that penetrate the cultural location of queer-feminist punks of color; at the same time, it shows a strategic claim of space for people of color within punk history. A medium and space for the self-representation of queer punks of color within punk culture are zines. Adela C. Licona's analyzes feminist zine writing by punks of color in her article "(B)orderlands' Rhetorics and Representations." She understands the discourses and strategies of feminist zines as "(b)orderlands' rhetorics." "(B)orderlands' rhetorics"—as already mentioned—represent fluid, ambivalent or uncertain identities and subjectivities (Licona 105). Licona refrains from using the term or concept of culture in favor of postcolonial concepts of borderlands. She reworks such concepts by placing the b of (b)orderlands in parentheses to "interrupt any fixed reading of the notion of (b)orderlands" (ibid.). At the same time, she signifies the concept of crossings and in-betweens as well as the actual violent reality of crossing borders.

Queer punks and punk researchers of color describe their location within queercore discourses as "black (w)holes" and "(b)orderlands" because these theoretical concepts take into account the dynamics of violence that structures their experience and (in)visibility within queer-feminist punk scenes. In particular, Stinson's concept of the "black (w)hole" signals the cultural and political agency that queers of color assume in punk rock and with punk methods. This concept also plays with metaphors of time and space. On the one hand, it creates the image of a strong pulling effect and the danger of queer punks of color becoming engulfed. For example, with regard to white hegemony inside and outside of US punk cultures, it seems that queer-feminist punks of color have to be persistent in continuing their anti-racist and decolonial politics in order to resist oblivion and racialized oppression. On the other hand, if "black (w)hole" is read as not directed

against but origin among punks of color, by drawing on black female sexuality, it also signifies enormous power over or within punk communities. I draw on Stinson's and Licona's concepts because their terminology and theoretical accounts mark the violent reality of (queer) punks of color very explicitly, while still offering tools to analyze their agency. In other words, both concepts enable me to analyze how cultural activists use zine writing, music and performance as "strategies that reflect [their] lived experiences as fragmented, partial, real, and imagined, and always in the process of becoming" (Licona 106), to resist phallogocentrism and colonialization with the "potential to build and inform community" (ibid. 109).

In the final part of this chapter, I focus in greater detail on the decolonial politics of queer-feminist punk rock in reference to queer-feminist postcolonial theorists, like Gloria Anzaldúa and José Muñoz. I discuss the work of these and other theorists on the interdependencies and interrelations of racialization, patriarchy, homophobia and heteronormativity in order to explore the ways in which queer-feminist people of color have engaged with queer-feminist punks to participate in anti-racist queer-feminist politics. Moreover, I show that anti-racist queer-feminist activism by self-identified people of color and their allies was and is informed by theoretical academic work and discourses, such as Black queer-feminist critique, postcolonial theory, "third world feminism" and Chicana feminism, by radical queer women of color. Furthermore, queer punks of color engage in dialogue with contemporary queer theory.

6.2. “Whitestraightboy Hegemony”:[169] How Punk Became White

6.2.1. “Punks Are N…”:[170] The Appropriation of Derogatory Terms and Racism

Punk rock, most theorists and historians agree, is either characterized by notions of or signifies anger. Moreover, punk rock’s anger is characterized by whiteness and, for the most part, punk rock itself represents whiteness, as contemporary punk historians and scholars like Daniel S. Traber have noted. This signification within the cultural realm seems paradoxical considering the punk community’s awareness and critique of racialized social structures from the beginning of punk, as documented in *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race* by Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay (114).

However, I argue that this is not paradoxical at all, but rather that it was exactly this awareness of racialized power structures that led to the association of punk with whiteness and, in some cases, to open racism. Indeed, some aspects of racism within punk rock, as I will show in the example of Patti Smith, were created due to misinterpreting a gesture of white incorporation as an appropriation of negativity.

In coming back to the formation of a collective consciousness of racialized power structures and the production of whiteness as the main signification of punk, the first academic analysis of the then new music scene by Dick Hebdige and especially its popularity must be considered. Hebdige located the emergence of punk rock within white British working class and white North American avant-garde circles in the 1970s and 1980s (see for example G.

169 Nguyen, Mimi Thi. “It’s (Not) a White World: Looking for Race in Punk.” *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race.* Ed. Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay. London: Verso, 2011: 257.

170 In his study *Subculture*, Hebdige documented the statement “punks are niggers” (62) by Richard Hell in an interview for the *New Musical Express.*

Marcus, *Lipstick*). Although it would certainly be misleading to argue that Hebdige was wrong, it is important to point out that his account was too general. While Hebdige primarily analyzed punk rock as a class riot, the historic evidence suggests that punk was more complicated and diverse. Equally multifarious as its politics was punk's social composition.

In order to understand punk's politics and meanings, it is important to look at the semiotics of the term and concept, and reflect on the sociopolitical and cultural environment in which it exists, while simultaneously considering the process of crafting punk history from Dick Hebdige's famous first account in the late 1970s. Although he was the very first punk researcher, Dick Hebdige identified a precarious relation between punk rock and racialized categorizations as early as 1979, however, it was not until the early 1990s that academic and popular discourses on punk paid attention to aspects of color or ethnicity. Furthermore, until the recent release of the anthology *White Riot* by Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay, pieces on punk's racial biases had never really been brought into a transnational, interdisciplinary and intertextual dialogue.

In his analysis, Hebdige argued that punk adapted elements of black Afro-Caribbean British culture and placed them within a white context of underground culture. Young white Britons also adopted the political and musical aspects of reggae, and translated them into a format that fit their experience. To be more precise, the emergence of punk and its connection to Afro-Caribbean music can be understood as political, as an expression of general otherness by British working class teenagers and their minoritized position. Young white male punks, according to Hebdige, picked up the most different, frightening thing they could find within their worlds, "a language capable of piercing the most respectfully inclined white ear" (Hebdige 64), which was reggae. "Reggae's blackness was proscriptive. It was an alien essence, a foreign body which implicitly threatened mainstream British culture from within and as such it resonated with punk's adopted values—'anarchy,' 'surrender' and 'decline'" (ibid.). According to Hebdige, "the punk

aesthetic can be read in part as a white 'translation' of black 'ethnicity'" (ibid.). Thus, the cultural meaning of punk only carried a trace-like signification of blackness. Interestingly, this invisible blackness continued to be part of the register of meanings of the term punk, probably because of Hebdige's seminal work and the popularity it gained within the field of cultural studies as well as with punk musicians.

Hebdige identified blackness as a "frozen dialectic between black and white cultures—a dialectic which beyond a certain point (i.e., ethnicity) is incapable of renewal, trapped as it is within its own history, imprisoned within its own irreducible antinomies," that lies "at the heart of the punk subculture, forever arrested" (69–70). By framing punk's blackness as "imprisoned" and "arrested," he implicitly draws attention to the violence of such counteridentification, which is only possible through white privilege. However, although his work serves as a foundational cultural narrative for future generations of punk-identified people and theorists, his critique of white privilege has seldom been picked up by punks or scholars.

Hebdige understood punk's cross-identification with blackness as a primal identification with the outsider status. Accordingly, he interpreted utterances like "punks are niggers" (Hebdige 62) stated by Richard Hell, who was one of the first New York-based punks, in an interview to the *New Musical Express*, as cross-identification with black US-citizens. In overlooking the racism of such provocative expressions, Hebdige failed to adequately focus on punk as a product and continuation of radicalized power structures. Furthermore, his positioning of punk within the political spectrum of the left supported the further neglect of racialized or racist discourses within punk rock, and helped to produce a meaning of the term punk that was free of racisms. By doing so, he inadvertently paved the way for future historians to signify leftist punk rock as anti-racist while simultaneously viewing such politics as a structural failure. Most importantly though, he started a discourse which suggests that neither queers nor people of color have played a major role in the movement.

Hebdige assumed that there were no differences whatsoever between the US-American and British scenes. In the specific context of New York, where Richard Hell uttered his infamous sentence quoted above, however, the cross-identification with blacks and use of the "n-word"[171] not only has a different history and reference but has also served slightly different purposes.

New York punks' cross-identification with blackness can be seen as a violent appropriation, and the use of derogatory terms related to blackness a re-introduction of derogatory language into a cultural climate that had already incorporated a positive or neutral use of them in the language of neoliberal capitalism. Although it can be assumed that Hell's use of the "n-word" was not intentionally racist, it can also be assumed that he was aware of its offensive connotation. Race/ethnicity was an openly discussed issue at CBGB's[172] in New York, as Lester Bangs' *Village Voice* article from 1979 suggests. Furthermore, the participation of black musicians put racial tensions and racism at the forefront of the New York scene, which Hell experienced himself when the African American musician Ivan Julian joined him in the Voidoids. Bangs reported in the same article that "Richard [Hell] got flak from

171 In contemporary US America, the "n-word" is racist. Although there have been attempts to reappropriate the term by African Americans, especially in the context of hip-hop, it is not for a white academic like myself to decide if such a reappropriation should be undertaken or not. As recent events demonstrate, for instance, when a white feminist in New York held up a sign quoting John Lennon and Yoko Ono's song "Woman is the Nigger of the World" from 1972, many queer-feminist women of color were decidedly against the usage of the word. Moreover, appropriation of the word by a white person is experienced as patronizing and violent by some queer-feminist women of color like the Bay Area Black feminist and scholar Andreana Clay ("Endorsing"). I therefore decided to use the phrase "n-word" instead, in order to draw attention to the word's violence.

172 CBGB (Country, BlueGrass, and Blues) was a music club in Manhattan, New York. Hilly Kristal opened the club in 1973 to feature country, bluegrass and blues music. Since his club policy basically allowed anyone to play, it became a venue for the punk scene instead. Bands that regularly played at CBGB's were the Ramones, Television, the Patti Smith Group, The Dead Boys, The Dictators, The Voidoids, Blondie, Talking Heads, and many others (Beeber 77–87).

certain quarters about Ivan Julian, a black rhythm guitarist from Washington, DC […]" (107).

Punk theorist Steve Waksman interprets Hell's statement "punks are n[…]," as an equation between himself and African Americans as well as an identification with blackness. Furthermore, Waksman sees such cross-identification as a partial continuation of the US tradition of blackface and minstrel shows, in which the overt racism of impersonating blackness as a comic stage act, using dark skin make-up and stereotypical postures shifts into a more subtle use of codes and signifiers that use and reproduce otherness as a spectacle (30–31). The song "Rock'N'Roll Nigger" by Patti Smith (1978) can be seen as another example of such a spectacle of otherness. Duncombe and Maxwell argue that Smith "envisions a redefinition of the word 'nigger,' framing it as a badge of honor for anyone 'outside of society,'" (37) in the song. For her, they continue, "being a 'nigger' was first and foremost about aesthetic transgression and mutation—a position she extends to the conventions of language itself […]. Art's (and punk's) transgression sets one apart from society, marks one as 'other,' and this is a phenomenon that, for Smith, transcends one's given race […]" (ibid.). However, to function as a spectacle, the derogatory and violent power of the word needs to be addressed. To put it differently, the only reason that the two white punks could use the "n-word" to provoke and irritate was because it was a derogatory and hurtful word. Therefore, use of the "n-word" by Patti Smith and Richard Hell was not only an idealized self-positioning and accidental continuation of white privilege but also an explicit reference to racism. Although they certainly did not mean to reproduce racist structures, they nevertheless were referring to them. Through the emphasis of their own white outsiderdom and ignorance of their own internalized racism, they unwittingly perpetuated particular misguided color politics in 1978 and the punk scene of New York.

Hell and Smith, however, were not the only or first ones who identified with the spectacular outsider position of African Americans. Such cultural appropriations can also be found in the

musical scenes of the hipsters of the 1940s and 1950s, as well as early rock'n'roll. Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation and their contemporary Norman Mailer are also well-known for this kind of counteridentification and productions of spectacular otherness. Mailer spun his idealized ideas about blackness and black experience in his infamous essay "The White Negro," which analyzes hipsters' attraction to blues and jazz music and scenes, and influenced generations of other poets and artists. Mailer synthesizes the white hipsters' interest in black music, their self-labeling as "white negroes" and their lifestyle into one phenomenon, which he then interprets as a nihilistic search for meaning. He links the hipster's sexual lifestyle, which may or may not have been promiscuous for the time, to blackness and African Americans. Blackness and African Americans are thus not only characterized by primitiveness, sexuality and virility, but also by rebellion. "The White Negro" depicts the black body as ecstatic, primitive and potent, and blacks as pre-civilized. The hipsters' nonconformity and rebellion not only becomes an identification with blackness but also an adoption of the African American experience of everyday life as war. Understanding societal oppression and hegemony as caused by over-civilization, Mailer identifies with the position of African Americans as the cultural and social other and wishes to emulate the constantly endangered black existence, a precarious position that he seems to romanticize as exciting. Mailer's narration of black existence was of course not only fueled by racist stereotypes; his cross-identification with blackness, as his friend and fellow poet James Baldwin countered in "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy," was made possible by white privilege and the perpetuation of white hegemony. Like the white punks following him, Mailer's identification with the outsider status was a personal choice, not a reflection of oppressive power structures.

Coming back to the 1970s, it can be assumed that the protopunk Patti Smith had read Mailer's infamous essay. In her book *Just Kids* Smith refers to Mailer and the Beat Generation as important influences during her pre-punk era as a poor newcomer to New York, although she does not mention the essay in particular.

It ought to be emphasized again, however, that as well intended or indeed harmless as the counteridentification of early punk with blackness might have been, the use of the "n-word" was definitely not naïve. While the violence of those words might not have been of great concern to the Beat poets or Mailer's hipsters, by 1978 their derogatory quality was certainly consciously reflected in US discourses. Hence, the reference to racist stereotypes with these words was not on a structural or unconscious level, but purposeful. Considering their cultural environment and politics, it can thus be assumed that Patti Smith and Richard Hell used the "n-word," first and foremost, with the intention to shock.

The reaction of mainstream society and the punk scene to the use of the "n-word," however, was not one of shock. The main intention to signify an outsider status by referring to the most socially oppressed, namely African Americans or British Caribbeans, accidentally became the foundation for the appropriation of punk by white supremacists. This occurred because it introduced racist language that had previously been taboo in most countercultural settings and the punk environment. The preservation of punk's trace of blackness within the founding narrative told by counter-cultural protagonists as well as scholars on the left of the political spectrum, prevented punks neither from benefitting from white privileges nor from participating in structural racism; rather, such active memorization of the black trace in punk history a priori spoke the scenes free of the suspicion of racism. Like punk's queer elements, or what Hebdige called "gender confusion" (25), black and other people of color were also excluded from historical accounts.

Nevertheless, punk's invisible blackness seems to haunt punk's leftist scene just as punk's queerness haunts the use of the term "punked" in reference to African Americans, according to contemporary queer punk theorist Tavia Nyong'o and his article "Punk'd Theory." Referring to the etymology of the word punk, he argues that while the meaning of homosexuality mostly disappeared in reference to the music genre, it stayed on within contemporary

African American slang where getting punked means getting fucked by a fellow prisoner from behind. In the music scenes and circles, however, punk's queer and black meanings lingered on the edge of consciousness and, in fact, required great effort before it became synonymous with straight white boy culture.

6.2.2. From Spectacular Otherness … to Open Racism

In coming back to the use of racist language and symbols in punk lyrics during the 1970s, it should be mentioned that the ambiguity of how these were being used caused immediate concern among some critics. For example, in his previously mentioned *Village Voice* article from 1979, Lester Bangs voiced his worry about the direction that New York's punk scene had taken since its emergence. He argued that the appropriation of fascist emblems through punk, like the swastika, which had originally been adopted because of its shock value, had smoothly transitioned into racist symbols and attracted white supremacists. "[S]wastikas in punk are basically another way for kids to get a rise out of their parents and maybe the press," Bangs commented (108). "To the extent that most of these spikedomes ever had a clue on what that stuff originally meant, it only went so far as their intent to shock. […] 'A real immature way of dangerous.' Maybe. Except that after a while this casual, even ironic embrace of the totems of bigotry crosses over into the real poison" (ibid.). Less concerned with the appropriation of the swastika or Nazi uniforms, Bangs was very worried about lyrics and remarks that he identified not only as anti-Jewish but also anti-Black and anti-Roma in the New York scene.

Greil Marcus subscribes to Bang's early verdict of racism within punk in his analysis of the Los Angeles-based punk scene between 1977 and 1992. He argues that the rejection of hegemonic power of early punk turned into a repudiation of what the mainstream signified as "the other, the powerless" ("Crime" 80). To make his point about the racism and homophobia in the punk scene, Marcus quotes lyrics by the popular punk band X, which

he sees as representative for the scene as whole: "She had started to hate / every nigger and Jew / every Mexican that gave her lotta shit / every homosexual and the idle rich" (ibid.). Interestingly, Alice Armendariz Velasquez, better known as Alice Bag, defends the lyrics of X in her recently published autobiography. She mentions that the "white girl" in the lyrics, which were written and performed by vocalist Exene, refers not to Exene herself but to "Farrah Fawcett Minor," a "racist, misogynist anti-Semite" (*Violence Girl* 222) and a friend of Exene's who participated in the Los Angeles scene early on. The line "every Mexican who gave her a lot of shit" was partly about Armendariz Velasquez herself, who used to confront "F.F. Minor" about her racism (ibid. 223). Armendariz Velasquez, an outspoken queer-feminist Mexican American Chicana activist and former singer of The Bags, was friends with Exene. While her anecdote exonerates Exene from the accusation of blatant racism, it also shows the dangerous side effects that the ambiguity of such punk lyrics created. The ambiguity of the lyrics and performances by Exene, who was white, made usurpation by racists very easy. What furthered this was the tolerance or ignorance that the early punk scenes showed towards outright racism in their circles. Moreover, unconscious racist biases in the early punk scenes built a solid foundation for the explicit racism and misogyny that followed with white power punk, Nazi rock and right wing Oi! movements in England, Germany and the US (cf. Duncombe and Tremblay 114).

While Greil Marcus analyzes the open racism in punk as a transfer from a rejection of hegemony to a rejection of otherness in the politics of punk, Daniel S. Traber is concerned with a much more subtle form of racism in his study of Los Angeles-based punk scenes from 1977 to 1983. He argues that the continuation of white privilege and hegemony was paradoxically reinforced by the very strategy of what he calls "self-marginalization" (*Cultural Critique* 31), which Traber explains, is the conscious social "downgrading" (ibid.) of white suburban adolescents to what they believed was the multiracial sphere of the urban underclass.

Rejecting their bourgeois white American suburban homes and the cultural privileges of their parents, they appropriated what they thought was the opposite of this, the subordinate. Ironically, they thereby reaffirmed radicalized stereotypes and stabilized the association of colored skin with subordination (cf. Traber, *Cultural Critique* 31). Traber's analysis refers to Hebdige's concept of spectacular otherness. Significant in his account, however, is that Traber gives a more in-depth account of the effects of the appropriation of blackness. In the context of Los Angeles, the choice of punks to identify with the subordinated culture reaffirmed the notion of subordination as synonymous with being not white, living in the inner city, being poor, in danger and dangerous, messy, surviving rather than living and so on (ibid.). "Black" poverty then became a life choice, a signal of "moral superiority" (ibid. 34) and because of the lack of any reflection on a structural level, a continuation of white privilege.

This train of thought also allows us to see the anti-racist rhetoric of the leftist punk movement, which is overwhelmingly white. "I looked long and hard at the Anti-racist rhetoric in peace punk," a Los Angeles based "half-Mexican" punk writes in Mimi Thi Nguyen's *Evolution of a Race Riot*,[173] and she continues:

> I could see that it's not really a desire for racial "Tolerance" (whatever that's supposed to mean), but in fact a call for racial Homogenization, […]. [T]hey all brag all of this shit about how they are working class, none of them really realizing that if they had any genuine experience with extreme poverty, like many blacks, Asians, latinos (and others), they would see that genuine poverty is NOTHING that you would want to brag about. Only in punk music do your hear people bragging about how

173 *Evolution of a Race Riot* was an anthology edited by Mimi Thi Nguyen in 1997. Together with *How To Stage a Coup*, another anthology edited by Helen Luu, Nguyen's work can be seen as one of the most influential queer-feminist punk of color publications in contemporary punk discourses and scenes (cf. Atao, *Maximumrocknroll* 313).

> […] underprivileged they are, mainly cos they have no real institutional experience of what its like to be born in a ghetto or a barrio with no way out, and this sheen of alienation […] ha[s] nothing to do with america [sic] today. (Rodriguez, *Untitled* 32)

Since these discourses of punk countercultures were not taken into account on a structural level, punk activism was not able to intervene in the politics of white middle-class conservatism. Hence, punk came to signify "otherness" without the necessary surplus meaning of anti-racism, anti-capitalism, etc., Furthermore, it became attractive to proponents of all kinds of ideological strands, including racism, homophobia and misogyny. Queers and queer punks of color realized and criticized the whiteness that historically and culturally underlies the punk concept, aesthetics and politics. At the same time, they also recognized and held on to the potential of punk activism to resist hegemonic power structures.

6.3. "Hey, Look Around, There's So Much White":[174] Early Role Models

It is necessary to once again emphasize the role that punks of color have played in the creation and continuation of the punk movement in order to fully understand the structural violence of their invisibility from punk history and meaning as well as to further theorize punk discourses as racialized and structured through white privilege. The analysis of the productions by and politics of (queer) punks of color provided here roughly covers the last 35 years. It attempts to map out some of the significant discourses within the broader punk movement in the US, however, it is by no means representative of all the discourses on racialization or queerness. Furthermore, the collection of artists introduced in this chapter is not exhaustive.

174 Heavens to Betsy. "Axemen." *Calculated*. Kill Rock Stars, 1994. LP.

With respect to the British context, it is fair to say that people of color did participate in the scenes, and that some of them became key figures in punk rock. One example of influential people of color was the band Alien Kulture, who was formed by "the three second-generation Pakistani immigrants: Ausaf Abbas, Azhar Rana, [and] Pervez Bilgrami" (Duncombe and Tremblay 231). The most significant British key figure, however, was Marianne Elliott-Said, better known as "Poly Styrene," lead of the pop-punk band X-Ray Spex. Elliott-Said, who started her band X-Ray Spex at the age of 17, was of Irish-Somalian background and participated in the punk scene in London from 1976 to 1979. Her feminist and anti-capitalist lyrics continue to inspire generations of queer punks and riot grrrls alike. The second most popular British feminist punk of color, who received some attention in the mainstream media during the 1990s is Skin, the black, bald-headed, bisexually identified singer from Skunk Anansie. Both Elliott-Said as well as Skin were not only singers but, in fact, also key figures in their bands and much appreciated by their fans.

Despite their popularity and partial success because of their feminist anti-racist politics, Elliott-Said and Skin participated in overtly white scenes. Moreover, anti-racist agendas did not make the whole British punk scene anti-racist and critical whiteness politics were not particularly well presented. Furthermore, it seems as if the anti-racist politics of British punk were highly selective. In his article "'I Won't Let that Dago By': Rethinking Punk and Racism," Roger Sabin argues that early punks did indeed build alliances with reggae and Afro Caribbean anti-racist politics and react to the increasing popularity of punk among racists with the explicitly anti-racist projects Rock Against Racism as well as the Anti-Nazi League. However, in contrast to their US-based colleagues, their political activism did not include fighting against attacks on Asians, Hispanics, Pakistani or other British minorities. Moreover, as Sabin shows in his analysis of the British punk movement—from the Sex Pistols to The Clash and Crass—not only did leftist punk rock not focus on anything other than Afro Caribbean minorities, it also actively participated in racist acts against other minorities.

Sabin further argues that the long-lasting ignorance of leftist punk scenes towards their own racial biases was highly supported by the history writing of punk by Hebdige and others. When Hebdige focused on punk rock's proximity to the British Afro Caribbean scenes and reggae in his *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, he accidentally initiated the myth of punk rock as anti-racist. Through the frequent re-narration of the connection between punk rock and reggae as well as the overestimation of the influence of the two organizations Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League, leftist punk could make racist statements and lyrics against Asians, Hispanics and other British minorities and still be viewed as anti-racist. As the historic overview of British punk movements shows, Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League could neither create their own punk scene as an inclusive one nor prevent punk rock from becoming increasingly used as a medium for open racism. On the contrary, punks' alliance with Rock Against Racism as well as the Anti-Nazi League and reggae, "enabled historians to co-opt punk into a more long-term tradition of countercultural-left-wing-dissent" (Sabin 58), and hence provided an excuse for the ignorance of both structural as well as open racism. Although Sabin's analysis focuses exclusively on the British context, early theorizations of punk rock with regard to its participation in anti-racist left-wing politics probably also influenced the view of US punk rock. Again, Hebdige's work in particular can be seen as responsible for development because he included punk productions and statements from US proto-punks like Richard Hell in his otherwise British-centered analysis. Due to the influence that such a signification had within the US, punk became simultaneously understood as anti- or at least not racist, while punks of color became invisible in historic writing and the definition of punk.

Nevertheless, people of color like the "NDN Navajo group Blackfire" (Duncombe and Tremblay 207) also participated in US-based punk rock right from the beginning. Some of the important African American musicians were Spearhed, who headed the San Francisco-based The Beatnigs (Malott and Peña 103), D.H.

Peligro, drummer for the Dead Kennedys, Skeeter Thompson of the Screamers and the aforementioned Bad Brains.

Bad Brains are a good example of the invisibility of punks of color regardless of their importance in their communities and other places. Moreover, revisiting writings about Bad Brains clearly shows the construction of punk as white that started with the punk movement. Bad Brains, which formed in Washington, D.C., in 1977, became known and appreciated for their extremely fast, energetic hardcore punk songs and their not to be underestimated musical influence on hardcore punk. Moreover, they established the cultural meaning of punk rock as a political act. The stage names of H.R., which stands for Human Rights, and Dr. Know also clearly indicate their politics. The other band members are Darrly Jenifer and Earl Hudson.

Bad Brains' popularity within the punk movement brought Greg Tate, the self-proclaimed "Black Bohemian Nationalist" (213) to the conclusion that the band had disenfranchised itself from the black community. This is remarkable because it shows that punk already signified a white form of music in the early 1980s. Although it seemed that Tate was implicitly criticizing Bad Brains for betraying their African American community by participating in white culture, he also pointed out that they not only mastered what he understands as "white rock" (214) but also that they brought "Jan-praising Rastafari" politics to the "95 percent" (ibid.) white audience in an educational mode. In being outspokenly political through their music and self-representation, Tate continues, they brought "reason with them in hardcore dialect, a messianic message of youthful unity, a rebellion, and optimistic nihilism" (215). In contrast to so many other punk bands, "the Brains adopted British punk's formal conventions and 'classic' thematic antipathies—towards mindless consumerism, fascistic authority, moral hypocrisy, social rejection—they took to them as if they were religious sacraments" (ibid.). Interestingly, Tate identified the most challenging dilemma, which dozens of future punks of color also had to consider, "How to be black (not Oreo) punk and how to be punks and look forward to waking up every morning" (ibid.).

Arguing for punk as a political form of jouissance, as I will do in the following, it seems appropriate to draw attention to the stage performances of Bad Brains, which Tate described as "throw[ing it] down like James Brown going berserk, with a hyperkinetic repertoire of spins, dives, backflips, spits, and skanks" (215). Their self-understanding as political activists, their engagement and their jouissance-like way of performing made Bad Brains important role models for future queer-feminist punks, as queer-feminist punk of color Kisha wrote in the zine *A Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Life*. However, their homophobia made it hard for queer punks of color to identify with the band, as Kisha continues: "The first band I fell in love with was BAD BRAINS. Bad Brains blew my mind because they played hard, they played fast, and they looked just like me. […] Now HR is a creepy homophobic jerk and I don't really care for his politics, but those early records seriously changed my life and I cannot ever deny that" (24).

Starting with the documentary film *Afro-Punk: The "Rock 'N' Roll Nigger" Experience* (2003) about black punk rockers and the issue of people of color and/within punk communities by director James Spooner, a series of concerts in the New York City area and elsewhere were organized, in which Afro-punk-identified bands were featured. When Spooner filmed his documentary, his aim was to simply chronicle the participation and struggles of black punks within the US. Through his interviews and the screenings of the film later on, Spooner accidentally connected black punks with each other. He started hosting shows and provided an Internet forum, which served to support the growth of an international movement. This sparked the interest of institutions like the Brooklyn Academy of Music, which hosts a yearly film and music festival. In addition, Afro-Punk began to gain some recognition in mainstream media and attract commercial sponsoring, much to the disappoint of anti-capitalist punks of color, like queer-feminist Osa Atoe (*Shotgun Seamstress 5*).

Visibility and representation that allow for recognition among punks of color are very important factors in creating cultural

homes and agency for the oppressed, as the example of Spooner's documentary shows. *Mutiny: Asians Storm British Music* by Vivek Bald as well as Martin Sorrondeguy's *Beyond the Screams: A U.S. Latino Hardcore Punk Documentary* were other influential examples of representations by people of color in documentaries—both largely unrecognized by mainstream media. I want to emphasize Sorrondeguy's film here because it supports my point that queer-feminist punks of color influenced many beyond their small circles, which I will return to in the next section. "Mas Alla de Los Gritos / Beyond the Screams," as Mimi Nguyen says in Punk Planet 37,

> is a half-hour video documentary about Chicano/Latino participation in US punk and hardcore, a statement which hardly begins to encapsulate the project begun here. Bracketed by the early East L.A. punk scene (featuring too-short interviews with Alice Armendariz from The Bags and Teresa Covarrubias from The Brat) and '90s US hardcore, Martin Sorrondeguy traces the historical trajectory of Chicano/Latino punk rock and more, its always-emergent body politic, with brilliant skill.
> (Nguyen, "Race, Riot Grrrls")

Another film and book that recently gained considerable attention in the underground media was *The Taqwacores* (2004 and 2011) by Michael Muhammad Knight. Knight's projects introduced Taqwacore[175] scenes, which are basically punk rock scenes of Muslim Americans, who are dealing with Islamic culture through their music, to a broader audience. Independent writer and journalist Siddhartha Mitter describes Taqwacore as "the genre, or style, or movement, or something, that may or may not be described as 'Muslim punk'" (237). Taqwa to him means "religious consciousness, or righteousness" (239). "Taqwa bands," he writes, "have sprung up

175 Taqwa means God fearing, which includes protection from Allah's anger by obeying the law.

across North America; the Kominas and Al-Thawra are the most active, but there's also Sarmust, Vote Hezbollah out of San Antonio, Sagg Taqwacore Syndicate in Oregon, the queer, all-girl Secret Trial Five in Toronto, and a constellation of bands, bedroom producers and MCs in the US, Europe and elsewhere" (239). Taqwacore is very diverse and can certainly not be reduced to one ideology or belief. Some Taqwacore bands foster anti-capitalist, feminist and queer politics in their stage performances and lyrics. One such example is the aforementioned The Kominas, whose song "'Rumi was a Homo (But Wahhaj Is a Fag)' […] eviscerates a conservative Brooklyn imam for his homophobic statements" (ibid. 237).

Queer-feminist-identified punks of color have gathered together with these very diverse white and non-white groups and scenes from the beginning of punk's history. A number of them have made anti-racist queer-feminist politics and demanded that their peers reflect on their white hetero privileges. Arguably the best-known queer punk of color is Vaginal Crème Davis. Davis, whose persona, zines and music will be discussed later on in this chapter in more detail, is not only one of queercore's self-proclaimed founding members but also one of the most theorized examples of queer-feminist punks of color. Davis formed her band Cholita with another early extremely influential punk musician, the Chicana feminist Alicia Armendariz Velasquez. Although Armendariz Velasquez does not identify as queer herself, she is an outspoken Chicana feminist as well as one of queer punks' most supportive allies. Scholar Michelle Habell-Pallán has argued that "Velasquez, […] Teresa Covarrubias and Angela Vogel shaped independent, noncommercial music communities […] in Los Angeles and responded to the erosion of the public sphere and the increased privatization of daily life in contemporary US culture through their musical practices" (223). Moreover, the aggressive performances of Armendariz Velasquez can be understood as transgressing class and gender, as well as racialized norms. "In a clip from Penelope Spheeris' 1981 documentary film, *The Decline of Western Civilization*, we witness Armendariz Velasquez exploding

onto the stage and wrestling the boys who jump onstage to join her during the show" (ibid. 225). She performed in high heels and mini dresses, but her attitude was far from feminine.

Velasquez, Vogel and Covarrubaias served as role models for future queer Chicana and Latina feminists like Taina Del Valla, the Puerto Rican singer of Anti-Product, a late 1990s punk band from upstate New York, punk musician Cristy Road from The Homewreckers, Jamie Varriale Velez (Rock and the Single Girl), zinester Daniela Capistrano (*Bad Mexican*), and *Maximumrocknroll* coordinator and band member of queer-feminist punk band Condenada Mariam Bastani. Other punk of color bands that gave Chicano/as and Latino/as and their politics visibility during the 1980s and 1990s were Subsistencia, Kontra Attaque, Bread and Circuits, Zeros, the Plugs, The Adolescents, Huasipungo and Los Crudos.

Los Crudos in particular deserve a closer look with regard to the history of queer-feminist punk rock. As already shown in chapter three, the band was a remarkable example of how anti-capitalist and decolonization politics were represented in punk. In addition, their vocalist Martin Sorrondeguy played and continues to play a key role in queercore-identified scenes. Amerindian Latin American Sorrondeguy was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, and grew up in Chicago, Illinois. With Los Crudos, Sorrondeguy brought issues of minoritarian racialized experience into punk rock and fostered visibility for Latinos between 1991 and 1998. Recording in both Spanish and English, the band also aimed at building a Latino punk community in addition to their consciousness-raising within overtly white scenes. Through his self-positioning in the middle of white punk culture, for example, by working for *Maximumrocknroll* as well as his support for Latinos in the scene with his record label *Lengua Armada Discos*, and the band's touring in South America and Mexico, Sorrondeguy tried to create Latino consciousness among punks and connect or build a Latino punk community. He connected white punk culture and people of color scenes with each other and after he started being open about his queer-identification on stage, Los Crudos concerts brought queer punks, Latino and Latina punks and white punks together.

After Los Crudos disbanded around the year 2000, he formed the contemporary queercore band Limp Wrist. Interestingly, Sorrondeguy never gave up his strong position in the more general and straight-edge punk scene, even after creating Limp Wrist. In addition, he increasingly started to participate in queercore projects and scenes, such as in Scott Treleaven's documentary film *Queercore: A Punk-U-Mentary,* where he discusses his position as a gay man in the US-based hardcore punk scene, or the *Queer Punk* issue of *Maximumrocknroll* in 2002. His strategy to self-position himself as gay, straight-edge, and punk of color through punk music and a hardcore style can be analyzed using Licona's "(b)orderlands rethorics" because he moves between white queer-feminist punk scenes, straight-edge male-dominated scenes and people of color environments.

Within punk cultures and queer-feminist punk rock, it is inevitable for people of color to constantly produce some degree of self-visibility or representation. Such efforts require a language of self-representation that not only uses categories like queer or women but also the appropriation of markers like color and Blackness, as well as identities like Latino/Latina, Mexican American, African American, Asian American, Native American, Chicana/o, Latino/a and Mestiza. Juana Maria Rodríguez argues that "for most Latinas/os living in the United States, the appropriation of language [...] forms part of a ritual of survival. Like 'queer,' the words Chicano, Pocho, and Nuyorican entered the vernacular with decidedly negative connotations, which were then appropriated and transformed [...]" (*Queer Latinidad* 25). This strategic essentialism is a form of identity politics that enables the formation of communities by offering a code for identification and understanding. Furthermore, it enables alliances with punks as well as queers and feminists, and maintains the recognition of difference, oppression and hegemony, as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga and Chela Sandoval have argued. In this sense, the phrases "punks of color," or "people of color" as used to address non-white punks indicates a "commonality of the marginalized experiences," as

feminist blogger Jordan Alam pointed out at a recent discussion session and presentation of the *People of Color Zine Project* at Barnard College in New York City.[176] Nevertheless, if looked at from the outside, such usage runs the risk of creating an image of similarity that homogenizes the experiences and politics of individuals into undefined otherness, or ignorance towards the inequalities and differences within groups and communities. Therefore, some punks, like Akiko Carver, editor of the zine *Evacuation Day* reject the phrase "people of color" because

> [t]he term [...] belongs to the same camp as the terms "diverse" (the new adjective for anything not straightwhitechristianamericanmale), "multicultural" (white culture with a few decorations), "inter-racial" (a white person plus someone else) and "minority" (a word used to describe 75% of the world's population). This kind of language doesn't adequately describe who we are, and it doesn't empower us to fight racism. Its main function is to relieve white guilt. (Carver, "I Am Not" 38)

Other punks like the blogger Angry Black-White Girl find the term quite useful and appropriate it for their own purposes. Her understanding of queer persons of color is playful and ironic. "POC (Person of Color)," she writes on her blog *ab-wg.blogspot.com*, is "any non-white or mixed person who considers themself a POC, including, but not limited to people of Black/Diasporic African, Asian, Indigenous, Latina/o, Middle Eastern descent, etc," and "QPOC (Queer Person of Color)" is "[w]hat all the cool kids are."

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176 The People of Color Zine Project, Barnard Zine Library and For the Birds Collective organized a zine reading and discussion on 16 November 2011 at the Barnard Zine Library in New York. The presenters were Mimi Thi Nguyen, Osa Atoe, Jamie Varriale Velez, Daniela Capistrano, Mariam Bastani and Jordan Alam.

6.4. “This Fight Is Ours”:[177] Queer Punks of Color Visibility within Queer-Feminist Punk Culture

Punk rock, as has been demonstrated in the previous section, was never simply a white suburban phenomenon, or simply “teenage anger towards their parents” as Sorrondeguy said in a *Maximumrocknroll* interview in 1999. Nevertheless, it was always “thoroughly racialized and inextricably structured around the articulation of racial identity and the struggle to ‘solve’ problems of racism” (Duncombe and Tremblay 15). Moreover, punk was structured through fights against as well as participation in misogyny and homophobia at the same time, as G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce, two of the earliest self-identified queercore participants documented in their work (Jones and LaBruce, “Don’t Be Gay”). Although queer-feminist punk rock can be seen as successfully creating cultural safe spaces for many white queers and female-identified people, queer punks of color had a much harder time within them. Such repoliticized punk environments invited people to represent and celebrate their non-normative sexualities or gender and queer-feminist politics. However, although queer punks of color were theoretically invited to embrace their female and/or queer identity as well, they often had to face structural or open racism. Negative examples like the line “there are too many Jews for my liking” from the song “Love in a Void” by Siouxsie and the Banshees or the anti-Hispanic lyrics of the song “Puerto Rican” by Adam and the Ants (Sabin 65) show that feminist politics and queer representation did not prevent punks from being racist. Neither did an identification with punk prevent one from being sexist or homophobic.

Nevertheless, the fact is that queer people of color participated in many different punk rock scenes and circles. For some punks of color, punk was actually the medium and community where

177 Condenada. “This Fight Is Ours.” *Discografia*. Self-release. Chicago, 2006. Audiocassette.

they first developed a people of color consciousness or identification. However, as Tamar-Kali Brown explains in Spooner's film *Afro-Punk,* their own embrace of and identification with blackness and black culture was not always recognized or appreciated because the cultural platform where such identification could happen was understood as white:

> […] I remember coming into my identity as a young African-American woman feeling my culture and recognizing how I grew up kind of hating myself to a certain degree and coming out of that, and when I embraced my culture, that's when I really started getting called "white." […] in my mind, me and my whole crew, we were on some hardcore black nationalist type shit, but to the average person, we was just doing some white shit. (qtd. in Duncombe and Tremblay 252)

In the last couple of years, queer-feminist punks of color have started to build networks throughout the US to support each other to resist white hegemony, end oppression and foster anti-oppressive activism.

In his book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* José Muñoz explains why queers of color have chosen punk rock to express themselves musically. He understands the choice of punk by queer people of color as initiated through the identification with what I have framed as spectacular otherness in punk. He describes this form of identification from the perspective of the oppressed as disidentification, "a survival strategy […] the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere" (4). In the following section, I take a closer look at Muñoz's concept of disidentification in order to investigate why queer-feminist punks and punks of color have chosen punk rock as an aesthetic form and political expression.

6.4.1. "Life Changed When I Discovered My First True Love—PUNK ROCK":[178] The Politics of Disidentification

In *Disidentifications,* Muñoz describes various examples of different artistic performances and how and why individuals who experience oppression identify with (more) hegemonic cultural forms. Interestingly, when explaining the identification with punk rock, he draws on his own experience as an adolescent. Muñoz describes this particular form of identification as selective and partial. Moreover, in the case of punk rock, it is an identification with a culture structured through certain signifiers that are derogatory, hostile, or even violent to the oppressed individual. In other words, it is an identification with a form and group of people with more differences than similarities with respect to the oppressed, and/or who participate in hegemonic oppression.

Nevertheless, like the black lesbian author Kisha (*A Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Life*) quoted in the subheading, Muñoz identified with punk rock and made it his (temporal) cultural location. Like the queer theorist and cultural studies scholar Michelle Habell-Pallán, Muñoz's favorite band was also the Los Angeles-based X, despite their homophobic, anti-Semitic and racist lyrics. Such identification, however, as Muñoz and Habell-Pallán explain, was not driven by internalized racism or homophobia. On the contrary, both identified with X and punk in general because of the relatively undefined "otherness," that they shared because of their queerness and the racialization experienced in their environment. Furthermore, both identified with punk's meaning of cultural critique and rejection of hegemony. Given that the Los Angeles' punk scene "was the only cultural critique of normative aesthetics available to" him (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 93), Muñoz transformed his blackness and gayness to a more general signification of "otherness" or difference to make an identification with

178 Kisha. *A Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Life* 2. Chicago: The author, 2010: 3.

punk possible. He names this form of identification "disidentification" in order to differentiate it from both counteridentification and assimilation. Disidentification with punk for people of color is not the same as the (dis)identification with the otherness and culture of migrants by 1970s punks in the British context, as Hebdige has described it, although the two are related. These forms of (dis) identification are nevertheless similar in their structure because it is an identification that is not based on sameness. Furthermore, they both recognize the complicated ways in which identification works with regard to and aside from class, culture, gender and racialization. However, the most relevant difference is that the British punks' identification was from a privileged position, while people of colors' disidentification with punk was not. Although British punks were structurally oppressed because of their working class background, their whiteness clearly privileged them over the migrants whose otherness they identified with. Furthermore, their identification was entirely by choice.

Disidentification by people of color, on the other hand, is often unconscious, a "misrecognition" born out of necessity. An unconscious disidentification with punk culture frequently requires ignorance of punk's homophobia, racism and symbolic violence against the integrity of the oppressed subject. Nevertheless, disidentification as misrecognition can also be voluntary and tactical. "Identification itself can also be manipulated and worked in ways that promise narratives of self that surpass the limits prescribed by the dominant culture" (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 95). Muñoz takes up the notions of misrecognition and manipulated identification to develop his concept of strategic disidentification. "Disidentification is a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology" (ibid. 97). Disidentification can be understood as an action, a way of doing that resists the ideology of fixed identities and definite subjects. "It is a reformatting of self within the social. It is a term that resists the binary of identification and counteridentification" (ibid.). Disidentification is a very appropriate concept to describe

the contradictory relationship that queer-feminists of color have with punk rock. It recognizes agency among the oppressed as well as cultural hegemony. Moreover, Muñoz's concept validates cultural production, aesthetics and forms not only as socially relevant but also as highly political.

One of Muñoz's primary examples of performances of disidentification is the work of Los Angeles-based queer-feminist punk performer Vaginal Crème Davis. Davis is well-known among queer-feminist and other countercultures, and is also gaining the increased recognition of academics.[179] Best known as a drag queen, Davis uses multiple cultural forms and genres to produce her cultural politics, including being a producer of independent videos, working actress, zinester, performance artist, short fiction writer and musician. Davis is not only one of the original figures of the early homocore/queercore movement but also one of the few who explicitly address(ed) and criticize(d) the whiteness of the punk movement as well as the gay party scenes early on. Her various punk zines during the 1980s and 1990s were surprisingly widespread throughout the US and Canada, and continue to be distributed within queer-feminist punk circles today. They can be seen as models for contemporary queer-feminist people of color punk zines. Muñoz (following Antonio Gramsci) uses the concept of the "organic intellectual" (*Disidentifications* 110) to honor Davis's intellectual labor as well as her influence on future generations of punks.

The queer-feminism that Davis is influenced by is Black and Chicana feminism, as her zines *Yes, Ms. Davis* (1994), *Shrimp* (1993), *Sucker* (1995–1997) and *Fertile La Toyah Jackson* (1982–1991) show. Furthermore, her appropriation of past feminist and people of color movements is obvious by her name, which is an ironic homage to Angela Davis and the Black Power movement (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 98). By referring to Angela Davis, Vaginal Crème Davis (re)introduces the black feminist to predominantly white queer discourses and punk scenes. Introducing past

179 Cf. e.g. Muñoz, *Disidentifications* and *Cruising*; Siegel.

and contemporary powerful feminists of color, or women of color artists like La Toya Jackson, as well as queers from the 1980s and 1990s punk movements (see e.g., Davis, *Yes* 1994), Davis refuses to participate in a narrative of queer and punk history as organically straight or white. It seems that she implicitly makes the statement that queer-feminists of color had been there all along and therefore refuses the logic of oppression. Repeating the narrative of a white straight male punk history paradoxically perpetuates and stabilizes "racialized and sexist bias" as "self-fulfilling" (Pérez 131) prophecy, which also obliviates the participation of queers and women of color in progressive activist, or academic queer-feminism. Her conscious references to women and queers of color and other oppressed subjects can thus be understood as a queer-feminist strategy of decolonization, as developed by Laura Pérez (129) in the context of US academia.

Thus, Vaginal Davis' references are always critical. Taking on the first name Vaginal, for example, can be read as "parody and pastiche to remake Black Power, opening it up via disidentification to a self that is simultaneously black and queer" (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 99). Her name evokes an amalgam of meanings and discourses, such as black feminism as signified by the reference to Angela Davis and Black Power discourses, as well as queer activist and punk discourses. Black feminism and queer (punk) discourses are historically viewed to oppose or succeed each other. Davis' politics thus do not create a linear historic narrative or ideology, i.e., they can be framed as a critique rather than a firm agenda. Nevertheless, her critique marks a very specific location that is constructed by various factors of oppression. Her strategy of highlighting not only multiple factors of oppression but also the oppressed can be understood as consciousness-raising or a politics of visibility. Another example of such creative politics of visibility is her band project PME, which stands for Pedro, Muriel, and Esther. PME was "named after a cross section of people that Davis met when waiting for the bus" (*Disidentifications* 97), as Muñoz writes. This sets the stage for a US urban and working class environment through the reference to public transportation, which

is stereotypically associated with migrant workers. It can be assumed that these three names, which are clearly culturally and ethnically marked, are more than just a random joke. The Jewish name Esther, the Spanish or Portuguese Pedro, and the Irish, Breton or Scottish Muriel represent three of California's largest minorities. Introducing these names in predominantly white punk and artsy queer-feminist scenes is clearly a politics of people of color visibility. This representation is complicated by the band's use of the acronym PME to introduce themselves. The use of acronyms evokes the hip-hop genre, which is stereotypically understood as a black American cultural format, as already suggested in chapter five in reference to the band Inner Princess. The band's musical style, which is aggressive punk rock, further contradicts the expectations of their audience. Davis' drag performance adds to this irritation and can therefore be understood as a queering of the punk style, which is stereotypically understood as male and white. I want to emphasize again that the performances by PME evoke very clear cultural stereotypes and intervene in these cultural significations and categorizations at the same time. Hence, this production of ambiguous and multiple meanings can be understood as an anarchy of signification. Davis also continues this anarchic production of meanings in her zines. Using a cut-and-paste style, she produces a kind of Hollywood and punk scene gossip that floats between truth and fiction. In her DIY punk productions, such as *Yes, Ms. Davis* or *Sucker,* she narrated what later became one of her best known acts, a form of exaggeration that Marc Siegel calls "fabulous gossip" (154). The point about her fabulous gossip, which are mostly reports about sexual encounters with famous people ranging from Andy Warhol (ibid. 155) to Gwyneth Paltrow,[180] is not whether it is true or false, but rather that "by situating queer investments in (popular figures) within the interrelated histories of race, gender, sexuality and underground celebrity, Davis' gossip does the disidentificatory work of

180 Davis tells about a lesbian encounter with Gwyneth Paltrow on her Web site *www.vaginaldavis.com*.

reimagining the self and the social" (ibid.). Besides functioning as a critical intervention in white, heteronormative mainstream pop culture, her gossip questions the concept of truth and its intrinsic structural whiteness and normativity.

The question of truth and falsehood or essence and mask, is further reflected in her performance, which is a "drag that is neither glamorous nor strictly comedic" (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 103). José Muñoz analyzes her particular way of performing as drag that is a mask without an essence, a continuous perpetuation of camouflage (ibid.). Muñoz explains the concept of her performances in reference to a PME concert titled *White to be Angry*[181] at the Squeezebox in New York City, hosted by the drag queens Miss Guy and Mistress Formika (ibid.). During the concert, black drag queen Davis performed most of the punk songs as Clarence, another stage persona. Clarence is a "boy drag, […] in military fatigues, including camouflage pants, jacket, T-shirt, and hat[, as well as a] long gray beard, reminiscent of the beard worn by the 1980s Texas rocker band ZZ Top" (ibid.). Although Davis is performing as a boy, she manages to keep her original drag persona—Vaginal—recognizable, as Muñoz further describes:

> Clarence introduces himself. During the monologue we hear Vaginal's high-pitched voice explain how she finds white supremacist militiamen to be "really hot," so hot that she herself has had a race and gender reassignment and is now Clarence. Clarence is the artist's own object of affection. Her voice drops as she inhabits the site of her object of desire and identifications. She imitates and becomes the [white, male, and straight] object of her desire. (ibid.)

Davis' performance draws on the "picture of paranoid and embattled white male identity in the multi-ethnic city" (ibid. 105) in order to mock ultra right-wing ideology. Moreover, as a black drag

181 *The White to Be Angry* is also the title of PME's CD from 1996.

queen giving a disturbing impersonation of a white supremacist, Davis also intervenes in "[…] predominately white post-punk queercore spaces such as Squeezebox and, further, the spaces of predominately white masculinity that are associated with hardcore […] music" (ibid. 110). Furthermore, through her portrayal of a white supremacist, Davis points to the exclusions that white punk and white queer spaces create by interrupting the discourses of political correctness. She emphasizes that her blackness and queerness already mark her as different, as a "freak among freaks" (ibid. 111) and appropriates this extreme position or "exploits its energies and its potential to enact cultural critique" as José Muñoz puts it (ibid.). By accentuating her intersectional self-positioning between discourses of queerness, blackness and punk, Muñoz argues that these discourses themselves become visible as ideological discourses. In addition, she portrays these discourses as ambivalent because they are not only "liberatory" (ibid. 115) but also produce exclusions, hierarchies and perpetuate discriminatory power structures (ibid.). Muñoz's lens of disidentification enables the reader to understand PME's performance as "a parodic and comedic demystification; [it carries] the potential for subversion," (ibid. 115) and also depicts the "subjects as constructed and contradictory" (ibid.), but nevertheless active. Equally disturbing as Davis' live performance are the lyrics of the songs on the *White to Be Angry* album. They contain anti-gay expressions, racism and admiration for white militancy. "Davis' body, her performances, and all her myriad texts labor to create critical uneasiness, and furthermore, to create desire within uneasiness," Muñoz concludes (ibid.). While Muñoz concentrates on the "desire within uneasiness" (ibid.), I want to argue that PME not only creates desire but also jouissance through their irritating and confrontational acts. Their particular combination of violent language, disturbingly loud music, anti-social and politically incorrect behavior creates a pleasure that deconstructs the social structures and politics of the environment they are located in and self-destructs with regard to their own identifications. Through their appropriation of racist, sexist and homophobic language and body performances,

PME target themselves—their bodily and sexual identification—as well as their audience. Although PME and their audiences enjoy the performances, the confrontation of the queer scenes with their homonormativity and whiteness painfully interrupts feelings of ideological superiority and political correctness. As offensive as their critique towards queer culture is, PME's questioning of Black Panther discourses for their sexism and misogyny, as well as bourgeois bohemian spheres in general for their class issues (cf. Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 112).

6.4.2. "Q. Are You Black or Punk? A. Both (and Yes, FUCK YOU)":[182] The In/Visibility of Racialized Difference within Queer-Feminist Punk Rock

PME creates a jouissance-like movement that violently disrupts normativity and at the same time attracts a lot of attention. It could be argued that the spectacular perversion or appropriation of white pride by a drag queen of color captivates the audience's senses by force. The performance thematizes blackness as well as black female and queer sexuality, and shows the violence against people of color, especially female-identified people of color. This can be seen as a perfect example of Elizabeth Stinson's concept of the "black (w)hole." By referring to Dick Hebdige's concept of the "black hole" and Evelynn Hammonds' trope of the "black (w) hole," Stinson provides black female punks of color—like Poly Styrene, or the more recent M.J. Zilla and Janelle Monáe (Stinson, "Means")—with in your face visibility while still marking the process of their negation within punk history writing. She refers to black feminism to critically analyze "the forces of negation and distortion at work," but also to object to the same negation. She sees the "black hole metaphor" as productive in accounting for the creative opportunities

182 Spooner, James. "Foreword." *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*. Ed. Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay. London: Verso, 2011: xvii.

> and the paradoxes that arise from it due to the counteraction of time and space. Time and space, among other things, are often distorted in a white dominated world. The "whole" complement offers a different kind of belonging, autonomy, and space of expression, in a somewhat similar way that punk rock imagines. However, a black (w)hole "reduces conventional discourses to zero sum" and zero volume. […] "The limited sexuality that is often presented and reproduced in media and culture and the lack of black feminism in the punk subculture assume an absence. The presence is there; it is not an absent presence, but a presence that refuses to be absent." (278)

According to physicists, black holes are not empty; to the contrary, there is a whole world inside. Moreover, black (w)holes become visible through the great effect they have on their surroundings (ibid.). Stinson uses this "dense, extended metaphor" to "bring together punk rock and black feminism" and relate their forms and imaginaries "for their rhetorical arguments and relief from structures of discomfort, violence, and dissemblance by inventing alternative spaces" (276). She analyses punk sound as "a radical force [that] has the potential to open a vital and alternative space of sexuality and performance" (279). Although I want to emphasize the destructive quality or jouissance of PME's performances and the emancipatory anti-racist and anti-sexist energy they create, I also want to point to their "relational" potential. I argue that the relational or productive quality is a surplus value of the same jouissance-like performance. PME addresses multiple discourses, politics and social spheres at the same time and as such is intersectional. Their cultural forms are a fluid amalgam consisting of punk music, spoken word performances, and drag elements. Moreover, their concerts connect the punk scene with the queer and drag queen scenes. PME is ambivalent or a hybrid in terms of their self-identification, art genre and political location. Therefore, they open up a space where new queer social bonds

can emerge. Other cultural locations for the self-representation of people of color that create the possibility for queer bonds are queer-feminist zines. In the following, I take a closer look at queer-feminist zines and argue that queer-feminist punks of color use zine writing as a political strategy for fluid and ambivalent self-representation, and the representation of subjectivities as well as for anti-racist and decolonial interventions.

While Stinson concentrates on performances and lyrics as the medium for expressing black (queer) female sexuality and representation, Adela C. Licona develops a theoretical concept and method to account for representations of queer-feminist punks of color in zine writing. Licona argues that (b)orderlands' rhetorics are able to deconstruct fixed notions of culture and normativity. In her article "(B)orderlands' Rhetorics and Representations: The Transformative Potential of Feminist Third-Space Scholarship and Zines," she refers to and reworks Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "borderlands" to describe the location from which feminist zine producers articulate their aims. She argues that feminist zines are platforms where "representational rhetorics emerge" and calls the emerging rhetorics "(b)orderlands' rhetorics." The representations within feminist zines must not be understood as representations of fixed identities. (B)orderlands' rhetorics instead represent subjectivities in their full ambivalence and uncertainty, as shifting and changing. Licona places the "b" of (b)orderlands in parentheses to "materialize a discursive border and to visibly underscore the myriad ways in which borders (much like dichotomies) have historically operated to artificially divide, order, and subordinate. However, the parentheses also work to interrupt any fixed reading of the notion of (b)orderlands" (ibid. 105) and thus implicitly of cultural belonging. "Unlike dualistic language structures, (b)orderlands' rhetorics move beyond binary borders to a named third space of ambiguity and even contradiction" (ibid.). The interruption effected with the parentheses opens up the term for a usage that evokes metaphorical crossings and in-betweens while acknowledging the actual violent reality of crossing borders. It

recognizes that cultural activists "put language into play by using disrupted discursive strategies that reflect [their] lived experiences as fragmented, partial, real, and imagined, and always in the process of becoming" (ibid. 106). Licona developed her concept to account for the subversive strategies of resisting hegemonic power by analyzing oppression from an intersectional position as well as for the "potential to build and inform community" (109) through zine writing. She argues that zines "perform new representations of subjectivity" (ibid.). They connect un- or misrepresented voices and give them visibility. Furthermore, they are "challenging, re-imagining, and replacing exclusionary and oppressive discursive practices" (ibid.).

Examples of queer-feminist punk zines that explicitly refer to the ambiguity and potential that Licona describes are easy to find. Jackie Loneberry Wang, for instance, describes her own work in the second edition of her zine *Memoirs of a Queer Hapa*[183] as writings that "keep [meanings] dynamic, ever-changing and open in every sense," (Loneberry Wang 1) and compares it to the fluidity of her "mixed-race queer identity itself" (ibid.). Moreover, the meanings she produces "slide in and out of ways of being, ways of writing, so that being itself is undermined in favor of becoming" (ibid.). Not all queer-feminist punk zines are as explicit in their references to (b)orderlands' rhetorics as Loneberry Wang's. In general, however, queer-feminist punk zines by people of color need to be understood as (b)orderlands' rhetorics. Moreover, such queer-feminist (b)orderlands' rhetorics are predominantly anti-social politics as well; for example, in *Memoirs of a Queer Hapa* this can be seen in the appropriation of the derogatory term "hapa" to irritate hegemonic power.

In the next section, I introduce another contemporary example of (b)orderlands' rhetorics by Osa Atoe. I will analyze Osa Atoe's

183 "Hapa," according to Loneberry Wang "is a term [...] taken up by activists and writers who are mixed-race and of Asian decent. [It] is a Hawaiian word that literally means 'half.' In the past it was used as an insult towards those who were half white and half Hawaiian or Asian. Hapa haole means half outsider or foreigner, haole, means white" (7).

impressive corpus of work to show in detail what (b)orderlands' rhetorics can look like, and what their aims can be. Moreover, I show that the medium of (b)orderlands' rhetorics is not necessarily zine writing or writing at all; music and direct action can work as (b)orderlands' rhetorics as well.

6.5. "It Puts a Little Bit of Meaning into the Fun":[184] Punk, (B)orderlands, and Queer Decolonial Feminism

An example of queer-feminist (b)orderlands' rhetorics within contemporary punk cultures is Osa Atoe's work. Atoe, aka Shotgun Seamstress, introduced in chapter two, is one of the most active recent queer punks of color. She is a zinester, musician and activist, and a prime example of a punk coalition advocate. On the online platform *We Make Zines*, Atoe describes the space or (b)orderland from which she speaks:

> Shotgun Seamstress is a celebration of every side of myself. The punk part, the Black first-generation Nigerian part, the queer part, the feminist part, the artist-loner-weirdo part. Hopefully Black punks, feminists, queers, and DIY artists & musicians find in Shotgun Seamstress a world where they don't have to choose between important identities. ("Shotgun Seamstress's Page")

Even though Atoe is based in New Orleans, she transcends places as well as artistic formats with her political activism. She is involved in local and transregional projects in addition to editing her zine as well as writing a column in *Maximumrocknroll* and a weblog. Furthermore, she plays in the band Deny It, and organizes queer punk shows in New Orleans, which she calls *No More*

184 Atoe, Osa. "Everyone's Not Welcome." *Maximumrocknroll* 321 (February 2010).

Fiction Shows. "My whole thing with No More Fiction Shows was," she explains in her *Maximumrocknroll* column *Shotgun Seamstress*, "to create this utopian punk scene in New Orleans where you look around and you see all different types of people. Not just all queer people of color or whatever, but all kinds of different backgrounds and experiences" ("Everyone's"). In response to the whiteness and male dominance in the US punk movement, Atoe books many bands comprised of "Black people, Asian people, fat people, people in wheelchairs, [and] gay people" to give those activists a platform and create visibility for their causes. While focusing partly on the politics of representation, she also wants to build coalitions between "[b]rown kids, queer kids, [and] white kids who are sick of the same old scene" (ibid.).

Atoe understands punk rock as an artistic expression as well as a cultural medium for her political agenda. She criticizes discourses of "metronormativity,"[185] which privilege coastal cities like New York and San Francisco and the lack of interest of most US-based queer-feminist punks in the South. Implicitly, and on a deeper level, her rejection of metronormativity criticizes the elitist, middle-class, well-educated background of most queer-feminist punk activists in cities like New York, Portland, Seattle and Oakland—all cities she frequently visits or has lived in. As a counter-initiative to such discourses, she advocates for the embrace of New Orleans, "the secret queer capital of the South," where "[…] tons of black, poor & working class queers, […] have created their own culture all to themselves" ("I can't believe").

Atoe aims to build an inclusive punk scene in New Orleans and foster queer-feminist decolonization. As Laura Pérez has pointed out with respect to gender and sexuality in theories and the

185 Halberstam explains metronormativity as the "conflation of 'urban' and 'visible' in many normalizing narratives of gay/lesbian subjectivities […]. The metronormative narrative maps a story of migration onto the coming-out narrative" (*In a Queer* 36). In his article, "Southern Backwardness: Metronormativity and Regional Visual Culture," theorist Scott Herring argues that the US-American South becomes framed in opposition to the progressive metropolitans, as backward, homophobic, anti-queer and racist.

politics of decolonization, central to anti-racist queer-feminist politics like Atoe's is the question of how to move from punk's consensus that racialization is oppressive, to imagining that this democratizing aim is accomplished by merely identifying the category of "race" in "a laundry list of oppression." Pérez argues "that gender and sexuality critique is at the heart of decolonizing politics" (122). She insists that the intellectual labor of decolonizing entails the raising of awareness of the racialization of gender and sexuality, and must be undertaken "collectively, in solidarity, and alongside of [one's] own subject formation" (ibid.). According to her, decolonizing politics need to "introduce, engage and circulate previously unseen marginalized and stigmatized notions of 'spirituality,' 'philosophy,' 'gender,' 'art,' or any other category of knowledge and existence" (123). For Pérez, productive and effective decolonizing politics demand political agents who reflect critically on their own "racialization, feminism, queerness, and economic exploitation" to be able to "disarticulate the false projections in dominant cultural notions regarding its "others," but also the accompanying false idealizations and naturalized super-valorizations of the positively racialized, gendered, sexed, "able-"bodied, and prosperous within the mainstreamed dominant cultural social imaginary. And it is [necessary] to recognize ourselves both among the negatively and positively constructed" (124). As if following Pérez's advice, Osa Atoe self-identifies as a political agent and constantly reflects on her "racialization, feminism, queerness, and economic exploitation," by referring to her positions not as a personal or private business but as representational and structural. Furthermore, she signifies her political position as a coalitional space where different theories, politics, and aesthetics intersect. The goal of her zine, music and shows is not only to build a queer punks of color community in New Orleans and other places but also to rewrite and decolonize punk's history with an emphasis on queer punks of color. Atoe's blog and zines are an incredibly rich resource full of portraits of queer punk musicians of color, bands, zinesters and zines. She started her zine *Shotgun Seamstress* in 2006 to continue queer punk of color activism. She writes the following on her webpage:

> I wanted to pick up where other zines that addressed race & punk left off. Zines like Evolution of a Race Riot and How to Stage a Coup […]. I was either the only one or one of very few Black kids and people of color in my scene and I needed to read the words of other kids having similar experiences. The only thing was, a lot of the writing in those zines made it seem like if you were truly through with racism and cared about your identity as a person of color, you'd leave punk rock. […] But I love being Black and I love punk rock. I don't want to give anything up. ("Shotgun Seamstress's Page")

Since 2006, Atoe has been influencing and educating many queer-feminist punks and scenes throughout the US about punk of color projects, zines, bands and music. She is also a key figure in bringing queer punks of color from various ages and generations, scenes and genres together. Extremely well connected with queer-feminist punks all over the US, she books shows in Portland, Oregon and other cities. In addition, she is a key figure in the national *People of Color Zine Project* with headquarters in New York. The *People of Color Zine Project* is a very good example of the nationwide efforts that queer-feminist punks of color like Atoe make to reach out and foster their decolonial, anti-racist politics beyond their local communities. The project was recently presented at a conference at the Barnard College zine library called *Meet Me at the Race Riot: People of Color in Zines from 1990–Today*. The event was co-hosted by the Barnard College Zine Library and the queer-feminist grassroots initiative the *For the Birds Collective*. It brought people from very different areas, fields and scenes of punk culture together. The speakers were Mimi Nguyen, professor at the University of Illinois Urbana Champagne and editor of *Evolution of a Race Riot*; Osa Atoe; Jamie Varriale Velez, musician and blogger of *Rock and the Single Girl*; Daniela Capistrano, producer of *Bad Mexican*; and Mariam Bastani, editor of *Maximumrocknroll*. The *For the Birds Collective* organized a Twitter page for the event so that people outside of New York could also participate in the event by

asking questions to the panelists or just following the discussion. The initiative showed that there are very engaged and committed punks of color in many punk scenes around the US, who are foregrounding anti-racist queer-feminist politics. Moreover, these queer-feminist punks of color reach out to each other beyond their own cultural locations to support each other and engage in broader discussions.

Coalitions like the *People of Color Zine Project* not only connect individuals but also actually link up movements and discourses with each other. One movement or feminist concept that Atoe (*People of Color Zine Project*) and the *For the Birds Collective* strongly refer to and build coalitions with is riot grrrl. Other punks of color like the already mentioned Sorrondeguy or Brontez Purnell, producer of the zine *Fag School* and band member of the Younger Lovers, seem more attached to the label and groups that identify themselves as queercore. Alliances between these and other queer-feminist punks of color with riot grrrl and other queer-feminist punk communities, however, are rarely ever unchallenged or uncritical. In most cases, they are a form of disidentification that celebrates those movements for their queer-feminist politics, while at the same time harshly criticizing their participation in white hegemony. One way of challenging contemporary punk cultures is to emphasize structural racism and the lack of appeal that the scenes have for punks of color because of the lack of awareness regarding white privilege. Another strategy to decolonize punk communities is, as described in the previous sections, to acknowledge past punks of color and their productions. Riot grrrl groups and archivists of riot grrrl's history need to be criticized for their unawareness regarding their white privilege and blindness to their hidden racism. However, attention also needs to brought to the fact that the absence of anti-racist politics and people of color continues in a paradoxical way such that "race and women of color are remembered in the story of riot grrrl [and queercore]—as an afterthought, as additive, as interruption" (Nguyen, "Aesthetics"). Contemporary punks like Atoe or Purnell agree with Nguyen that many initially well-intended grassroots scenes as

well as riot grrrl and queercore chapters continued white privilege and exclusionary politics by ignoring the multiple factors of oppression inherent in creating a group identity. Nguyen analyzed her own experience in the 1990s in a paper called "Aesthetics, Access, Intimacy, or Race, Riot Grrrl, Bad Feelings" presented at Sarah Lawrence College in 2010, in which she explains riot grrrl's failure to continue progressive queer-feminist activism by focusing too much on the personal experience of discriminated "women" and not questioning the whiteness of the notion of shared experience. However, Atoe and many others also emphasize that some riot grrrls have been proceeding from "early radical lesbian feminism, which is as much a critique of white, middle-class, heterosexual women's domination of the feminist movement as it is an articulation of the politics and livelihood of queer women of color," as queer-feminist scholar of color Andreana Clay points out ("Like" 58). In response to Nguyen's criticism of riot grrrl scenes, Tamara Spivey,[186] who used to be an active punk of color within the Los Angeles-based riot grrrl scene during the 1990s, noted on *threadandcircuits.wordpress.com* that "most of the founders of the major riot grrrl chapters [in Los Angeles] and of Revolution Rising, an influential riot grrrl offshoot, were Hispanic and Asian, and white girls were the minority."

Like Spivey, and in contrast to Nguyen, contemporary queer-feminist punks of color Atoe, Velez, Capistrano and Bastani also point out that queer-feminist punks of color participate in queer-feminist punk cultures and address its structure of white hegemony at the same time. Furthermore, they attempt to intervene in white hegemony through a politics of consciousness-raising with regard to the work and activities of earlier queer-feminist punks of color like Mimi Nguyen herself, who edited the queer-feminist punk anthologies *Evolution of a Race Riot* (1997) and *Race Riot II* (2002). For example, in her column in *Maximumrocknroll*, Atoe wrote:

186 Spivey published the feminist punk of color zine *Housewife Turned Assassin!*

> With all of the new books and DVDs coming out documenting riot girl, it's completely unacceptable that those riot girls' brown punk sisters are left out of that history. As much as people try to document punk history, punk rock can still be so ahistorical. People leave the scene and move on, records and zines go out of print, white punks continue to ignore the contributions of punks of color… and it's like all of it never happened. Well, a race riot did happen and I'm living proof. I know I wouldn't be here if other punk rock feminists and POCs hadn't carved out by force a nice comfy space for me to exist. ("A Race Riot")

In reference to Atoe's critique with respect to the continuation of a whitewashed history of punk, I want to emphasize that many queer-feminist people of color identified with and participated in the punk movement during the 1990s. Zine writers, like Kevin Jagernauth, editor of *My Foot Goes Forward*, and Lauren Martin from the zine *You Might As Well Live*, fiercely criticize the racism found in riot grrrl and queercore scenes. Martin harshly criticized the language of shared "sisterhood" and "girl-love" used in her riot grrrl chapter, but always ended her criticism with notes like "p.s. I still love you. I still believe" ("Open Letter" 16). In the following section, I analyze examples of queer-feminist, female-, and Asian-identified punk writers and musicians from the 1990s and early 2000s with a focus on Mimi Nguyen, Sabrina Margarita Alcantara-Tan, editor of the New York-based zine and blog *Bamboo Girl*, the queer-feminist punk musician and academic Selena Wahng from the band Lucy Stoners, and Kelley Besser, editor of *Chop Suey Specs*. I focus on these examples because their work was and still is influential for many within the queer-feminist punk movement as well as others.

6.5.1. "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Homicide":[187] Resistance against White Hegemony and Racism

Sabrina Margarita Alcantara-Tan published her zine *Bamboo Girl* from 1995 to 2001, and continued her punk writing on *bamboo girlzine.blogspot.com* until 2010. Her intention, as stated on her blog, was to challenge "racism, sexism, and homophobia from the Filipina/Asian Pacific Islander (API)/Asian mutt feminist point of view." Moreover, she aimed to support other "yellowcore" artists and writers, and build a queer-feminist pan-Asian consciousness within DIY communities in the US. Her politics targeted her broader sociocultural environment, but also, and explicitly, the countercultural punk scenes that she frequented, as she writes in her article "The Herstory of Bamboo Girl Zine":

> I was getting totally disenchanted with the punk and hard-core scene; I was sick of explaining my heritages when fielding the constant "Where are you from?" or "What are you?" questions; and I was experiencing way too much harassment in the streets of New York City […]. I didn't have a constructive way of expressing my annoyance, anger, and rage […]. (159)

In her publications, Alcantara-Tan and her contributors criticize the implicit racism in the feminist punk scene and cry out for a different thinking in drastic language. They draw attention to the fact that white women dominate the scene and white ideas about gender and sexuality dominate the discourses. They agree with Mimi Nguyen that punks and riot grrrl-identified activists have made great efforts to criticize racism and mainstream society, such as when some of the scenes "produced some shrewd analyses of US foreign policy […], effectively organized huge protests against apartheid or the Persian Gulf War" (Nguyen, "It's (Not)"

187 Wahng qtd. in Wobensmith, *Queercore* 7.

259). Nevertheless, punk movements fail to realize their own racisms. Selena Wahng takes up this point when writing about the queer punk scene in a copy of *Bamboo Girl*. "[I]t seems," she argues, "that it's the white women who need to have lesbianism defined as some 'pure' thing. Like preserving the lesbian race is tantamount to preserving the Aryan race or something" (Wahng qtd. in Wobensmith, "Queercore").

Wahng as well as Alcantara-Tan reject the assumption of a shared "lesbian" identity based on sexuality. In describing their personal experience and identification, they emphasize that "heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification are impossible to understand apart from each other" (Lugones, "Heterosexualism" 187). Rejecting the incorporation of queer punks of color into groups based on a lesbian group identity, they argue that racialization and ethnicity crucially influence their gender and sexual identification. Authors like Wahng, who was strongly connected to the riot grrrl New York chapter, or Nguyen, who was part of the East Bay riot grrrl and punk chapters, condemn the hypocrisy of their communities where "some kinds of 'individuality' are valued according to punk's 'common culture' while others, well, aren't" (Nguyen, "It's (Not)" 260). Wahng and Nguyen consider the strategy and efforts of their punk communities to include people of color in their communities as a structurally violent incorporation and a form of assimilation. They feel that once integrated, the structural oppression of people of color becomes ignored through the ideology of a punk communality and sameness among all punks. Another example of a queer-feminist punk of color who challenges punk communities through decolonizing politics is Madhu Krishnan. Krishnan emphasizes that "integration" into white punk cultures comes at a high price for queer people of color. She argues that "any non-white/non-homogenous aspects of [her] home life that leaked into [her] social life were either swept away completely, or subtly filed away as some kind of joke" (279). Furthermore, such assimilation politics not only produce a notion of punk scenes as white and reestablish white privilege, they also and paradoxically produce the non-white punk participants as

"token-assimilated-quasi-white/novelty figures" (ibid.) and constantly continue to "other" them.

Queer punks of color like Krishnan, Nguyen, Wahng and Alcantara-Tan need to be understood as what Lugones calls "theorists of resistance to multiple oppressions" ("It's All" 49). The analytical tools they use to parse their location within punk and queer-feminist communities are rooted in many different theoretical and political fields. While Nguyen refers to post-structuralist thinkers like Judith Butler (cf. *Race Riot II*), Alcantara-Tan and Wahng apply different strategies. They make references to earlier feminists of color from the field of literature and other art forms to explain themselves to their punk peers. For example, in the widely distributed self-published queercore zine *Outpunk* (Wobensmith, "Queercore"), Wahng refers to the experimental play *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (1975) by Ntozake Shange for the title of an article, which she turned into "Bamboo Girl: For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Homicide." This reference must be understood not only as the active production of a feminist tradition of knowledge but also as a critical questioning of earlier feminist politics—a tactic already analyzed with regard to Vaginal Crème Davis.

Although strategies and analytical tools vary from person to person and scene to scene, the individual's phenomenological microanalysis is always developed into a broader reflection of structural racism, sexism and homophobia. By arguing from experience and theorizing from "within a troubled social and a troubled real" (Lugones, "It's All" 49), queer-feminist punks of color manage to build resistance against oppression and reclaim agency within their community. They create a setting of collective resistance and support in their daily lives and create concepts of decolonizing politics through punk activism. Furthermore, queer-feminist punks of color also question and broaden the archive of queer theory. They challenge predominantly post-structuralist influenced political theories by including Black feminism, Mestiza consciousness and decolonial feminism into their discourses.

Another example of this kind of decolonial queer-feminism is the writing of Nia King. In her zine *The First 7-inch Was Better: How I Became an Ex-Punk,* King describes her coming of age within the anarcho-punk scene in Boston, Massachusetts, her growing frustration with the homogeny of the movement, where everyone seemed to be male, white and straight, and her becoming conscious of the scene's antifeminist, homophobic, transphobic and racist (despite claiming to fight against racism) attitudes. Although Nia King, at least as a rhetorical move, rejects punk and punk communities because of her personal experience of racism and sexism, her writings need to be understood as an important medium for queer-feminist punk of color coalition building. Her zines are still present within many different punk communities today, and all kinds of punks refer to her work as influential. Like Wahng and Alcantara-Tan, King explicitly refers to feminist theory and activism in her writing. She addresses her experience of racism and homophobia within punk communities and other places from the perspective of a mixed race writer. In her zine anthology *Borderlands: Tales from Disputed Territories between Race and Cultures*, King explicitly refers to Gloria Anzaldúa's book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). The purpose of her zine is to offer a space for dialogue and the sharing of experience for queer-feminist punks of color. In her zine *Ungrateful Black-White Girl,* King uses the offensive and aggressive style typical for punk to address racism within the dominantly white punk counterculture she grew up in. She does not shy away from addressing less obvious forms of racism in her own community when she writes:

> Whites who want to be allies to people of color: You can educate yourselves via research and observation rather than rigidly, arrogantly relying solely on interrogating POCs. Do not expect that POCs should teach you how to behave non-oppressively. Do not give into the pull to be lazy. Think, hard. Do not blame POCs for your frustration about racism, but do appreciate the fact that POCs will often help you get in touch with that frustration.

In addition to her intervention in punk countercultures, King reflects on the continuation of white hegemony within the field of theory production. She emphasizes that "white academics still make careers out of researching and telling the stories of people of color and other marginalized communities while […] the researched continue to receive little prestige" (King, *Ungrateful*). Implicitly, King argues that colonialism continues through academia.

The mode of agency and resistance of the antiracist and decolonialist queer-feminist writings in these examples by Wahng, Alcantara-Tan and King is predominantly angry and hostile. They are excellent examples of a politics of anger, as will be explained in chapter seven. Although such politics reject aspects of punk, riot grrrl and queer scenes, they are nevertheless located within those discourses and social spheres. Therefore, they affect queer-feminist punk discourses. King, Wahng, Alcantara-Tan and Nguyen were important role models for many queer-feminists of color. Their examples encouraged others to start a band, zine or become involved in political activism themselves. They inspired contemporary zines like *Finger on the Trigger*, a zine written from the perspective of "a poor, black diy punk, hailing from the dirty south" (Atoe, "A Race Riot" 313) as well as Atoe's *Shotgun Seamstress*, and the band New Bloods. Furthermore, queer-feminist punks of color educated their (white) punk peers in punk's own offensive and aggressive punk rhetoric. They appropriated academic work as well as literature, feminist art and other influences into a language and style other punks can relate to, and can therefore be understood as organic intellectuals in the sense of José Muñoz.

Zine writing, however, was not the only format that yellowcore and other queer-feminist punk activists chose to communicate their decolonization politics. Bands like the all-Asian Emily's Sassy Lime, Los Crudos and Spitboy challenged punk communities with their lyrics and also influenced many queer-feminist punks, including the punks of color of today. Their politics prove that the criticism of white dominance within punk, the "Race Riot" during the 1990s was not reduced to "the letter exchanges and columns

of fanzines rather than in words sung on a stage or recorded in a studio" (256), as Duncombe and Tremblay falsely concluded in their recent publication *White Riot*.

6.5.2. "Black Love, Black Love! / Who'll Be There till the End / Rocking to the NTN!":[188] Queer-Feminist Punk as a Decolonizing Project

My Parade and NighTraiN are two very interesting examples of the artistic and poetic expressions that punks of color use to confront their peers about their white privileges and to make themselves and their art visible today. Moreover, the aim of their songs can be interpreted as the desire to produce knowledge and awareness about the history of US colonialism. My Parade and NighTraiN teach their punk community about colonialism by going beyond the thematic boundaries of punk and punk countercultures by referring to other musical genres and historic periods. In other words, they create an archive of colonial history in the field of countercultural music production. Moreover, by addressing colonial history in their songs and calling attention to the white hegemony found within their scenes and other places today, they clearly show that colonialism continues to perpetuated.

The first example I will analyze is the song "Hand Jobs on the Freight Train" by the Seattle-based band My Parade. It is a fast, aggressive punk song about topics like homelessness and freedom, danger and excitement. The song is a reference to the popular folk song "Freight Train" written in the early 1900s by the black US-American blues and folk musician, singer and songwriter Elizabeth Cotten from North Carolina. The original song by Cotten evokes images of pre-Civil War America. The lines "Freight train freight train run so fast / Please don't tell what train I'm on / They won't know what route I'm going" can be interpreted as the words

188 NighTraiN. "Black Love." *Derailed*. Self-released, 2010. CD.

of an African American from the South escaping on a night train, who is anxious about being discovered. With this reference, My Parade is honoring a piece of folk music written by a female African American working class person and remembering the violent colonial history of the US. Moreover, by transforming the folk song into punk rock, it implies that colonization, oppression and racism are not yet over. In addition, the sexual imagery of the word “handjobs” refers to discourses about modern forms of slavery and sexual violence. Although “Hand Jobs on the Freight Train” evokes these discourses of violence and oppression, it also draws on a very different set of meanings. On the one hand, the sexual acts, i.e., the handjobs implied in the song, are a very clear reference to the sex trade and violence as can be seen in the lines

> Aint got love / Aint no purpose /
> Aint found home […] But since I got some bills to pay
> And learning to do / I’ll just stay and jack off all of you.

The meaning implied with the following lines, however, is slightly different

> from three and so much time to spend / to 40 hours
> with no end
> No different then constantly moving on
> No remorse / No sad songs.

The song changes the sexual perspective again, by suggesting that everyday labor—a 40-hour work week—is a form of prostitution, the selling of one’s own body. However, when considered in combination with the ecstatic performance and high-speed music, the sexual quality of the song nevertheless also communicates sexual pleasure, as described in chapter three. The “sad song” themes and references to Elizabeth Cotten and pre-Civil War America, past and modern day slavery, the sex trade and sexual violence are transformed into agency by the energetic music and performance, which is also emphasized in the last stanza

Why stick around and be the fool?
I'm tired of waiting I paid my due
Now I need something from you
Whose gonna be traveling too
You and you and you and you.

This last part takes yet another turn by addressing and involving everyone in the audience and on stage in the discussion of the different topics. Not only does the song allow for multiple interpretations of the lyrics and music, it also forces multiple meanings on the listener. It feels as though the song is in itself a meaning producing machine, going fast like a train. I want to emphasize again that by addressing US colonial history and dragging it into the present, My Parade historicize their own oppression and resistance against it. They go beyond a monolithic, linear narrative of the experience of racialization and sexualization. Hence, their song "Hand Jobs on the Freight Train" can be understood as an argument for the continuation of "colonial processes imprinted in bodies whose sexual urges and longings are tortured in the process of production in the plantations, the *mita,* the emptying of lands for the assemblage of the capitalist world order," as Lugones puts it ("It's All" 49). My Parade's position seems to be in line with that of academic decolonial feminists, who describe their own experiences and histories as complex and themselves as "interrelated beings in multiple relations, including both relations of power and relations of resistance, of exuberant excess" (ibid.). Moreover, like many scholars, My Parade frame themselves as "historical beings" (ibid.) within colonial history, thereby implying that their experience and place in society can only be understood within the context of this history.

The last example of decolonizing politics within queer-feminist punk rock I want to discuss here, which coincidentally also involves trains, is the song "Black Love" by NighTraiN. NighTraiN is a contemporary all women of color band from Seattle. The band members Selena "No Pick" Paquiet, Nicole "Christ Child" Peoples, Taryn "Hot

Legs" Dorsey and Rachael F. play a very melodic, pop-influenced version of punk rock, which they call "Locomotive Punk" in their profile on *www.sonicbids.com*. The band's name already implies their politics, which is a clear reference to the song "Nightrain" by Guns N' Roses from the mid 1980s; a sexist song about being drunk that refers to a cheap wine from California called *Night Train Express* and a stereotypical white trash relationship. Guns N' Roses are known for being racist and sexist, among other things. Furthermore, the song "Nightrain" contains the unexpected and unrelated line "I got a Molotov cocktail / With a match to go." Considering Guns N' Roses' reputation for being racist, this line can be read as an expression of white anger. Taking up this song as a band name for an all-black queer-feminist group can thus be interpreted as an ironic statement against racist discourses in popular culture and rock'n'roll. Moreover, it can also be understood as a strong expression of agency by queer-feminist people of color.

The song "Black Love" by NighTraiN follows the trajectory of their other songs. In general, "Black Love" is about white men's love and desire for black women. Like the aforediscussed "Hand Jobs on the Freight Train" by My Parade, it speaks to the listener and analyzes contemporary societies by referring to pre-Civil War America. The line "Even Thomas Jefferson had an ebony honey / An African beauty who was brought to this country," refers to the sexual relationship between Sally Hemings, an enslaved woman, and her master Thomas Jefferson, principal author of the *United States Declaration of Independence* (1776), and the third President of the United States from 1801 to 1809.

By referring to Jefferson and Hemings in "Black Love," NighTraiN addresses the discourses of slavery and sexual abuse. Historians often portray Jefferson's relationship with Hemings as romantic and loving, but doubts about the possibility of romantic love under the conditions of slavery cannot be ignored, as scholar Annette Gordon-Reed argues in her book *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*. The feminist author Octavia Butler also addressed the complicated issue of the possibility of love, desire and sexual pleasure for enslaved women who had no

power or control over their bodies or actions in her novella *Kindred*. These authors suggest that sexual or even romantic relationships can be used as survival strategies, which do not fit easily into either the category of rape or free love.

NighTraiN does not give a definite opinion of the relationship between Jefferson and Hemings either, however it clearly points to the unequal power relations with the lines "She took his shit faithfully and produced for him fruitfully / And made him a forefather, truly. Black Love!" Moreover, the song transfers this dilemma to romantic and sexual relationships between black women and white men in the present, which concludes with "White men, Black girls; Black men, White girls. / [are] Always struggling in a not, not right world." However, the lyrics do not propose that such relationships are impossible or wrong. On the contrary, they suggest that they might have the political potential, to "tear [the not right world] down! / Put it up, spit it out! / Ever since way back when, / We're the revolution!" At the same time, the lyrics focus on the structural challenges that exist for mixed-race relations, and the oppression of women of color in general by using many contemporary derogatory and sexualized metaphors for black women, like the aforementioned "ebony honey" and "chocolate" that "melts in your mouth."

In the last stanza of the song, NighTraiN mentions Vim Crony as someone who is into *Black love*. Addressing Crony is their way of continuing black history writing, more precisely black rock'n'roll, music video art production and black activism history writing.

Donovan Vim Crony is a contemporary video artist, director, performer, educator and illustrator in Southern California. Rooted in punk, afro-punk and rock scenes, Crony supports and produces many queer-feminist punk of color projects and features queer-feminist punks of color like Osa Atoe and the band New Blood in his music shows. *The Vim Crony Studios* have been producing professional music videos and documentaries for over ten years, while supporting mainstream artists as well as independent projects and young DIY artists. By ending the song with this reference to Crony and, implicitly, an example of a successful queer-feminist

black community activist, NighTraiN calls on white men to become allies and supporters.

6.6. "Rise Up—No One Is Going to Save You":[189] Queer-Feminist Punks of Color and the Queer-Feminist Punk Revolution

Despite punk's signification of and through whiteness, queer punks of color have been part of punk scenes in the past and continue to be part of them today as well. Thus, the signification of punk as white anger is neither neutral nor does it circulate solely within the discourses of music and genre. In other words, punk's whiteness is neither a mere result of its origins among groups of working class kids and Marxist-oriented avant-gardes in London and New York nor a sociolinguistic problem. Rather, as music critics and theorists from Lester Bangs to Roger Sabin or Greil Marcus ("Crime") have pointed out from the 1970s on, much of early punk rock was not only unconsciously racially biased but also actually intended to be overtly racist.

By going back to the early era of punk rock and communities, I was able to show why punk became signified as white. In my analysis of the specific development of the punk scene within the US, I explained how early punks like Patti Smith and Richard Hell identified with blackness as a spectacular otherness, by producing punk as white and simultaneously reproducing racist power structures. The appropriation of blackness as well as fascist emblems like the swastika by most of the first generation of punks was motivated by the shock value of these symbols. What used to be provocative, however, ended up transitioning smoothly into racist meanings as well as attracting white supremacists. While such punk strategies need to be understood as abusive utilizations of white privilege, their structural racism never went

189 Los Crudos. "Levantate—Rise up." *Los Crudos / Spitboy*. Ebullition Records, 1995. LP.

unchallenged within the scenes. Historic articles on the 1980s' punk scenes in the US show that interventions and resistance against such use and appropriation were carried out early on.

Despite punk's hegemonic whiteness and structural racism, queer-feminist punks of color saw and continue to see possibilities in punk music and style. While problematizing the white bourgeois hegemony at play within punk communities, people of color were able to gain space and agency within punk scenes. Among the very early punk subcultures and first queercore circles was, for example, the Los Angeles-based Vaginal Crème Davis, who influenced generations of queer-feminist punks and activists. Moreover, queer-feminist punks of African and Asian descent, as well as Latinas/os have not only contributed to the queer-feminist movements but indeed played a major role in their creation, which they also challenged with their critique.

By using José Muñoz's concept of disidentification, I was able to explain why and how queer-feminist punks of color appropriate punk as a cultural signification of resistance and non-normativity, and rework it with their specific decolonial politics. Queer-feminist punks of color use the multiple strategies and means of punk, like zines, fast and angry music, and explicit lyrics to fight against oppression. Punk writers like the editor of *Bamboo Girl,* Sabrina Margarita Alcantara-Tan, and musicians like Sorrondeguy and Cristy Road work hard to create their spaces and build new communities by creating queer-feminist punk alliances. Furthermore, they produce and communicate an incredible corpus of theoretical knowledge, by reworking academic and other queer-feminist theories with their do-it-yourself punk approach.

The punk narratives that queer-feminist punks of color like Mimi Nguyen and Osa Atoe have produced are not simple additions to a general punk history nor do they make the punk movement prettier and more diverse. Rather, such narratives are efforts at "deconstructing social relations and the exercise of power," as Nguyen puts it. "This is not food to be consumed," she writes in a review of her involvement in punk cultures during the 1990s, "or a show of spectacle to be enjoyed. This is sharp, sharpened—needles and

splinters to be pushed under the surface of skin, experienced as punctures and upheavals. I don't want to make this comfortable, or comforting—this is supposed to fuck with you" (Nguyen, *Race Riot II* 1). Nguyen, HartAttaCk columnist Helen Luu, zine writer Lauren Martin, and their many colleagues created a network of people of color within the US and other places that provided a "nuanced critique of racism in punk rock beyond the simplified pronouncements ('Nazis suck') and inadequate analyses ('We're all united by punk rock, color doesn't matter')" (ibid.). They emphasized that racism and homophobia, like sexism and classism, are not special issues that concern only particular minorities. Through their music and writings, they raise awareness of the fact that racism, sexism, heteronormativity and classism are intersectional, structural and affect everyone. Punk rock and punk communities are not outside such systems of oppression.

Analyzing the appropriation of punk rock by queers of color with Muñoz as disidentification, and reading it in reference to theorizations of the black (w)hole and (b)orderlands by Elizabeth Stinson, Gloria Anzaldùa, and Adela Licona, the potential of punk for anti-racist and decolonizing politics and social alliances can be demonstrated. These concepts point to a punk potential, and at the same time address the structural violence against punks of color as well as their invisibility within punk communities and history writing. The danger of becoming invisible lies in the general power structures of white hegemony, as can be seen in every single-issue effort, including the feminist struggle as well as past and contemporary queer activism and theory. Furthermore, this danger is even more prevalent because of punk rock's cultural signification as white. Within most punk spaces racialized and ethnicized differences are constantly obliviated and therefore constant efforts to address racism and white dominance are required. This is very exhausting work for those punks of color who undertake this task. Consequently, punks of color like Nia King and Mimi Nguyen left their scenes after many years of anti-racist and decolonial activism because of the lack of response from their peers. Although they retreated from their punk rock scenes, their

cultural productions such as zines and recordings continue to be influential for consciousness building in punk circles. Their legacy lives on in their productions, zines and music, and influences new generations of queer-feminist punks (of color). The knowledge of their prior participation in the punk movement inspires queer-feminist punks of color to participate in punk culture themselves.

Queer-feminist punks of color continue to build coalitions with other punks to strongly criticize and reject societal injustice, as well as queer-feminist punk communities and groups, and queer-feminist punk itself. The queer-feminist and punk countercultures of today show a high degree of non-white queer-feminist punk participation and anti-racist queer-feminist politics. Many bands, like My Parade, NighTraiN, Stag Bitten, Inner Princess, The Home-wreckers and Royal Pink are made up of queer punks of color and foreground queer-feminist anti-racist themes.

7. “WE R LA FUCKEN RAZA SO DON’T EVEN FUCKEN DARE”:[190] Anger and the Politics of Jouissance

All of my hurt immediately turns into anger. Is this healthy?
Probably not, but what the fuck is healthy anyway …
(Bastani, “The Dicktator”)

In the previous chapters, I focused primarily on the production of meaning through written and other verbal forms of communication in queer-feminist punk rock. Language, however, is not the only form in which queer-feminist punks produce knowledge. In this chapter, I move away from the verbal forms of queer-feminist politics to look closely at punk performances. I argue that the embodiment of punk on stage—the dancing, the way of singing or screaming, and the way of playing the musical instruments—in itself communicates anti-social queer-feminist punk politics.

To give a good idea of what queer-feminist punk concerts and performances look like in general, I will briefly start with a description of a queer-feminist decolonialization performance by the band called Stag Bitten.

On 28 August 2010, Stag Bitten played in a concert called *Punkstart My Heart*, a punk show and release party for the latest issue of the zine *Shotgun Seamstress* at the feminist bookstore *In*

190 Sugar. “I Am Chicana …” *Race Riot II.* Ed. Mimi Thi Nguyen. Berkeley: The editor, 2002: 41.

Other Words in Portland, OR. The show was sponsored by the *People of Color Zine Project* and promoted with the phrase "support brown punx!" Included in the line-up were the Seattle-based band NighTraiN, whose decolonial queer-feminist lyrics I analyzed in the previous chapter, the already frequently mentioned My Parade, as well as Kusikia from Portland. The most impressive performance that night, however, was given by the local band, Stag Bitten.

Stag Bitten performed for only a couple of minutes, but their stage presence was so intense that they made a lasting impression. Their songs had a very fast beat and were very loud. Most remarkable, however, was the vocalist, a female-bodied person of color, who screamed into the microphone at the top of her lungs, shaking her whole body in arrhythmic rapid movements that looked like painful spasms. The singer seemed to be completely detached from the room she was performing in and was in an ecstatic mode, connecting with the audience—who enjoyed the show immensely—not through verbal communication but through nonverbal affect. When asked to describe these punk rock performances, the singing, dancing and playing of the instruments in a single word, most of the people I spoke to after the show answered "angry."

Locating the performance by Stag Bitten and the experience of the audience within a broader context, it can indeed be argued that punk rock music is not only culturally signified as angry music but is actually experienced as anger by most audiences. Moreover, the performance and embodiment of this anger corresponds to the verbal references to anger made by musicians and writers. Such writings and other verbal expressions often describe the different forms of punk rock, its aesthetic and sound as articulations of anger.

The following analysis is a detailed reflection on queer-feminist punk rock as a form of angry expression and an expression of anger, i.e., the emotional color used to address social and political issues as well as anger itself as the main theme and meaning of the lyrics and music. Moreover, it makes a connection between

emotional anger and the previously described expressions of negativity and jouissance as political action. I argue that focusing on anger allows the critiques, interventions and resistance of queer punks of color to be understood within the broader sphere of queer-feminist punk rock. I further argue that queer-feminist punks of color appropriated the anger of queer-feminist punk as a political strategy and combined it with the accounts of black feminists to challenge their predominantly white punk scenes. Thus, a brief analysis of the theorizations of anger within black feminism, especially the works of Audre Lorde and bell hooks, is appropriate. I analyze their accounts not least because queer-feminist punks of color frequently refer to these theorists themselves. For example, through their involvement with black feminism, queer punks themselves have elaborated on the connection between their punk aesthetic and black feminists' embrace of anger, like the following anonymous author: "[…] I started reading Killing Rage by bell hooks. Finally, I have been able to put a name to the feeling I occasionally have towards white people: a killing rage" (enero 12: 72).

I will relate black feminist theory to people of color theory, cultural studies and psychoanalytic accounts in order to explain why and how queer-feminist punks of color, like the just mentioned anonymous writer, have appropriated their anger as an artistic and political strategy for their social criticism. Moreover, by referring to the analyses and problematizations of feminist and decolonialization theories, as well as the black and Chicana feminisms of queer-feminist punks of color, I again show how these countercultural agents developed and practiced non-normative forms of intellectual labor.

As already briefly mentioned, an analysis of the politics of anger within queer-feminist punk rock necessarily goes beyond a focus on verbal expressions. Such an analysis not only has to consider musical forms but also the sound and bodily expressions of the performer. Using work on emotions and emotionality, I show that the politics of anger and negativity work their force on the

intersection between rational, emotional and bodily cognition and meanings, and by extension that the politics of queer-feminist punk rock also affect its own social and political environment at these intersections as well through its multiple forms and expressions. However, the effect that queer-feminist punk music has with respect to cultural criticism, intervention in racialization and white hegemony, and political resistance is not dealt with sufficiently. I take up the argument of José Muñoz that experiencing queerness can disrupt the normative and linear experience of time to show how queer-feminist punk rock can create shared feelings of queerness in an audience and momentarily suspend normative structures. Stitching Muñoz's theories together with work on anger and my argument that punk performances can be understood as a disposition to jouissance (cf. Povinelli, "The Part"), I focus on the possibility of creating collectivity and alliances through anti-social politics. Taking up my argument again that practices and experiences of queer jouissance are uniquely able to build community and collectivity, I draw attention to the possibility for collective decolonial and antiracist practices and resistance within queer-feminist punk. Emphasizing the physical and emotional politics of punk rock, I resume my theorizations of jouissance to explain how queer-feminist punk negativity manages to irritate and violate, while they also create social bonds. My point is that the relationality or collectivity that queer-feminist punks both experience and generate during concerts and other social gatherings needs to be located on a bodily and emotional level in order to be fully understood. Moreover, I argue that punk performances are indeed activities that open up spaces for collective resistance against white hegemony, racism, queerphobia and sexism. In addition, I argue that the queer bonds that queer punks of color and their allies exceed the limits and norms of conventional concept of community, but are nevertheless valuable and sustainable because they point to the intersections of bodily, emotional and cognitive forms of pleasure as well as lapses into jouissance.

7.1. "We Speak in a Language of Violence":[191] The Aesthetics of Anger

The most popular connotation that punk rock as an aesthetic form and genre has within mainstream as well as countercultural spheres is anger, as already indicated. Moreover, historians, sociologists and feminist theorists, starting with Dick Hebdige, have identified anger and the communication of angry messages as the drivers of punk rock. In an interview conducted by scholar Michelle Habell-Pallán, Alice Armendariz Velasquez, one of the very first punk musicians in Los Angeles, confirms this association of punk with anger as she describes the feelings that arise during her musical performances:

> all the violence that I'd stuffed down inside of me for years came screaming out … all the anger I felt towards people who had treated me like an idiot as a young girl because I was the daughter of Mexican parents and spoke broken English, all the times I'd been picked on by peers because I was overweight and wore glasses, all the impotent rage that I had towards my father for beating my mother just exploded. (Habell-Pallán 226)

While the cultural signification of punk rock as an expression of anger seems to be popular and unquestioned in the US and other places, the relationship between anger and politics within mainstream discourses and theoretical accounts seems to be very ambivalent and sometimes even contradictory. In general, the political continues to be perceived as belonging to the sphere of rationality, which is the opposite of emotionality. In contrast to this signification, a certain degree of aggression and anger are highly appreciated qualities in politicians. It can also be argued that most mainstream media and political commentators respect the anger expressed by (white) males on the political right.

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191 Agatha. "Language of Violence." *Agatha*. Self-release, 2012. LP.

Democrats, liberals and more left-wing politicians, on the other hand, avoid the word anger and representations of anger in their political speeches. Nevertheless, it is not exaggerated to suggest that all politicians, on the right as well as the left, use emotional appeal to promote their politics. Thus, while democrats and more left-oriented politicians tend to address feelings of community and hope, like the current President Barack Obama with his famous slogan "Yes, we can" in his 2008 election campaign, it seems that only the right wing of the political spectrum openly supports expressions of anger. Scholar Neil Nehring goes so far as to propose that "anger became synonymous with the white male after the 1994 elections" (xix) within the US-American cultural register when the Republican Party gained majority control in the House and Senate. And indeed, until very recently, right-wing hate speech, like the diatribe against the "axis of evil" in the *State of the Union Address* by George W. Bush in January 2002 was not only part of mass media but in general also seemed to meet with public approval (or ignored). The unopposed use of hate speech in political commentary and advertising was interrupted for a short while in January 2011, when Gabrielle Giffords, a Democratic congresswoman, was shot in an assassination attempt. Shortly after the attack, a media debate ensued about the use of hate speech, especially by conservative politicians like members of the Tea Party and right-wing politicians, however, the public outcry did not last very long.

Nevertheless, both the perception and use of anger changed with the protests of the ongoing Occupy Movement in October 2011. Since then, anger—the word and its representation—became synonymous with the anti-capitalist movements that sprang up in so many US-American locations. Political anger and anger as politics dominated the Occupy Movement and the media coverage of it, at least in the first months of its existence. While the public representation of anger in a politicized context was mostly considered counterproductive, the representation of anger in the Occupy Movements was acknowledged to an astonishing degree. Even the White House and President Obama felt

the need to address this collective display of anger in a speech given in New Hampshire on 22 November 2011, where he recognized the feeling of "frustration" expressed by the Occupy Movements. Earlier that year, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney had already stated that the President "understands people's frustrations" in a public speech on 28 October. Nevertheless, even though media and representatives alike say that they understand people's anger, it is still largely rejected as a tactic or form of political action by state officials, the law enforcement apparatus and corporate media.

Scholars like Neil Nehring and Sara Ahmed have established that the rejection and negation of emotions, especially negative emotions like anger, within the political field, is a political tactic that serves multiple purposes. Moreover, they point out that this negation does in no way interrupt the continued use of emotions within the political field. According to these feminist theorists, the distinction between the political and emotional needs to be upheld within the symbolic order and register of meaning in order to continue hegemonic power and keep the "disruptive power of emotion" (Nehring xi) in check. It can be understood against the background of queer theory, queer color critique, black feminism and other feminist accounts that draw attention to the cultural construction of emotions in relation to the categories of race and gender. While women become generally understood as oppositional to anger and aggression, or if associated with anger become pathologized, within this register of cultural meanings, non-white racialized others become associated with anger, in discourses that problematize anger. In their work, both Audre Lorde and bell hooks emphasize that anger, when expressed by women and racialized individuals or groups, becomes understood as dangerous, uncivilized, inappropriate, and a marker of the working class or 'below' working class. Such expressions of anger are understood as opposed and even inferior to reason and rationality. The signification and public denunciation of non-whites in particular as angry and dangerous guarantees the continuation

of white male colonial hegemony, and the (self-)discipline of females, especially non-white females. Reflecting on the first half of the 1990s, bell hooks stated in *Killing Rage:*

> Currently, we are daily bombarded with mass media images of black rage, usually personified by angry young black males wreaking havoc upon the "innocent," that teach everyone in the culture to see this rage as useless, without meaning, destructive. This one-dimensional misrepresentation of the power of rage helps maintain the status quo. Censoring militant response to race and racism, it ensures that there will be no revolutionary effort to gather that rage and use it for constructive social change. (17)

While it is true that anger is neither appreciated in white women nor in people of color, the degree of disciplining as well as punishment is not the same for both. The anger expressed by some angry white women, for instance, when voiced by right-winger Sarah Palin, was recently very much tolerated and even appreciated by some. Angry black women, on the other hand, do not have this possibility. hooks argues that the rejection of black anger must be understood as a way to "perpetuate and maintain white supremacy" (15) and a continuation of the colonization of black Americans. Moreover, "a part of that colonizing process has been teaching" African Americans to "repress" (ibid.) their anger about racism.

Queer-feminist punks of color observe a similar abjection of black anger within their predominantly white punk communities. Lauren Martin, for example writes:

> A white woman writes (in response to an essay of mine about racial and ethnic identity and the racial and class politics of zines, punk, and riot grrrl): "She brings up several valid points, but it was her tone more than anything

> that perturbed me." […] The implications of her message were downright disturbing—it's okay to argue, just as long as I do it nicely and hide my fury. Not too messy. Don't cause a scene. She wasn't the first or the last to imply this. […] I was reprimanded by an Asian American boy for being "too critical" when I pointed out the grossly obvious fact that HeartattaCk's "Women" and "Race" issues were tokenizing gestures. My hand wants to reach for the butterfly knife every time I am told I am too PC, too sensitive, lack sense of humor.
> ("On Being" 33)

Martin as well as hooks emphasize in their writing that the anger expressed by non-white individuals and groups continues to be understood as uncivilized, inappropriate, and representative of the working class or below. Moreover, the criticism of black anger allows the critic to maintain his/her hegemonic position and diminish the strength of the argument. To put this differently, the cultural signification of racialized anger as anti-social legitimizes the dismissal of the angry speaker's agency and therefore of strong positions against racism and sexism. Thus, the only acceptable place from which to foreground racialized and sexualized oppression is the weak position of victim. This strategic maneuver of keeping the anger of non-white individuals in check—the angry calm—permeates every sphere of the social, and is in fact internalized in the psyche of those who need to be kept in place. The rigor of this strategy suggests that anger carries the meaning of great political potential; it is an emotion that might lead to revolutionary riots, therefore it needs to be strictly controlled.

The common belief in the revolutionary potential of anger in the US recently became very visible with the ongoing Occupy Movements. The word anger dominates the reports of Occupy in mainstream media as well as the huge network of independent media that the movements have set up. For example, On 17 October

2011, the online edition of *The New York Times* headlined an article "Countless Grievances, One Thread: We're Angry" by journalist Marc Lacey, in trying to find a common denominator among the very diverse movements. In addition, countless blogs and Web sites have appropriated the word anger to express their political views, e.g., *oneangryqueer.blogspot.com* and *www.angryblacklady.com*. Moreover, it seems as if the word anger has become a signal word for occupiers to find each other on the web.

At this point, I want to come back to the theorization of anger with a focus Audre Lorde's account in *Sister Outsider*. In her book, Lorde reflects on the strategic norms and ways of self-disciplining that concretely forbid black women to articulate their anger about their daily experiences of racism and sexism. She claims that "[e]very Black woman in America lives her life somewhere along a wide curve of ancient and unexpressed anger" (145). Lorde argues that self-disciplinary measures like suppressing anger towards white supremacy guarantee a maneuvering through the imitation of violence in everyday life, and must be seen as a survival strategy. However, such self-discipline leads to an internalization and sublimation of anger, and directs black anger against other black women and children. Lorde acknowledges that "as Black women, we have wasted our angry feelings too often," and continues by saying that they

> buried them, called them someone else's, cast them wildly into oceans of racism and sexism from which no vibration resounded, hurled them into each other's teeth and then ducked to avoid the impact. But by and large, we avoid open expression of them, or cordon them off in a rigid and unapproachable politeness. The rage that feels illicit or unjustified is kept secret, unnamed and preserved forever. We are stuffed with furies, against ourselves, against each other, terrified to examine them […]. (166)

Although Lorde is talking about the hostile environment of North America of the mid-1980s, the norms and values she describes in addition to the disciplining of anger as well as racism and sexism are still at play today. The suppression of anger, especially the anger caused by the experience of racism, often leads to self-victimization, which paves the way for white benevolence and charity, both strategies of continued colonization and supremacy within the contemporary US-American context. Moreover, I want to emphasize that Lorde's writing continues to influence queer-feminist punk of color activists today. They look to Lorde's work to examine this anger and direct it where it belongs, against racism and sexism as a political strategy and therapeutic way of healing. Like Lorde, who explicitly marked her politics and theory as anger (132), bell hooks views the embracing of emotionality as an act of empowerment for the marginalized, and argues decidedly for the expression of anger and rage as a means of decolonialization. Anger and rage are "necessary aspect[s] of resistance struggle [that] can act as a catalyst inspiring courageous action," says hooks. She also maintains that "a black person [can become] unashamed of her rage, using it as a catalyst to develop critical consciousness, to come to full decolonized self-actualization." hooks explains how a confrontation with and analysis of one's own rage can help one to find self-confidence and a better understanding of the racism and sexism that produced the anger. Furthermore, such anger has political value as a "militant resistance" (hooks 8). Nevertheless, she also warns that such militant resistance by a person of color "ha[s] no real place in the existing social structure" (15). Consequently, the subject who appropriates anger as a political strategy from the perspective of a racialized experience has to face violence from the contemporary hegemonic system.

Influenced by the work of Lorde and hooks as well as others, researchers such as Andrea Juno, Neil Nehring, Martha Nussbaum, and Sara Ahmed see the potential to irritate the hegemony of emotions. They agree that the precondition for the appropriation of anger as a creative and appropriate way of producing politics is, as already suggested, to experience this emotion on a conscious

and reflective level. On the other hand, unconscious and unreflected anger and rage mostly results in violence and hatred against the self and others, as hooks explains. Only conscious forms of anger can become channeled into a creative form of political action. Furthermore, reflecting on what triggers the anger and the purpose it serves can result in the successful appropriation of it. The most interesting forms of anger in terms of queer-feminist, anti-racist and decolonialization politics within punk productions are not triggered at the exact moment of production (e.g., writing, singing or performing). Queer-feminist punk critic Lauren Martin reflects on the anger of her punk writings. She explains that her "anger is a legacy passed down from immigrant generations, yellow ancestors, queer patriots, centuries of marginalized peoples, who were fucked by The Man and did everything they could to fuck back […]"("On Being" 33). Although her anger speaks through the clearly structured form of an article, the emotion that comes through is strong with regard to her experience and knowledge of her surroundings as well as of past and contemporary society. It is highly reflexive and meant to be a political maneuver.

Performances of anger, such as the writing of Martin are reflexive. Nevertheless, such expressions of anger are also forms of jouissance, or dispositions to jouissance. Since they are emotional, they are forms of jouissance and never fully under control. Consequently, performances of anger are dangerous to the self and ego. The feminist punk singer Alice Armendariz Velasquez comments on the jouissance-like character of her music, noting that her "performances were coming from a place that [she] didn't fully control" (*Violence Girl* 310). Despite this, Armendariz Velasquez also highlights the political aspect of the appropriation of anger throughout her book *Violence Girl*. She emphasizes the agency and confidence she gained through her angry punk performances, an agency that was generally denied by the racist and misogynist climate of the late 1970s. Like Armendariz Velasquez, many feminist scholars and activists, as well as black power movements have used anger as a political strategy, as suggested earlier. Although the different movements are very distinct with respect

to their goals, political forms and protagonists, they all view anger as an "against-ness" (Ahmed 174) that reflects and responds to the history of subordination, violence and oppression. Moreover, and again as in the case of Armendariz Velasquez, their anger represented not only a reaction but also a creative source of agency. Her statement that "Alice Bag was born from chaos" (ibid.) in regard to her stage persona describes this creativity or productiveness. The word "chaos" in her text refers to the place that her angry—jouissance-like—performance emerged from. This place, although it temporarily suspends the social order, social rules and norms, as well as her self-control to some extent, is also productive. It produces the figure Alice Bag as well as a bond with the audience.

In his analysis of riot grrrl, Neil Nehring underscores examples of the way that angry music is perceived as a "conspicuous public voice of protest" that keeps "visions of humane social change alive" and potentially stimulates "efforts in other areas, by offering instruction in the possibility of dissent at a time when it seems futile with respect to conventional politics" (xiii). Other cultural studies researchers like Chérie Turner and Simon Frith agree with Nehring's thesis that subordinate groups, especially young people, focus their politics on leisure activities and forms like music, instead of on institutionalized politics, not least because they do not have access to political institutions (ibid.). According to Sara Marcus, the reason that riot grrrl movements choose music over other forms of art is because they believe it is the most successful means of communicating political ideas (cf. 34).

Riot grrrls chose their particular style of punk rock, as already suggested, because it was the genre and style most associated with anger and politics. While previous cultural theory seemed convinced that the political impact of punk rock was short lived and punk as a musical genre had taken an apolitical direction after its peak in the late 1970s, when it became appropriated or incorporated by mass culture, the emergence of riot grrrl changed the cultural studies perspective of punk, as well as the potential of music. In contrast to the consensus in cultural studies that punk

rock was apolitical during most of the 1980s and early 1990s (cf. G. Marcus), I argue that a good number of punk productions and scenes continued to be considered political by their producers and recipients. Queer theorists like José Muñoz, Michelle Habell-Pallán and cultural studies researchers like Nehring implicitly support my thesis by addressing their own history as fans of punk rock. These scholars argue that the angry music of punk rock was crucial for the formation of their political consciousness.

The reason that punk rock has the potential to politicize individuals and, moreover, communicate concrete political ideas is that the meanings of rebellion and resistance associated with punk, which are often just empty signifiers without any consequences, stayed within the cultural knowledge of the mainstream. At the beginning, punk implied "the persistent nemesis of the authoritarianism that emerged in the 1970s" (Nehring xxvi) and this meaning stayed throughout the years, although others were added. The meanings of music, however, as the musicologists Philip Tagg, Simon Frith and Phil Ford argue, are never sufficiently covered by lyrics alone. Rather, sound, rhythm and artistic expression need to be considered in order to fully analyze them. Furthermore, these meanings must not be reduced to political ideologies or any other intentional messages. Affective experience is part of every performance, every reception of a musical work, as well as every writing and reading process. The affective experience cannot be detached from the meaning of the product, regardless of whether written, recorded or performed live. "[T]he relationship of words to music in rock is not simply the setting of words to appropriate music, but the fusion of words and vocal gestures into musical signs comprised of an indissoluble alloy of both" (160), as Ford points out. I analyze anti-social queer-feminist decolonialization punk rock as politics that are articulated at the intersection of embodiment, sound and verbal articulation. My understanding of the production of meaning through music is similar to Simon Frith's, who explains that

> [s]ong words work as speech and speech acts, bearing meaning not just semantically, but also as structures of sound that are direct signs of emotion and marks of character. Singers use non-verbal as well as verbal devices to make their points—emphases, sighs, hesitations, changes of tone; lyrics involve pleas, sneers and commands as well as statements and messages and stories (which is why some singers, such as the Beatles and Bob Dylan in Europe in the sixties, can have profound significance for listeners who do not understand a word they are singing). ("Why Do" 120)

In reference to musicologists such as Frith, Tagg and Ford, I want to again stress that meaning does not prevail over sound or vice versa and that sound does not prevail over lyrics or performance within queer-feminist punk rock. Rather, they are all factors that represent meaningful politics on the emotional, affective and rational level. Which meaning gets through to the audience is different from person to person and to a large degree not within the musicians' control. The listener's own ideological background, as well as her/his openness and mood at the moment of listening is as important as the intention of the performers and the content of the lyrics.

In queer-feminist punk rock in particular, the sound, the physical experience and the social context during a concert might actually be more meaningful to the audience than the lyrics themselves because punk is usually more screamed than sung and therefore very hard to understand. However, this is not to say that the lyrics do not matter. A few words are usually articulated clearly enough to be understood, however, the distinguishability of signal words like "queer," "homo," or "sex" in the context of queer-feminist spaces is sufficient to create a political atmosphere, in which the audience has the possibility to participate. Moreover, most performances are staged in an already politicized setting. As will be shown in the example of a concert featuring the bands Stag Bitten / Negro Nation, NighTraiN and My Parade, such

a setting is created through the announcement of the concert, the advertisements or the choice of location, or because there is a another purpose like fundraising for a political project or the decoration of the stage, which often contains posters and flags with political messages, or because there is a table where people distribute their political manifestos and zines.

Before I move on to my analysis of some examples of angry queer-feminist decolonialization within contemporary punk rock communities, I want to reiterate that scholarly theorizations of anger are also useful to gain an understanding of the political impact of queer-feminist punk rock. This is because theorizations of anger consider the politics of negativity at the intersection of bodily expression, layers of artistic articulations, and communicative channels such as lyrics, sound and performance. Hence, such accounts enable us to focus on queerness within queer-feminist punk communities beyond the level of meaning and the symbolic order. As already explained in chapter three, moving beyond the symbolic order is necessary because psychoanalytic accounts like Lee Edelman's are insufficient to fully analyze the experience and expression of queerness or queer political agency and action. One argument for why the focus needs to be broadened is that the symbolic does not include the body or physical experience. An analysis of punk rock—or any other music for that matter—as well as political activism, necessarily needs to focus on bodies and (physical) experience.

The analysis of the anti-social meaning of punk rock by Lee Edelman as well as his understanding of politics in the form of the Child generally relies exclusively on language and semantics.[192] On the other hand, feminist theory argues that even though anger can be a very cognitive process if conscious and reflected, it is also a very bodily experience. This can be seen with Audre Lorde, for example, who emphasizes the bodily implications and

192 A detailed analysis of Edelman's view on punk rock and his rejection of punk rock as negativity is provided in chapter three.

expressions of anger in *Sister Outsider*. Thus, treating anger as an emotion as well as experience, combined with Edelman's account of queerness as anti-social, makes it possible to identify a politics of negativity within contemporary queer-feminist punk rock that does not necessarily end in deconstruction, but in a different form of solidarity or community.

7.2. "Smile Bigger Until You Fucking Crack":[193] Anger, Jouissance and Screams

Before delving into an analysis of specific examples of queer-feminist punk lyrics, performances and other forms of expression, it is first necessary to briefly discuss some important general points about the anger of queer-feminist punk, its connection to jouissance and the function of screaming in punk performances.

7.2.1. "He Went through Life like a Cocked and Loaded Gun":[194] Anger and/as Jouissance

Feelings and expressions of anger within queer-feminist punk rock are mostly retroactively staged and well reflected, not spontaneous, as already suggested with the example of Martin, who theorizes her anger as "a legacy" ("On Being" 33). The reasons for such forms of anger lie in the past or result from a general reflection of oppression. However, the fact that the anger of queer-feminist punk rock is staged does not mean that it is not felt in the moment of the performance, but rather that it is felt (again) on purpose. Furthermore, such intentional experiences of anger are, most importantly, enjoyed. Expressions and performances of anger within punk are forms of enjoyment, which come very close

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193 Angries. "Arrange Your Face." *Angries / Hooray for Everything Split.* Self-release, 2011. EP.

194 Armendariz Velasquez, Alice. *Violence Girl: East L.A. Rage to Hollywood Stage, a Chicana Punk Story*. Port Townsend: Feral House, 2011: 28.

to what psychoanalytic theorists call jouissance. Thus, to fully understand the politics of queer-feminist punk rock, it is necessary to focus on jouissance in the music, lyrics and stage performances in relation to theorizations of anger.

First of all, in order to treat queer-feminist punk politics as an expression of anger means that it needs to viewed as a legitimate form of political sentiment. If anger is understood as a form of politics, it goes beyond the level of language. Anger is a bodily expression and reflection of experience and to be experienced. It is always at the intersection of the body, mind and the social. In fact, the articulation of anger—the screaming, violent movements of the body and fast sound—needs to be understood as political in itself. Furthermore, not only is the production of queer-feminist punk political, the experience of it can be very political as well, regardless of whether the shouted lyrics are understood or not. This, of course does not mean that verbal communication, lyrics, and other spoken or written forms of language are not key to the politics of queer-feminist punk. Thus, verbal expressions are not the only meaningful factor.

A consideration of anger is helpful to understand how queer-feminist punk politics operate. Moreover, such an account necessarily broadens the analytical concept of queerness to allow a focus on its intersection with multiple other determinants. As discussed earlier, an anti-relational queer theory like Edelman's analyzes queerness exclusively within the sphere of the symbolic. Such accounts are limited on various levels, as shown in chapter three with regard to queer scholars of color Juana Maria Rodríguez and José Muñoz. Anti-relational queer theory supports a version of queerness that implies being gay, male and white, and thus hampers any reference to non-normatively gendered and racialized factors within discourses of sexuality and identification.

Queer people of color theorists like Muñoz, as well as anger theorists like Nehring, argue that the problem of accountability for gendered and racialized forms of oppression lies in the exclusive focus on language and the symbolic order. Following materialist

accounts in the tradition of Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin, they argue that language is interdependent with materiality and embodiment (cf. Nehring 129). Thus, anger is a signification of the constitutive interdependence of the body and mind. Like other emotions, anger itself is language-like, as Sarah Ahmed (175) has pointed out, and it connects the body with language and meaning. In other words, anger rests at the very intersection of the body, mind and social experience.

I want to argue that the effect of anger within queer-feminist punk rock can only be understood if queerness itself is understood as exceeding the signification of an identity category, a critique or political ideology. In *Cruising Utopia*, José Muñoz argues that queerness can be experienced or felt during a concert. While his account of queerness as an experience focuses predominantly on the relational and communal aspect of such mutually shared feelings—the queer bonds it creates—during concerts, I want to stress that queerness as a felt experience is also relevant for the individual listening to a record. Experiencing queerness affects those involved in the process of hearing and creates a feeling of relationality, even if this togetherness is mediated through artifacts like recordings. Furthermore, such queerness, regardless of whether it is experienced in the presence of others or alone, can be a sexual experience. Nevertheless, feeling queerness in the context of queer-feminist activism more importantly means a communal rebellion against injustice. In other words, a shared experience of queer otherness creates an atmosphere of communal rejection of hegemonic society.

I want to emphasize again that feeling queerness needs to be understood as a simultaneous mental and physical experience. Focusing on anger and queerness as experience, however, should not be mistaken with a move towards authenticity, i.e., an essentialist notion of feelings or bodily experience. Instead, anger needs to be understood as "a social form, rather than individual self-expression," or something naturally determined, as Sara Ahmed asserts in relation to emotions as a whole (9).

7.2.2. "This Rage It Feels So Good to Say / This Rage It Takes Me So Far Away":[195] Screaming, Jouissance, the Psyche and the Body

The close relationship between emotion (or the body) and language can be seen in the fact that language manifests itself through the voice. The voice is a medium that connects the body to language and society. The body becomes noticeable via the voice and it is the vehicle through which meaningful language becomes communicated by means of intonation, tempo and individual sound. Thus, the voice is never authentic or genuine (see Nehring 133) because it is always formed by society through social communication. Nevertheless, physical speech, like musical expression, especially with the voice, is a form of agency.

Lacan clearly distinguishes language and the symbolic from the body. He frames language as preexisting speech and the body that articulates and determines the articulations of speech. In contrast to Lacan's theory, feminist theorists have argued that the construction and determination of the body through language and the symbolic, and therefore the experience of body and the self, is never exhaustive. In other words, the body is not a mere construction of meaning. Feminist theorists like Ed Cameron and Julia Kristeva argue that the body "cannot be reduced to either a naturalistic conception of embodiment that escapes cultural inscription or to a human cultural construction like so many others" (Cameron). On the contrary, the body "is actually the place of th[e] split" between the structural determination and something else. This something can be understood as materiality as well as an interrupting force. I want to argue that this remainder is jouissance, the force that shifts the Lacanian subject back and forth "between being and knowing, between drive and desire" as Ed Cameron puts it. Referring to Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* and *Desire in Language* Nehring argues for an understanding of the voice as "exceeding rational meaning through

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195 Agatha. "This Hate." *Agatha*. Self-release, 2012. LP.

a tactile 'grain' and jouissance [...] or a corporeal significance (as Julia Kristeva puts it)" (131).

Although Kristeva's account adjudicates bodily expression, like the voice, a political value, it does so only by detaching it from the act of producing meaning consciously (cf. Cameron). The meaning of the embodied voice is thus detached from the intention of the subject. In the concrete example of the queer-feminist punk singer, Kristeva's account indicates that the meaning and effect of vocal utterances are entirely detached from the intention of the individual. Furthermore, although the bodily quality of music can be seen as a means of access to jouissance, this access must be understood as involuntary and therefore useless as a means of political agency.

However, I argue that queer-feminist punk music and writing must be seen as successful political activism, although these forms access jouissance. My thesis is based on my own experience within queer-feminist punk countercultures as well as prior theoretical analysis by Judith Jack Halberstam, José Muñoz, Susan Driver and Neil Nehring, among others. The combination of psychoanalytic theorizations of the voice and theories of anger allows us to understand the interruptive force, or jouissance, as both conscious and at the same time exceeding the symbolic and consciousness. It allows for an understanding of jouissance on the level of both the body and psyche. Accordingly, the negative emotions in punk music and writing, the celebration of anger and sarcasm, as well as the fast and edgy sound constitute a conscious politics of negativity. At the same time, since they are conscious, they go beyond the mind, on a temporary ecstatic ride, which is the death drive. The experience and production of jouissance, furthermore, results in politics that have the potential of irritating hegemony, and paradoxically results in feelings of communality or community. The communities created through such queer bonds in this setting are felt rather than structural; in fact, they may exceed structural limits. This fact deserves some attention because it also means that such bonds exceed the limits of verbal expression and therefore the limits of labels and categories. If

understood as a political tactic, angry punk rock thus has the potential to connect people, ideas and efforts beyond facile group affiliations.

The potential of anger, negativity, and jouissance within queer-feminist punk rock can best be illustrated by framing these concepts in relation to the physical activity of screaming. Screaming in punk rock, researchers of punk agree, has a meaning beyond delivering the lyrics. To a certain degree, screaming is a pleasure for the singer; moreover, however, it is negativity, especially for women and other subordinated groups. This negativity lies most obviously in the violation of norms and rules. Although I admit that screaming as a dominant form of articulation has become the norm for punk performances, I want to point out that the use of screaming to represent the violation of norms, which originated at the beginning of punk in 1976, is still done today. Furthermore, the sound of punk occasionally offends social norms quite literally, such as when residents complain to the police about loud noises that cause disturbance of the peace.

In the following passages, I will illustrate what I have theorized as the jouissance of queer-feminist punk rock, using the example of a performance by the band Stag Bitten. Through my analysis, I show the specific meanings that queer-feminist punk performances by people of color can have and further elaborate on the features of queer-feminist punk of color politics.

7.3. "Screaming Queens":[196] The Voice, the Body, and Meaning

Stag Bitten, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, is a contemporary hardcore punk band from Portland, OR, that frequently performs in contexts featuring outspoken queer-feminist people of color politics. Their presence on the Internet as well as in pertinent punk publications is very minimal. Their description on *Last.fm* does not indicate their sexual self-identification or politics, other than their commitment to DIY ethics and self-releases. In fact, no verbal expression of Stag Bitten's politics has ever been recorded at all. During their concerts, they do not speak to the audience, at least not the concerts that I attended, and their lyrics are articulated or performed in a way that makes them incomprehensible.

Despite this lack of information and verbal communication, it can be suggested that Stag Bitten fosters queer-feminist as well as anti-racist and decolonization politics. Flyers and other announcements for their shows contain phrases like "support brown punx," and they perform in line-ups with bands known for their queer-feminist decolonizing politics. The queer-feminist decolonizing politics of Stag Bitten, however, are articulated most clearly when the band members perform under the name Negro Nation. Interestingly, but surely not coincidentally, they use this name only when covering the songs of other, mostly commercially successful bands. The name Negro Nation can thus be seen as a reference to political accounts by people of color like Chicano/a Nation or African nationalism. African nationalism, also called Black nationalism, as well as Chicano/a nationalism, expose the continuation of colonialism in contemporary North America, which is exercised through the exploitation of racialized labor, migration policies and

196 The Screaming Queens are a contemporary transgender-only punk band from Vancouver. Although I do not analyze the politics of The Screaming Queens, I want to mention that their name indicates their punk style as well as their queer politics, which are representative for queer-feminist punk movements in general.

neoliberal discourses on multiculturalism, to name a few examples. Although there are multiple indigenous nationalist philosophies, a common denominator is the advocacy for self-determination and independence from European colonialism. Furthermore, these movements all foster confrontational and radical politics, and are less interested in a dialogue with what they understand as the ruling white hegemony than in revolution and liberation.

The queer-feminist of color theorist and poet Cherríe Moraga takes up and reworks the politics of the Chicano/a movement as well as Queer Nation. Moraga understands the politics of black nationalism and Chicano/a Nation as "struggles [...] not for 'nation-states,' but for nations of people, bound together by spirit, land, language, history, and blood" (169). Although she invokes concepts of shared land, history and blood, which are determined through right-wing nationalism, she blurs them through multiple strategies. Moraga argues that the term *land*, especially within the context of the politics of the Chicano movement, is more than a mere struggle for territory and must be analyzed in the concrete and broader sociohistoric and cultural context of the United States. Apart from the struggle for territory, the term nation within the Chicano movement refers to this special idea of land. Land therefore means "more than the rocks and trees, the animal and plant life [...]" (ibid. 173). She explains that land also connotes the bodies of the oppressed and, furthermore, connects the Chicano/a struggle to queer politics. "For women, lesbians, gay men," she notes "land is that physical mass called our bodies. Throughout las Américas, all these 'lands' remain under occupation by an Anglo-centric, patriarchal, imperialist United States" (ibid.). Through her reference to queerness, she subverts the significations of a cultural, racial or territorial essence or communality that unites people and land within movements in the name of a nation. In addition, Moraga connects such movements and queer politics with the feminist concept of mestiza consciousness. Mestiza consciousness, as already explained in the previous chapter, is a state of being in-between. Through the implication of mestiza consciousness, Moraga irritates the binary conceptions

of sexuality once more and simultaneously extends the focus of queer politics, which are structurally bound to white hegemony. In other words, Moraga blurs the identifiability of concepts of sexuality as well as race, gender and nation, while holding on to the political term nation. By pointing out that "[t]here was no denying that the United States had stolen Aztlán from México, but it had been initially stolen from the Indians by the Spanish some 300 years earlier" (ibid. 154), she redefines "Chicano Nation" as "a mestizo nation conceived in a double-rape: first, by the Spanish and then by the Gringo" (153), and thereby implicitly rejects some of the concepts of Chicano/a nationalism.

By using the pseudonym Negro Nation, Stag Bitten is referring to the historic and contemporary colonialism of the United States. Moreover, by playing cover songs by the most popular white punk and grunge bands like Crass and Nirvana, among others, they are criticizing white hegemony within leftist punk scenes because their name makes the bands' whiteness and hegemonic dominance visible. By choosing songs like *Shaved Women* by Crass and *Territorial Pissing* by Nirvana, they are also ironically questioning prior and contemporary attempts to fight misogyny within punk communities. Furthermore, Stag Bitten/Negro Nation concerts are predominantly promoted as queer-feminist shows, or performed in queer-feminist spaces. Hence, I argue that the name Negro Nation intervenes in predominantly white queer-feminist punk politics and spaces. At the same time, the consciousness developed in the context of queer-feminist agendas and politics within punk spaces subverts the reference to politics in the name of Nations in ways similar to those described by Cherríe Moraga. Combining queer-feminist politics with political movements, as implied by the "Nation" in the band's name, can thus be understood as deocolonialization politics that aim to decolonize bodies from heteronormativity as well as territories from white hegemony.

Besides or beyond their use of the pseudonym Negro Nation, the politics of Stag Bitten are apparent from the places and line-ups

they choose, as already briefly indicated. They regularly perform in line-ups with bands like NO/HO/MO, NighTraiN and My Parade, who are vocal about their queer-feminist and/or queer people of color politics. Furthermore, they play events with very distinct queer-feminist people of color politics. The Stag Bitten performance that I analyze in the following section supported exactly such a queer-feminist people of color effort.

On 28 August 2010, Stag Bitten played in a set with NighTraiN, My Parade, and Kusikia. These three bands, which include or entirely consist of queer people of color, performed in the feminist bookstore *In Other Words* in Portland. The event was a release party for the fifth issue of the queer punks of color zine *Shotgun Seamstress* by Osa Atoe.

The most interesting feature of Stag Bitten is the presence of their vocalist Arolia McSwain. McSwain identifies as a punk of color according to the promotion material for her shows. She performed every single song of the set in a very energetic, intense way, screaming and shouting at the top of her lungs. It is probably her stage presence that made journalist Aris Wales describe the band as a "power trio that snarls like Cerberus at the gates of the underworld" in the online version of *The Portland Mercury*.[197] The experience of McSwain's strong, sharp and loud voice is further intensified by her rapid body movements and her facial expressions. Her whole body communicates intense emotions like rage and anger, but also very intense pleasure. During every song, she seems detached from the place, in a state of agitation, yet she not only communicates with her fellow bandmates but also connects with the audience. This allows the listeners to be take part to some degree in her ecstatic rage, an intensity of performance by McSwain that can best be described with the words "drive" or force.

Researchers who write about riot grrrl, such as Joanna Gottlieb, Gayle Wald and Neil Nehring, suggest that dynamic and

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197 *The Portland Mercury* is a weekly print newspaper that mainly focuses on the diverse local popular music scenes. It is also available as an online newspaper with the same focus.

forcible punk rock performances as in the example of Stag Bitten constitute forms of jouissance. They argue that the pleasurable drive towards the deconstruction of the self becomes clearly visible in such performances. For example, screaming, as in the case of McSwain's performance, can result in pain or the performer temporarily losing control over the lyrics, rhythm and melody (or his/her own body). However, although this form of screaming in punk performances is an experience that is always on the edge of self-destruction and self-loss, it is nevertheless a conscious and intentional form of jouissance. Moreover, it is conscious meaning making. This distinguishes punk screams from most other forms of screaming, e.g., when triggered by frightening or horrifying situations or physical pain.

I understand screaming in punk rock performances as closely related to the politics of anger. Screaming is culturally signified as an expression of anger, among other things. Furthermore, the angry slipping into jouissance needs to be understood as part of the cultural script of anger as well as punk performances. Because anger is a speech act (Ahmed 177), it follows certain conventions and norms. The danger of anger becoming an unconscious force enacted by screaming is already a culturally constructed script. Thus, the jouissance of the performer is not only conscious but also creative. It creates meaning through its connection to anger and social bonds because it follows a script, which is understood by most of the punk audience. Nevertheless, it is also destructive or has the potential to become so because it is never fully controllable. Screaming can potentially harm the body and mind of the singer, as well as destroy the social bond to the punk community on the level of political meaning or feelings.

This destructive or violent potential of punk music, especially angry, queer-feminist, decolonialization punk deserves some attention. Such angry, queer-feminist and decolonization punk screams irritate and violate social norms on various levels. Screaming in public is, with a few exceptions (e.g., in sport arenas), understood as disturbing, inappropriate, vulgar and a marker of a low social status. While a screaming man is mostly associated with

danger, screaming by female-identified or feminine acting person is frequently associated with vulnerability. Joanna Gottlieb and Gayle Wald label feminine screams as "emotional ejaculations" (261) associated with violence or with very messy and private events like childbirth or orgasm. Female and feminine screams are highly sanctioned expressions, devalued in public as well as in private.

> Often associated with femininity at its most vulnerable, the scream in its punk context can effect a shocking juxtaposition of sex and rage, including the cultural terrors of the open expressions of female sexuality, or feminist rage at the sexual uses and abuses of women. If female screams are often associated with women's sexual violation and rape, then these examples seem to voice a collective outrage at such abuse. (ibid.)

In other words, the appropriation of punk rock as a form of musical screaming by female-identified people can be understood as a rejection and appropriation of sociocultural stereotypes. Moreover, it is a thematization of sexuality. In addition, queer-feminist punk screams not only signify sexuality on the level of criticism as indicated by Wald and Gottlieb but also imitate sexuality in its most negative stage, which is jouissance. That such an understanding of punk music is indeed collectively shared throughout punk scenes can be seen in reports on punk concerts by punks themselves. In a recent issue of *Maximumrocknroll,* author Bryony Beynon described her experience of punk music as a "[c]oncussion in place of orgasm. Safer, littler deaths" in her column *Bryony Beynon Gives It to You Straight*.

While Wald and Gottlieb concentrate their analysis on punk screams by queer- and female-identified singers, it can be argued that a similar potential to irritate or violate social norms can also be found in punk screams by people of color. Moreover, screams by people of color also signify and imitate sexuality in a similar way. Although the sociocultural discourses with regard to people

of color and screaming are very different from those concerning white women, non-whites are both signified as screamers and socially prohibited from screaming or expressing any other form of angry articulation, as Audre Lorde and many others have shown. Therefore, performances of screaming, as in the example of McSwain, can be understood as a rejection of the prohibition to scream. It is a violation of gender norms because she self-identifies or is identified as a woman. Moreover, her screams violate class and racialized norms because only the so-called lower classes are associated with screaming. At the same time, it is also an appropriation of stereotypes because women are associated with screaming and emotionality in general in certain contexts, as are people of color. Her punk screams thematize violence against women and people of color, and at the same time function as a sign of strength and agency. Moreover, because screams connote sexuality, especially female screaming, as shown by Wald and Gottlieb, the screams of McSwain make reference to sexuality as well. Because people of color are signified mostly through excessive sexuality, McSwain appropriates a derogatory sexual connotation when screaming. In addition to the deconstructive or violent quality of screaming, the screamer is nevertheless able to establish a social bond with the audience through the sensual quality of her performance, her bodily presence and sound. In addition, the shared cultural script for anger in punk, as well as the political reasons for being angry connects the singer to the audience.

Having established that queer-feminist punk screams by people of color constitute jouissance, I will now shift my focus from the irritating and violent potential of punk anger to the music's potential for initiating queer bonds. To do this, I refer to Elizabeth Povinelli's concept of jouissance and combine it with José Muñoz's concept of queerness and collectivity.

7.4. "We'll Start a Demonstration, or We'll Create a Scene":[198] The Creativity in Negativity

Queer-feminist punk rock, as I have described throughout this study, is both negative and productive. It is deconstructive or negative as a cultural form or activity because it challenges the binarism of negativity and productivity, or positive forces and negative forces. It creates criticism on a cognitive level by pointing to racism, classism, homophobia and sexism in concepts of benevolence and social belonging in groups, nations and cultures in general from an intersectional position. It creates negative meanings, like rejection. In addition, queer-feminist punk rock also obscures normative systems of categorization through the production of surplus or ambivalent meanings that may not necessarily be negative, but still carry the potential to irritate.

Nevertheless, as I have emphasized in the previous sections, the effect of queer-feminist punk is not only to be found in irritation, rejection or mockery. One other effect that queer-feminist punk jouissance can have is an experience of non-normative or queer time, as Muñoz calls it. This quality or effect could be seen as irritating as well. However, queer-feminist punks themselves view this effect as positive. Hence, the irritation or suspension of normative senses of time can be understood as creative or positive. Following José Muñoz's understanding of this effect as creative, we come to recognize punk as a negative force; at the same time, however, we are able to imagine an existence as a queer-feminist punk of color as well as a resistance against violence and oppression. According to Muñoz, this happens because a queerness becomes possible at the moment that normative time is suspended, whereas anti-relational queer theory considers queerness in general to be structurally impossible. Thus, Muñoz's account allows sustainable queer bonds or communities to be envisioned

198 The Gossip. "Pop Goes the World." *Music for Men*. Columbia Records, 2009. CD.

and recognized. Moreover, because of his emphasis on the bodily quality of queer-feminist punk participation, envisioning a queer bond, relationality or alliance becomes thinkable, i.e., individuals are able to form connections despite their differences and structural privilege/inequality without ignoring them.

7.4.1. Ecstasy: Bodily and Emotional Jouissance, Time and the Formation of Queer Bonds

As already discussed in chapter three, José Muñoz describes the intense experiences of pleasure during a queer-feminist punk concert as "ecstatic" and the temporality of such moments as "ecstatic time" (*Cruising* 25). He argues that these are moments of intensified emotionality, or ecstasy, a state of losing control over the body and voice. I argue that the moments Muñoz describes can be equally identified as jouissance. The reason that I prefer the term jouissance to describe punk ecstasy is because it accounts for the violence and negativity. While the term ecstasy carries the connotation of heightened feelings of "love," jouissance marks not only self-destructive feelings and thoughts but also those initiated by negativity, like anger. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize again that jouissance is one form of ecstasy or at least a stage of being that is very related to it.

Punk performance as jouissance is irritating to perceptions of time; at the same time, it is productive and creative, as the following report in the *Maximumrocknroll* column *Bryony Beynon Gives It to You Straight* about a recent punk concert experience shows:

> This is the sweetness of productivity, punks sure that maybe we can stop time with this shit, just for a few seconds, to register your existence as a true thing that happened, that you were, definitely, and without doubt both living and breathing for at least one miniscule moment, there down in the buzz and howl and sweat of absolute and total sonic something. (Beynon)

The "truth" of existence that the author is reporting refers less to any essence than to the intensity of the feeling, bodily as well as psychologically. This truth can be read as a connection to the death drive that exceeds the symbolic order and meaning, and therefore any cultural influence. This violence of the experience is further described as "electric shock from strands of spit" by the same author. Beyond a description of violence, it is a report about feeling the self in relation to others. The "productivity" that the other notes lies in the feeling of collectivity, or a "total sonic something." A phrase that aptly describes experiences of time like these is indeed "ecstatic time," according to Muñoz.

Following Muñoz, ecstatic time (or moments of jouissance) is a time beyond the past, present and future that becomes experienced when someone "feels" (*Cruising* 32) rather than knows. In other words, these moments can be located on the body and in feelings rather than as forms of cognitive experience. Nevertheless, experiencing ecstasy as well as what I have conceptualized in the previous text as bodily and emotional jouissance creates forms of recognition and bonds on multiple levels of experience, including the rational cognitive level.

The intense bodily and emotional qualities of queer-feminist punk in particular allow for "the impossible existence in the world as it is now organized" (Povinelli, "The Part" 304). Such existences can be experienced through the screams of Stag Bitten or the rhythmic force NighTraiN's locomotive punk, as I will show in the following section. They enable queers of color to become a "part that can have no part in the common world—the thing that cannot be, yet is, concretely, before us" (ibid.) in a very concrete physical sense, by occupying space as dancers, performers or listeners. Moreover, through the combination of meaningful textual references, physical representation and sound, performances by NighTraiN, My Parade and Stag Bitten make room for the collective recognition of historic resistance and struggles by people of color.

Such music creates relations on the grounds of punk knowledge, but this knowledge about structural oppression, sexism,

homophobia, racism and classism is not necessarily based on personal experience. Thus, the recognition of different individuals is not a question of identification or experience but rather one of a shared politics, namely a rejection of hegemonic oppression.

I want to briefly come back to the example of the band NighTraiN. NighTraiN is a band that thematizes the history of slavery, colonialism, racialized misogyny and queerophobia in the United States more explicitly then most other contemporary punk or pop-punk bands. When NighTraiN draws on the history of slavery in their lyrics and way of playing and performing their song "Black Love," they build on the collective knowledge about the sexual relationship of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, one of his female slaves, based on the cultural signification of trains as a way to flee from a slave state to an abolitionist state, and extend this idea to the present. In other words, they focus on a contemporary form of oppression, while relating this oppression to sociocultural politics throughout time and give a lesson in history at the same time. Hence, NighTraiN halts normative time and creates experiences of time that Muñoz describes as queer time. This queer time is cognitive as well as a feeling. Through their choice of medium and aesthetic, the particular sound and form of their locomotive punk, a sound that emphasizes the drums and therefore rhythm, they also go beyond the meaning of their words. Through their performance, they create a space where individuals, regardless of whether they understand or not, can participate and relate to the rhythm and sound. Through the intersection of verbal meanings and bodily experience, a different form of collective knowing, remembering and educating becomes possible. The created knowledge is sensual as well as cognitive, irritating and violent as well as relational.

The angry locomotive punk of NighTraiN, as well as Stag Bitten's screams, are tools for relations and communication, which allow a connection with other bodies that goes beyond sexual intimacy. They function as communication tools because of their emotionality, as queer theorists Muñoz and Sara Ahmed have stated. In

the moment of queer-feminist ecstatic time, or shared jouissance, the possibility of "different ways of living with others" as Ahmed puts it (165), becomes thinkable. Punk researcher and fan Jasmine Mahmoud describes the effect of NighTraiN's performance of "Black Love":

> a celebration of black love as echo and anthem, a celebration that recognizes and eschews forced racial binaries. I feel united with this audience. We—the four women on stage, the largely white audience, my Chinese-American friend, and I (a black female)—have approached a frenzied trance. We have boarded NighTraiN. […] This is a space where we, together, we resolve to chant "black love!," a space where radical transracial intimacy is predicated on that collective, unfettered, and proclaimed love of blackness. (Mahmoud 317)

Yet, such experiences of ecstasy or jouissance are not delusional. On the contrary, these emotional and bodily experiences are a reflection of the here and now. In her description of a NighTraiN concert, Mahmoud explains how the band's highlighting of racialized difference produces a feeling of togetherness. This togetherness, however, is not produced under equal conditions, and the individuals do not become "one" or "the same." NighTraiN points to this difference, as Mahmoud has further documented. At the concert that she took part in on "the eve of 2011," they introduced the song "Reparations" singing "'If Black is beautiful then why don't you pay me?'—their delivery makes a claim on the audience and on society, with the unapologetic refrain 'You owe me reparations'" (Mahmoud 320). The anger that drives them, as could be explained in the previous analysis, is a result of structural oppression. "[W]hat was most important to me as a performer," writes Alice Armendariz Velasquez (better known as Alice Bag), "was to connect with people when I was onstage, where I felt like a conduit for energy. The rage that had been bottled up for years came pouring out by the audience. It was a deeply intimate

and personal exchange, a give-and-take between audience and performer, not unlike sex" (*Violence* 309). Such provocative performances of queer-feminist punk rock, Armendariz Velasquez describes, can be interpreted according to Muñoz, Ahmed and others, as an "invitation [...] to think about our lives and times differently, to look beyond a narrow version of the here and now" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 189). They enable a "political imagination" (ibid.) and "a collective political becoming" (ibid.). Such imaginations are a "stepping out of this place and time to something fuller, vaster, more sensual, and brighter. From shared critical dissatisfaction we arrive at collective potentiality" (ibid). They are highly productive; nevertheless, they are rooted in critique and highly reflexive as the queer-feminist punk of color Mariam Bastani wrote in the editorial of the *Maxismumrocknroll* issue of January 2012:

> I did not come to punk to collect records, nor was I wooed by the hopes of being "cool" in a subculture when I couldn't make it in normal society by way of mimicking mainstream culture that I claim to be rebelling against (that shit…is weak), I am punk because of the music, the anger, how offensive it is, fucking shit up and the prospect of being able to fight back and get results. I am home here. ("The Dicktator")

Bastani's comment is part of a longer letter of reply to a male punk who was not aware that he was reproducing racism through his promotion of a shared punk identity. He criticized queers and punks of colors within the punk community for pointing out differences, inequality and white dominance. His argument was the classic one that punk communities are spaces where everybody is equal; his argumentation was oblivious to internalized racism, sexism, homophobia and his own white privilege. Interestingly, Bastani's answer does not reject punk communities for their participation in white privilege; on the contrary, she explains that punk for her is exactly the place and community where her criticism can be articulated. In other words, Bastani's idea of community

is about support for criticism rather than performing one's personal identity or similarity. It can be understood with the help of the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, who theorized that social forms are not based on a common identity, origin, nation, etc. Nancy's concept of community is based on the idea that the very meaning of being (as an ontological status that carries meaning) is always a being singular plural. Politics based on concepts of sociality that refer to equality, as in the example of the white punk critic, are never able to reach beyond the logics of exclusion and inclusion. Politics of community that emphasize difference and reject a shared identity like Bastani's are able to relate to others by focusing on differences. Accordingly, such communities are not only more inclusive but also manage to avoid hierarchies and hegemonies to some degree.

7.5. Not Perfect, Passionate: Conclusion

Punk rock as a cultural practice and aesthetic signifies anger. Provided that punk rock can be understood as politics, punk music can be understood as politics of anger. Located within the sphere of meaning and verbal expression, the politics of anger within punk communicates social criticism. However, such politics can be conveyed not only on the verbal level, but also with music, sound and bodily expressions. Hence, the politics of anger and negativity work their force at the intersection of rational, emotional and bodily cognition and meanings.

By focusing on queer people of color critique and participation in queer-feminist punk rock, I showed that my examples of musical and verbal anger, emotional negativity and jouissance represent anti-racist, decolonial and queer-feminist political action. In addition, by referring to theories of anger within black feminism, especially the work of Audre Lorde and bell hooks, people of color theory, cultural studies and psychoanalytic accounts, I was able to provide further arguments for understanding anger as a political form. In my brief overview of prior feminist politics of anger,

I provided various explanations for queer punks of color's choice of the cultural form punk rock. I argue that the most important reason that queer-feminist punks of color chose punk rock indeed has to do with punk's connotation as a political form of anger and outrage caused by social injustice and oppression. Moreover, by pointing to the connections between feminist and decolonialization theories as well as black and Chicana feminisms, I was again able to show how queer punks of color developed and practiced non-normative forms of intellectual labor. The textual references to black feminist works within queer-feminist punk writing and music, such as bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldúa allowed me to show how queer punks themselves have made the connection between their punk aesthetic and black feminists' embrace of anger.

I want to emphasize again that angry queer-feminist punk performances must be seen as a form of decolonial and antiracist practices and resistance. Nevertheless, such criticism affects its social and political surroundings on more than the rational or cognitive level. By taking the theoretical work on anger and emotionality into account, I was able to argue that not only the anger of queer-feminist punk but also the effects of the performances need to be located on a bodily and emotional level.

Moreover, I argued that the effect of queer-feminist punk music is not just criticism. In my reference to the concept of ecstatic time by José Muñoz and the concept of jouissance by Elizabeth Povinelli, I argued that experiencing queerness within queer-feminist anti-racist environments can disrupt the normative and linear experience of time and space. Consequently, it creates moments in which queerness can be experienced or lived and shared with others. Hence, by looking at the theories of ecstatic time in relation to works on anger and jouissance, I argued that punk performances enable forms of collectivity and community. In other words, experiences of pleasure and lapses into jouissance do not simply co-appear with experiences of collectivity, but indeed partly create queer bonds. Yet the kinds of queer bonds that

queer punks of color and their allies form exceed the limits and norms of a conventional understanding of community. Like anger and criticism, the relationality or collectivity that queer-feminist punks create at concerts and other social gatherings are located on the bodily, emotional as well as cognitive level. Such communities promise anti-hierarchical structures and collective resistance of oppression. Although such communities should not be idealized, it is important to note that they enable a politics of resistance and anti-racism.

8. “We’ve Got to Show Them We’re Worse than Queer”:[199] Epilogue

Queer-feminist punk rock is radically queer. It is more than a style or music genre. It is a political movement as well as a form of activism, and although I have focused solely on its US-based aspects, it needs to be said that queer-feminist punk is a global movement. It is a grassroots movement that uses the terms queer and punk as anti-social terms to irritate neoliberal ideologies of inclusion, assimilation and normalization as structured by homophobia, transphobia and misogyny within mainstream society. It criticizes and rejects neoliberal politics within gay and lesbian scenes and raises awareness about oppressive power relations within seemingly progressive circles and politics. Moreover, it questions identity politics and aims to irritate normative concepts of sexuality, sexual norms and genders from an intersectional perspective. Queer-feminist punk activism focuses on structural oppression as well as institutional and administrative oppression. Its core themes, as already mentioned, are sexual and gender politics. However, the movement also thematizes racialization, immigration politics, body norms, ableism and the distribution of wealth. Hence, it needs to be understood as a queer-feminist, anarchist and decolonial movement.

It forces anti-social queer politics and creates, distributes and analyses radical queer theory through artistic strategies like lyrics, zine writing and weblogs as well as more traditional political forms like workshops or other forms of political debate. Through

199 Bikini Kill. “Suck My Left One.” *There’s a Dyke in the Pit*. Outpunk, 1994. CD.

the specific artistic forms of activism using music and informal forms of writings, queer-feminist punk irritates and communicates ideas on the cognitive as well as emotional level. It works on the level of emotionality because it communicates meanings through sound and embodiment during performances. The mode of meaning production in queer-feminist punk through sound, performances and verbal expressions must be understood as an anti-social drive or jouissance. Queer-feminist punk jouissance is a (self-)destructive form of enjoyment that is not only political but also powerful because it is able to attract attention and at the same time disturb normative values, beliefs and self-perceptions. In other words, queer-feminist punk performances and verbal expressions need to be understood as violent and alienating as well as relational and able to create queer bonds. Hence, it is a movement of collective resistance.

Historically, this movement emerged as a reaction to the specific sociocultural and political context of the US, including its domestic as well as foreign policy. It emerged as a reaction and counterreaction to the cultural and political shift towards neoliberalism in the 1980s, "where the most obvious [political] option is to struggle for nothing more than incorporation into the existing social order" (208), to borrow the words of the transactivist and scholar Dean Spade. I want to emphasize that queer-feminist punk emerged as a reaction to the sociopolitical environment in the US and its crucial role in globalization on a structural and reflexive level. In addition, queer-feminist punk rock not only reacts to and analyzes the social, cultural and political environment but also actively works against the continuation of oppressive forms of power. While many queer-feminist punk communities occupy countercultural spheres with distinct political and social values that regulate membership within them, they proactively build alliances and bonds with other oppressed groups. For example, in recent times, queer-feminist punks left their countercultural spaces to reach out to Occupy and Pussy Riot activism. I will discuss these two cases of alliance building in this chapter to highlight

the potential of bringing anti-oppression discourses that open up normative thinking into the mainstream, as well as the danger of confirming ethnicized and culturalized stereotypes by expressing alliance or solidarity with oppressed "others."

In this final chapter of my analysis, I will take up some of the most important aspects, strategies and agendas of queer-feminist punk politics again by reflecting on queer-feminist punk activism outside of punk and queer-feminist countercultures. In addition, I will discuss queer-feminist punk's involvement with the US-based Occupy movements as well as the Free Pussy Riot movement in order to analyze and highlight the genealogy of queer-feminist punk feminism and the production of queer-feminist punk knowledge over time and space. In my brief description of queer-feminist punk involvement in these social uprisings, I argue that queer-feminist punk rock needs to be credited as one of the most influential antecedents to these new riots.

8.1. "I Am Sickened by Your Money Lust / and All Your Fucked-Up Greed":[200] Queer-Feminist Punk Occupying the US[201]

Queer-feminist punks were among the first few thousand who participated in the protest that would morph into the occupation of Zuccotti Park in the financial district of New York City[202] on 17 September 2011. Moreover, queer-feminist punk slogans and protagonists were also seen rallying and ultimately camping

200 Spitboy. "Fences." *Los Crudos / Spitboy*. Ebullition Records, 1995. LP.

201 Angela Davis and other people of color activists have pointed to the colonial violence implied by the term "occupy." Taking up decolonial approaches from the Puerto Rican (Un)Occupy movement, Davis urged that the movement "must be aware when [they] say 'Occupy Wall Street' that this country was founded on the genocidal occupation of indigenous lands" (A. Davis, "(Un)Occupy" 133).

202 Demonstrators set up tents, information points, an improvised kitchen, etc. at Zuccotti Park, which they renamed Liberty Plaza.

out at Franz H. Ogawa Plaza, which would later be renamed Oskar Grant Plaza,[203] in downtown Oakland that day. People like J.D. Samson and her band MEN, punk musician and artist Cristy Road, and punk writer Marissa Magic actively helped create what would later come to be known as Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland.[204] These queer-feminist punks and their collectives (e.g., *The For the Birds Collective* and *Lang Houl Collective*) create theory and provide knowledge and education for each other. They understand themselves as activists or protesters and their cultural products as political actions. One example of queer-feminist punk activism within the Occupy movements was a performance by MEN at Union Square on 1 May 2012 and their participation in the *Occupy Wall Street May Day Rally* following the show, which the band explains on their Web site *www.menmakemusic.com*:

> We are a protest band. We are here in solidarity as feminists, queers, and part of the greater 99 percent. We are here to support immigrant rights, workers rights, AND the occupy movement.But this is not a day to divide, this is a day to stand as one.
> We will not only protest, but make a collective promise that we will never ever back down. That we will never weaken our intelligent force, and that we will only get

203 The plaza in front of Oakland's city hall was in-officially renamed Oskar Grant Plaza, in honor of the young man that was shot in the back by a Bay Area transit system police officer on New Year's Day 2009.

204 Despite the similarity of strategies and causes between Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland, it needs to be mentioned that the two movements differ significantly from each other. For one, the political and demographic make-up of Occupy Oakland was significantly different from the situation in New York. Oakland has a strongly politicized black community due to the long history of the Black Panther party there and many Black Panthers also participated in the local Occupy movement. Furthermore, the tensions between the police and the African American population gave way to anger and civil disobedience. The Occupy Wall Street participants, on the other hand, were predominantly white, young, college-educated males who are relatively well situated economically, as punk activists Cristy Road (personal interview) and many others occupiers have pointed out.

> stronger. We must remain simultaneously angry yet hopeful and continue our constant support for each other. […] We cannot do this alone. We need this choir. We need this team.

Interestingly, (queer-feminist) punk alliances under the "Occupy banner" develop alliances with a large part of US society that is considered mainstream, which is a new development within the movement. While queer-feminist punks of past decades generally rejected mainstream society with expressions like "This society isn't my society" in the first *Bikini Kill: A Color and Activity Book* zine, recent queer-feminist punk publications suggest that use of the word mainstream is less oppositional than it used to be within the movement. While queer-feminist punk still points to the complicity of mainstream society in capitalism and oppression, they express solidarity with the majority of people in the United States and other places, who are oppressed by capitalism and by the small minority who benefit from the system. Some even identify themselves as mainstream, like J.D. Samson, who published an article in the online edition of the newspaper *Huffington Post*, in which she calls on her fans to realize that she is one of the many struggling mainstream Americans.

It seems that punks left their queer-feminist spaces—those important "underground" spaces where they can engage with each other, reflect on and partly retreat from the oppressive power structures of homophobia and sexism—to get involved with Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland to reach out to a broader social sphere. Highlighting this point of contact with mainstream society does not mean that queer-feminist punks did not engage with the mainstream before. Indeed, riot grrrl and queer-feminist punk culture have garnered much attention lately due to the creation of the riot grrrl archive at Fales Library at New York University, as I describe in chapter two. Even more recently, riot grrrl material was broadcasted through the exhibition "Alien She" curated by Astria Suparak and Ceci Moss. The exhibition was shown at The Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburg and

included archival materials from the DUMBA collective, the EMP Museum in Seattle, Interference Archive in Brooklyn, Jabberjaw, the Riot Grrrl Collection at the Fales Library, NYU, and personal collections.[205] Alien She examined the impact of queer-feminist punk and riot girl on artists and cultural producers working today. It focuses on the works of Ginger Brooks Takahashi, Tammy Rae Carland, Miranda July, Faythe Levine, Allyson Mitchell, L.J. Roberts, and Stephanie Syjuco, and their visual art practices, which were informed by and constitute a transformation of riot grrrl knowledge and participation. Other engagements with mainstream society are newspaper articles or blogs, as individuals like Kathleen Hanna, J.D. Samson, or Bruce LaBruce are frequently subjects of news headlines.

These people actively interact with mainstream media and thereby manage to communicate some of their queer-feminist punk and riot grrrl knowledge, but always first to promote their art, music or films, and only second for political reasons. Moreover, such engagement with mainstream society and media is very individualized, or rather based on individual efforts. Hence, it manages to communicate queer-feminist punk politics only through individual popularity or fame. In contrast, within the Occupy movements queer-feminist punks did not participate primarily for their own benefit and visibility but in solidarity with the masses. They supported the protests through the distribution of information, their networks and Web sites like *forthebirdscollective.org*, or organized events like OCCUPIED: Occupy Wall Street Art Show at the anarchist, queer-feminist book store *Bluestockings* in November 2012.

In Oakland, punks were particularly active in terms of their contribution to the movement. The zine *Punks! Punks! Punks!:*

205 The exhibit also included queer-feminist punk tunes curated by Tammy Rae Carland of Mr. Lady Records and the *I (heart) Amy Carter* zine, Pete Dale of Slampt Records and Pussycat Trash, Donna Dresch of Chainsaw Records and Team Dresch, Maaike Muntinga of Riot Grrrl Benelux and Ladyfest Amsterdam, Jessica Gysel of *Girls Like Us* magazine, Lynne T and Bernie Bankrupt of Lesbians on Ecstasy, Allison Wolfe of Bratmobile, the *Girl Germs* zine and Ladyfest Olympia, Elisa Gargiulo of Dominatrix, as well as Ceci Moss and Astria Suparak (cf. "Alien She' Exhibition").

The Valley Punk Perspective reported their participation on *punk spunkspunks.com* in December 2011, noting that "[t]he Occupy Oakland encampment has struck a chord with the local punk community." Many local bands started playing at Occupy sites and rallies, such as the Side Effects and Mugwart, as well as the anti-racist, people of color hardcore band Que Se Mueran. The queer-feminist band Alabaster Choad also made multiple appearances at Occupy Oakland events, including to support the Occupy Oakland Rise Up Festival on 28 and 29 January 2012.[206] Local bands like Fucktard, Acid Fast and Bad Blood contributed songs to Occupy, and the band Neon Piss, wrote a full-length album about it. One of the most interesting of the numerous ways that punks have taken part in Occupy Oakland are the contributions to *Slingshot!*, a quarterly independent radical East Bay newspaper.

The participation of queer-feminist punks in the Occupy movements was not intended to promote or teach queer-feminist punk knowledge. Regardless of whether they identified themselves as mainstream or not, contemporary punks like Marissa Magic attempted "to challenge the status quo and mainstream values and society and to challenge and push [themselves], to check [themselves] in everyday life beyond sitting around and reading theory books" (Splatter Zone, *Maximumrocknroll 348*). The Occupy movements are an example or outcome of the alliances between queer-feminist punks and mainstream society. Musicians and writers like Mariam Bastani (personal interview), Cristy Road (personal interview) and J.D. Samson ("I Love") participated in the Occupy movements as protesters and contributed their punk art.

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206 Although Alabaster Choad was announced on the flyers for the festival, it is not clear if they ever got the chance to play. The festival was integrated into a rally and attempt to occupy a vacant building in downtown Oakland. The local Occupy movement had planned to squat the building and transform it into a community center. The people at the rally made multiple attempts to occupy two different buildings, but were met with strong police force. The situation escalated and numerous people were taken into police custody.

Many other queer-feminist punk groups and individuals followed their example, especially in San Francisco and Oakland, where most punks identify with the movement, as noted by Mariam Bastani (personal interview). Queer-feminist punk of color Mariam Bastani, feminist punk Ivy Jeanne McClelland and the band NOFX were involved in Occupy San Francisco; the band Anti-Flag performed for Occupy Wall Street protestors and numerous punk benefit shows were organized all over the US.[207] Famous punks like Jello Biafra of the Dead Kennedys and Ian MacKaye of Fugazi also supported the Occupy movements through press releases (e.g., on *undertheradarmag.com*). In addition, many queer-feminist punk bands produced songs about and for the movements, such as Samson's band MEN, Pariah Piranha and the Mynabirds. However, punks do not only identify with or participate in Occupy movements; punk musician, writer and Chicana feminist Alicia Armendariz Velasquez notes that "[p]unk attitude continues to inform today's counterculture, protest movements and popular actions aimed at social change," on her blog *http://alicebag.blogspot.com*. "Punk is not dead," she declares,

> but neither is it to be found in the local mall's "alternative" clothing store. Punk is alive and well in Tahrir Square, in the planned actions and protests of anti-Corporation movements, in local organic farming co-ops […], in the anarchic ideals of hacktivists who target corrupt governments and organizations under the pirate flag of Anonymous. As we examine the antecedents of punk and specifically punk feminism, I'd like to make the point that all social change is a continuum; just as something came before punk which created the social context for it to occur (and provided meaning for punk) so too did something follow. ("Work That")

207 Such as the *When Flying feels like Falling* punk rock benefit for Occupy Chicago on 6 January 2012 or *ROccupy: a night of punk, folk and country music* to benefit Occupy Ithaca on 14 January 2012.

I agree with Armendariz Velasquez that queer-feminist punk rock influences other social movements, individuals and the mainstream, as well as with her implication that contemporary countercultures continue punk strategies. However, in contrast to her view, I argue that punk rock did not dissolve or morph into a different shape or movement. Queer-feminist punks continue their activism today and participate in and challenge various movements with their unique punk style, aesthetics, methods and critique. In other words, although it is important to recognize that queer-feminist movements have changed over time, it is equally important to remember that their protagonists continue to identify themselves as (queer-feminist) punk activists.

In the following, I relate Occupy politics and strategies to queer-feminist punk discourses to show that the movement has been highly influenced by punk values and methods, and communicates queer-feminist punk politics.

8.1.1. "I'm Not Kidding / I Threaten Everything You Hold Dear":[208] Rejection, Negativity and Anger

The first political message that the occupiers communicated through their chants and protest signs at Zuccotti Park in New York's financial district and downtown Oakland was the dissatisfaction and frustration with the current sociopolitical inequality in the US. On the Web sites *occupyoakland.org* and *occupywallst.org*, which came later, protesters objected to the influence that corporations have on democratic systems, the striking and increasing disparity in wealth, and the legal system's leniency towards financial institutions and their role in the global monetary crisis. Like queer-feminist punks and anarchists, a surprisingly large number of people had been following the US-American social, economic and political environment and their place within it for a long time with growing frustration and anger. They were quickly coming to

208 Heavens to Betsy. "Terrorist." *Calculated*. Kill Rock Stars, 1994. LP.

the conclusion that the established political and economic system of democracy and capitalism, as well as its tools, protocols and proponents, was inadequate to establish social justice and equality and, most importantly, that there was no concept of reform that could even begin to make the existing system fairer. Surprisingly, the result of this frustration was an increased willingness on the part of US citizens to take to the streets and protest. Although it seemed that the feeling of doubt and distrust in the state as a social system and political entity was widespread in the US prior to the Occupy movements, this doubt and distrust seemed to be solely attributed to a strong belief in capitalism and social Darwinism, and an insatiable desire for success. Moreover, this skepticism seemed to be in line with the already discussed "North American affliction" of positive thinking (Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 3), and the "mass delusion" (Ehrenreich 13; cf. also Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 3) that queer-feminist punk bands like Erase Errata ("Wasteland") had criticized for decades. The uprising of Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland, as well as many other Occupy chapters, however, seems to be signalling an end to the idea of "American exceptionalism[: the] belief that success happens to good people and failure is just a consequence of a bad attitude rather than structural conditions" (Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 3).

The politics of the Occupy Oakland and Occupy Wall Street movements share some important features with the queer-feminist punk politics of rejection and anger I described previously. The movements reject inequality and the institutions that create it—the workplace, educational institutions, US military actions, the police force, the government and, most importantly, corporations and the rich. They have clearly stated what they are against, however, they have never stated who they are (other than "The 99%"), or what they want. The queer-feminist pop-punk band MEN addresses this important aspect of the movement—the refusal of Occupy protesters to form a group identity—in the line "We're Nobodies and Now We're In Charge" in their song "Make Him Pay." Occupiers have refused to label their movement with a group identity, elect a representative or explain what kind of

future they desire.[209] Marina Sitrin (6) frames the movements' politics as the desire to "pull the emergency brake" on contemporary social and political development. She further remarks that this rejection of participation in the "economic, political and social system" did "open up and create something new." However, no one is yet sure of "what that something is" (ibid.). Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland, like many other Occupy movements in the US, have been characterized by expressions of anger and grief, and a distinct unwillingness to negotiate or reform. This unwillingness can be viewed as a rejection of positive thinking, as well as of a vision of any form of future under the current hegemonies.

The strategy of using politics of negativity to form resistance rather than negotiate a place within the existing systems, as I have discussed throughout my study, is the prime strategy of queer-feminist punk rock and punk. Moreover, while other movements, like anarchist or black feminist movements, also share these strategies, punk is signified through anger and rejection within the cultural register of meanings in the US. Although the verbal discourse of Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland focuses on traditions of angry politics within black feminist theory (e.g., through references to Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Black Power), and mainstream media has demonized the movement through its signification as anarchistic, I argue that the visibility of punks and especially queer-feminist punks within the new social movements speaks to the distribution of punk knowledge. In other words, the lack of a broader discussion of the influence of punk should not distract from the important role that punk theory and activism actually play in both movements. Furthermore, theories of negativity like black feminism and anarchism were and still are discussed within queer-feminist punk communities, as demonstrated in chapter four. Queer-feminist punks rejected and continue to reject "The Future" that the contemporary sociocultural and

209 Although some participants like Eli Schmitt, Astra Taylor and Mark Creiff have expressed some concrete goals, this has never been articulated as a shared desire or aim.

political system creates. Like the Occupy movements, they rigorously question the American Dream. A representative example of the rejection of the American Dream is Agatha's song "Cut the String," in which the band members chant "cut the string / kill the dream." Furthermore, most queer-feminist punks not only reject American ideology but also rigorously "Reject All American" (Bikini Kill) culture, politics and administrative apparatus. Lines like Bikini Kill's "Regimented / Designated / Mass acceptance / Over rated" and "If you work hard / You'll succeed / Reject all American" ("Reject All American") seemed to anticipate the slogans of Occupy Oakland and Occupy Wall Street even in the mid-1990s. Such lyrics, as well as Occupy chants, refuse compliance with national ideologies and beliefs and denounce them as myths that lead to the eradication of structural inequality and participation in injustice in the past and present. Bikini Kill's proposal to "Reject All American" as well as the collective "No!" (Sitrin 6) of the Occupy movements can be seen as a wake-up call and awareness raising regarding the relationship between the construct of an American nation, its values and structural oppression. Like angry punk rock music and writing, the actions of the Occupy participants, such as angry chanting and marching during rallies, shouting a speech amidst the noise of a helicopter, or fighting back against an attack by the police, can be seen as dispositions to jouissance (Povinelli, "The Part"). These dispositions to jouissance irritate and destroy meanings, coherence and normativity, and can sometimes result in psychological as well as bodily harm. However, they also create new social bonds. The new bonds that are created through negative politics of anger, rejection and negation, significantly diverge from other, politically motivated social bonds, like identity-based groups or movements. Moreover, they carry the promise of being structured differently and therefore possibly being less unequal, exclusionary, privileging and oppressive.

Another feature that queer-feminist punk communities and the Occupy movements share is the appropriation of creative forms

of cultural production like music, writing and visual art to communicate their ideas and messages. They use pamphlets, zines and chants to communicate anger on a textual level and write songs with Occupy lyrics. One amusing example is the folk song "Eat the Rich" by Michael On Fire, which contains the lyrics "The writing on the wall says life's a bitch / Ain't enough food—eat the rich." Although those forms and messages are ironic and sometimes funny, they are also mostly very angry, rejecting and sometimes nihilistic. An activist group broadcasting a good amount of queer-feminist punk negativity is Oakland Occupy Patriarchy, whose members participate in most Occupy Oakland actions and initiatives. They established a *Women and Queers Only* zone at the encampment at Oskar Grant Plaza; they organized *Community Outreach BBQs*, where Occupy Oakland members gathered in poor areas of Oakland with free food; offered a space for workshops, art and education during the spring and summer of 2012. They were crucial in planning and facilitating the *Move-In Festival*, which was supposed to result in the occupation of a building. They are also part of the Glitter Bloc, which uses bright outfits and glitter and performs fun choreographies and collective dance performances as political action at rallies and demonstrations in addition to providing a sound system at most rallies and punk tunes for the movement (e.g., like the band Gossip at the *Justice for Oskar Grant Rally* on 1 January 2012). Many queer-feminist punks are involved in Occupy Patriarchy events and meetings. Some are part of other collectives and initiatives like the *Long Haul Collective*, the radical library in Berkeley, the radical newspaper *Slingshot*, the zine *Maximumrocknroll*, the squatter scene or one of the various other Bay Area punk communities.

The politics of Oakland Occupy Patriarchy, as already indicated, are the politics of negativity and anger. Moreover, they are decidedly intersectional. In their *Points of Unity*, which can be read on *oaklandoccupypatriarchy.wordpress.com,* they aim to "threaten capitalism, patriarchy, or white supremacy." Moreover, they state that they are "against the cops; they are our enemy. Police protect the interests of the ruling class, repress our resistance, harass,

injure, rape and kill people in our communities." Occupy Oakland Patriarchy "do not seek to reform, negotiate, or work with this system; instead, [they] work with each other." Besides producing discourses of negativity, the group actively creates and facilitates community, not just for women and queer-identified peers but for many others. In addition, the group intervenes in the Occupy Oakland movement, by pointing to structural and internalized forms of white supremacy, racism, sexism and homophobia. It is a great example of the influence that queer-feminist punks have beyond punk scenes and circles.

The surplus value of queer-feminist punk and the Occupy performances of anger and negativity—music as well as writing or dancing/marching, which I have described as jouissance in chapter three—creates relations between individuals. Such performances irritate normativity, as José Muñoz has pointed out (*Cruising* 185). Moreover, being angry together and angrily occupying a public space creates jouissance-like experiences, which are not only political but also have the potential to form bonds among the participants in similar ways as punk rock (e.g., while dancing at a concert or screaming on stage). Furthermore, following Elizabeth Povinelli's concept of jouissance, I also argue that in the Occupy as well as queer-feminist punk movements, a different future is envisioned in the moments where new bonds are formed and experienced. In both cases, the term that signifies this different future is community.

I want to highlight again that the irritating or interrupting qualities of the Occupy movements as well as queer-feminist punk rock are not in addition to and do not alternate with the creative aspects of politics of negativity. It is rather that through the collective rejection and irritation people "pull the emergency brake, freeze time, and begin to open up and create something new," observes Sitrin about the dynamics within Occupy movements (Sitrin 6). She elaborates further that "We are not even sure what that something is. We know we want to create open space. What that looks like we are discovering together, as we create, which is

also how we create: together, horizontally and with affect" (7). The space that Sitrin points to can be understood according to what Judith Jack Halberstam calls a collective "quest" to find "alternative vision(s) of life, love, and labor and [ways] to put such a vision into practice" (*The Queer Art* 2), as he explains in reference to contemporary academic as well as countercultural political activism and art in *The Queer Art of Failure*. While the feminist, queer and people of color discourses in academia, as well as countercultural activism and the art movements that Halberstam refers to have a relatively long history of resistance against neoliberalism and oppression, the mass participation of mainstream Americans in the Occupy movements must be understood as a new and surprising development. Interestingly, the multitude of people who came together to communicate their anger and participate in direct democracy also shared and expressed a new interest in community and collectivity. Like the queer-feminist punk movements, Occupy Wall Street used their art, manifestoes and social media to create what Halberstam calls "radical utopians […] to search for different ways of being in the world and being in relation to one another than those already prescribed for the liberal and consumer subject" (*The Queer Art* 2).

I want to point out again that people started occupying public spaces and coming together primarily to express disagreement and rejection of the present social structures and politics. And it was precisely, though not exclusively, through their shared anger and counter-establishment politics that the people at occupations in New York City and Oakland formed coalitions despite their differences in background, class and personal identification. Within the chaotic Occupy encampments, busy crowds of people, signs, banners, symbols, chants, conversations, music, and beats people inhabited the liminal space between thinking and doing, as well as art and politics, and were able to envision new and different social relations. Some aspects of these newly established bonds and feelings of community were identified, reflected and labeled with a group identity, the "99%" representing the majority who do not benefit from the contemporary political, social and

economic systems. The "We" of the notorious slogan "We Are the 99%," however, distinguished the movement clearly from individualism. Actually, the "We" was as much a signification of political oppositionality as a gesture of creating collectivity, very similar to how the labels punk and queer are used to distinguish musicians, writers and other political activists. The coming together through negativity can be seen as a parallel to the historic development of queer-feminist punk communities, as I have described in previous chapters. The terminology for and concepts behind the new social bonds and forms of community and collectivity that emerge through the politics of negativity at Occupy Oakland and Occupy Wall Street show significant similarities to the queer social bonds I described and theorized in chapter three. Moreover, as I have already shown in the example of queer-feminist punk politics, they are in line with anarchistic concepts. These concepts of community and collectivity at the Occupy encampments as well as within queer-feminist punk movements are never presented as contained and exhaustive elaborations. The definitions and meanings of the terms community and collectivity mentioned in the small self-published pamphlets, discussions and interviews are flexible, multifold, inconsistent and can vary greatly from song to song, line to line, sentence to sentence, or feeling to feeling. In both the Occupy movements as well as queer-feminist punk rock, the terms and concepts carry multiple meanings. The tactic of keeping the terms and concepts of community, collectivity and solidarity is a productive strategy, which can be explained according to Halberstam's "anarchy of signification" ("The Anti-Social" 142).

Anarchy of signification is frequently used by queer-feminist punks to create ambiguous and ambivalent meanings. It is a politics of negativity that prefers modes and expressions of rejection. It needs to be understood as a strategy that only identifies social oppression but does not offer a concrete political perspective or future, even though it is evoked. The "positive" perspective or future that the politics of the queer-feminist punk and Occupy movements evoke is community. However, this perspective of new social bonds does not refer to an origin or identity.

It is a future of being together without a concrete definition or "plan." Inevitably, such a concept can only be ambivalent and fluid. Moreover, it is a concept that emerges as agency or doing rather than as coherent theory.

Anarchy of signification often comes in a musical or theatrical form and is a drive towards the endless production of meanings. It indeed opens up space for new and queer meanings, and ways of being and relating to each other. It opens a space where people can relate to each other, not despite their differences, but through their differences, and keeps the movement flexible to serve the purposes of the participants. Hence, it allows a broad variety of people to engage and build new alliances. Within queer-feminist punk rock as well as in the context of Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland, the use of anarchy of signification to signify these newly built communities is very productive. It irritates the establishment and draws further attention to revolutionary uprisings. This irritating effect can be seen in the comments expressed in mainstream news and by politicians who were not able to understand the movements' cacophony of voices, opinions and their refusal to elect a representative or name a single (set of) demand(s).

The new sociality or social bonds and the multiple meanings that queer-feminist punk rock as well as my examples of Occupy movements created can be understood according to Elizabeth Povinelli as queer social bonds, as already emphasized. In addition, these new notions of community can be understood along the lines of Jean-Luc Nancy's theorization in his book *Being Singular Plural.* Tavia Nyong'o describes Occupy Wall Street encampments as "living and breathing together in conspiratorial difference, a new economy of bodies and affects pitched toward the ethic" ("Occupying"), and uses Nancy's theories to analyze them in detail in a conference paper that he recently presented. They are social forms that are not based on a common identity, origin, or nation, etc. Nancy's concept of community as a "being singular plural" marks individuality and difference, while also accounting for the relationality between individuals. Moreover, Nancy argues

that the very meaning of relationality is or should be an experience of difference. Occupy protagonists as well as queer-feminist punks share his view that politics based on concepts of sociality that refer to an origin are never able to reach beyond the logic of exclusion and inclusion (Nancy 23). In identifying a politics of equality—equality under the law, human rights, or a politics based on origin—these movements reject such forms and look for different approaches. Moreover, queer-feminist punk scenes as well as my examples of Occupy movements reject Western heteropatriarchal models of society such as states, nations, families and even humanness because they are only able to address this ontological state of being singular plural by attaching it to a communality of the single parts by assuming the same origins and a generic (cultural, national, gender, class, etc.) identity.

What binds people together in this context is negativity. However, shared negativity is not a simple identification with each other in terms of seeing oneself in the other. It is rather what Nancy sees as a potential in the social form of community, where sociality means simply co-appearing at the same time in the same place (Nancy 61). Interestingly, the political form that the Occupy Movements chose, the encampments, reflects exactly this notion of co-appearing. Queer-feminist punks also place great importance on co-appearing with respect to live shows, concerts and activism, and the high validation that they give those forms of social and political gatherings.

Using Nancy's concept of community as co-appearance allows us to grasp the political significance of being physically present at a space like Occupy Oakland's General Assembly,[210] the movement's decision-making platform, or a queer-feminist punk

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210 "Our General Assembly is a participatory gathering of Oakland community members," can be read on the Web site of Occupy Oakland at *www.occupyoakland.org*, "where everyone who shows up is treated equally and has equal decision-making power. Occupy Oakland's General Assembly uses a participatory decision-making process appropriately called, Occupy Oakland's Collective Decision-Making Process. Our Assembly and the process we have collectively cultivated strives to reach agreement while building community."

concert. The experience of community within such spaces is a bodily as well as cognitive experience of togetherness that allows the single part to hold on to its agency as an individual—in contrast to the invisibility of the individual within the masses—or the creation of a new agency for the individual that is explicitly political. The impact of this experience, in terms of personal development through the building of self-esteem, feeling more comfortable with oneself and stripping away prejudices, can be seen throughout the history of queer-feminist punk[211] and the sense of hope inspired by the recent Occupy movement. The participants of the Occupy movements as well as queer-feminist punks were looking for organizational models for their communities that took into account their emphasis on difference and co-appearance, in order to avoid the reinscription of hierarchies through social organization.

Despite these reflections on and theorizations of the new social bonds created, it is important to stress again that, like queer-feminist punk rock, the communities and futures created through jouissance-like moments within the Occupy movements are often felt rather than conceptualized. Such feelings are often random, temporal, confusing or overwhelming, and not signified by longevity or permanence. Nevertheless, they are important initiatives to establish different concepts of relationships, social bonds and structures that move away from the long passé ideas of social organization, such as the patriarchal family, marriage and the oedipal generation as Judith Jack Halberstam has pointed out (*The Queer Art* 72–3). Valuing temporalities, like the bonds established through communal jouissance, however ephemeral such a construct might be, furthermore allows us to understand how people can work with and for each other despite their differences.

The problem or challenge that both the Occupy encampments as well as queer-feminist punk communities have had to deal with, however, is how to maintain an appreciation of the differences and the willingness to work through them, in order to keep

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211 Cf. Ciminelli and Knox; Driver; S. Marcus.

the social bonds fluid and anti-hierarchic and not fall back on normative and hegemonic models of sustaining communities. The attempts that have been made to keep the communities horizontal as well as supportive and aware of the individual differences, have also often been used to direct democratic and anarchist strategies (cf. Schneider 39–40).

Despite the good intentions to remain "a multitude composed out of antagonism, not identity" (Nyong'o, "Occupying"), the movement has often recreated familiar hierarchical structures and forms of oppression. This has put queer-feminist punks, people of color and "transgender activists" in the problematic position of having to "remind[…] those who would hear that […] privilege is not restricted to the 1%" or the mainstream, and that it embodies the "necessary fractures within" (ibid.) those movements. In reference to the involvement of queer-feminist musicians in Occupy Wall Street, Nyong'o explains that queer-feminist artistic activism "become[s] part of the affective work of occupation, not so that occupation can become more inclusive or safe, but in order to keep those minor feelings quilted into the banners and broadsides of the many, both as a formal reminders [sic] of [the] precarious bonds that stitch us together […]" (ibid.). Such interventions can be tiring, especially because they are not always successful, as queer-feminist punk of color Cristy Road has pointed out. The resistance among many occupiers to realize their own white and heterosexual privilege ultimately led her to distance herself from further participation in Occupy Wall Street. In addition, although queer-feminist punks have contributed the much needed decolonial, anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homonormative discourses to Occupy Oakland, it would be far from true to argue that punk discourses are not white or blind to their whiteness to a large degree. Nia King, for example, refers to the unwillingness of punks to reflect on their white privilege as the reason that she left punk behind.

The problematic of relating to each other through the notion of difference, and not similarity or communality, becomes especially

apparent with international queer-feminist punk solidarity projects. Before explaining why I understand some recent queer-feminist solidarity projects as transforming themselves into white North/Western dominance and incorporation systems, I briefly lay out the background that provides the conditions for the transformation from queer-feminist punk plurality to a hegemony.

8.2. Queer-Feminist Punk Goes International

To understand the discourses around the relationality and solidarity in riot grrrl and queer-feminist punk today, it is important to note that queer-feminist punk knowledge and productions were translated and distributed globally (almost) immediately after their emergence. Although this chapter (and this study in general) concentrates on the US context, it is also important to recognize that the international dissemination of riot grrrl and queercore knowledge through alliances, social bonds and (new) media has not only influenced and transformed the cultural spaces and people where the US export "landed" but also queer-feminist punk knowledge, and the forms and methods of knowledge production themselves. Moreover, the reformulations and transformations of queer-feminist punk outside the US have made their way back to US punk culture. Most importantly, however, knowledge about the global riot grrrl and queer-feminist punk activities also supports a local sense of belonging to and prompts feelings of solidarity with the movement. This global solidarity, however, is not unproblematic, as I will show in the final part of this chapter.

It is interesting to note that even though the existing literature does not provide much insight on the influence of international queer-feminist punk rock on US countercultures, queer-feminist punks like Mariam Bastani often refer to queer-feminist and lady punks around the world (e.g., "we are destroyers of the status quo"). As is more frequently the case, any discussion regarding the import of riot grrrl and queer-feminist punk politics usually

has to do with contexts outside the US. For example, British cultural studies scholar Julia Downes documents the import of US riot grrrl politics to a UK context and their use of "punk sounds, sights, and productions to challenge and resist the gender power relations of music subcultures" in her article "The Expansion of Punk Rock" (204; see also "Grrrl: The Legacy and Contemporary Landscape"). During the 1990s, she argues, British girls and young women took up riot grrrl culture in response to their exclusion from cultural and political power within DIY and punk spaces. They adapted riot grrrl politics to their own specific cultural location to "disrupt gender power relations and encourage the politicized participation of girls and young women in independent punk music culture. Riot grrrl created a series of sonic moments to create a punk feminist community and provoke young women and girls' subcultural resistance and exploration of radical political identities" ("The Expansion" 204). The Austrian scholar Silke Graf has documented the influence of US riot grrrl and queer-feminist culture on the local environment of Glasgow, London, Hamburg and especially Vienna in her study on Ladyfest Vienna of 2004 (*Verhandlungen* 64–124). Rosa Reitsamer (Reitsamer and Weinzierl), Ulli Mayer und Sushila Mesquita ("What's Going on?") have given accounts of the connections and vital exchanges between the European and US queer-feminist punk underground, and Elke Zobl has provided a global map of the localities of queer-feminist punk and DIY productions through the creation of her *Grrrl Zine Network*, a Web site for international feminist zines and distros as described in chapter two. In 2009 she wrote that "the site lists and links to more than two thousand feminist zines from forty-three countries in fifteen languages and includes information on zine distros, resources, research, writings, and interviews" ("Cultural Production" 1). In her research project, "Young women as creators of new cultural spaces," Zobl and her team of six researchers tried to map the Ladyfest phenomenon in a global context. They counted 284 Ladyfests in 36 countries between 2000 and 2011, with most of the festivals taking place in Europe and the US. Interestingly however, 29 Ladyfests were organized in

Latin America, 9 in Australia and New Zealand, 3 on the African continent and 2 in Asia. According to the study, all of these Ladyfests self-identified as feminist, the participants seeing themselves in the tradition of feminism, especially the riot grrrl culture. Moreover, all of the festivals highlighted genderqueer politics. Zobl's research gives an impressive account of the transfer of the labels riot grrrl and Ladyfest and the general influence of queer-feminist punk culture in Europe and beyond. Although I could not find any academic analysis documenting a similar transference of the labels queercore and dykecore in non-US contexts, independent media outlets provide a great deal evidence of such a transfer. The Facebook group *Queercore International*, for example, collects information on and promotes queercore events all over the globe, from Prague to Pittsburg, and Rimini to Sydney. Queercore International also provides evidence of the translation and transformation of queer-feminist punk styles and politics to different (counter)cultural and national contexts because people share videos, audio files, flyers and writing. Another interesting account of international queer-feminist punk activities is provided by the *Queer Zine Archive Project*, which was already discussed in chapter two. The archive collects queercore zines and documents queer-feminist punk activities in places like Rennes in France, England, Poland, Australia, etc.

The label queer-feminist punk as a self-identification and queer-feminist punk knowledge have travelled the world and connected people and their art. Moreover, these individuals have created networks of international solidarity. However, the new social forms created through queer-feminist punk jouissance are not perfect and need to be constantly reflected upon in order to not develop into familiar hierarchical structures. The one-sided research focus on the transfer of US concepts to other places, which hardly ever includes an analysis of the counter direction, supports the idea of US (counter)cultural hegemony and imperialism. Furthermore, this perspective misses the importance that global queer-feminist punk knowledge has for the local movement in the US.

8.2.1. "I'm Standing with You on the Front Lines":[212] Queer-Feminist Punk Solidarity and the Case of Free Pussy Riot

Recently, riot grrrls, queer-feminist punks and queer-feminist punk solidarity garnered mainstream attention in the US with the Pussy Riot case in Russia.

The "Russian feminist performance art group"[213] Pussy Riot that emerged in the wake of the December 2011 protests[214] became a reason for and symbol of queer-feminist punk solidarity actions in support of Eastern European feminists, as well as lesbians, gays and transgenders, when they were prosecuted and incarcerated for a feminist punk performance in one of Russia's most famous churches in August 2012.[215] Prior to the incarceration of the three Pussy Riot members Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina and Yekaterina Samutsevich, no one had taken notice of Pussy Riot—at least not within the global North/West—although the anonymous collective had been organizing spectacular and mediatized illegal punk performances at various places, such as a

212 MEN. "Let Them Out or Let Me In." Online video clip. 17 August 2012. Web. 22 November 2013. <http://www.menmakemusic.com/>.

213 http://freepussyriot.org/about (5 November 2013).

214 In December 2011, protests started in response to the Russian legislative election process, which many political activists, journalists and Russian citizens considered to be flawed. People demonstrated for fair elections, and also criticized the then ruling party, United Russia, led by Vladimir Putin, who had announced his plans to run for President at the same time.

215 Five members of the group staged a performance entitled "Punk Prayer—Mother of God, Chase Putin Away!" in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior on 21February 2012. Three of the group's members, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina and Yekaterina Samutsevich were identified, arrested and charged with hooliganism in March 2012. They were denied bail and held in custody until their trial began in late July of 2012. After a hasty trial, the three members were convicted of "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred" in August 2012, and each was sentenced to two years imprisonment. Following an appeal, Samutsevich was freed on probation in October that year. Alyokhina and Tolokonnikova are still imprisoned.

prison roof, on Red Square, in front of the Kremlin, and most recently at an oil drill site, since October 2011. The topics of their performances are political persecution, gender inequality, homophobia, class inequality as well as racism, capitalism, exploitation and environmental pollution in Russia, especially that caused by the state. They always perform wearing balaclavas and brightly colored feminine clothes.

Pussy Riot has made clear references to riot grrrlism and punk rock in general, verbally as well as through their style and politics. However, they have also made many references to other, more local (or non-Western) political art forms as scholars and artists like Vera Akulova (279) and Alexandra Neufeld ("Maskerade") have noted. Even though Pussy Riot has chosen punk style and punk-styled performances as their preferred art form, they have pointed out many times that they are not a band. In an interview on *http://pussy-riot.livejournal.com/*,[216] they explain that they decided to use punk rock and illegal performances because they were looking for a spectacular, ironic and provocative form, which could not be smoothly integrated into the conservative sphere of mainstream media. They wanted to be as visible as possible and punk seemed to be the perfect format and brightly colored balaclavas the perfect attire. North/Western analysts and activists, however, took these references as an identity and designated them as (queer-)feminist punks and riot grrrls, and the label stuck. Moreover, they did not take into consideration that methods, forms, concepts and labels change according to context and how they are applied by the specific individuals.

North/Western feminists, riot grrrls and punk activists concentrated solely on the artistic adaptation and conceptual reference to riot grrrlism and queer-feminist punk and started presenting Pussy Riot as "one of them." The increased attention that Canadian and US (queer-)feminist punks and pop-punks, like Alice Bag, Bruce LaBruce, the band MEN and Rape Revenge started to pay to Pussy Riot supported the assumption that they indeed located

216 10 November 2011, translated into Engl. by Maria Neufeld.

themselves within a global riot grrrl or queer-feminist punk movement. Musicians like Peaches, J.D. Samson and the band MEN produced punk and pop-punk music and music videos to express their solidarity with (what they believed to be) the Russian punk feminists by addressing Pussy Riot as queer-feminist punks and riot grrrls and producing an international queer-feminist collectivity under the label "We." For example, J.D. Samson and her queer-feminist punk band MEN and Tobi Vail produced Free Pussy Riot songs and videos in addition to organizing a reading of the courtroom statements and letters of Alyokhina, Samutsevich and Tolokonnikova on 17 August 2012, the day the verdict was announced. Samson also participated in many protests in NYC, the latest of which was a riot in front of the Russian embassy in NYC on 17 August 2013, one year after the verdict was issued.

The problem with the riot grrrl label in this context, however, is that it ascribes a set of political values and believes to Pussy Riot that they do not communicate in their songs or interviews. Pussy Riot's political performances are much more an intervention in public space than an actual punk concert. It is meant to disrupt everyday life, offend and provoke. Although most punk concerts, especially queer-feminist punk concerts are also about all of that to some extent, the latter are also about the sound, music and queer-feminist punk community. Due to the references to riot grrrls and punk, Pussy Riot has become incorporated in a North/Western canon of rebellious musicians. The form of protest and art that Pussy Riot chose was one that North/Western queer-feminists in particular could understand. However, Pussy Riot is not concerned with questions of sound and musical ability. Thus, the incorporation of Pussy Riot into the North/Western canon of queer-feminist punk values and issues makes their actual issues invisible. Categorizing them according to North/Western riot grrrlism is a dangerous negation of the differences between Pussy Riot and US riot grrrls, which promotes the invisibility of their different local experiences, histories and sociopolitical structures. At the same time, such categorizing is a production of extreme differences between the US and Russia, as it connotes

political resistance towards the Russian regime with North/Western culture in opposition to Russian culture. Furthermore, when reference is made to the US history of queer-feminist punk rock, it implies that the struggle that feminists in Russia have to face today belong to the North/Western past, which has the effect of perpetuating North/Western hegemony. Moreover, "[i]n this construction," maintain Kulpa and Mizielińska, "whatever CEE became/is/will be, North/West had become/has already/will have been" (18). These scholars argue for more caution with regard to post-socialist localities and "to look for possibilities of conceptualizing and doing sexual politics in CEE without falling into the false logic of origin/al and copy; to go beyond the diagnosis of the North/Western/American hegemony and CEE legitimization through referencing this hegemony" (Kulpa, Mizielińska, and Stasinska 119).

While it is important to continue the efforts of riot grrrls and queer-feminist punks like J.D. Samson, a critical discussion of the underlying assumption of solidarity is needed. Reducing Pussy Riot's actions to or interpreting them solely according to riot grrrl and queer-feminist punk values and forms is problematic because by doing so North/Western riot grrrls and queer-feminist punks project their own political issues onto Pussy Riot and ignore the benefits that their own solidarity actions have.

Further examples of the projection of local desires onto Pussy Riot by North/Western riot grrrls and queer-feminist punks, artists and writers can be found in the recent publication *Let's Start a Pussy Riot* (2013), which was released by an international group of activists. The foreword of the book is an interview between its editor Jade French and one of the initiators of the project, Emely Neu. Asked why she felt the need to create a solidarity project for Pussy Riot, Neu answers that she felt like "growing up in the 90s, [her generation] never had one of these moments that hit you like a thunderbolt. Those provocative, musically-tinted click moments that every generation seems to have, except [hers]" (*Let's Start* 5). Neu reaffirms the interpretation of Pussy Riot's performance as

a riot grrrl act, praising its "raw DIY punk power […] paired with bravery and courage" (ibid.). Furthermore, she highlights her emotional attachment to the group by saying that what she identified as "bravery and courage […] just surpass every logical emotion running through your brain cells" (ibid.). Pussy Riot satisfied her desire for a political spectacle, danger, courage and extreme oppositionality. The reason that Neu was able to respond to the political immediacy of Pussy Riot's actions, however, was because she saw the Russian activists group as (North/Western) riot grrrls. To put it slightly differently, it seems that the political urgency of endangered lives was not enough to create the need within Neu and her peers to create a solidarity movement—this becomes clear when she says that until Pussy Riot, there weren't any "moments that hit you like a thunderbolt." This precarious moment needed to arrive in a familiar medium or format to create a strong attachment and initiate a reaction, which was obviously Pussy Riot's reference to punk rock. Pussy Riot filled a personal or collective void in politically motivated riot grrrls, queer-feminist punks and other feminists. In summary, their effect seems more important than Pussy Riot's actual politics and fate in North/Western countercultures.

8.2.2. The Creation of a Queer-Feminist "We"

Many queer-feminists use the signification "We" to attach their angry anti-oppressive politics and politics of rejection to their group. They subsume Pussy Riot as well as every other person (or rather "woman") that is in solidarity with the collective under this label and who—willingly or not—creates a group identity. Articles, songs and riot slogans frequently start or end with the line "We're All Pussy Riot" (e.g., Morris, "We're All"). It seems that for many Free Pussy Riot alliances, creating a feminist "We" is important because they feel marginalized as individuals, and therefore need the label to feel empowered through a designated group affiliation. This desire to belong and feel powerful is understandable, especially

considering that people in solidarity with Pussy Riot often maneuver themselves into legally, materially and physically precarious situations, such as protesting on the streets of New York wearing balaclavas, where it is illegal to cover your face in public and the police is known for its brutality during political riots. However, often the emergence of this "We" is based on or creates a dangerous feeling of equality that neglects differences and supports white hegemony.

Such binary thinking in terms of a universal queer-feminist "We" against "them" frequently emerges in the book "Let's Start A Pussy Riot" mentioned in the previous section, which suggests a collective queer-feminist, punk identity. Other examples of Pussy Riot solidarity projects that base their activism on the problematic identification with "the Russian other" through the label queer-feminist punk musician or riot grrrl can be found in the songs of the New York-based band MEN as well as riot grrrl icon Tobi Vail.[217] In the lyrics of the song "Let Them Out or Let Me In" below, MEN also use "We" in an undefined way, which leads us to believe that like them, the members of Pussy Riot are also lesbian, genderqueer or riot grrrl/punk identified:

> They said let me out / I said let me in
> We scream let them out / I scream let me in
> This is a revolution and together we will win
> We scream let them out / we scream let us in
> Let them out or let me in, yeah let them out or let me in

If the "me," "we" and "us" are exchanged with "them" in the lines above, it makes it difficult to know if they are singing about themselves or Pussy Riot. By playing with the pronouns, they are expressing their feelings of sisterhood and their similarity with Pussy Riot, as well as the seriousness of their intentions to "free Pussy Riot."

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217 Tobi Vail and her friend Kathleen Hanna were two of the first women who created and used the label riot grrrl for their punk feminism in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Olympia, Washington.

> 30 seconds of protest just got you two whole years in jail
> I'm standing with you on the front lines / we'd sell our souls to make your bail
> We are all sisters and today you are me …

This assumes that the ideas, ideals, political values and identifications of these North/Western individuals and groups are similar to those of Pussy Riot. A similar creation of a universal queer-feminist punk "We" that incorporates Pussy Riot in North/Western concepts is the song "Free Pussy Riot" by Tobi Vail and Pussy Riot Olympia agitator Henri Riot (repurposing a song written by Vail and New York-based artist Amy Yao in their group The Up All Nighter's in the late 1990s) released on 7 October 2012.[218] The lyrics consist of the names "Nadezdah, Yekaterina, Maria," which are repeated four times and followed by the lines "We Are All / We Are All! / We Are All / We Are All! / We Are All You / You Are All Us / We Are All You / You Are All Us!" The last stanza repeats the words "Death to Prison, Freedom to Protest" four times in a row and ends with "Pussy Riot is organizing in Moscow but the struggle for the self-determination of women, LGBTQ rights, gender justice and political transparency is an international one."

Again, Vail and Riot closely identify with Pussy Riot and ignore any differences with regard to identification. In addition, they also assume that Pussy Riot's political aims and agendas are exactly the same as their own. Although I do not want to argue that the opposite is the case, the certainty that these songs suggest is rather annoying.

This perception of Pussy Riot privileges radical queer-feminist punk movements in the North/West, as well as their forms and methods of solidarity. In addition, Pussy Riot becomes incorporated in the North/Western riot grrrl movements and genre of

218 The lyrics can be found on http://spiderandthewebs.bandcamp.com/track/free-pussy-riot (10 November 2013).

political music and assigned the values of these movements. Moreover, they become associated with North/Western values and environment, meaning that Russia is viewed in opposition to the universalized (North/Western) values of equality, freedom and secularism. Furthermore, it overemphasizes Putin's power and neglects any diversity that might exist within Russia.

Everything in Pussy Riot's performances and politics that does not fall into the North/Western framework of riot grrrl feminism or queer-feminist punk politics becomes sidelined or completely ignored. Hence, the identification of Pussy Riot as riot grrrls, without paying attention to their transformation or use of riot grrrl forms, reaffirms what Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska call a "North/Western present" as a Russian "future to be achieved." Consequently, the Russian present is coerced as a North/Western past (Kulpa and Mizielińska 16). Within this narrative, Russia can never become equally tolerant, progressive, free, etc. as the allegedly "advanced" North/West. Consequently, every action of solidarity runs the risk of becoming a paternalistic gesture of charity for helping Russians to catch up with North/Western conditions, which by definition they never can.

8.3. "… A Cover by a Band That No Longer Supports the Message of Their Own Song"!?![219]

Activists and scholars like Judith Butler, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Slavoj Žižek see the Occupy movements as a new interest in community and solidarity within the US context, and I believe that the Free Pussy Riot movement is in line with such a collective desire. While I agree that the Occupy movements as well as Free Pussy Riot have made important efforts to deconstruct hegemony, I want to emphasize that the movements were not utopian spaces without oppressive power structures in themselves, and

219 Condenada. "Homofobia." *Discografia*. Audio Tape. Self-release. Chicago, 2006.

point to the problematic discourses proliferated through them. In both cases, I found that the queer bonds created through the politics of negativity, the "being singular plural" collapsing into a queer-feminist punk "We" based on similarity that highly tends to neglect the differences between queer-feminist punks in the global North/West, produces and incorporates non-Western "others." Occupy Oakland participant and queer-feminist punk Marissa Magic talks about the pitfalls of the collective "We" of the protesters as the "99%" in her *Maxismumrocknroll* column of January 2012. She argues that despite the intentions of the movement to forego hierarchies or to work against already existing privileges to create a horizontal and egalitarian community, the subsumption of all oppressed under one label creates the illusion of equality where there is none. She continues by saying that "labeling ourselves 'the 99%' collapses all of us into the same situation, as if racism and sexism doesn't exist, as if classism is exclusive to the 1%." Instead of insisting on a group identity, Magic asks for an intersectional analysis of the internal social situation of the new movement. Many other queer-feminist punks agree with Marrisa Magic that the rhetorical binarism of the 99% versus the 1%, which allows for the movement to be broad and inclusive, also allows for ignorance about hierarchies, privileges and oppression within the Occupy movements. Tavia Nyong'o eloquently points to this aspect in his already mentioned analysis of the Occupy Wall Street movement:

> Occupation is a performative: it doesn't so much represent the 99% as it conjures that figure into being as a speculative object of public attachment. This feeling for numbers is non-majoritarian and post-democratic insofar as it expresses an anarchist and antinomian preference for consensus decision making over majoritarian and electoral process. Excluding the 1% certainly articulates a healthy and appropriate smash the rich mentality. But the Lacanian in me also sees the 1% as yet another stand in for object a, the irreducible antagonistic

> remainder around which the social composes, and which is forever decomposing it. ("Occupying Gender")

What Nyong'o points to is the psychological process of building a (group) identity through the rejection of an "object," or an "other." Through this rejection of the other, the self—or a group, as in the case of Occupy—is able to create the illusion of wholeness, where in reality there is fragmentation. Such a politics of negativity and rejection has great potential to escape what could be described, according to Lee Edelman (see chapter three), as heteronormative futurity (cf. Edelman, *No Future* 9). Nevertheless, it is not immune to the reestablishment of heteronormativity, white supremacy or even capitalism. On the contrary, in order to avoid familiar oppressive structures, countercultural movements need to make great efforts to question their own privileges, biases and hierarchies.

Grouping under the paradigms of similarity can only ever lapse into the creation of hierarchies, as I have explained in reference to queer-feminist punk communities in chapter six. The availability of time and the possibility of gaining insider knowledge were crucial factors for such hierarchies in the case of Occupy. Like in queer-feminist punk and riot grrrl communities, the Occupy as well as the Free Pussy Riot movements ended up privileging white knowledge as well as economically relatively stable whites.

Such developments put queer-feminist people of color and non-Western subjects in the position of having to challenge their own movements. For example, queer-feminist punk Cristy Road and other people of color participants felt the need to establish a People of Color Working Group and tried to raise awareness of the white and heterosexual hegemony within the Occupy Wall Street movement. Her emphasis on the necessity of reflecting on the influence that hegemonic discourses have within the movement and the efforts she made to educate occupiers is similar to the prior efforts that contemporary queer-feminist punks made within their punk communities. Indeed, Road herself participates in such efforts within the contemporary queer-feminist punk scene

in New York. An earlier representative example of intersectional queer-feminist interventions was Chris Crass, who wrote during the 1990s. Like Road, the editor of HeartattaCk argues that "the possibilities for radical social change" cannot reside in a "fight against the injustices of capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and authoritarianism in society but also the ideological effects of these institutionalized powers on our movements" (Crass 21).

Scholar, activist and recent Occupy Oakland participant Angela Davis tried to raise awareness of this crucial point in a short speech that she gave at an Occupy Wall Street event in Washington Square Park on 30 October 2011. Davis addressed the differences among the protesters by saying that "[a]ll minorities are the majority" (Davis qtd. in Blumenkranz et al. 121) and called on the audience

> to learn how to be together in a complex unity, in a unity that does not leave out our differences, in a unity that allows those whose voices have been historically marginalized to speak out on behalf of the entire community. […] It is important that this movement expresses the will of the majority from the outset, but that majority must be respected in terms of all the differences within. (ibid.)

Angela Davis stresses the importance of constant reflection on individual and structurally established differences and the different needs that they create. In addition, she asks for an intersectional analysis of hegemonic power structures as well as individual participation in establishing oppressive power through the new movements. Queer-feminist punks have a long history of emphasizing such an intersectional analysis of oppression through the hegemonies within and outside their own circles, as I analyzed in great detail in chapters five, six and seven. They have clearly pointed to (and continue to point to) the crucial factor of racialization. Queer-feminist punks of color, like Mimi Nguyen, Mariam Bastani and Osa Atoe, in particular, challenge white hegemony within the broader punk rock movement. Moreover, queer-feminist punks

including queer-feminist punks of color also challenge Occupy Oakland and Occupy Wall Street through their rejection of white hegemony. One of the many examples of such interventions by people of color, which I analyzed in chapters six and seven, is the song "Homofobia" by Bastani's band Condenada. Condenada call their fellow punk colleagues out on their "Homofobia" and question the punk label because it suggests political correctness and equality, when in reality homophobic oppression remains a commonplace experience. They sing that homophobia under the label of punk is "a cover by a band that no longer supports the message of their own song." They also argue that, while the label punk manages to address and include people of color, queers and other structurally oppressed individuals, it also makes their differences invisible and covers up inequality and internal hierarchies. They loudly articulate their disappointment over the presence of homophobia and racism within the punk community with the line "Everyone remembers when they lost their hardcore virginity / All my passion was lost when I found out …" Nevertheless, they do not intend to leave their community but rather express the will to continue to confront homophobia until "The face of hardcore has changed."

Queer-feminist punk and riot grrrl are definitely not over. On the contrary, queer-feminist punk knowledge and the movement's protagonists continue to influence and politicize contemporary youth, and sometimes reach mainstream attention such as those within the US-based Occupy movements as well as the Free Pussy Riot movement. As important as the involvement of queer-feminist punk ideology is, it is also not without its flaws. The relationality created through jouissance runs the risk of becoming a bond with a group identity, a universal "We" that neglects differences and inequality in support of white hegemonies. In the context of solidarity projects in particular, it seems to require constant self-reflexivity and effort to search for relationality and bonds that are not based on communality, and the full appreciation and acknowledgement of differences, without exoticizing the other.

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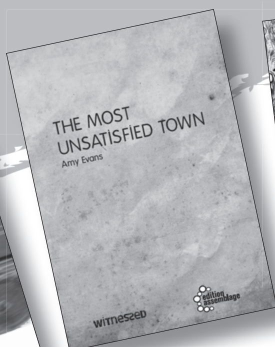

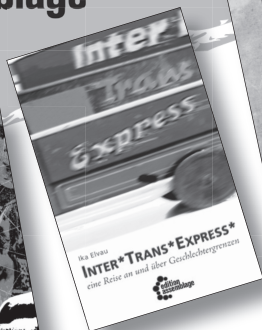

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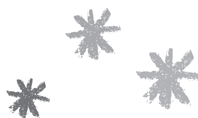

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(Agatha, album *Panic Attack*, 2009)

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Maria Katharina Wiedlack studied German, English and Gender Studies at the University of Vienna, where she works at the Gender Research Office. She teaches Gender, Queer and Disability Studies and is involved in various queer-feminist and dis/ability projects and activist collectives.

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