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“We’re Punk as Fuck and Fuck like Punks:”* Queer-Feminist Counter-Cultures, Punk Music and the Anti-Social Turn in Queer Theory

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* The title “We’re punk as fuck and fuck like punks” is a line from the song *Burn your Rainbow* by the Canadian queer-feminist punk band the Skinjobs on their 2003 album with the same name (released by Agitprop Records).

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“We’re Punk as Fuck and Fuck like Punks:”¹ Queer-Feminist Counter-Cultures, Punk Music and the Anti-Social Turn in Queer Theory

1. Introduction

The topic of this doctoral dissertation is queer-feminist punk in the US between the mid-1980s and today. What I understand as *queer-feminist punk* includes countercultures, as well as individual bands, musicians, writers and organizers, their politics and productions. Some of them are known as *queercore*, *homocore* or *dykecore*, as well as *riot grrrl*, some might be signified through different labels. Despite their different labels, and self-identifications, I understand the individual protagonists, scenes as well as their artistic and political discourses that I collected for my analysis as connected. 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 argue that queer-feminist punk countercultural agents do not only engage with queer and feminist politics, as well as 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, as well as explicit and open violence and oppression.

The usage of the terminology of *queer-feminist politics*—rather than queer politics—is inspired by the tradition of many activists around the world who account for the still prevalent sexism, misogyny and inequality in mainstream cultures as well as queer movements by foregrounding the feminist aspects of their queer politics. More recently, similar politics found their way into academic accounts, for example, through the book *Feminism is Queer: The Intimate Connection between Queer and Feminist Theory* (2010) by Mimi Marinucci, as well as the work of José Muñoz,² Judith Jack Halberstam,³ and

¹ The title “We’re Punk as Fuck and Fuck like Punks” is a line from the song *Burn your Rainbow* by the Canadian queer-feminist punk band the Skinjobs on their 2003 album with the same name (released by Agitprop Records).

² Especially 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 UP, 2009 by José Muñoz are from a decidedly feminist and queer perspective.

others. Such activist and academic accounts alike conceptualize their queer politics as a continuation of feminist movements and theory rather than as a revolutionary break with it. Furthermore, such accounts seek a dialogue between lesbian and gay movements, second wave feminists and the diverse range of queer movements to build alliances and forms of solidarity.

My examples of queer-feminist punk rock activists equally seek to find alliances with different groups of queer, feminist and decolonial thinkers and activists. They and their allies understand the usefulness of queer, feminist and decolonizing politics, activist strategies and social analysis against 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. Analyzing lyrical content, writing, music, sound, performances and countercultural settings in general, I provide examples of queer-feminist anti-social accounts of punk music, like 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 does not only negotiate, translate and appropriate academic accounts, but also produce similar negative and repoliticized queer-feminist theories without any direct inspiration through 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* often does not achieve: they transform their radically anti-social queer positions into (models for) liveable activism. Moreover, they form social bonds through queer negativity that exceed normative forms of relationality.

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 P, 2005 and *The Queer Art of Failure* Durham and London: Duke University P, 2011.

1.1. Radically queer

Considering contemporary usages of the term *queer* within 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 able to counter the ongoing inclusion of queerness into neoliberal capitalism. Such politics are able to reactivate the radical potential 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.⁴ “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 provocative self-reference first—“highlight[s] homophobia in order to fight it” (4), as Robin Brontsema has pointed out.

When theorists imported queer as a theoretical concept into the academy in the 1990s, they aimed for a similar effect—to challenge norms. Theresa deLauretis was the first documented scholar to use the term queer theory in an academic setting. David Halperin recalled deLauretis’ intention for her usage 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 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

⁴ Cf. Shepard 512; Brontsema 4.

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 emphasize Halperin’s interpretation of deLauretis’ motives as “provocation,” and “deliberately disruptive.” He suggests that deLauretis used queer theory to reject dominant gay and lesbian identity politics as well as academic approaches that focus on sexuality as stable identity category. Halperin’s anecdote indicates that queer theory was once seen as a promising, and radical political intervention into the production of knowledge and meaning, into social structures, and into institutions. Moreover, it implies that queer emerged within counter-cultural spheres and activism, among “street kids” and “the art world” during the 1980s and was introduced to academia only afterwards.

The successful incorporation of the term *queer* into the language of capitalism, the promotion of life-style products, the concept of metro-sexuality, and commercial entertainment through the late 1990s and 2000s—for instance in shows like *Will & Grace*,⁵ *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*,⁶ or *The L Word*⁷—however, speaks to the de-radicalization and de-politicization of queerness in such contexts, as well as the flexibility of capitalist heteronormative patriarchal power structures. Such corporate media representation of gays and lesbians created mainstream perceptions of queerness as non-threatening, successful, beautiful and predominantly white and, most importantly, compliant with capitalist consumer logics. Shortly following the annexation of queer in academia, a de-radicalization of the term *queer* within the mainstream became visible, and, queer became normalized within the academic landscape. The incorporation of queer

⁵ *Will & Grace* was a US television sitcom about the New York-based, successful gay lawyer William Truman and his female straight, successful, designer friend Grace Adler. 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.

⁶ *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).

⁷ *The L Word* was a US television drama series on the TV channel 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 consists of exceptionally gender normative, tall, conventionally beautiful, predominantly white, rich people. The location is West Hollywood.

theory into gender studies programs, the numerous queer studies or queer theory readers by commercial publishing companies such as Routledge,⁸ Palgrave MacMillan⁹ and Blackwell Publishing¹⁰ as well as the establishment of queer theory book series such as the *Series Q* by Duke University Press—mark such processes of absorption and de-radicalization 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 usage of 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 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 counter-cultural queer theory, as 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 et. al 1)—a queer theory, which 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 counter-cultural sphere of punk rock in which queer still has the political potential to irritate and resist neoliberal incorporation, and reject oppression. Additionally, it presents counter-cultural 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 his recent book *The Queer Art of Failure* (2).

⁸ Hall, Donald E. and Annamarie Jagose, Andrea Bebell, Susan Potter. *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*. Routledge, 2012.

⁹ Morland, Iain and Annabelle Willox (ed.). *Queer Theory*. Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.

¹⁰ Corber, Robert J. and Stephen Valocchi. *Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

I argue that queer-feminist punk counter-cultures produce queer-feminist theory that is neither less sophisticated nor less valuable than academic approaches.

Furthermore, the theoretical approaches developed within the queer-feminist punk movement have a strong connection to the everyday life of its participants, in contrast to much of academic theory.¹¹ Within the counter-cultural 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.). Theory accordingly, is not just a product of cognitive and emotional processes, but the processes themselves must also be understood as theory. Following anarchists among queer activists and scholars, such as Benjamin Shepard, theory does not only influence practices, but practices and theory 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 and concept of theory itself need to be reworked for the purpose of my investigation.

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

¹¹ Cf. McLemee; Rogue and Shannon; Klappeer; Rauchut

Queer-feminist punk rock, I argue throughout my analysis, 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 parallel in interesting ways 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 anticipated queer as anti-social even before academia “jump[ed] on the negativity bandwagon” (Eanelli 428), as queer anarchist Tegan Eanelli,¹² as well as queer theorists, such as Halberstam,¹³ Nyong’o,¹⁴ or Muñoz¹⁵ indicate. 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 Theory” (*The Anti-Social* 140-156).

1.2. Anti-Social Queer Theory

As a theoretical concept, the anti-social turn is informed by psychoanalytical—mostly Lacanian—concepts of sexuality. Following queer psychoanalytical 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 scholar Lee Edelman in his book *No Future: Queer Theory*

¹² Eanelli, Tegan. “The real Anti-Social Turn in Queer Theory.” *Queer Ultra Violence: BashBack!* Anthology. ed. by Fray Baroque and Tegan Eanelli. San Francisco: Ardent Press 2011: 427-428.

¹³ Halberstam, Judith. “The Anti-Social Turn in Queer Studies.” *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 5.2 (2008): 140–156.

-----, “The Politics of Negativity in Recent Queer Theory.” *Publication of the Modern Language Association of America* 121.3 (May 2006): 823-825.

-----, *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham and London: Duke University P, 2011.

¹⁴ Nyong’o, Tavia. “Do You Want Queer Theory (or Do You Want the Truth)? Intersections of Punk and Queer in the 1970s.” *Radical History Review* 100 (2008): 103-119.

¹⁵ Disidentification

¹⁶ Bersani, Leo. *Homos*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995.

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* 3). What constitutes and structures queerness as a meaningful term, according to Lee Edelman, is not its relation to queer desire but "jouissance" (*ibid.*). Jouissance, or enjoyment is "the painful pleasure of exceeding," to use the words of psychoanalytical theorist Elizabeth Povinelli (*The Part* 288). What jouissance exceeds is the symbolic order of meanings, as well as social rules and regulations—everything that signifies certainty, familiarity and safety. However potentially radical or dismantling Edelman's theory is, it also forecloses 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 psychoanalytical queer theory as politics. Judith Jack Halberstam,¹⁷ Elizabeth Povinelli,¹⁸ Tavia Nyong'o,¹⁹ and José Muñoz²⁰ 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 333), as Juana Maria Rodríguez points out. 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

¹⁷ "The Anti-Social Turn in Queer Studies." *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 5.2 (2008): 140–156.

¹⁸ Povinelli, Elizabeth. "The Part that has No Part: Enjoyment, Law and Loss." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17(2-3) Queer Bonds (2011): 288-308.

¹⁹ "Do You Want Queer Theory (or Do You Want the Truth)? Intersections of Punk and Queer in the 1970s." *Radical History Review* 100 (2008): 103-119.

²⁰ *Disidentification: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

resist hegemony. Additionally, I will combine and extend anti-social queer theories with works by the black feminists bell hooks and Andre Lorde to argue that these black feminists' theorization of anger allows for a thinking through of the anti-social and queer at the intersection of racialization. Moreover, a focus on anger enables us to extend our analyses of anti-social queer politics from the realm of symbolic meaning to the realms of the corporeal and the affective: action, feelings, experience and the body.

I relate such different academic accounts to queer-feminist punk movements to establish a dialogue between and to enrich both fields in their abilities to resist the de-radicalization of queer theory critically. On one hand, I use academic psychoanalytical accounts to analyze queer-feminist punk productions and the social relations they create and circulate within, and to make queer-feminist punk productions more comprehensive to an audience unfamiliar with punk rock conventions. By making connections between academic theory and counter-cultural productions and social spaces, on the other hand, I aim to gain attention and interest from the activists of the counter-cultural movement of punk rock who might not necessarily relate well to the machinery of academic knowledge production.

1.3.The culture(s) of Queer-feminist punk

The field, or object of my research, as 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 will reflect on the particular counter-cultural movement in connection to the broader socio-political and cultural environment of the US. Hence my analysis must be understood as a contribution to the broader field of American Studies, as I analyze the cultural place of the counter-cultural phenomenon within the US-American socio-cultural, political and geographical landscape. I will show that the queer-feminist punk movement emerged as reaction to the political and social US-specific discourses on homosexuality, gender, HIV/AIDS and racialization

between the late 1970s and early 1980s. I will 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 queer-feminist punk movement's historical overview until today, I will 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 counter-culture 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, queer-feminist punks actively establish a dialogue with other oppressed people in the US, although they reject the cultural and political US hegemony. They build alliances and community far beyond the limits of their own counter-cultures. 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 the art as crucial to forming their queer identities, getting self-esteem and becoming political. Moreover, the long-lasting effect of queer-feminist punk politics can be seen in the continuation of the movement and communities for over thirty years. Hence, my contribution to the archive of American Studies of an analysis of the queer-feminist punk movement opens a new discussion about US-located punk rock in general beyond the notion of style.

I want to underline that the counter-cultural sphere of queer-feminist punk rock is not restricted through definite borders but is instead quite fluid; however, the music, writing and social scenes I designate as queer-feminist punk are connected in a multitude of ways. Queer-feminist punk productions are connected through their politics. Some are additionally connected through explicit verbal references; some relate through an identification with riot grrrl, queercore or homocore, and dykecore; some bands, writers, organizers and scenes are connected through mutual projects, and some through personal friendships. Additionally, and in close relation to their shared politics, they are connected through their musical style, through 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 tight connection with the musical style, the word and concept *punk*, I argue, 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,” to speak with punk writer Jessica Skolnik (*Modernist Witch*). This does not mean that style is not important. On the contrary, as I will show in chapters two and three, punk style—the music’s speed, its high volume, d.i.y character and aggressive performances—corresponds with the outspoken antisocial behavior, the liberating verbal violation of rules and the embrace of an outsider-status, 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 their 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 counter-cultural sphere of queer-feminist punk is an understanding of its productions—music, zines and other forms of expression—as forms of meaning production and active, political interventions into hegemonic power following the cultural studies approaches of Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson,²¹ Dick Hebdige,²² or George Lipsitz.²³ Moreover, I understand queer-feminist

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

²² Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture. The meaning of style*. London/New York: Routledge 2001 [1979].

punk communities, concepts and ideas, as well as their cultural productions as connected through a political movement. The concept of a movement emphasizes this connection between queer-feminist punks and their various productions 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 where they circulate. I theorize queer-feminist punk as a movement in order to emphasize its forms and products as activism or doing. Additionally, the notion 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 a 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, according to the broader socio-political context within the US and beyond. Moreover, queer-feminist punks address individual and structural differences of experiences and politics themselves. They do not share a group identity, but, to the contrary, resist such simple identifications 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 at reflecting continuation and change, accordingly. I will show a stringency of key concepts within queer-feminist punk during its history. I will also point to changes and shifts of meanings, forms and activities. Embedding my work in the broader field of American Studies, my work contributes to the

²³ Lipsitz, George. "Cruising Around the Historical Bloc: Postmodernism and Popular Music in East Central Los Angeles." *Cultural Critique* 5 (1986): 157-177.

analysis of cultural, administrative and legal US hegemonies in the context of neoliberalism and globalization. Moreover, it diversifies the picture of US hegemony through a focus on resistance against and criticism of hegemony within US culture.

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. 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. Furthermore, I will 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 scientific research. Moreover, I agree with Judith Jack Halberstam that it might be time to rethink the perception of ‘the academy’ and ‘the counter-culture’ as such.²⁴ Queer activists are often students, researchers or even faculty members of universities. Hence, not only did academic queer theory influence counter-cultural spheres, but queer theory was also sometimes developed within those counter-cultural spaces by academics as well as non-academics. Additionally, queer-feminist activism intervened in multiple cases in discourses on academic territory. Thus, my account differs significantly from scholarly views suggesting that queer theory lost its social relevance in recent years.²⁵ Nevertheless, it needs to be emphasized that academia follows a set of norms and rules that does not allow for its total invasion by queer-feminist counter-cultural protagonists like punk rock musicians. Academia’s administrative, legal and social apparatus does not allow for a total deconstruction by queer-theory.

²⁴ *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham and London: Duke University P, 2011: 7-15.

²⁵ Cf. McLemee; Rogue and Shannon; Klapeer; Rauchut

Accordingly, I argue that queer-feminist counter-cultures have a greater potential for radical resistance than academia can ever have, because to become part of academia requires a great amount of self-disciplining, assimilation and normativity in the first place. In other words, to become resistant to academia, the individual has to assimilate him or herself to academic norms first. These norms are patriarchal, capitalistic and mostly white. Although the US state and its apparatus as well as social conventions and norms oppress queer-feminist punks, their hegemonic power and survival requires assimilation.

My research argues that the social structures of both academia and queer-feminist punk rock need to be understood as highly intersectional. They are hardly separable from each other, and, accordingly, ask for an analysis of their specific intersections. 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 from countercultural phenomena to academic theory. Mostly, but not exclusively, the theories applied are anti-social queer theories, as already suggested.

Queer-feminist punk's production of meaning and knowledge must be located on various levels: the textual, the oral, the performative and the 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 can be best addressed with what Judith Jack Halberstam calls a "queer methodology" (*Female Masculinities* 10). It combines "textual criticism, ethnography, historical survey, archival research, and the production of taxonomies" (ibid.). Such 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 analysis as developed by cultural studies scholars. The most important punk researcher, for the purpose of my analysis, is Dick Hebdige. His thesis, formulated in 1979, that counter-cultures affect hegemony through style influenced decades of semiotic analysis of counter-cultural productions. Moreover, his research was 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 or Ngyong'o, I will investigate queer-feminist punk style at the intersection of political agency, knowledge production and social relevance. Including writings about queer-feminist punks' experience, especially with their community, and data I gathered through interviews, as well as participant observation, I will analyze how queer-feminist punk communities translate their political values and theories into social practice. To explain the forms of community that emerge through politics of negativity, I will use Jean-Luc Nancy's²⁶ theorizations on counter-hegemonic concepts of social bonds.

The analytical theory I use for the interpretation of my examples is mostly, but not exclusively, informed by the queer psychoanalytical work I described earlier. Inspired by queer-feminist punk rock's usage of queer as anti-social, I will read contemporary anti-social queer theory against some representative queer-feminist punk lyrics. I will 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. I will 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 accounts. However, using psychoanalytical work by Elizabeth Povinelli, I will argue that the value of such politics does not necessarily remain in the deconstruction of existing meanings,

²⁶ Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Being Singular Plural*. Stanford UP, 2001.

values and social relations. On the contrary, referring to Judith Jack Halberstam,²⁷ Elizabeth Povinelli²⁸ and Antke Engel²⁹ I will suggest that the value of queer-feminist punk politics of negativity lies in its potential to create queer social bonds that are able to resist heteronormative logics.

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

Analyzing queer-feminist appropriations of feminism and their relationships to other feminist movements, I will draw on work by Judith Jack Halberstam (*In a Queer Time and Place*), Rebecca Walker and Ann Cvetkovich. In connection with queer-feminist punks, anti-racist and decolonial politics I will draw on a corpus of cultural studies approaches to punk rock that are not necessarily queer, such as Hebdige's, or Simon Frith's.

Additionally, I will focus the intersection of queer-feminist punk's politics by closely analyzing their complex deployment of anger. I will point to text-references in queer-feminist punk writing to black feminists like bell hooks or Audre Lorde through an analysis of such discourses. I will put black feminist discourse into a fruitful dialogue with

²⁷ Halberstam *The Anti-; The Queer Art*

²⁸ Povinelli *The Law*

²⁹ Engel, Antke. "Desire for/within Economic Transformation." *e-flux journal* 17 (june/august 2010).

contemporary cultural studies approaches by Halberstam, Neil Nehring³⁰ (*Anger*) and others. I will try to explain the position 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 “borderlands” by Gloria Anzaldúa. I will explain the relationships between queer-feminist punks of color and their peers drawing on the concept of decolonizing politics by Laura Pèrez.

I start my project by giving a historical overview of queer-feminist punk bands, communities, and some of their cultural productions and collective activities in chapter two. Although my overview is by no means exhaustive, it is the first collection of bands, subcultures, their cultural productions and collective initiatives that accounts 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 broadening is necessary not only to do justice to queer-feminist punk activism, but also to disrupt the notion of a strictly white male archive and countercultural archive. In other words, I collect or assemble queer-feminist punk productions, bands, scenes and community projects to contribute to the ways existing anti-social queer archive theorists such as Lee Edelman or Leo Bersani have established through their analytical work. Moreover, I want to challenge and extend the same archive that “oddly coincides with the canonical archive of Euro-American literature and film,” as Judith Jack Halberstam emphasizes, “and furthermore, [...] narrows that archive down to a select group of anti-social queer aesthetes and camp icons and texts” (*The Anti-Social* 152). Incorporating queer-feminist punk into an academic archive, however, is also an act of normalization. I will address this problem in chapter two and chapter four.

³⁰ Nehring, Neil. *Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism: Anger is an Energy*. Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997.

Chapter Three provides a close reading of queer-feminist punk's theories of queerness and explains how queerness can be used as anti-social politics. In addition to my semiotic analysis of queer-feminist punk's lyrics and other writings, I address queer-feminist punk's musical and performative style, to argue that queer-feminist punk politics of negativity need to be located on the level of verbal expression as well as within sound and embodied performance. I address the effect of queer-feminist punk anti-social politics, to argue for recognition of their ability to irritate heteronormativity. Moreover, referring to José Muñoz' work, I argue that such politics additionally irritate a heteronormative experience of time and social relations. Taking Jean-Luc Nancy's theories on community into account, I will further propose 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 those that critique oppressions from an intersectional perspective. I explain that intersections of social, political and institutional oppression are marked by queer-feminist punks themselves and address concepts such as the state, capitalism and white hegemonic power. The rejection of the plethora of intersecting hegemonic discourses, of class, gender, race and sexuality, is often marked as anarchy. I show how such anarcha-queer politics are formulated, what they address and for what they aim. Moreover, I account for the connection between the anti-social queer-feminist politics and the anarchist ideas punks express.

In Chapters Five to Eight I focus on various specific issues queer-feminist punks address through their intersectional anti-social politics. In every chapter I exemplify aspects like feminist politics, antiracism, or critical whiteness approaches referring to a corpus of lyrics, bands and community efforts. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that a queer-feminist punk politics of negativity is intersectional and that the examples I offer are not necessarily representative of a single band, its products or communities as such, but representative 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 more or less separately are products of my foci or interests.

In Chapter Five I also address the feminist politics of anti-social queer-feminist punk rock. I locate feminist politics within queer-feminist punk lyrics, zines and community projects, and explain the form and purpose of such politics. Furthermore, I investigate the relationship between the queer-feminist punk movement and prior feminist movements.

In Chapter Six I discuss white hegemony within queer-feminist punk communities. Reflecting on previous work on punk cultures, I pick up my argument again, that a single issued reflection on queer-feminist punk music and scenes perpetuates white hegemonic power structures within academic research, and furthermore, ignores actual counter-cultural interventions, as well as their agents. Against common narratives of queer-feminist punks' whiteness and the scenes' ignorance about their white privilege, I will highlight some crucial interventions by queer-feminist punks of color. Moreover, I show such interventions on the intersection of anti-social queer approaches and anti-racist, decolonial politics.

Chapter Seven continues the focus on anti-racist, anti-privilege and decolonial interventions by queer-feminist punks within their communities. Addressing the meaning and usage of anger for such interventions I point to significant intersections between queer-feminist, black and Chicana theory and queer-feminist punk rock's anti-social politics. 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, the conclusion, I briefly summarize the most significant results on my study. Moreover, I come back to the question of how queer-feminist punk activism must be situated within the broader US-American culture. I come back to some of my examples of recent queer-feminist punk activists and their socio-cultural politics to show how they engage with larger society in the concrete context of the contemporary Occupy

Wall Street and Occupy Oakland movement. I argue that a focus on the intersections of the queer-feminist punk movement and contemporary Occupy movements is able to highlight the effect queer-feminist punk movements have beyond the limits of their counter-cultural spheres. It shows that the production and distribution of queer-feminist, anti-capitalist and decolonial knowledge, transgress mainstream society. It proves that queer-feminist punk activism creates new social bonds and contributes to the formation of a broader movement for anti-racist, decolonial, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic, critical whiteness resistance with other oppressed subjects, as well as people who self-identify as part of mainstream society.

2. “To Sir With Hate:”¹ A Liminal History of Queer-Feminist Punk Rock

“We’re punks. We should be taking the piss out of the past.”²

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 politics of queer-feminist negativity from its emergence in the 1980s on and that the movement is still informed by such politics. Considering the vast number of bands, communities, productions and pieces of art, 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, highlighting some of the most interesting cultural productions of queer-feminist punk. Moreover, it can be argued that the collection I assemble here is 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 issues and agendas of queer-feminist punk, and their politics in general, from an intersectional perspective, 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 workingclass identified punks, but also focuses on anti-capitalist, anti-racist, decolonial, anti-ableist or genderqueer anti-social politics.

First, I will introduce the very first people who explicitly fostered queer-feminist punk politics, using the labels homocore and queercore. I will briefly describe those terms, and explain why queer-feminist punks created the labels referring 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

¹ 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. Band-members included J.B. Jones and Jena von Brucker. The phrase *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. Homepage. 10 May 2012. <<http://www.britannica.com/>>).

² This quote is from Carolyn Keddy’s punk column “Bring me the head of gene Siskel” in *Maximumrocknroll* 347 (April 2012). Keddy urges contemporary punk community to critically reflect on forms of oppression and hegemonies in and through past punk communities.

homocore seem too limited to account for the diversity of politics significant for the movement. Moreover, the wording 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 will use the phrase queer-feminist punk, because it seems more appropriate to address the flexibility and openness of the terms of self-identification, the research field and the counter-cultural productions and spaces it covers. Additionally, 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, as well as social structures within it. Moreover, it accounts for processes of counter-cultural knowledge production and transmission throughout 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, such belongings are signified through references to punk music and politics. It ought to be emphasized that the subsumption of a diverse crowd of people, identities, and cultural productions, which is provided here, although eclectic to some degree, is appropriate not least through the focus of shared anti-social queer-feminist politics. These politics lie 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 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 counter-culture productions. Third, I will show that the anti-social queer theory of queer-feminist punk, often in contrast to academic work, is characterized

by an intersectional approach. In other words, queer-feminist punks target not only homophobia, transphobia and misogyny, but additionally understand the intersectionality of oppressive power structures along 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 hold on to my work as a contribution to such a queer theory archive, while acknowledging and emphasizing the problematic position my contribution inhabits, especially within the counter-cultural spheres of queer-feminist punk itself. This position is problematic insofar as my presentation of people, bands, and events, as well as my analysis, are filtered through my outsider position as a white European academic, my education and personal interests. Moreover, by claiming space within academic queer theory for queer-feminist punk, the politics and cultural productions become incorporated into academic discourses, however marginal those academic queer discourses might be themselves within academia. Related to the critique on the incorporation of counter-cultural knowledge and art into the academia, the final part of this chapter will discuss and further problematize the locality and subjectivity of documenting and archiving the queer-feminist punk movement. I will do so in order to highlight accessibility as one major aspect of queer-feminist punk agendas.

2.1. “Gay Punk Comes Out With a Vengeance.”³ The Provisional Location of an Origin

The first documented usage of the name homocore (which later became replaced by queercore) was in the Toronto, Canada based zine *J.D.s*⁴, produced by the filmmakers,

³ Rathe, Adam. “Queer to the Core.” *Out Magazine*. Homepage. 12 April 2012. <www.out.com> (Capitalization added).

⁴ 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).

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 and drawings, comics about queers within punk scenes in Canada and the US, mixed with personal stories from queer punks, mockery 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. *J.D.s* developed an increasingly fierce criticism of mainstream culture and politics, gay as well as hardcore scenes throughout its existence. Issue 5 from 1989, for example, included a collection of angry fan letters by gays and lesbians to *Maximumrocknroll*,⁵ 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 created as a twofold intervention. It was a queering of macho-dominated punk rock scenes by contributing to them from a queer-feminist perspective, as well as a harsh critique of gay lifestyle-cultures through punk style and politics. Every issue included also a list of punk bands and titles, which helped queers to learn about and connect with each other. LaBruce, additionally, produced a homocore compilation tape, for which he recruited through *J.D.s*.⁶ 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.⁷ LaBruce, Jones 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” from 1989. The piece criticizes the gay scenes and punk scenes, as well as mainstream culture in a very blunt and sometime very offensive language.

⁵ *Maximumrocknroll* is a very popular, widely distributed, monthly fanzine from San Francisco, founded in 1982. Its production and distribution are very professionalized, covering not only bands and news from punk scenes all over the world, but also allowing for mail orders from almost every corner of the world. The magazine itself remains to be in the early punk style, although it is professionally printed and digitally edited, produced on thin newspaper-paper, contains of many different fonts and has no page numbers.

⁶ see e.g. *J.D.s* 5.

⁷ 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, or *Raging Hormones* (anarchist-lesbian zine) from Boulder, Colorado (see, *J.D.s* 5 47f.). Explicit references to *J.D.s* as inspiration to create a zine can further be found in San Francisco based *Fucktooth* (Screams 35), and *Outpunk* (1).

Soon after the introduction of the term homocore through the zine *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 got exposed to Jones' and LaBruces' zines and politics (Ciminelli and Knox 9). *Homocore's* first issue emerged the same year in the typical Xerox printed zine style. Until its final issue in 1991, even as the aesthetics of *homocore* got more professional—the zine was printed in newspaper style and format—its politics remained d.i.y., 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 Records label owner and musician Donna Dresch, or Lookout Records founder Larry Livermore. *Homocore* zine did not only cover and influence an impressive number of Bay Area, or West-coast queer-feminist punks, but 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-Pilot⁸ in 1990. The two editors of the zine *Homocore NYC* were well connected with queer-feminist punks all over the US 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.⁹ Moreover, they influenced generations of queer-feminist punks, for example the Skinjobs, whose name picks up a theme from God Is My Co-Pilot's song *Replicant*. A Los Angeles based early 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 herself a name with her d.i.y. zine *Fertile La Toyah Jackson Magazine*,¹⁰ before she entered more deeply into punk music and history with the zine *Yes*,

⁸ God Is My Co-Pilot probably named after the 1945 American propaganda film based on the autobiography of Robert Lee Scott, Jr., a United States Army Air Forces pilot during World War II.

⁹ 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 quite some zines.

¹⁰ Vaginal Crème Davis' punk zine *Fertile La Toyah Jackson Magazine* (1982-1991) actually predated Jones' and LaBruce's zine a couple of years. Drag performer Davis produced various zines during her long and

Ms. Davis and her various band projects. Starting her music career with the Afro Sisters around 1978, Davis has performed with Cholita! The Female Menudo (where she played with punk legend Alicia Armendariz aka Alice Bag) from 1980s on, as well as with the more recent Black Fag, who share their name with another queer-feminist band from the Bay Area. The band scholars have paid most attention to regarding the topic queercore was Pedro, Muriel and Esther.¹¹ A more detailed discussion of Pedro, Muriel and Esther, their particular usage of negative queer punk aesthetic and content with a focus on Vaginal Crème Davis will be provided in chapter Three. In the band Pedro, Muriel and Esther, Davis performed with another of Los Angeles' provocative musician and drag performance artists, Glen Meadmore. Country-punk Meadmore achieved media attention for his outrageous stage performances, which included becoming naked and "stick[ing] a chicken head up his butt" (Ciminelli and Knox 77).

Around the same time Meadmore and Davis appeared on punk stages, another fierce and furious punk band featuring queer themes, entered Los Angeles' punk scenes: Extra Fancy. Neither Extra Fancy's singer, Brian Grillo, who was the only gay member of the band, nor his band mates 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 independent label Spitshine Records and their concerts gathered 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 into Los Angeles' homophobic punk culture and beyond. Interestingly, Extra Fancy continued to be a strong influence within the hardcore community despite their explicitly queer lyrics. They managed to do so through "[t]he exaggerated masculinity of Brian Grillo's performing image" (ibid. 89). Schwandt analysed Grillo's performances of masculinity as

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

ongoing career including *Dowager* (1972-1975), *Crude* (1976-1980), *Shrimp* (1993) and *Yes, Ms. Davis* (1994), as well as *Sucker* (1995-1997).

¹¹ see Muñoz, *Dissidentification* 93-115.

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. (89)

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

One of the few queercore bands reaching audiences in the size of football stadiums were Pansy Division. Pansy Division's initiator Jon Ginoli was inspired by San Francisco's *Homocore* zine and by *J.D.s* to form a pop-punk band, according to his autobiography *Deflowered* (18). Ginoli and Chris Freeman started Pansy Division in 1991,¹² 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 by 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.¹³ Pansy Division's music, though clearly emphasizing fun over punk rage and anger, always had a political and educational purpose. Their lyrics foregrounded 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 though 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 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

¹² In 1996 drummer Luis Illades joined the band, followed by guitarist Joel Reader in 2004.

¹³ Green Day is a contemporary punk band from Berkeley, CA. They emerged within the Bay Area's radical political grassroots punk scenes and became world famous in 1994. Green Day's major label debut 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 webpage (9 May 2012. <<http://www.riaa.com/>>).

what Judith Jack Halberstam frames as queer archive (*In a Queer* 32-33). It exemplifies how interwoven aesthetics, sound, pleasure and politics are within queercore. Furthermore, it can be read as documentation of the impact this music with political content had on their protagonists, fans and sometimes opponents.

Equally important for the fast propagation of queer-feminist punk were 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 want to emphasize Tribe 8's key role within the queer-feminist punk movement at this point. 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 Breedlove¹⁴ and guitarist Leslie Mah, the only constant members of the band (which disbanded around 2005) were important figures of multiple queer-feminist scenes as well as 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 tight 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 additionally 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 lasting zine *Bamboo Girl* and fellow queer-feminist punk musician Selena Whang, she thematized issues of race-blindness and racism within queer-feminist scenes (Alcantara-Tan et. al). Additionally, Mah served role model for other bisexual and feminine punks within the general climate of rejecting femininity as well as heterosexual conducts.

¹⁴ 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).

One point of political consensus among all of these very diverse cultural products, as well as among the broader queer punk rock scene, was a disagreement with assimilatory gay and lesbian politics, as well as with 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) puts it. In an interview for the gay magazine *Oasis*, Bruce LaBruce 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, like the band Destroy,¹⁵ used a particularly extreme language, to reject existing socio-political systems and the culture that surrounds and supports them. The lyrics from Destroy’s 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 for punks’ anti-social style. The “Fuck you” rhetoric represents typical language conventions of punk, and “louder, faster,” speak to the musical style, the high energetic performance, the screamed vocals, emphasis on the drums etc.

2.1.1. “This Faggot Could Beat Your Fuckin’ Ass:”¹⁶ Queer-Feminist Punk Politics and Language Conventions

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 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

¹⁵ Destroy! was a punk band from Minneapolis from 1988 to 1984. Their song *Burn the Racist System Down* was first released on the 7” EP with the same title on Havoc Records.

¹⁶ Free, *Fight*. (Capitalization added).

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 and ensured that punk’s meaning of negativity lingers 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 had called it (Malott and Peña 26). THE signifier for the rejection of society and its norms was “No Future,” first uttered by the Sex Pistols in *God Save The Queen*, influencing 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-Pilot¹⁷ shows, queer-feminist punks sometimes use the same language as Edelman does in his famous book years before Edelman did himself. 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,” or “I kill kids” from their song *I Kill Kids* show remarkable similarities to Lee Edelman’s rhetoric in *No Future*. Indeed, his most famous expression from his book “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 further engaging with 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 punk movements in the late 1970s. According to Halberstam, the Sex Pistols “used the refrain ‘no future’ to reject a formulaic union of nation, monarchy, and fantasy” (Halberstam *The Politics* 824). Addressing Halberstam, Edelman argues that the Sex Pistols’ expression of negativity is, in fact, no negativity at all. Their phrase No Future, he argues, actually means “We’re the future” (Edelman, *Antagonism* 822). But while Edelman disqualifies this expression of “material political concerns as crude and

¹⁷ God Is My Co-Pilot’s productions, politics and will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

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 to this negative form a certain surplus value. The political background nurturing punk rock’s negativity in the late 1970s and early 1980s, specifically the US-American context, were the Cold War and neoconservatism. Under Ronald Reagan’s presidency, starting in 1979, governmental politics shifted from democratic, exhibiting human rights oriented tendencies to social neo-conservatism and economic neoliberalism¹⁸ (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 *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 went 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 in, offered a valve for anger and frustration.¹⁹ Queer non-conformists were inspired by punk ideas and ethics, aesthetics and performative formats. Especially the signification of cultural rejection and the anti-social 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

¹⁸ 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)

¹⁹ See Armendariz, *Violence* 7; Spitz and Mullen 48.

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 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, and, additionally, for riot grrrls were London's X-Ray-Spex.

To understand the connotation of negativity of punk rock, it is important to emphasize that punk rock musicians as well as historians of punk tend to see the emergence of punk aesthetic, style and cultural politics as a very loud and aggressive, anti-social statement by outsiders of society as such. 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).

The embrace of the outsider-status conveniently fits into queer activists' rejection of a politics of victimization, as well as 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, besides 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," 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 rules of good taste and self-references with (former) terms of abjection was a punk tactic

long before queer emerged on the scene. Such tactics, as well as the cultural production 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, as aesthetic and politics, communicates and how they relate to the term and concept of queerness. I will do so by briefly tracing punk's as well as queer's negativity back to both concepts' origins, 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 by queer theorists on punk rock and queerness, to locate my research within the broader theoretical field and explicate 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," Steve LaFreniere, member of Toronto's queer-feminist punk community remembered (Rathe 2). It can be argued that queer-feminist punks played a key role in defining the term queer within radical counter-cultures 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" (no pagination). Interestingly, Flanagin defined queer in tight relation to the term punk. One reason to define queer as such was to appeal to his primary readership: other punks. His amalgamation of the terms queer and punk, however, additionally goes back to the previously mentioned documentation of the 1980s' queer-feminist punk alliance, the *Maximumrocknroll* article by LaBruce and Jones in 1989. LaBruce and Jones introduced a dictionary entry for the word punk, emphasizing its former usage 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" (LaBruce and Jones, *Don't be*). No matter if their framing of punk's etymology is accurate or not, it emphasizes punk as derogatory term.

Moreover, their equation of queer with punk, as both “enemies of the state” is relevant, 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. Like 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 for the usage of the linguistic references between the word queer and punk can be found in the songs of the Canadian band Skinjobs.²⁰ I will analyze some of the 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 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 usages are ignored within the gay and lesbian subculture as well as in large parts of the new millennium’s queer movements. Moreover, parallel to the derogatory usage, queer is used as an affirmative identity category for LGBT by an increasing amount of people today. With passages like “We’re punk as fuck and fuck like punks” the Skinjobs, however, draw a line from the formerly negative usage of the word queer to those of the word punk, which was or still is used for instance to insult someone, like ‘gay’ in African American slang according to Tavia Nyong’o (*Punk’ed* 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 usage of anti-social behavior as an important

²⁰ 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.

intersection between queer and punk. Understanding that punks as well as queers chose terms as self-designation out of 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. Additionally, 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 in 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 discriminating meanings never fully vanished. They are still part of the term punk (or the term queer), even if not in the foreground. An example of these surplus meanings is the previously mentioned former usage of the 'derogatory' term punk in Afro-American slang to refer to a gay man. As Nyong'o explains:

The core meaning of getting [...] punked—from at least the late 1950s to the early 2000s—appears to be getting scapegoated within an erotic and masculinized economy of scarcity. [Male homosexuality] in this homophobic imagination, is the situation beyond one's experience, impossible to anticipate, and is associated with extreme forms of unfreedom like imprisonment, slavery and rape. (Nyong'o, *Punk'ed* 22)

When the Skinjobs sing "we fuck like punks," they refer to those meanings of punk.

Punks, like the Skinjobs, address the derogatory meanings of the terms punk and queer to provoke. Politics of provocation have 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 such potential to provoke is indicated the derogatory usage 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 in derogatory or hateful ways. Additionally, drawing on queer as a negative term, positions 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 focussed 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.).²¹ 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.²²

HIV/AIDS was first mentioned in the public press in 1981, classified as GRID, which meant “gay-related immune disease” (Brown and Perry 34). Medical institutions, experts as well as officials concerned about HIV/AIDS focused exclusively on gay men back then. The media happily adopted this sentiment of homosexual men as only carriers of the virus, orchestrating a world-wide panic around HIV/AIDS. These single-sided discourses through public media and institutions led to a stigmatization and pathologization of gay men in general in the public eye, no matter if deceased or not (Padilla 39). Furthermore, the “federal government inaction on that crisis dramatized the oppression of homosexuals” (ibid.). Newspapers and neo-conservatist 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’s²³ “notorious 1977 ‘Save Our Children’ campaign”²⁴ (Murphy et al. 1). Bryant became a “pop icon” (2) for her anti-gay propaganda and 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 et al. 2).

²¹ Cf. additionally Ritchie 263.

²² See Murphy et al. 1

²³ Anita Jane Bryant is a US-American pop-country or folk singer, and former Miss Oklahoma beauty pageant winner. She had multiple best-seller hits during the late 1950s and 1960s, and used her popularity and public attention for her anti-homosexuality propaganda.

²⁴ Bryant’s campaign “led to the repeal of a civil rights ordinance protecting gay and lesbian employees from discrimination in Dade County, Florida” (Murphy et al. 1) in the late 1970s.

Although Bryant may stand for many groups and politics during the late 1970s and early 1980s, I want to emphasize her specific rhetoric. It is exactly this rhetoric that queer activists, theorists as well as queer-feminist punks reacted against. Furthermore, as Murphy at al. suggest, Bryant's famous assertion "I know that homosexuals cannot biologically reproduce children, [...] therefore, they must recruit our children" (Bryant qtd. in Murphy at al. 2) epitomizes 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. Red 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 at al. 3).

The increasingly homophobic and xenophobic public discourse around HIV/AIDS, a fundamental disagreement with assimilationist lesbian and gay identity-politics, as well as 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.²⁵ "All of the horribleness of Toronto compelled us to react against it in every possible way. It pushed us to this breaking point" says J.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 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 group Gay Activist's Alliances (ACT UP) (Ritchie 262-263), or Queer Nation (Klapeer 30), queer-feminist punks appropriated the term queer as a provocation or intervention into gay and lesbian assimilationist politics as well as hardcore punk. Like queer theorists, they understood the concept of sexuality and gender and as socially constructed, and "activity performed" (Butler *Undoing Gender* 1), rather than naturally determined.²⁶ Accordingly, gender as well as sexuality were understood as fluid and changeable and as categories that

²⁵ See Ginoli; Jones and LaBruce, *J.D.s 1* to 5; also Jones, *Three Dollar*.

²⁶ See *Gender Trouble*; *Bodies That Matter*; *Undoing Gender*

cannot describe a person's entire identity. The derogatory term queer²⁷ seemed culturally defined enough to mark different non-normative sexualities, identities, sexes, and genders. Additionally, it seemed fluid enough to become redefined as critique, questioning 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, uncritically used queer as an "umbrella term" for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender (Ritchie 264). Queer-feminist punk communities tried to work against the usurpation and to hold on to a more provocative and radical notion of queerness.

Queer-feminist punks underline the flexibility in 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 punk's aesthetic forms: the shouting, the high volume, the relative speed, and the emphasis on the drums. This negativity is also reflected on the social or socio-political level in the form of criticism and rejection. Reflecting on all these factors in their combination—the multiple negative connotations of queerness within lyrics, the aggressiveness of the performance and sound, as well as the often unspecific or universal signification of punk as *anti-everything*, it can be argued that the label queer itself is an "anti-label" (Ritchie 270) to queer-feminist punk activists. The queer theorist Judith Jack Halberstam described this encounter with queer as an "Anti-Social Turn" (Halberstam, *The Anti-Social*). The notion of politics behind queer-feminist punk activism was not limited to institutions, or the public sphere. The appropriation of the negative notion of the term queer as well as punk come along with a general rejection of politics within any existing institutionalized social or political system, hierarchical structured organization, the nation, or the state.²⁸ Mark Dreher expressed in *J.D.s* 5, for example: "Homosexuals ARE enemies of the state!" (42). Queer-feminist punks like Dreher reject hegemonic power rigorously. Nevertheless, they also analyze this form of power closely from an intersectional perspective. Additionally, they understand their own entanglement within oppressive

²⁷ For the derogatory usage of "queer" during the 1980s and 1990s see Halperin (*The Normalization* 339); Shepard (*Bridging the divide* 511-527); Brontsema (*A Queer Revolution* 2)

²⁸ Cf. Dreher 42; Ritchie 270.

power structures. Accordingly, a single focus on sexuality for their politics and action was seen as counter-productive because it reproduced exclusions of (other) oppressed groups. Instead, queer-feminist punks focus on connections between homophobia, transphobia, sexism, racism, and discrimination on the grounds of categories like class. Examples of such 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, analysis of racism and homophobia among other issues.

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*²⁹ by the Skinjobs. In their song, the Skinjobs play with fears and myths about queers, singing: “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. (Mitch Fury qtd. in Ciminelli and Knox 89)

Fury’s comment emphasizes the negative connotations of the words queer and punk. In addition to the self-identification with the derogatory meaning of queer, the term queer in *Recruiting* is used as insult. The line “I’m queer, you’re queer / and your brother’s so queer / I saw him after the football game sniffing jock-straps!” exemplifies this insulting usage. It becomes additionally emphasized through the tone with which singer Mitch pronounces the word queer—lascivious, and moaned.

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. Through this very energetic song they draw once again a connection to early punk icons and the roots of punk when singing: “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

²⁹ The song was inspired by a poster of the Vancouver based lesbian activists’ group Lesbian Avengers that announced “Lesbian Avengers. We’re Recruiting” (Ciminelli and Knox 89).

“anyone can meddle” alludes to punk’s rejection of the rock’n’roll and glam rock style of the 1970s, which was seen and as being too spectacular, sophisticated and arty. Moreover, it also hints at the d.i.y.-character of punk. Once again, this passage also mentions sexuality and its shock-value used by punk. By referring to Mötley Crüe giving a 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 and therefore contains some of its elements or not. In their song *Peep Show Love*, they refer to the ‘shocking’ potential of sexuality once more by using the image of gay sexwork and ‘dirty language’ and relating this to punk. They sing “under the red neon Glory holes, buddy booths / punks unite as one Latex, and leather.” By connecting punk to sexwork, 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 gets emphasized, additionally, by the very fast tempo the song is performed in, 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 deviation from the social norm. Both terms—queer and punk—are understood as denotation of negativity, and their negative cultural meanings get stressed. Accordingly, the historic or contemporary usages of the labels as discrimination are referred to. Insodoing, queer punk activists really participate in what queer theorist Judith Jack Halberstam described as the “Anti-Social Turn in Queer Theory” (*The Anti-Social*). The appropriation of the negative notion of the term queer and punk go hand in hand with a general rejection of politics seeking inclusion into hegemonic social or political systems, like hegemonic organizations, nations, or states (see Ritchie 270). Against such civil rights oriented politics, queer punks share their definition of politics with the Second Wave Women’s Movement, as far as they understand all of life (or everyday life) life and every action as political. Queer-feminist punk music, style and their performance are understood as political activism is understood as “two fold. 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 *Maximumrocknroll*, explains (qtd. in Screams 36).

2.1.2. 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 queer was the reason for queer activists as well as queer 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). To use queer for queer activists was “a way of reminding [queers] how [they] are perceived by the rest of the world” (Kaplan 1992: 36). Taking up the term queer was a provocation: provocation towards assimilationist and identitarian gay and lesbian politics as well as activism against homophobia. The aim was not to win the support or approval by heteronormative hegemony, but rather a rejection of a civil rights model of political activity, fighting for equal rights for an oppressed minority (Duggan 16).

A decade after the initiation of an emancipatory usage of the term queer, anti-social queer theory academics and activism echoed this initial motive, taking up psychoanalytical 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 psychoanalytical approaches, Leo Bersani suggested in his book that sex in general and “homosex,” in particular, needs 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 which understands queer as a negative, anti-social term, beyond borders and disciplines, is Lee Edelman in his book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Edelman takes up Bersani’s psychoanalytical assertion that the sexual instinct is distinct from the sexual desire. The sexual instinct, accordingly, is a converging force towards the destruction of the self which is described as the death drive. Edelman argues that sexuality can only get ‘saved’ from its self-destructing and 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 in this logic can only signify the opposite of creation and reproduction, “the place of the social order’s death drive” (Edelman, *No* 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 its emergence on. Moreover, he ignores the existence of a relatively broad scene of queer punks today, performing 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 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:”³⁰ 1990s Queer Punk and The New Wave of Feminist Resistance

Although it can be argued that queercore and homocore were feminist politics from the emergence of the anti-patriarchy band Fifth Column and J.D.s on, 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 great detail. However, I want to briefly analyze the connections between riot grrrl and queercore at this point to contextualize the socio-political structures and micro-politics of the broader queer-feminist punk context during the 1990s. Moreover, the intersection between the two helps make

³⁰ “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)

sense of the specific punk politics at play and their usage of terminology and labels. Young female-identified punks came up with the term riot grrrl during the 1990s as reaction against the misogyny within hardcore punk scenes. Many self-identified riot grrrls, like Donna Dresch for example, additionally used the term queercore as a self-referent. This does not mean that the two terms were interchangeable, but the alternating usage 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, must be understood with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as “strategic essentialism,” “a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak, *Subaltern Studies* 214).

Musicians like Gina Young³¹ explain their usage of the labels queercore and riot grrrl as 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 against the usage of the particular term riot grrrl were national debates around abortion that provoked a new wave of feminist actions, as Sarah Marcus (*Girls* 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” (Marcus, *Girls* 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.³² They understood misogyny and homophobia as structurally created and made a connection between national politics and their 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

³¹ Gina Young, Kathi Ko, Tracy Dicktracy and Kelly Addison started the queer-feminist band Gina Young and the Bent in New York in 2002.

³² Cf. Kaia Wilson qtd. in Ciminelli and Knox 182. Wilson, who palyed 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.

could articulate their dissatisfaction (Marcus, *Girls* 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's³³ 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 for queer-feminist punk rock in general. Dresch was very significant for the emergence and especially the distribution of the term queercore as well as riot grrrl in San Francisco and later 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 Records* produced bands like Heavens to Betsy, Excuse Seventeen, and The Need, who became popular as riot grrrls. Additionally, *Chainsaw* produced records by bands like Sleater-Kinney or 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 topics like coming out, lesbian relationships, or societal homophobia. Dresch also played in J.B. Jones' queer-feminist bands 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

³³ 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 University of California at San Diego.

like Olympia, WA or Berkeley, CA.³⁴ Moreover, within this widespread network of politically interested punks, other outraged people, like LaBruce and Jones in Canada found punks willing to engage into 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 regulation, especially in case of mail orders on between Canada and the US, complicated these distributions as numerous issues of *Homocore*'s, and *J.D.s*' as well as autobiographical writings report.³⁵ The increase of public interest in riot grrrl feminism, furthermore, drew attention to the possibilities of d.i.y. 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 did not only emerge at the same spaces but actually were mostly one and the same movement. 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 band-mate Donna Dresch, for example, was not only playing in queercore bands and releasing riot grrrl albums, but additionally worked with Jon Ginoli from Pansy Division at the record store Rough Trade (Ginoli 17). Ginoli's band mate 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 best connected person until 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 of zines like *Outpunk* at that time to connect 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), specifically 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 by running *Goteblüd*, a vintage and back issue zine archive in San

³⁴ See Ginoli, *Deflowered*; Ciminelli and Knox, *Homocore*; Marcus, *Girls*.

³⁵ See Ginoli, *Deflowered*

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 by running his record label *Outpunk*. *Outpunk* 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.* that released various queer musicians from dance, rock, and electronic, to punk and homo-hop³⁶ (Ciminelli and Knox 16). He continues to release independent publications, the most recent one being a vinyl 7" 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, zesters, 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 enriches San Francisco's queer-feminist punk scenes with his zine project *Holy Titclamps* from May 1989 till today. Another Bay Area influence were 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, who 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).

³⁶ Homo-hop: queer hip-hop.

2.3. “For Once, We Will Have The Final Say, [...] cause They Know We’re Here to Stay.”³⁷ The Queer-Feminist Punk Explosion

SPEW: the Queer Punk Convention was crucial for the connection of far flung queer-feminist punk scenes all over the US and Canada. The first *SPEW* was organized at Chicago’s Randolph Street Gallery in 1991. It displayed zines and merchandise, videos and performances. Most of the major queer punk zines were represented, from *J.D.s*, to *Bimbox*, or *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* followed soon all over the US and beyond. In 1994, Olympia, WA hosted the first *Yoyo A Go Go Festival* at the Capitol Theatre, followed by similar events 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. Performers included Sleater-Kinney, Tribe 8, Sta-Prest, The Need, Third Sex, and Vaginal Crème Davis (Larry-bob).³⁸

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, were other

³⁷ This subtitle are lyrics from the Gossip song *Pop Goes the World* released on their album *Music for Men* in 2009, by Columbia records. (Capitalization added).

³⁸ Other performers were The Vegas Beat, Behead the Prophet No Lord Shall Live, Dirt Bike Gang, Dyke Van Dick, Cypher in the Snow, The Potatomen (Larry-bob).

examples of smaller, but no less important events supporting queer-feminist punk acts. Additionally, 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, a vibrating Queer Punk Collective emerged in Vancouver. The lively local scene included the Skinjobs, as well as Kim Kinakin's zine *Faggo* collaborated with US based musicians like the members of Pansy Division and Bruce LaBruce.³⁹

Joanna Brown and Mark Freitas organized *Homocore Chicago*, an all-age concert night from 1992 to 1997.⁴⁰ A very active queercore band from Chicago was Three Dollar Bill.⁴¹ The band appears in Scott Berry's documentary movie *Gay Shame '98* and contributed the soundtrack of the 2005 film *Hellbent*, along 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 "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, the Homewreckers and connects Brooklyn's queer-feminist punks with the Manhattan crowd. Additionally, the club also gathers quite an impressive amount of people from different queer-feminist punk chapters and generations, hosting the latest riot grrrl and Rock Camp for Girls' offspring as well as some of the first queercore musicians like Luis from Pansy Division and his new band the French Letter, or the band Goonsquad, featuring Miss Guy. New York's queer-feminist

³⁹ 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.

⁴⁰ The two of them briefly revitalized Homocore Chicago to benefit LadyFest Midwest in May 2011.

⁴¹ Three Dollar Bill was founded by Jane Danger and Chris Piss in 1998. Their 2005 recording, *Parody of Pleasure*, reached public attention beyond the gay press, when it was nominated for the 2006 Out Music Awards (Three Dollar Bill).

punks uphold sex positive politics, continuing to reject institutional as well as religious ideologies and the promotion of abstinence up to the present. 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 towards HIV/AIDS among the participants of *Rock'n'Roll Fag Bar*, Johnson started to raise awareness about the danger of infection, and 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 band mate Mary Feaster recalls.⁴² His own band the Velvet Mafia was a punky glam-rock assemble with provocatively, unapologetic, queer and very humorous lyrics. Johnson, who always performed as Drag Queen, was extremely well connected throughout New York's Drag, music, and queer scenes and influenced as well as supported an impressive number of queer performers. Another queer artist who expressed his anger about HIV/AIDS through fast, loud, and edgy music was Scott Free. Although his style was influenced by multiple different music genres, the rage his music expressed and his lyrics were very punk. Furthermore, Free continues to support the queercore movement through curating and hosting the performance series *Homolatte* in Chicago since the year 2000 (Free, *Homolatte*).

Far from the coastal queercore centers the band Fagatron performed in Lincoln, NE and in Denton, TX, the lesbian bar 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* provided local and traveling bands 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 till around 2006.⁴³

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*

⁴² 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 counter-cultures equally. Homocorps intentionally featured a range of queer (and not queer) artists, who were rejected by misogyny and homophobia, from mainstream and independent labels (Downey 25).

⁴³ Lipkandy songs are featured on the *Agitprop!* compilation *Stand Up and Fucking Fight for It: Queers in Hardcore and Punk* from 2001, among others (Lipkandy).

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 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:"⁴⁴ Queer-Feminist Punk Recurrences after 2000

Towards the end of the 1990s, some of queercore's most important figures seemed to lose 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 general in an interview in the year 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 counter-cultures (qtd. in Simon). "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 the gay rights movement had made since the late 1970s, and the socio-political climate of the year 2000, which seemed more tolerant than earlier decades, Bruce continued

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 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 Simon)

⁴⁴ This subtitle is a line from the song *Graffiti Tent* by the band My Parade. (Capitalization added).

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

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 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 played among the more than 40 other bands at the festival (Homo A Go Go).⁴⁵

Another queer-feminist d.i.y. festival was *Scutterfest*, a week-long lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth artists 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 previous festival in 2002 and 2003. It was a huge event that united queer-feminist punks of various generations and politics. In 2002 performing bands were Pansy Division, Best Revenge, Brian Grillo, and Allen Bleyle, among others.⁴⁶

In Seattle, WA queer-feminist musicians played at the monthly concert series *Team Bent* and the *Bent Festival* provided queer counter-culture space throughout the Pride Parade Weekend in 2002 and 2003 (Maerz). From 2003 on Seattle’s Bend-It Collective has been organizing a non-corporate, queer-feminist punk spirited d.i.y. art festival during the Seattle Pride Parade (Bend-It). In spring 2004 the New York City-based band manager and music promoter Anna Jacobson-Leong created the *Queercore Blitz Tour* (Ciminelli

⁴⁵ Among the 40 bands were Athens Boys Choir, as well as Berkeley local Hunx and His Punx.

⁴⁶ *Scutterfest* additionally 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, 14yrd old Girls (Scutterfest).

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, including the Gossip. The Gossip⁴⁷ 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 a part of the multi-artist *True Colors Tour* which traveled through fifteen cities in the US and Canada.⁴⁸ Ironically, the tour was not only corporately sponsored by the Logo channel, but its profits went to the Human Rights Campaign, a campaign many queer-feminist punks reject because of their single-issued focus on gay marriage. Despite their participation in projects that queer-feminist punks reject for 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 LeTigre were often harshly criticized for selling out when cooperating with mainstream labels, the Gossip continue to be praised for their community and queer oriented lyrics, as well as for Beth Dittos' fat positive activism.⁴⁹ Other bands forming around 2000 were the aforementioned 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 emphasizes that touring and performing along other out queer musicians was not only about self empowerment and representation, it was also a way of creating a safe place that was free from homophobic

⁴⁷ 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, played at Ladyfest in Olympia in August 2000 and toured with Sleater-Kinney. In 2003, Kathy Mendonca left the band and was exchanged by Hannah Blilie.

⁴⁸ The tour was headlined by Cyndi Lauper and included many world-stars like Debbie Harry and Rufus Wainwright.

⁴⁹ Queer-feminist punk musician and comic artists Cristy Road, for e.g. emphasized Beth Ditto as a major role model for the queer-feminist punk scene in an Interview with the author, in March 2012.

harassment. Moreover, on tour, musicians could develop their music skills by teaching each other in a d.i.y. style, exchange political ideas and views and communicate them to their audience. After many years of touring and experiencing different kinds of audiences, Young resumed 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 socio-political and cultural discourses and topics, beyond homophobia and misogyny. Queer-feminist punks of color in particular intervened into the predominantly white queer punk and riot grrrl scenes with their analysis of the xenophobic and racist socio-political climate after 11 September 2001, as well as their critique on queer-feminist punk scenes itself.

2.5. “Punk may Not Be Dead, but It Is Queer ...:”⁵⁰ Intersectional Approaches in Contemporary Queer-Feminist Punk Rock

Queer-feminist activists like Nia King, or 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, or 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 Whang as well as Lala Endara’s zines. In her zine *Chop Suey Spex* from 1997, Endara chronicles her experiences of racism, sexism, and homophobia and the exploitation of Asian culture in mainstream society and culture, as well as within the punk counter-culture environments

⁵⁰ Chistian Vargas qtd. in Queer Control Records (capitalization added).

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 her 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 a decolonial politics within queer-feminist punk, as I will show in chapter five. Moreover, it is also a remarkable engagement with national politics, socio-political historic events⁵¹ in relation to cultural, social, economic and structural oppression of people of color.

Although anti-racist and decolonizing activism within queer-feminist punk will be discussed in great detail in chapter five, it is important to note at this point that cultural products as well as political activism like Alcantara-Tan's or Nguyen's did not only influence the scenes of their time but had a lasting impact on later generations of queer-feminist punks. They inspired people like Osa Atoe to produce not only her zine and blog *Shotgun Seamstress*, but to create a queer-feminist punks of color scene in New Orleans and a US-wide network which connects like-minded punks and d.i.y. 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 Washington, 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 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, or schools in punk politics and punk scenes' social dynamics. 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,

⁵¹ 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.

however, after Hurricane Katrina. The Hurricane affected especially 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, revitalizing or creating the punk scene, which was now 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 those new white leftist scenes and the native people of color groups and initiatives. 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*) and people of color politics, she intervenes into 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, or the *People of Color Zine Project* in Brooklyn, New York.

Providing support and an alternative perspective for non-conformist thinkers is and was always as important an aim of queer-feminist punk rock as challenging society with 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 late-2000s recession (Atoe in *Maximumrocknroll* Homepage), starting in December 2007 and continuing until today, Barack Obama’s 2009 election (Atoe, *Shotgun Seamstress* 3), or the terrorist attacks on the 11 September 2001 (Alcantara-Tan, *Bamboo Girl 10* and *Bamboo Girl Blog*) and the processes of ideological and social transformation following them. An equally important social critic and queer-feminist punk influence was and still is singer and writer Martin Sorrondeguy. Sorrondeguy who used to be 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 antiracist initiatives. His queercore band, Limp Wrist, started performing in 1998, and he currently works for

Maximumrocknroll and has collaborated with musicians like Alicia Armendariz⁵² and Matt Wobensmith.

These political efforts are continued by many non-white queer-feminist punks through contemporary bands like Seattle's NeighTrain, Stage Bitten, My Parade, Portland's New Blood, or New York's Inner Princess, The Homewreckers, and Royal Pink. Some other queer-feminist queer punks of color bands that similarly challenge their surroundings with their stage presence and political lyrics are the Negro Hippies from New Orleans, Mariam Bastani's Chicago-based band Condenada or Brontez Purnell's Former Lovers as well as Alabaster Choad in Oakland, or Hey, Girl! from San Francisco. Hey Girl!'s drummer also produces a zine called *Punk Is Ladies* in Berkeley, CA.⁵³ A festival especially dedicated to critical whiteness, anti-racism and decolonization within queer-feminist punk was B.A.B.E., the "*Breaking Assumptions and Barriers to Equality Fest*" (Irwin, B.A.B.E.) in Portland in 2007.

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,⁵⁴ a women and transgender-only group from Brooklyn, New York. Through their d.i.y. feminist cultural activism, For The Birds aims to empower radical women. For The Birds member Lauren Denitzio emphasized 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 Rio⁵⁵ in particular, did not offer many possibilities for girls. Since their founding around 2004 one major aspect of their work was 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, featuring queer-feminist bands, arts, crafts, discussion groups and presentations. During

⁵² 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 chapter four and six in detail.

⁵³ Other contemporary queer-feminist punk of color bands are the Magic Johnson from Portland, Forever 21 from Olympia, WA, Mika Miko in Los Angeles, Black Rainbow and Eggs on Legs from San Francisco, Abe Vigoda from LA, Hornet Leg from Portland, Oregon, and Talbot Tagora from Seattle, need to be mentioned as well.

⁵⁴ An analysis of For the Bird's feminist politics, especially their connection to riot grrrl politics will be provided in chapter five.

⁵⁵ 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 community center ever since. In 1996 the city of New York donated the building to its occupiers.

the year they also host many punk shows in d.i.y. spaces like *The Loft* or the *Silent Barn* in Brooklyn, 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.⁵⁶

2.6. “Don’t Put Me In a Box. I’ll Only Crush It.”⁵⁷ Writing and Archiving a Movement

Giving an overview of the counter-cultural movement of queer-feminist punk throughout history is very challenging. The artists, writers and musicians identifying 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 between counter-cultural spaces, cities and states. An overview of queer-feminist punk rock, punk politics and their practitioners, accordingly, can only be fragmented and biased through the researcher’s interests and world views.

However, I want to argue that these challenges were met through the production of mostly whitewashed, middle-class, ableist and often binary gendered documentations of queer-feminist punk. I want to reflect critically on my own position as archivist, arranging and analyzing my material throughout this entire book, to avoid the oblivion of non-white, anti-racist, decolonial, working and underclass, gender-queer, punk politics and protagonists. I will reflect on exclusions and bias 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 will give a brief introduction of some important popular as well as scholarly documentations of queer-feminist punk, for example *Homocore* by David Ciminelli and Ken Knox. Second, I will introduce and problematize some archive collections, for example the recently opened *Riot Grrrl Collection* at New

⁵⁶ 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 women fronted band projects from the East Cost (Variale, 15 March 2010).

⁵⁷ This subheading is a quote from the Blog *Crunk Feminist Collective*, an online platform for feminists of color to discuss and raise consciousness (“[Sigh]...I am so tired.” *The Crunk Feminist Collective*. Home page. 1 April 2010. 30 September 2011. <<http://crunkfeministcollective.wordpress.com/>>). (Capitalizing added.)

York University. Additionally, I want to shift the focus from the topic of representation—who gets subsumed and analyzed under the 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 processes of archiving, like the work of Judith Jack Halberstam (*In A Queer; 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 that attempts to document the movement, I present some counter-cultural writings, documentations and archives. I argue that counter-cultural 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, counter-cultural 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.”⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ More recently, professional writers have started publishing historical review books, like Sarah 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*, or Stephen Duncombe’s and Maxwell Tremblay’s anthology *White Riot*. Additionally, queer-feminist productions became incorporated into university libraries like New York

⁵⁸ 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.)

⁵⁹ See e.g. Marcus, *Girls* 97 and 160.

University or 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 counter-culture 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, ethnic, race and queerness into US universities since the 1970s 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, journalists started publishing articles and books, documenting and analyzing riot grrrl and queercore around 1993. Such journalistic work, like Ciminelli’s and Knox’s first attempt to write a comprehensive overview called *Homocore*, reproduced whitewashed histories of middle-class existences and cultural productions, ignoring almost all non-white, working class identified politics and personae. Sarah Marcus’s recent historic overview of riot grrrl’s emergence, *Girls to the Front*, is

less ignorant to 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 although it rightly thematizes the whiteness of some riot grrrl circles, it ignores the participation of women of color in other places to the largest extent. 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 latter 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,⁶⁰ well-established scholars like Halberstam (*In A Queer Time and Place*), Muñoz (*Disidentification*) and Angela McRobby 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 many university departments within the humanities and social sciences around the world. Interestingly, although queercore, homocore and other forms of queer-feminist punk entered the universities and scholarly discourses through this trend, they rarely ever were 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 focusses 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 into such discourses. Thus, more and more academic writings try to intervene into 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 for academic work on race, gender and queer within punk is Stephen Duncombe's 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 to give a "definitive" study of punk's racial politics and to offer an "ultimate collection on punk and race," on the back cover of the book is highly problematic. Moreover, although they present an important collection of criticism on white punk cultures, they mostly ignore queer-feminist punk

⁶⁰ E.g. Schwandt, *The Erotics*; Ritchie, *Principles*; Wilson, *The Galaxy*.

bands, scenes and their cultural productions by punks of color within the US as punk musicians and writers like Gordan Nikpour from Maximumrocknroll have emphasized.

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

Recently, Columbia University and New York University both established elaborate collections of queer-feminist cultural productions within their libraries. Interestingly, both universities silenced the materials' queerness and queer embodiment through the titles of their collections. Although, their collections of queer-feminist punk material do frequently include especially 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" (Freedman, 53). All of these zines are feminist zines, many queer-feminist punk zines, including 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 the 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 appropriate member of academia, student or researcher is even more relevant concerning Fales Library at New York University, which opened its *Riot Grrrl Collection* in fall 2010. The collection does not only host zines, but assembles 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 or 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 to Fales. A visit to Fales Library requires an official invitation by a sponsoring faculty member of the New York University and an appointment for every single visit at the collection. The zines and documents must always be read in sight 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 the typical d.i.y. style, on a book rest. Thus, what seems to be of concern in the latter two cases are not only the required procedures of encountering the material, which indeed are oppositional to punk styles and require an elaborate degree of knowledge of academic cultural rituals and norms. The most concerning issue about the inclusion of queer-feminist punk material into private university libraries is that these university libraries—and accordingly their archives—limit entrance to certain visitors and excludes multiple persons, in accordance with very elitist, normative mainstream standards. People without valid identification, university affiliation or visitors' allowance, 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 through their explicit boundaries, especially regarding 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 world wide 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 *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*⁶¹—guaranteed that some queer-feminist performances and politics remained approachable beyond oral history. Furthermore, starting with *J.D.s*, zines like *Homocore*

⁶¹ Cf. *From the Back of the Room*. Documentary by Amy Oden. DVD. 2011, Video; and *Don't Need You: The Herstory of Riot Grrrl*. DVD. Directed by Kerri Koch. Urban Cowgirl Productions 2006, Video.

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.

Additionally, many queer-feminist punks started publishing their autobiographies during the last years. The first was Lynn Breedlove's *Godspeed*, followed by Michelle Tea's *Valencia*, or 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 2012⁶² and Sleater-Kinney and Wild Flag member Carrie Brownstein was recently reported by *The New York Times* to be currently working on a memoir (Bosman).

Books like *Godspeed*, *The Creamsickle*, or *Deflowered* give "complex record[s] of queer activity," (*In a Queer* 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 or readership through their language conventions. In other words, such histories are understandable to a great extent of English speakers, in contrast to academic writings, which are only understandable for a limited educated minority. Through their language, narratives and poetic style, such historic writings intervene into 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 1990s queer-feminist punk culture, is an eclectic bricolage of letters, handwritings, drawings, newspaper articles, photos, as well as later reflections. Additionally, 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 easy 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 *Uncle Phranc* or Le Tigre in *Hot Topic* "create an eclectic encyclopedia of queer cultural production" (*In a Queer* 170), as Judith Jack Halberstam notes. *Uncle Phranc*

⁶² Ditto, Beth. *Coal to Diamonds: A Memoir*. Spiegel and Grau, New York 2012.

refers to the queer punk musician Susan Gottlieb, a.k.a. Phranc, who played in the early 1980s band Nervous Gender and the feminist all-girl band Castration Squad, together with Alicia Armendariz. Le Tigre's *Hot Topic* calls on feminists: "don't stop" their political interventions. They give an exhaustive list of past and contemporary feminist thinkers including the queer-feminist punk bands The Butchies, Sleater-Kinney, Vaginal Crème Davis or 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 these zine libraries is located in the community house project ABC No Rio in New York. A similarly grassroots example is Matt Wobensmith's d.i.y. 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 their 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 counter-cultural productions. Moreover, entrance to those just mentioned grassroots zine archives is not bound to economic or class factors. Thus, access to the archives requires only an already existing knowledge about punk culture, concretely 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 easy accessible queer-feminist punk historiographies are the aforementioned *Shotgun Seamstress* blog, *Rock and the Single Girl*, *Soul Ponies: A home for lost and wayward queercore & riot grrrl music*, *Total Trash: girl and queer music*, or the *International Girl Gang Underground* zine project. 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 audience 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, providing 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 d.i.y. 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. 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,” according to the mission statement.

2.6. 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 socio-political and cultural agendas, as well as strategies. Two of those agendas could be identified as rejection of homophobia and misogyny. However, queer-feminist punk cannot be reduced to a critique on homophobia and misogyny. By highlighting especially critical voices from queer-feminist punks of color, I was able to show that queer-feminist punk critique targets social and political oppression from an intersectional perspective. Moreover, through references to anti-racist and people of color politics, as well as anti-ableism politics, the common view of queer-feminist punk culture as whitewashed, self-celebratory, middle-class, and ableist was complicated and hopefully irritated.

This chapter followed queer-feminist punk politics throughout 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 at least around 1985 on to the present. The continuation of the specific aims 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 every other movement, queer-feminist punk changed over time, and shows different features in different places and scenes. However, a significant

commonality between all queer-feminist punk chapters, productions and politics is the usage of queer as anti-social. Moreover, I argue that the choice politically interested individuals made for the specific form of punk rock was motivated by punk's signification through negativity. I explain the specific punk negativity by tracing back queer-feminist punk politics to some origins of punk in the 1970s. The negativity of punk is signified through the usage of anti-social verbal expression, like the usage of derogatory terms, and the rejection of social norms. This negativity on the level of verbal meanings becomes mirrored or complemented through the music, as well as sound. The usage of fast, mostly simple and loud music, as well as the emphasis on the drums, need to be understood as anti-social, and moreover as political action or form. Such punk negativity becomes aligned with anti-social queerness within queer-feminist punk rock. Through a brief discussion of some analytical work by queer theory scholars, I have explained why punks chose queer negativity for their political activism. Moreover, a reference to the Anti-Social Turn within queer theory suggests that queer-feminist punk rock produced anti-social queer theory even before the Anti-Social Turn was introduced to the academy.

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

Another important aspect of queer-feminist punk politics is its accessibility. This topic is reflected through queer-feminist punk's preference for d.i.y. methods, like the production of self-published zines as well as musical style. Moreover, it is reflected through queer-feminist punk's attempts to not only preserve their own history, but also make these historical records as easily accessible as possible. The artistic forms of queer-feminist punk documentations vary from zines to films, autobiographic books to lyrics and online blogs. Additionally such efforts have been supported by grassroots zine libraries and online archives. By including a critical discussion about the accessibility of academic and other institutionalized forms of the documentation of queer-feminist punk, I have problematized the strategies and attempts to safeguard counter-cultural productions for future generations. Finally, in contrasting such institutionalized documentations with grassroots initiatives I was able to show the specific queer-feminist d.i.y. politics of queer-feminist punk rock.

3. “We’re punk as fuck and fuck like punks:”¹ Punk Rock, Queerness, and the Death Drive

A homosexual
is a criminal
I’m a sociopath, a pathological liar
Bring your children near me
I’ll make them walk through the fire²

These lyrics from the song “Homosexual Is Criminal” offer a very clear idea of how queer punk musicians address queer sexuality and desire as negativity. The performance artist Vaginal Crème Davis created the song and performed it with her queercore band Pedro, Muriel and Esther. It was released on the CD *The White to Be Angry* in 1998.

Queer-feminist punk rock, here exemplified by the lyrics from Pedro, Muriel and Esther, includes representations of queerness, queer sexuality, desire, and bodies. Such representations are usually negative; they carry anti-social, violent or irritating meanings and connotations. I will prove my argument that queer-feminist punk musicians comment on and produce meanings of queerness as anti-social through a close reading of some representative queer-feminist punk lyrics. The central question this chapter attempts to answer is why queer-feminist punks represent queerness, queer sexuality, desire and bodies as negativities. What are the aims of queer-feminist punk rock? The hypothesis behind this question is that queer-feminist punk rock aims at something. This something is an irritation or violation, or at least a critique of normative systems and hegemonic societies. Additionally, it aims at creating a form of collectivity or community, in the moment of a concert, while listening, and beyond. 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 analyze forms of queer-feminist punk rock, their content, strategies, sociality and politics, a close look at representations of queerness, queer sexuality and desire needs to be taken. Subsequently, these representations will be read against contemporary

¹ The line “We’re punk as fuck and fuck like punks” is from the song Burn your Rainbow from the band Skinjobs. It was released on the album Burn your Rainbow in 2002.

² Pedro, Muriel and Ester. “Homosexual Is Criminal” qtd. in Muñoz, *Disidentification* 107. Cf. Pedro, Muriel and Ester. “Homosexual Is Criminal.” *The White to Be Angry*. Spectra Sonic Records (1998).

psychoanalytically informed queer theories, as well as against or along other philosophical works. I will analyze textual representations of song lyrics and other forms of writing and situate them in the social contexts they have emerged and circulate in. I establish the contours of the political and social discourses of queer-feminist punk by embedding them within the realm of the social. My decision to use accounts within queer theory that follow a psychoanalytical, 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 has put it. Moreover, especially those accounts can help to understand the frequent usage of negativity in representations of queer desire and sexuality. 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).

What constitutes and structures queerness as a meaningful term according to Lee Edelman is not its relation to queer desire but something that psychoanalytical theorists following 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 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” (Evens 98). *Jouissance* flees these social relations, their rules and norms. It also exceeds the relation to the object, no matter if the object is another person, a fetishistic object, a thing, or even the imagination of an object. If queerness is understood as 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 the ego.

A psychoanalytical concept of sexuality and sexual desire, especially as represented in Edelman’s notion of queerness, seems an interesting starting point to analyze punk’s usage

of queerness as negativity,³ 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 pit⁴—in reference to sexuality. The usefulness of Edelman’s concept reaches its limit, however, at exactly that point where punk’s negativity becomes a communal political effort, rather than the singular expression and pleasure of an individual. One of the theoretical questions this chapter tries to answer is, therefore, if it is legitimate to understand queerness within queer-feminist punk as *jouissance* and if 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 read such queerness/*jouissance* as something that can be shared, as scholars like Elizabeth Povinelli suggest? Or, if it 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. Additionally, it can 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 to create social bonds as well as political alliances. To put this differently, anti-social meanings are not contradictory to aspects of punk rock that involve social responsibility

³ It is necessary to address two points in Edelman’s theory that seem problematic from a feminist perspective. First, Edelman builds his theory on a psychoanalytical account of sexuality and sexual desire, rooted in a highly patriarchal discourse, which understands women always fundamentally subordinate to men – symbolically as well as in their psychology. Accordingly, the usage of Edelman’s work within queer-feminist subcultures as well as queer-feminist theoretical approaches can be problematic. Related to this point it needs to be understood, that his writing seems to understand queerness only bound to male sexuality, but not to female or any other sexuality. The female body doesn’t come up in his considerations. Secondly, Edelman’s exclusive consideration on sexuality does not consider factors like race, class, gender or able-bodiedness as intersecting to form queerness as negativity.

⁴ 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.

and community, as well as 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 its physical and emotional qualities, which entail forms of negativity, enable individuals to connect with each other, to enjoy each other and create or at least collectively imagine a social sphere more appropriate to their needs and desires, partly through this negativity. But how are such social bonds, produced through a shared drive, carried by 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 or Slavoj Žižek see the political in jouissance in “its nonrelationship to all normative social orderings” (Povinelli, *The Part* 289). Accordingly, 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 desire. Taking the psychoanalytical concept of desire as the twofold desire of a subject for autonomy as well as recognition (cf. Butler, *Undoing* 131-151) into account, can help elucidate the multifarious meanings queer-feminist punk rock carries 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, and jouissance, which is anti-relational and queer, needs to be questioned, when considering queer-feminist punk's usage of queerness as negativity to relate, through jouissance (or a disposition in the means 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. Instead of understanding the desire for recognition or sociality and jouissance as two internecine forces, it seems appropriate to suggest an understanding of queerness and jouissance as always coappearing with desire in a violent relationship. Considering punk aesthetic, the metaphor of a battlefield could be an appropriate one for the different drives, desires, meanings and aims structuring queer-feminist punk rock, where it is often hard to differentiate between battling parties. Moreover, punk music and performances are on every level ambivalent: 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, not even to one set of meanings. While theorists like Lee Edelman with their notion of queerness as anti-futurity foreclose additional coexisting significations, a reference to other contemporary scholars like Judith Jack Halberstam, or Elizabeth Povinelli helps to make clear queerness within queer-feminist punk as schizophrenic, multifarious and only temporary fixed. Queerness, as will be shown, is anti-social and irritating as well as creative or creating, aiming at 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 appearing through 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 of 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 counter-cultures. This needs to be thought in relation to the irritating effects the conjunction of desire for recognition and jouissance produce. An appropriate theory to imagine a non-normative version of community and sociality is offered by José Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia*.

Considering Muñoz’ account of queer utopianism, which might seem contradictory to the anti-social Lacanian approach to sexuality, besides offering the possibility to think politics, future and community differently, intends to be 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 becomes signified and uttered in relation to and addressing hegemonic discourses, but not necessarily or exclusively. Additionally, 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 to demand to be heard by the dominant, in the context of a political action, but to signify difference from the dominant and embrace social exclusion as desirable. One meaning of queerness, then, might be negativity, but paradoxically this negativity might be the crucial factor for relationality, which can be understood as emancipatory, and enabling, evoking visions of a (brighter) future. This future, accordingly, 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 become overcome to become understood—nor is it just an unconsciously produced inconsequence of this particular counter-culture. In fact, it is a political strategy, the “anarchy of signification” as Judith Jack Halberstam (*The Anti-Social* 142) has framed it, that has a long history within queer activism, and becomes very explicit in queer-feminist punk environments. Before further engaging in the theoretical questions queer-feminist punk raises, I will take a closer look at queerness, queer desire and bodies as represented in queer-feminist punk rock.

3.1. 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* from the band Agatha. This song addresses in a relatively unencrypted way some of the politics behind the usage 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 usage 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 the drums. Although “fuck” is clearly used as an insult, Agatha additionally hold on to the meaning of “fuck” as sexual activity, which is signaled through lines like “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 following, that go:

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” makes a connection 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 the establishing of 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 accordingly lesbian and gay activism—can be limited to individual sexual freedom. Additionally, the lines “I wanna sing about liberation but I can’t / do that without talking about your lips” seems to criticize gay and lesbian liberation politics for their single issued politics and focus on exclusively sexuality. Agatha, contrary to gay rights groups, are calling for a more radical liberation movement, that is not only intersectional in its approaches and analysis, but also more rigorous in its rejection of the socio-political 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, they represent anti-social queerness on stage to reject heteronormativity within and outside punk rock’s macho-dominated scenes. Partly, these representations of negativity were meant to carve out a place for non-normative desires or bodies. Partly, 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 representational, 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 consistently, 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 the fluid and ambivalent

understanding of queer is Craig Flanagin's definition of term queer 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" (*Tendencies* 8). Despite or in addition to the emphasis on such fluidity, queer punk rock reverts to pejorative meaning of queer. Moreover, they understand queer as oppositional to society or anti-social and stress this "anarchic character to the word queer" (Ritchie 270). Hence, their usage 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" (Halberstam, *The Anti-Social*) as early as 1985.⁵ Hence, it seems appropriate to read anti-social queer punk rock against anti-social queer theory, especially Lee Edelman's work. A necessary move 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. Edelman argued, in response to Halberstam's suggestion of valuing punk's negativity as instantiations of his

⁵ G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce published their first edition of J.D. approximately in 1985 and introduced queer negativity to the broader punk community, as already described in detail in chapter two.

(unrealizable) rejection of futurity, 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 have no potential at all, because it “does not [...] dissent from reproductive futurism” (ibid.). He in contrast 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. But—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,⁶ where spurious 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 at 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 emphasize 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. Such an anti-social queer-feminist punk theory, furthermore, might be better equipped to acknowledge differences among queers and experiences—something the anti-relational queer theory, like that which Edelman proposes, fails to address adequately (cf. Muñoz, *Forum* 825).

⁶ Neologism: Future and Church

Queer-feminist punks refer to the negative place of queerness within the symbolic order, which Edelman so pointedly describes and the violence 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 display it in their lyrics. By taking on this negative, anti-social meaning in the term queer to signify their own cultural location, queer-feminist punks reject futurity in Edelman's terms. Furthermore, performing their anti-social lyrics on stage sometimes comes very close to what Edelman, in reference to Lacan termed *jouissance*. But although these lyrics and performances are violent and self-destructive, appropriating and displaying 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 account among contemporary queer punk activists. As already mentioned, zine producers like those of the zine *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 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, lies not exactly in the rejection of benevolence, compassion and humanism, for he shares that view with a range of queer postcolonial theorists like Gayatri Gopinath and others. Edelman's texts are frequently read by radical queer-feminist activists because of the rigidity in which he understands queerness as the opposite of conservative values, and his "No Future" rhetoric.⁷

⁷ 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" is much criticized by radical queer-feminist activists (ibid. 427).

Edelman's stance on the place of queerness within the social becomes mirrored in God Is My Co-Pilot's⁸ song *Replicant*, which 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"⁹ 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 base for the 1982 film *Blade Runner*. 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*. The bio-robotic replicants or "Skin Jobs," in the film and comic, look like adult humans, but have superior strength, and are more intelligent than humans. Their only weakness—compared to humans—is their lack of emotion. 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.¹⁰

The name "Skin Job" in *Replicants*, connotes the exclusion of queers from the social and therefore from futurity, within the symbolic and the social. Moreover, the name already addresses a rejection of compassion and benevolence because of Dick's bio-robots' inability to feel emotions. The rejections of the Judeo-Christian repertoire of benevolence, love and compassion through the name "Skin Jobs" becomes further emphasized in the song *Replicants* through 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 understand benevolence and compassion as repressive and rejects them as political or personal strategies. Their suggested reaction to the unavoidable place of queerness as signifying the anti-social is a radical consciousness of queerness within the

⁸ The choice for focussing on God Is My Co-Pilot and the Skinjobs was inspired through both band's antisocial lyrics, which indeed augured a lot of Edelman's elaborations on the epistemological place of queerness and their high popularity among their communities and beyond. Moreover, the Skinjob's reference to God Is My Co-Pilot's song *Replicant* is a good example for the conscious continuation of core themes and knowledge in queercore, as already addressed in chapter two.

⁹ God Is My Co-Pilot musician Craig Flanagin discussed some queer theory approaches and works, and undergoes a queer reading of the Marvel's comics action figures "Skin Jobs" in the fourth issue of *Homocore NYC* titled *Girl-Love Can Change le Monde*. The band the Skinjobs from Vancouver also refer to the film *Blade Runner*, when asked for their name (Ciminelli and Knox 2005). It is also very likely that they knew the song *Replicants* by God Is My Co-Pilot.

¹⁰ Considering Edelman's unwillingness to acknowledge punk as anti-social politics, it seems a funny fact 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).

social and symbolic order and a loud and visible embrace of this place. They sing “Hey Skin Job / Wake up! / Skin Job / Ask. Tell” (God is My Co-Pilot, *Replicants*). This embrace of negativity can indeed be read along Edelman’s *No Future*. God Is My Co-Pilot decided to communicate the negativity of queerness through a fairly popular (and at that moment 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, a shared cultural history. The reference to the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy of the US military through the line “Ask. Tell.” could favor such an interpretation, as it additionally draws on the specific cultural and social location of the US. In other words, although God Is My Co-Pilot certainly embrace negativity and suggest a rejection of mainstream politics, their lyrics relate not only to the US socio-cultural mainstream, but also to some of its counter-politics, namely gay liberation movements or queer activism. In addition to their educational or conscious raising purpose, such references aim to create social relations. Therefore it can be argued that through their various purposes the lyrics, through their rejection of contemporary cultures and politics, enable individuals to imagine some kind of future.

While accounts like Edelman’s continue to reject any possibility of non-heteronormative politics or futures, scholars like José Muñoz, Judith Jack Halberstam or Jafari Sinclair Allen recognize the political potential in anti-social queer theory. Juana María Rodríguez recently criticized the concept of futurity within anti-relational queer theory, like Edelman’s, 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 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)

It is necessary to imagine forms of futurity and politics that are not heteronormative to account for the counter-cultural activism of queer-feminist punk. Nevertheless, Edelman's theorization of The Future—with a capital F—is helpful to understand social criticism of queer-feminist punk rock. Edelman argues that The Future is a heteronormative concept. Moreover, he emphasizes that The Future 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, further following Edelman, is The Child. Indeed, the whole logic within which the political and the social rest within the symbolic order, is shaped through the fantasmatic image of The Child, a figure 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 Future that politics 'fight' for, as Rodríguez explains. Nevertheless, the meaning of The Child becomes transferred 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, from The Anti-Social per se. It signifies what society fears most, its 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 3*).

Following Edelman, within a society, whose politics, moral and ethics are as strongly attached to what he calls "reproductive futurism," as the contemporary North American society, queerness necessarily must embody the meanings of negativity, inhumanity and death within the symbolic order. This place within the symbolic order, although it does not become incorporated into 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 strongly criticizes Edelman

for the homogenous picture of North American societies he draws through his theories.¹¹ Halberstam pointed out that the North American society is not one homogenous entity. S/he emphasized that some core institutions, like kinship systems, are more diverse than the psychoanalytical account suggests and that the social norms and values have changed according to the new kinship patterns. Thus, Halberstam asked 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 imagining politics and sociality that are able to resist humanism and compassion.

Before engaging with aesthetic and verbal negativity, and the jouissance-like drive of punk rock, it is necessary to finally elaborate on the oft-mentioned psychoanalytical concept of jouissance. I will first explain Edelman’s notion of jouissance in some detail, highlighting its punk rock qualities and relations. Thereafter, I will point to some problematic features of Edelman’s concept, especially when employed in phenomenological socio-political contexts, like queer-feminist punk rock. I will explain that the concept of jouissance, if slightly reworked, can become a crucial instrument in analyzing specific cultural productions and contexts.

¹¹ Judith Jack Halberstam. *Low Theory: Transdisciplinarity and Queer Studies*. Oral presentation, Frauenbibliothek Saar, Bleichstr. 4, Saarbrücken, Germany (30 June 2011).

3.1.1. “Come ride with me come ride with me.”¹² Through Punk Rock to Jouissance

I want to emphasize again that Edelman’s psychoanalytical concept of jouissance is helpful to understand the place and politics of negativity in queer-feminist punk rock, because his concept accentuates queer negativity as radical or extreme, as do queer-feminist punks themselves. Hence, I will start with Edelman’s conceptualization of the negativity of queerness and jouissance and complement them with other queer theory accounts to finally come to an anti-social queer theory that allows for the imagination of a non-normative form of politics and sociality. Edelman’s delineation 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 through desire¹³—which is always in relation to an object, although this object is always imaginary, never real in terms of a co-acting subject—than through a drive. The drive signifying sexuality is ‘the death drive,’¹⁴ a disposition towards jouissance (Povinelli, *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 to save the subject and guarantee 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 of sexuality—every sexuality—culminates, and the anti-identitarian, anti-communicative, and destructive quality of sexuality becomes visible.

¹² “Come ride with me come ride with me” is a line from the song *Tiara MC* by Inner Princess.

¹³ Butler understands desire always as desire for autonomy as well as for recognition (Butler, *Undoing* 131-150). “[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).

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud developed the psychoanalytic concept of the “death drive” first. He conceptualized the death drive as one of the two binary drives crucial for a human mind’s motivations, as oppositional to the life-ensuring forces. According to Freud, the death drive was not essential to the life of an organism because its nature is 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 not oppositional 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 a part of the symbolic order (cf. Evans 32-33).

Although desire motivates sexuality (like every other political action), it is also driven through a disposition for enjoyment, especially when the signifier guaranteeing futurity (the Child) is absent in queer sex. What becomes produced then is “a constitutive surplus” (Edelman, *No* 10), an undefined, uncontrollable excess. Edelman, referring to Lacan again, understands this surplus as “an excessive, unreal remainder,” something that compels “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 of 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 identify to the full extent with these meanings because a full identification would ultimately lead to the subject’s destruction, to the end of the social subject as such (ibid. 6). “For queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one” (ibid. 17). The threat 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 neither to be confused with desire or lust, nor 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 (Edelman, *No* 25), negativity and queerness. Although the possibility to free sexuality and *jouissance* from desire, even from a theoretical standpoint, needs to be questioned, the concentration of sexuality’s negativity, which becomes apparent when *jouissance* is understood as distinct from desire, is nevertheless very productive.

The destructive qualities of sexual acts are most obvious—of course—in narrations about rape and other forms of sexualized violence. Violent sexual acts are often displayed in queer-feminist punk rock, for example in The Homewreckers’¹⁵ song *Destroy* (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*)

Sexuality, in the song *Destroy* interrupts or opposes the romantic imagination of love and sexual relationships. Sexualized violence harms the integrity of a person to the severest degree and should not be mitigated through drawing a connection to consensual sex. Nevertheless, from an psychoanalytical point of view, also consensual sex irritates the self of the speaker. The danger and violence of consensual sexual encounters becomes addressed through lyrics like “Taking me into your world / taking me execution style” (I Am Loved, *High World*) by the band I Am Loved.¹⁶ In the sexual encounter, the twofold desire—for relation as well as for autonomy and domination—interplays with the drive towards jouissance. In this case, the sexual act does not only suspend communication, it endangers the speaker, threatens to “execute” the self. The song interestingly builds the picture of romantic love and sexuality through lines like “Taken under the stars, like under a blanket of light,” or “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, becomes characterized as messy and destructive, as an affect, that does away with the autonomy of the self, as it is framed in psychoanalytic theory (see Rodríguez, *Queer Sociality* 340; Povinelli, *Notes* 228).

The queerness that I Am Loved refer to signifies this collision of contradicting meanings, and the irritation or disruption of coherence and identity, according to anti-social theorists. What queerness signifies, then, is also jouissance: “a movement beyond the pleasure

¹⁵ The Homewreckers are a contemporary queercore band from Brooklyn, New York.

¹⁶ I Am Loved was an L.A. queercore band from the early 2000’s. They frequently played at the monthly queercore club called “The Freak Show” and were friends of other queer punk bands like Best Revenge.

principle, beyond the distinction of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law” (Edelman, *No 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. Additionally, sexual or emotional satisfaction or fulfillment through queerness can only ever be phantasmatic and illusory. Both are effects of the “fetishistic investments” (ibid.) with the object, which *jouissance* dismisses. Moreover, *jouissance* rejects the very foundations of such “imaginary identifications” (Edelman, *No 25*), the coherence of social reality and the symbolic order. In other words, queer sexuality, as Edelman suggests, makes identity as illusion and impossibility visible. 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 be understood as the ultimate threat then, 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 reference to its danger to the coherence of society than to the self. The already mentioned 1990s band God Is My Co-Pilot can be read as a prime example of queer-feminist politics, displaying a version of queerness 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 fears, for example in the title for their 1993 7“ vinyl *My Sinister Hidden Agenda*, queerness is positioned as precisely opposed to the future and the imaginary Child. In 1995, for example, they released the song *Sex Is for Making Babies* (DSA). The title consists only of one line: “Sex is for making babies 1000000 times.” On their EP *How I Got Over* (1992), they feature the song *I Kill Kids*. They sing:

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 connect the term queer to right wing hate speech against queers, through the lines “we’re going to fuck your children,” which addresses prejudices, combined with “don’t die by a word,” addressing those with queer desires. They refer to the subordination of queers in the dominant hegemony and embrace the negative symbolic position, through enjoying themselves in articulating it. They mark discourse on the public/private dichotomy as an oppressive system, which can, among other things, be read as reference to feminist politics, if read as affirmative references, or the failure of gay liberation politics, if read as negative ones. The references to coming out narratives with phrases like “Speak up” and “live in the light” are drawing 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 in a history of political movements. God Is My Co-Pilot take a critical stance to that self-positioning and additionally criticize 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 anticipate what Edelman suggests in *No Future*, which was published in 2004. Yet, the queer-feminist punk band does not propose to take the symbolic place of queerness, its negativity, literally (*No 5*). In contrast to Edelman, God Is My Co-Pilot do not reject politics per se.

Edelman argues that politics are always bound to the future and therefore to the Child. In other words, embracing negativity and a rejection of the symbolic Child would imply a rejection of any future, and furthermore 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 7*). Besides the point that living humans 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 the social. But 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. Because 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 politics, futurity and society differently? What if the surplus, the opposition to all meaning, the negative, does produce meaning after all—a different meaning that is ambivalent to the point that it can never become frozen, attached to one meaning, even not for a moment?

The impossibility of being outside the sphere of meaning as well as the social, is the point where theorists like Judith Jack Halberstam or 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 none, 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 an understanding (in the sense of a lucky speech act) or identification.

Queer-feminist punk rock, as displayed in *God Is My Co-Pilot’s*, *The Skinjobs*, *Agatha’s*, *I Am Loved’s* or *The Homewreckers*’ examples, suggest the possibility that an embrace of queer’s negativity as political action or politics is not only possible, but locatable. They deploy anarchy of signification—their textual negativity can never be fully decoded or understood. The irritation they produce in doing so can be understood as doing a politics of negativity. It is necessary to rework the concept of politics to account for such irritation as political.

3.1.2. “Yes It’s Fucking Political”¹⁷

Edelman’s concept of politics, with queerness as its other, is again bound to Lacan. Politics within the Lacanian symbolic order determines the “framework within which we experience social reality” (Edelman, *No* 7). But this reality we experience 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, no matter if conservative or 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 text, which opens up a possibility to translate his “impossible” account 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. But reading “the Political” in Edelman’s text within a very narrow, conservative definition of politics, bound to legislation, law, and participation in hegemony, the rejection of politics and the political becomes not only possible, but empirical evidence of such a practice is easily found within various grassroots communities. A different kind of politics than in Edelman’s version can not only be imagined, but (at least rudimentarily) experienced, following queer theorists like José Muñoz, Judith Jack Halberstam, or Elizabeth Povinelli. This different kind of politics could be a politics of queer negativity, or *jouissance*. To envision a different kind of politics though, it is necessary to acknowledge that not all forms of political action aim for full recognition by, or participation in hegemony.

Three points within Edelman’s theory need to be mentioned, before moving on to engage with the possible aims such a politics of *jouissance* could have, and something that could

¹⁷*Yes It’s Fucking Political* is a song from the British band Skunk Anansie (*Stoosh*. One Little Indian, 1996. CD).

be called the futurity of negativity. First, his understanding of the symbolic order is a very static one, which doesn't leave gaps for ambivalence or in-betweens. Second, his assumption that *jouissance* cannot become a disposition that could be shared between two or more people or become 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* 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 counter-culture, as built on a disposition of *jouissance*, is not the same as to assert that *jouissance* can be shared. Nevertheless, regarding sexual acts, or equally ecstatic experiences like dancing in a mosh pit or shouting, screaming, and ranting in a crowd, these 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 theorists of psychoanalysis like Slavoj Žižek consider *jouissance* as a factor in politics (Žižek 231).¹⁸ Such an account disagrees with other psychoanalytic theories like Teresa de Lauretis's, who understands sexuality as oppositional to politics insofar as it needs a translation "from theory to politics, from words to things, from the disturbing heterotopia¹⁹ of conceptual figures [sexuality] to the utopian orientation of the ego, of sense-making, of politics, and of the future" (Weiner and Young 235). De Lauretis' account would be clearly counterproductive to the acknowledgement of queer-feminist punk as political. Although queer-feminist punks translate the disturbing quality of sexuality, as de Lauretis understands it, into political action, and thereby surely also translate queer theory in their lyrics to communicate it to their audiences, their politics is more than that. 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 within such political situations of enjoyment, the self becomes vulnerable and available to the Other. This happens when mind and body are loosened from "the gallows

¹⁸ Cf. additionally Povinelli, *The Part* 289

¹⁹ Heterotopia is a concept developed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. Heterotopia is a metaphor for non-hegemonic spaces, both utopian and able to experience. They are locations of inbetweens, spaces of otherness (Foucault, *Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias*).

erected by the Law” (Povinelli, *The Part* 290), the normative social order, through embracing the undoing of the self within the social order. This state of vulnerability is a precarious situation, bearing the danger of literally being harmed or undone. But it is also a situation where enjoyment can be shared. Povinelli emphasizes that such moments of “availability of intensified potential, like the [...] availability of enjoyment” (ibid.) do not only potentially emerge within “specific social orderings,” but do necessarily emerge 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” (Povinelli, *The Part* 291). Accordingly, Povinelli suggests that we understand queer not only as a sign, or “an empty signifier,” but also as an affect that is able to relate to others. By accepting or simply focusing the blurry line between the subject and its social surroundings, the most individual experience like enjoyment can be understood as “divided by [individual] displacements” (ibid. 300) in the world and social order, as signifying difference through different social conditions or regulations. But at the same time, this very same enjoyment can become, or rather produce, the “social bond” that joins individuals. “[Such a] social bond [would be] the 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).

To follow 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 rather is the basis of an experience of closeness when the singular being is lost at a place where nothing can be shared, expressed or otherwise translated into the symbolic order. It requires acknowledging the person in their most vulnerable phase, a place of negativity, which could indeed be called *jouissance*. Tavia Nyong’o’s recently offered an

explanation of what such a politics through a mutually *jouissance* or disposition to *jouissance* could look like, analyzing of a scene from the documentary *The Filth and the Fury*, where 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—songs which address not only the system outside, but the people inside the very circle of dancers, deconstructing their very selves. The surplus value this scene produces, the shock value, was documented on film, fortunately for the researcher, and maintains its 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, which determines our understanding and knowledge, this scene loses its shocking quality, and therefore becomes apolitical. For it shows the embrace of negativity through the very ones who it addresses—parents and children—, in a moment where a different sociality becomes possible through a new social form.

Applying Povinelli’s concept to this and other scenes would also mean to consider queer as carrying social responsibility. This includes the responsibility to focus not exclusively on sexuality as crucial for achieving a position within the social. While most anti-relational queer theories tend to neglect differences among queers, focusing exclusively on the negative place of queer sexuality within the symbolic order, contemporary queer-feminist accounts in the tradition of black feminism, postcolonial theories or Chicana feminism account for 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, queer-feminist punk politics will be presented as examples for a series of theoretically outlined possibilities of *jouissance*.

God Is My Co-Pilot shift their focus from sexuality to gender, but hold on to the negativity of their sexual self-positioning, to articulate their aim to educate in their song *We Signify*.²⁰ In this way, they mark their political strategy of using sexuality's negativity through ambivalence and irony. They proclaim:

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 term “instruct” and the phrase “giving some back” can be understood as attempting education, but this could also be meant as a (queer) threat. On a textual level, the audience God Is My Co-Pilot want 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, queer and not so queer punk communities. The negativity against mainstream society is not so much a message to hegemonic societies, then a signifier that enables 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 passage 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.

Regarding the embrace and enjoyment of negativity, the issue *Homos Invade Punk Rock* of the zine *Homocore NY* deserves mention. In this issue, Flanagin, bandmember 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, drawing on the meaning of

²⁰“We Signify.” *Illusion Of Secrecy*. Dark Beloved Cloud, 1993. LP.

queerness as something destructive, but it additionally demonstrates a sense of utopianism and a feeling of community. The clear reference in this quote 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 at the same issue of *Homocore NYC* as well as at 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 queer to a negative meaning. Furthermore, their attempt at keeping queerness undefined and in flux, but nevertheless 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 will explore some significant aspects of different queer-feminist punk socialities. Such an examination makes necessary a reflection on contemporary queer theoretical designs of sociality and futurity.

3.2. "Fantasies of utopia are what get you hooked on punk in the first place right?"²¹: 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*).

This strophe from the already quoted song *Queer as in Fuck you* by Agatha, can be understood as a disposition of jouissance, the urge to throw a brick through a window, that instead of smashing or destroying something, 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.

²¹ Atoe, Osa. "Feminist Power." *Maximumrocknroll* 327 (August 2010)

Agatha's statement, accordingly, needs to be read as countering anti-social theories that understand jouissance as the other side of sociality and politics. Furthermore, the concept of politics underlying their statement seems to contradict also 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" (de Lauretis 259), they would certainly understand every theory and sexuality in general as fundamentally political, as they are effective – producing effects. One effect of a negative sexuality, as in the metaphor of throwing a brick, could produce a form of queer sociality. The imagination of such a queer social form can be understood with the help of José Muñoz' concept of "concrete utopia," developed in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*.

Muñoz criticizes anti-relational theory for its one-dimensional focus on (male, white) sexuality. Moreover, he criticizes contemporary psychoanalytical informed queer theory for its exclusive focus on the individual. Such accounts, he argues, neatly fit into neoliberal celebrations of individuality and uniqueness, and furthermore foreclose the possibility of political activism. As a response, Muñoz provocatively focuses on the social, the relational, and hope, countering 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* 25), with his version of queerness as "longing" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 1), and becoming. While Edelman implicitly argues that the 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 "liveable" (Butler, *Undoing*), to borrow Judith Butler's term, Muñoz, though not claiming that queerness would mean something positive or liveable, nevertheless, argues that queerness can enable social bonds, politics, or a different future. Muñoz's concept, and his usage 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, a similar entanglement to the one that Povinelli speaks of.

Bloch's utopianism centers on hope as its motivator, Muñoz explains. This hope, or hopes, which can be shared hopes of a collective or the hopes of a 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 counter-cultures, but also for an understanding of queerness as such as bound to futurity. Although his account seems oppositional 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).

Regarding queer-feminist punk rock, it seems worthwhile to think Elizabeth Povinelli’s concept of a shared disposition towards jouissance (*The Part* 288) against or along 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 nothing more utopian than Povinelli’s vision of a different kind of social bond, a social bond, 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-issued 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 of a desire for recognition might be grounded in its emergence along with

jouissance, in the violence of pleasure. But 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 plan-able 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. (Rodríguez, *Queer Sociality* 338)

The promise Rodríguez refers to can be understood as 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 appropriately answer Povinelli’s demand for giving up the only existing theoretical distinction between the singular psyche and the social, and instead, to acknowledge the entanglement of them. Such an approach might qualify as 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 “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 339), to use Juana María Rodríguez’s words again. Because sex is “a coming undone predicated on a coming together” (ibid.), the politics it bares 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 queer politics of jouissance as well as 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 further engaging 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 counter-cultures. The titles and themes of the Skinjob's songs like *Burn your Rainbow*, *Transister*, *Recruiting*, and *Gender Bender* clearly mark their political strategy of using queerness as negativity. Yet, asked why he chose the genre 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, his emphasis on enhancement and identity, seemingly contradicts the afore mentioned negative titles that draw on popular stereotypes against queers, for example in the title *Recruiting*, as well as express a rejection of gay and lesbian liberation movements, in *Burn your Rainbow*. Similarly contradictory statements can be found in the Skinjobs' lyrics. When they sing: "stop trying to fit in. If everyone looked like everyone, tell me: Just who would you fuck?" (*Burn your Rainbow*), they ask for rejection of social norms, for an affirmation of their non-normativity. The Skinjobs utter their critique against society without offering any concrete positive counter model or any concrete suggestions for improvement. This, once more, places them in the tradition of punk, understood as a destructive and negative force, but additionally, it attaches them to a younger movement of queer critique marked by a refusal of the ideology of productivity, efficiency, or optimization. Accordingly, the Skinjobs also choose a language of simple, sometimes vulgar or brutal, and even violent words and codes to express their critique. Four-letter-words like 'fuck' or other swear words belong to their repertoire, which is supported and ironized by their aggressive play, 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 read 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 agency, namely, their critique of the gay and lesbian subculture as well as on the fun-oriented culture lacking political awareness. The occasional usage of more melodious exclamations, reminiscent of the specific aesthetic of camp, like "woho"

(*Burn your Rainbow*) or “du-du-du” (*Transister*) between the text-passages, underlines this embrace of fun. This gets somehow contrasted with rather vulgar outbursts like “yeah” (*Burn your Rainbow*)—uttered with a very deep voice, a guttural sound—which can be seen as (persiflage of a) stereotypical ‘male’ expression.

The Skinjobs’ lyrics, language and performance embraces queerness as negativity. Nevertheless, they express a longing, a desiring 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 realltionality. Moreover, the dominant modes of rejection and negativity in the Skinjobs’ songs, always appear relational to a person, a community or group. Other examples for the co-appearance of rejection and bonding at the same time are *Burn your Rainbow*, which gives their album its name, as well as in *Go Away Before I Change My Mind*. In both songs they reject the gay and lesbian culture. In *Go Away Before I Change My Mind* the Skinjobs 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 read as a negotiation of a personal relationship between two lovers, it can also be read as rejection of gay and lesbian politics. The signifier for the gay and lesbian movement that makes such a gesture of rejection legible is the “rainbow.” Moreover, the lyrics are presented among other outspokenly critical songs towards gay and lesbian movements, as well as the politics of compassion in general. The concept of compassion here brought up through the word “care” seems to relate to Edelman’s understanding (No 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 read as rejection of this compassion. Furthermore, they display 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 hegemonic discourses

on progress and enhancement, the Skinjobs respond with destructiveness, violence and negativity.

The jouissance or pleasure in destruction becomes visible in the song *Burn Your Rainbow* again. The Skinjobs address the lgbt movement again through implying 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 usage of the “We” in “We’ve built this up.” Accordingly, the Skinjobs’ expression of an anti-social and anti-futurity attitude, and rejection of conservatism as well as (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 can be read as a rejection of the meaning of the Future within the symbolic order, like Edelman depicts it. But 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 resist wallowing themselves in a feeling of superiority or self-pity about their social positions as queers and reaffirm it. Furthermore, these lyrics make a connection between the gay-rights movement and politics, queer counter-cultures and neoliberal mainstream culture in general. By placing themselves within queer counter-cultures that are entangled with the broader neoliberal mainstream through the word “We,” their embrace of the anti-social queerness can also be read as call for an embrace of negativity within the realm of the social. In other words, their lyrics can be read as an expression of a desire for a different form of relationality and social bonds. A further indicator for the Skinjobs’ longing for social bonds is that they group themselves around political agendas in the social form of a community they call “collective”—the *Queer Punk Collective* in Vancouver.²²

²²It can be assumed that the choice of queer-feminist punks to use the term collective, like the *Queer Punk Collective*, or the *For 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.

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 toward accounts on queer sociality. José Muñoz's concepts of utopianism and hope as well as Elizabeth Povinelli's vision of a different social bond, enable us to think "queerness as collectivity" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 11) again. 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, it needs to be clarified for the purpose of this analysis, that a reference to concepts like Muñoz's is by no means an argument for futurity per se. Muñoz himself emphasizes 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. (Muñoz, *Cruising* 49)

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 politics and social bonds, which both are bound to a version of futurity. Muñoz's theory opens the field of queer strategies that embrace the meaning of queerness as negativity, to the possibility that they may not result in the anti-relational and anti-political.

Muñoz's reference to the negativity of the meaning of queerness focuses not exclusively on Edelman's work. He draws on feminist theory, the works of women of color, as well as the concept of the performative by J. L. Austin's to suggest a rethinking of queerness's negativity. Muñoz emphasizes 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, he suggests that radical negativity, negation, rejection etc. must not be understood as oppositional to the positive, following Paolo Virno as well as feminist theories of radical negativity, like Shoshana Felman's. Rather, queer radical negativity must be understood as belonging to the scandalous "nonopposition" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 13), a term he borrows from Virno. Muñoz emphasizes that gay males white 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 by Virno, Felman, and others, to open anti-social queer theory for the possibility of a different future, and additionally to 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). Such a move needs to be attempted according to him, because the contemporary concept of time is "straight time" (ibid. 22).²³ Accordingly, the contemporary time-narrative does not allow for an imagination of a queer present or future, or a present and future for queers. But that does not mean that the embrace of queerness as anti-social is not possible while simultaneously imagining a future. These elaborations are surprisingly similar to Edelman's approach, arguing that queerness inhabits the "impossible, insofar as it exists outside the logic of meaning that, nonetheless, produces it" (Edelman, *No* 10). The important difference in their conceptions of queerness, however, lies in its quality and purpose. While Edelman interprets queerness as a reminder of that which is forbidden, neglected or rejected by the social order that necessarily leads to social death, Muñoz, while also confronting contemporary queerness's negativity, understands queerness as a process of emerging. What emerges, according to Muñoz, then, is a non-normative sociality, as well as a political activism which disrupts this present/future binary, realizing

²³He draws on the work by Judith Jack Halberstam, as well as Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Carolyn Dinshaw, Gayatri Gopinath, or Jill Dolan to explain straight time.

“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. Criticizing the present oppression as well as the assimilation of queerness and queers into mainstream society, Muñoz suggests 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). Meaning as well as being, to Muñoz, drawing on the concept of performativity by J. L. Austin, 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 turns to the fringe of political and cultural production to offset the tyranny of the homonormative” (ibid. 26). The evaluation of the present needs to be informed by the hope for something “more” (ibid. 27). 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), to 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, Halberstam’s “anarchy of signification” (*The Anti-Social* 142) would aim at a similarly fluid queerness. Muñoz’s

queer strategy, as well as Halberstam's anarchy of signification appropriate the contemporary meaning of queerness as negativity or impossibility, and produces meanings that go beyond that 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" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 55).²⁴ 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 danger to the symbolic order. Moreover, his rhetorical addressing of queers as masses as well as the present as sex panic, are hopeful. They are hopeful insofar as they suggest the possibility of a queer collectivity and the political value of an appropriation of anti-social queerness. Queer negativity as social and political practice, or *jouissance*, accordingly, could temporarily actualize the desire for recognition and community.

I want to emphasize 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" (Povinelli, *The Part* 304). This queerness is never fully actualized or "not-yet here," to use Muñoz' words. It can never be fully here, because queerness within the contemporary symbolic order of meanings is indeed defined through its own impossibility. Yet, queerness is not fully rhetorical or theoretical, either. It is a doing or performing that can only partly, but nevertheless, be actualized and experienced in some theatrical, musical and political performances. It is "an anticipatory illumination of a queer world, a sign of an

²⁴His terminology of the present as "sex panic" refers indirectly to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and early 1990s and radical scholars like Gayle Rubin.

actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility within a stultifying heterosexual present” (Muñoz, *Cruising* 49).²⁵

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 tell the story of someone's ride on a freight railway wagon in *Hand Jobs on the Freight Train*. Through this setting, a railway wagon, the imagery of a homeless person is suggested. The title “Freight train” is not only a reference to both homelessness and freedom, but to the popular folk song with the same title written by the black US-American blues and folk musician, singer, and songwriter Elizabeth Cotten from North Carolina, from the early 1900s.²⁶ Drawing on Cotten's song about a fleeing African American person on a night train, who is anxious about getting discovered, the song evokes feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and danger. Furthermore, through placing the sexual act of a handjob into such a setting, the sexual act itself carries very specific notions. Rather than drawing on positive images and feelings, these lyrics refer to sexuality as negativity. They elucidate, I suggest, the doubled violence of jouissance, the irritation it poses towards an outside as well as the irritation towards the self. Drawing on black history, as well as that the song is actually performed by queer punks of color within Seattle's (predominantly white) queer-

²⁵ Muñoz sees the actualization of queerness in moments of “ecstatic time” (Muñoz, *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 manifestation in and of ecstatic time offers queers much more than the meager offerings of pragmatic gay and lesbian politics (ibid. 32). Muñoz theorization 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.

²⁶ The reference to Cotton in My Parade's song Freight Train will be analyzed as example of queer-feminist decolonial politics in chapter five.

feminist punk subculture, the lyrics can additionally be read as referring to the hostile environment of contemporary US-American society towards people of color and the influence this setting has on both the perception and construction of sexuality. My Parade draw 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,” as Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (358) has it. My Parade mark their place within their community and broader society, a place where there is none. Moreover, through singing about negatively connoted sexual acts—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 that, nevertheless, 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 political activism. In doing this activism, furthermore, something that could be termed a queer social bond with their 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-US-American queer punks of color project. 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 located on the level of meanings. The meaning of queerness, however, is also reflected in the music, the sound and the performance as such. Moreover, the social bond is also created through those channels. *Jouissance* is never only experienced on the level of the cognitive, but also on the level of the emotional. Similarly, the social bond that emerges is felt as well as understood. Numerous queer theorists like José Muñoz or Sara Ahmed emphasize that emotions like pleasure or 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, that bear the possibility of introducing “different ways of living with others,” and the method to reach this goal is emotion (Ahmed 165). 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,” Ahmed claims. “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.). The emphasis on the emotions of anger and sexual pleasure is crucial for understanding the social bonds jouissance might create. We must understand anger and sexual pleasure as two drives 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. The political quality of sexual acts, accordingly, 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 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 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” needs to be considered as well (ibid.) 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.

3.2.1. “We’re different but the same / just one big game:”²⁷ Queer-feminist Punk Rock, Bonds, and Communities

The social bonds jouissance produces, in terms of a one-time occasion, are certainly not enough to form any stable social form like a political coalition or a 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

²⁷“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.

collective carry the least objectionable connotations to denote social groups to queer-feminist punks. They consciously distance themselves from words like scene or subculture. Whereas scene seems to carry too much live-style meaning, or is not political enough, subculture marks a subjugation to a hegemonic culture, that, although it might reflect someone's experience, is not critically reflected by the term per se. Moreover, it includes an implicit notion of culture tightly bound to nationality. Queer-feminist punk bands reject notions of culture and nationality, through 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 Ciminelly and Knox 115). But they do refer to their fellow queer-feminist punk rockers, fans and allies as community. Another term they frequently use is "movement" (ibid. 117).

Although queer-feminist punks use community or collectivity as a reference for their gatherings, they hardly mean a harmonious gathering of equals among equals. On the contrary, 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 the other, forcing the involved parties to change. This violence, that the social always bears, becomes even more precarious in the battlefield of sexuality, where different desires, the desire for autonomy as well as the desire for recognition, intersect with a disposition to jouissance, and the drive. On the level of meaning the violence of togetherness becomes 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 along categories like sexuality, gender, race, class or ability 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.

They are forms of belonging and recognition that are neither naturally emerging gatherings, nor created through any identification of similarities. Queerness accordingly, is not the basis for a group identity, but it is one signifier, to which every single person can relate to, 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 in flux, flexible, and varying from person to person.

Queer scholars like Antke Engel or Julian Graham and Katherine Gibson often draw on work by the 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 emphasizes that the very meaning of being (as an ontological status that carries meaning) is always a being singular plural. Western (hetero-patriarchal) models for society—like states, nations, families and even humanness itself—are only able to address this ontological status of being singular plural through attaching it 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, thus, is able to address a being together without having the same origin or identity (Nancy 23). Politics based on concepts of sociality referring to an origin are, according to Nancy, never able to reach beyond the logics of exclusion and inclusion. Such politics are politics of equality—equality under the law, human rights etc. It is clear that such politics are highly selective regarding the very definition of what the communality of such a being-in-common or equality is. Furthermore, such politics are not able to think being singular plural to a 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 at the same time embrace their social formation in pairs, groups and crowds. What certainly binds them together is negativity. But the shared negativity is not a simple identification with each other in terms of seeing oneself in the other. It is rather what Nancy pictures 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 (Nancy 61). Such a model could account for the contingency of the co-appearance, during a concert for example, as well as for the shared aim against normativity. It could account for the well documented but rarely cherished expressions of the impact queer-feminist punk rock had and has on individuals all over the US and beyond. This impact might not have resulted in the formation of a new band, a new local scene or movement, but might be visible in personal lifestories, in personal development, building self-esteem, feeling more comfortable with oneself, eliminating prejudices (see Ciminelli and Knox, *Homocore*; Davis, “(Un)Occupy;” Marcus, *Girls*).

The “we,” such a form of community produces, then, 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 becomes signified. Frequently, this mode of being together is negativity, the term queer, punk, feminism etc. Hence, such signifiers are never meant to refer to an origin, an identity, as something that has a fixed meaning or a single definition. On the contrary, the very usage of those significations, through which individuals can relate to each other, are produced through a drive of endless production of meanings or, as Halberstam called it, through the anarchy of signification. The usage 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 mentioned in the Skinjobs' choice for their band's name. The name Skinjobs, as already explained, draws not only on a gay archive, but moreover refers to one of the earliest queercore bands known, God Is My Co-Pilot, who used the name in their song “Replicant.” Although the name draws on past movements and groups, it is never clearly stated in what relation to them they position themselves. They leave it to their audience to understand their references as mockery, as honest references or as rejection (or all of the above).

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 on punk as always already including feminist ideas and a rejection of heteronormativity (LaBruce and Jones) by referring to punks from the 1970s and 1980s like X-Ray Spex, The Raincoats, and The Slits, The Nervous Gender, or 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*, or their contributions to *Maximumrocknroll*, LaBruce and Jones 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 to establish a queer critique on hardcore punk scenes. Ironically, the offensive quality of queer-feminist punk, in a way mimicking the history of the term queer itself, got almost 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 themselves became positive role models for younger queer-feminist punks. And a normative model of origin, generations, and linear time-concepts became partly established. Nevertheless, ambiguity is still effective within queer-feminist punk and anarchy of signification is still its favored strategy: 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.

The Skinjobs, for example, use negativity and express the death drive as a political strategy to reject mainstream society, embrace their queer negativity and relate to their peers. But their lyrics contain so much irony and sarcasm, that all of their messages are ambivalent and cannot be easily reduced to one interpretation or be fixed to one of these multiple aims. When they sing about queer punks within their communities, who aim 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 address is sung. That this sarcasm needs to be understood as critique becomes clear through the line “And when you’re rich and famous, I hope you don’t forget us All us punk and all us queers,” which precedes the address. 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. Additionally, the song is a critique of some New York City queer scenes, which 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 in which this rejection is uttered—the punk sound—can be read as embracing a queer counter-position that is marked through negativity. Such embrace of negativity, as mentioned before, lines up with the negative place of queerness in the social realm as well as its playfulness, celebration, and having a good time. They do so through sarcasm and irony, and the alternating of aggressive and vigorously played parts with very melodious segments, sounding almost sweet and soft, reminding one of camp aesthetics. 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 references to historical events and movements, that cannot be seen in the light of the afore mentioned critique, but in a more positive way. By using the phrase “We’re recruiting” as title and theme for a 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 from right wing conservatives on queers, but 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. Additionally, this ecstasy opens up the field of the relational. Queer punk spaces and performances take up Muñoz’s suggestion, “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 has it (*Cruising* 187).

Another example for 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 conversation with the riot grrrl movement as well as to 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 (89-91?) 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 proclaim 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 claim 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 frame is never clearly delineated. It is fragmented enough to pose a threat towards hegemonic regimes, as well as to build a foundation for variously identified individuals to recognize themselves within their politics and practices. “[T]hese scenes of polymorphous eroticism enacted in language, in fantasy, in film, on stage, and in sexual play,” to quote Juana María Rodríguez

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. (Rodríguez, *Queer Sociality* 345)

3.3. “So fuck that shit / we’re sick of it.”²⁸ 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. The embrace of this negativity, accordingly, can be read 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—however accurate this etymology may be in the example of Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones—and relate it to punk.

It seems important to emphasize that queer-feminist punks understand the intersection between queer-feminist activism 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 the touching upon 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, like the shouting and screaming of queer-feminist punk into account, it can be argued that queer-feminist punk rock potentially is a drive or disposition towards enjoyment or *jouissance*, a violent passage towards the deconstruction of the 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 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 such a social and political relation yields, do not have a describable group

²⁸“So fuck that shit / we’re sick of it” was a lyric’s line by the queer-feminist punk band Gina Young and the Bent (qtd. in Ciminelli and Knox, *Homocore* 114).

identity. Moreover, such social forms do not rely on established forms of social contract. The communities emerging through and around queer-feminist punk rock are mostly anarchistic, rejecting 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, although they never actually meet 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, creating ambivalence and ambiguity. This production of ambiguity through queer-feminist punk is as important as its political strategies of negativity. Moreover, the production of ambiguity—which can be termed 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. To call queer-feminist punk a form of politics, the political, accordingly, needs to be thought 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 wouldn't aim for participation in hegemonic societies, or the social contract in terms of laws and rights. The productiveness of such politics lies, on the one hand, simply in irritation. At the same time, it lies in the creation of social bonds and forms of community.

In the next chapter, I pick up the concept of queerness as a threat towards society within queer-feminist punk music again and relate it to anarchist theory. I will take up anarchism as a political concept because queer-feminist punks frequently refer to anarchism or identify themselves as anarchists. Moreover, taking up anarchism as decidedly negative politics helps, first, to understand how queer-feminist punks theorize the usage of anti-social queerness as political strategy. Second, such a reference helps to understand queer-

feminist punk politics as intersectional approaches that go beyond sexual politics. Third, 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.

4. “Challenge the System and Challenge Yourself.”¹ Queer-feminist punk rock’s intersectional politics and anarchism

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.²

These lyrics of the song *Reject all American* by Bikini Kill are a good example of the anti-social activism of queer-feminist punk rock. Such political activism is a rejection of social norms, structures, as well as normativity as such. 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, as I have shown in the previous chapter. This strategy is centered around negative meanings of the terms queer and punk, and 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. Moreover, queer and punk are not the only anti-social terms that become appropriated. One other culturally pejorative term queer-feminist punks appropriate is anarchy. This chapter discusses the relationship between anti-social queer-feminist punk rock and anarchist theory. I make this reference to anarchism because queer-feminist punks are often self-identified as anarchists. Moreover, I will show that they use and rework anarchism as a political strategy because it has the potential to deconstruct existing social norms, and especially structures, and at the same time allows for the imagination of different kinds of social bonds. Additionally, it maintains tools to facilitate the newly created queer bonds. Most importantly, queer-feminist punks refer to anarchism to account for the intersectionality of oppressive power and hegemony.

Musicians and writers address oppression within and through their social, and political environment—“the system,” as in the Limp Wrist lyrics that give the title for this

¹ Limp Wrist. “Limp Wrist.” *Limp Wrist*. CD, San Francisco 2001.

² Bikini Kill. “Reject All American.” *Reject All American*. LP. Kill Rock Stars, 1996.

chapter—based on various intersecting categories. Thus they reflect on homophobia, and transphobia at the junction of racism, colonization, classism as well as nationalism and general xenophobia. Moreover, “the system” is not viewed as one single oppressive entity. Queer-feminist punks realize that social, political and economic oppression do not only intersect, and depend on various different categories, but they additionally understand that there is not only one source of oppressive power. Hegemonic power, queer-feminist punks argue, can be located in various different places and institutions, the state, and its administrative complex, law enforcement, health services, the prison industrial complex, as well as corporations. Additionally, they identify social relations and structures, like contemporary forms of kinship, as oppressive. Accordingly, such texts orient 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 make the connection between their everyday experience in private and public 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 and state-power, administrative-power, as well as the influence of the capitalist market.

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

Although anti-capitalist and anti-institutional politics within queer-feminist punk lyrics are closely intertwined, I will 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-institution politics and show how anti-capitalist politics, for queer-feminist punks, are necessarily aligned with anti-authority, anti-institution and anti-state politics. I will do so by showing how queer-feminist punks drew on 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 makeup of the US as such. Nevertheless, as already explained in the previous chapter in great detail, such politics are not anti-relational. On the contrary, especially the anarchic, anti-institutional and anti-capitalist aspect of queer-feminist punk rock demonstrates punk's commitment to community. In reference to anarchist discourses and theories circulating within queer-feminist punk, I will address the concept of community my punk protagonists envisioned and (at least partially) realize through their activism.

4.1. "Anarchy is freedom—people before profit."³ Queer-feminist punk approaches to capitalism

Punk rock's critique of capitalism has a long history. Punk "has always been about fighting capitalism," Conor Crockford, "member of the [Bay Area] local punk band Deadset," stated in a recent interview published on *punks!punks!punks!.com*. In reference to punks engagement 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, agree 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 occupy and punk are related," he points out. Queer-feminist punks like Mariam Bastani (*Interview by the author*) or Cristy Road (*Interview by the author*) express similar views. Both participated in the Occupy movement, Bastani in San Francisco, 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 an album and song called *Anarchy in the UK*. Moreover, they addressed the connection between state politics

³ *Bitter Pie* 4, San Francisco 1999.

and capitalism in their 1976 song *No Future* (also known as *God Save the Queen*), singing “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” (Sheppard, *Anti-*) 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” (In My Head) 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 the 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*)

that 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, “Anti-Capitalism in Punk”).

Queer-feminist punks criticized capitalism, but they did not just reject it as 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-queer⁴ 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,⁵ GATT,⁶ 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 / Spitboy*. LP. Ebullition Records, 1995)

Davison rejects US consumerism because she sees it as 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 contemporary 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, for example in the lines "Future is always near but it's never really here / it's just a promise that will keep our false hopes alive." Moreover, such lyrics connect an ideology of positive thinking to capitalism and politics.

Erase Errata identify positive thinking as a US-American ideology. Scholar Barbara Ehrenreich defines positive thinking similarly as ideology, as "the idea that our thoughts can, in some mysterious way, directly affect the physical world" (9) in her seminal book *Bright-Sided: How Positive Thinking Is Undermining America*. "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 emphasizes that positive thinking is a form of national self-disciplining (ibid.). Furthermore, it is a "false hope," as Erase Errata point out in their song *Wasteland*, and delusional (Ehrenreich 13). Another queer-feminist activist who recently pointed to the

⁴ I use the term "anarcha-queer" instead of "anarcho-queer" to mark the feminist politics of anarchist and queer groups and individuals.

⁵ 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 to NAFTA regulate furthermore labor and environmental conditions.

⁶ GATT is short for General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Signed in 1946, it was replaced by the World Trade Organization in 1995.

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 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 phrase “American Dream,” is the idea that freedom means the opportunity for prosperity and success (among other things). Moreover, such mindset suggests that upward social mobility can be achieved by anybody through hard work. Samson rejects these ideas and uses her personal career as example for the untruthfulness of such 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* marks their financial struggles with lines like “we are getting too poor we are getting too rich.” Furthermore, “we are getting too rich” can be identified as the criticism of their 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 demand for novelty from the market. Other bands with similar lyrics are “Spank Rock, Das Racist and the Drums” (Samson). A queer-feminist band that goes further than to just criticize is Agatha. In their song *Cut The String* they suggest 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 many others gives Samson “Another reason to come together. Another reason to occupy Wall Street” (ibid.). Like Samson, Agatha or Erase Errata, theorist Ehrenreich emphasizes 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). Within 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.) Ehrenreich continues. As she says:

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 be because you didn’t try hard enough, didn’t believe firmly enough in the inevitability of your success. (10)

Erase Errata suggest that the ideology of positive thinking triggered by false promises made by institutions makes Americans dismissive of disturbing facts. The biggest of such self-betrays “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 urging listeners to stop positive thinking and the belief in a bright future, and start facing the economic and social crisis. An issue which 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 any color and ethnic minorities. Their song *Beacon*, for example, can be read as criticism of rich areas of San Francisco, especially Pacific Heights, but also the gay dominated Castro. Although they do not mention a specific part of town, it can be assumed that the “Beacon on the hill” is a metaphor for those rich areas, where wealth and capital are displayed by private individuals, in stark contrast to the poor areas of the city like the Tenderloin, where homelessness and poverty are part of everyday experience. By implying criticism of the Castro and gay culture in general Erase Errata question gay liberalism and gay consumer culture, which is so prevalent in San Francisco. Queer-feminist punk Mariam Bastani additionally supports such critique. She emphasizes that people in San Francisco are more comfortable with non-normative sexuality than issues of color and race (*Interview*). Bersani points out that “even white male straights know what insider terms like cis-gender etc. mean, and if they don’t, the punk community teaches them very quickly.” In contrast to this queer-friendly attitude stands 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 understand 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” (*The Twilight* 50). The queer-feminist punk of Erase Errata or Bastani is intended to intervene into such politics.

I want to argue that the angle or mode of such anti-capitalist politics, like Erase Errata’s, can be understood as 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. Queer anarchism, they seem to agree with theorists like Judith Butler, is an important countermovement to gay liberalism (*On Anarchism* 93). In a recent interview, Butler explains the usefulness and importance of queer-anarchist strategies as interventions into gay neoliberalism, using the example of queer Pro-Palestine activism in the Gaza Strip (*ibid.*). Although Butler emphasizes 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 I engage further with queer-feminist punk as an anarchist intervention into 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—for example, makes 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 the prison industrial complex that is increasingly corporately owned and profit oriented.⁷ Like many scholars, for example Eric A. Stanley and Nat Smith, Michelle Alexander, or Dean Spade, they emphasize that the prison-industrial complex is an industry that exploits the labor of the incarcerated 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 additionally point to their own collaboration with it as well.

Erase Errata, for example point to their own compliance and that of American citizens in general through ignorance, silence and 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,” address state violence, and the citizens’ involvement in state actions through the emphasis on the “we.” Moreover, they condemn US foreign policy as hypocritical. This point gets further emphasized through the 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, calling out to “rebel!” Their way of rebelling is pointing out injustice with their punk rock.

Erase Errata’s song *Another Genius Idea from our Government* criticizes federal laws regulating surveillance, the prison industrial complex and national ideologies of security. The lines

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*),

are a sarcastic statement against the national paranoia around terrorism and other criminal

⁷ By 2006 private companies in the United States operate between 260 and 270 correctional facilities, housing almost 100,000 adult convicts, according to Schmalleger, Frank, and Smykla, John. *Corrections in the 21st Century*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007.

activity. The last line “or catching something” carries the double meaning of detecting a crime through surveillance and the production 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. Stating that “your federal government knows that this is true” refers to the production of knowledge and truth within society through state propaganda within mainstream media. The emphasis on “true” suggests that mainstream medias news are not necessarily facts or “true” at all. Implicitly such lines refer to the creation of blackness as equaling criminal activity or intentions, drug abuse and so forth. In her book *The New Jim Crow* scholar Michelle Alexander challenges such narratives by emphasizing that media representations of increasing criminal activity stand in stark contrast to the actual decrease in criminal activity, especially among African Americans. Contrary to this decrease in criminal activity, however, 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 emphasizes, 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 connection to the prison industrial complex and the military industrial complex. A song, addressing legal issues on a state basis, in relation to social homophobia, is Erase Errata’s *Rider*. Stating “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 to carry certain concealed firearms in public. With 2012 about 49 US states have passed such laws allowing their citizens to carry weapons like firearms or knives without a permit or after obtaining a permit from local government or law enforcement. The Spitboy song *Wizened* (1995) addresses the death penalty.⁸

The Berkeley based queer-feminist all female anarchy-punk band Spitboy start their song by addressing the convicted as person as marked through his social environment. His or her “past and [...] pain,” however, means nothing according to the legal system. Relevant in legal terms, so Spitboy is only the deed, the “Senseless killing,” without asking for the

⁸ As of Spring 2011, only fifteen of the 50 US states had fully abolished the death penalty. They are: Alaska, Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

(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 draws on the complicity of US citizens in the state executed killings. The “we” furthermore, stands in contrast to the “you,” with which the person on death row is addressed. This emphasis on the opposition between a collective we and the individual marks the double standard in the legal system, which understands the individual’s deeds as free and personal choice, ignoring social structures and other circumstances influencing a person’s choices. This point is further emphasized through the lines “Your guilt / Your consequences / We are justified.” The lines

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*),

however, make a clear position against the ideology of personal choice and personal freedom. Crime is not seen as simply personally chosen, 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 points to 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? (Gonzales, *Spitboy / Los Crudos Split LP*)

Gonzales’ words emphasize again 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 the 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. Following 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 usage of cultural forms, like music and artistic forms of writing. Queer-feminist punks draw on anarchism in the search for actions and theories opposing 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 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: An Interview* 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: An Interview* 95). Anarchist accounts within queer-feminist punk rock, accordingly, question not only state violence, but the legitimacy of the US state as such. 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 self-identified and continue to identify 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, queer-identified anarchist, punk musician, and editor of the long running zine

Doris.⁹ Crabb explained why she is an anarchist with 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 forms of oppression and gives her a tool to work on multiple issues at the same time (*The Encyclopedia* 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 *Scream* 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 Kate 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 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

⁹ Cindy Crabb is a Bay Area based zine writer, publisher, and punk musician, who started her zine *Doris* around 1991 and has continued to publish, write and organize within various queer and punk communities until today. In her zine *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” (Julia Booz Ullrey, “Read a Book.” *Maximumrocknroll* Homepage 2 December 2012)

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, or 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. In Anarchist ideology and action, Stina sees most of her points reflected. 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 can be found in the zine *Anarcho Homocore Night Club* from about 1992. 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:"¹⁰ queer-feminist politics of negativity and anarchism

In *Anarcho Homocore Night Club* author Robynski draws attention to the public outcry the Sex Pistols' song "Anarchy in the UK" (1976) provoked. Moreover, he emphasizes 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 an understanding the politics of the Sex Pistols as 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 society offers for both movements. Conservatives, mainstream newspapers, commentators or politicians used anarchism frequently as a derogatory term in 1976 when the Sex Pistols introduced their song and they continue to use anarchism that way (cf. Squibb 175). Journalist and theorist Stephen

¹⁰ Dreher 42

Squibb argues that until today “[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” (175). The word anarchists is used by the *Globe* editor to mark senseless violence, destruction and chaos, ignoring the fact that Occupy Wall Street “has been anarchist from the start” (ibid.), as Squibb as well as scholar David Graeber argue.¹¹

Queer-feminist punk Robynski points to the “cultural,” or symbolic negativity and anti-social meaning of anarchism. Moreover, 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 as well as anarchism are stereotypes, or structural, not empirical, he nevertheless refers to them, because he understands that there is a “grain of truth in stereotypes” (Robynski 13). What Robynski donates as “truth” can be understood with the help of psychoanalytical theory as symbolic meaning, which influences verbal and social discourses as well as the formation of the inner psyche. One social effect the symbolic meanings of anarchism and punk have or had in the past, he further notes, 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, as well as 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. (Robynski 11)

Like Lee Edelman, Robynski points to the symbolic meaning of queerness. He refers to the

¹¹ It can be argued that the key features of all Occupy Movements within the US, the General Assemblies, the emphasis on participatory and direct democracy, the intention to create horizontal power relations and direct action are values and strategies of anarchism.

negative place of queerness within the symbolic order, Edelman describes so pointedly, and to the violence 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, for instance in the seminal *Maximurocknroll* 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 understand queerness and punk as negative forces, or 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” (Evens 98) in Lacanian terms. Moreover, Robynski understands queer-feminist punk performances and the production of meaning as political activism that is able to reject the 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 than 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 for queer-feminist activism, 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 understand 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 a definite future 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,” to use Judith Butler’s words (*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 emphasize 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; Queer Art*) or José Muñoz (*Cruising Utopia*), he does not reject futurity per se. Quoting work on 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, with scholars like Halberstam (*The Queer Art*), or 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 understood as politically productive insofar as it potentially deconstructs heteronormativity and other systems of oppression, while at the same time establishing a queer social sphere, which 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 by rereading¹² *The Catechism of the Revolutionary*¹³ by Mikhail

¹² Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin was a socialist Russian revolutionary and theorist of anarchism. Bakunin’s 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 get equal opportunity, support, education, and recourses. Bakunin, although married, had a sexual relationship with Nechaev, as the letters they wrote to each other suggest (see Kennedy, *Johann* 88f.; also Young, *Bakunin* 14)

Aleksandrovich Bakunin. He makes his argument in connection to the love affair of Bakunin with the anarchist extremist Sergei Gennadyevich Nechaev (16-18). Robynski argues that the threat Bakunin and Nechaev posed towards society was reflected within their illegitimate relationship that he calls “a Man/Boy S/M relationship” (18). His emphasis on an 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)” (Puar and Rai, *Monster* 117), to use the words of Jasbir K. Puar and Amit S. Rai. In their article “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots” Puar and Rai analyzed media and popular culture discourses within the US after the attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001. They argued, that the symbol of the terrorist became increasingly constructed as sexually and racially other (ibid.). They 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 Bakunin’s and Nechaev’s love affair 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 of 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 theoretization of Puar and Rai are helpful to understand the connection between queerness and the construction of a symbol of national threat that Robynski makes.

In addition to this, the reference to Bakunin and Nechaev’s love affair that Robynski makes adds some scandalous quality to his exhaustive analysis, which might prevent his readers—other punks—from losing interest. Moreover, such an argument is meant to

¹³ The authorship of the *Catechism of a Revolution* is 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.

provoke reactions from the anarchist scenes. I have analyzed this strategy of using queerness in its derogatory form as intentional provocation in the previous chapters in reference to the reading of 1970s punk by queer-feminist punks. Hence, it can be argued that this strategy is one of the most significant strategies of queer-feminist punk throughout its history.

The reference to the *Catechism of a Revolutionary*,¹⁴ and the version of anarchism Bakunin and Nechaev represent, however, primarily supports the 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, spiritual—[need to be] completely and utterly destroyed” (13). And indeed many theorists understood *The Catechism of a Revolutionary* as the “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 *The 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 emphasizes 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 an appropriation of the nihilistic meaning of anarchism as a strategy for queer-feminist punk. Additionally, a reference to Bakunin and Nechaev allows Robynski to understand anarchism as a movement, rather than as 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). The emphasis

¹⁴ Robynski emphasizes that *The 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).

on anarchism as activism, in contrast to theory, is interesting, because it supports Robynski's argument of the cultural activity of punk rock as anarchist activity. Furthermore, it supports my initial thesis that queer-feminist punk rock was understood and performed as political activism.

Robynski implies that successful queer-feminist politics need to be shaped as revolution. Referring to Nachaev in *The Catechism of the Revolutionary*, Robynski states that a revolution can only be made to happen through revolutionary action, not through 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" (23).

Both, anarchism and punk activism emphasize action rather than theorization. Moreover, both promote collective forms of action and activism, rather than individual deeds. Accordingly, they create discourses, which are simultaneously anti-social as well as envisioning (non-normative forms of) collectivity. In other words they create and maintain queer social bonds. Robynski emphasizes in his discussion of *The Catechism of the Revolutionary* that anarchism must be leaderless, although it 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. The references to prior punks as well as activists, feminists and thinkers within queer-feminist punk counter-cultures, accordingly, has to be understood as reference to role models that 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 read as such a search for alternative role-models and new forms of activism. Drawing on *The Catechism of the 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. They need to reflect on their own entanglement in oppression themselves, Robynski emphasizes, 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, or the *Home Alive* project in Seattle that teaches women and queers self-defense skills.¹⁵ Additionally, festivals like *Ladyfest*, or *Queerruption* can be seen as facilitating projects, because they offer musicians and music fans platforms for their activism.

To sustain anarchist projects, however, queer-feminist punks have to resist the cooptation of their movement by their oppressors, Robinsky 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 disrespectability. [T]he Patriarchy has totally assimilated Punk. [...] Anarchy has likewise been coopted” (27). Robynski emphasizes the role of language and meaning for the realm of the social again. He traces the downfall of anarchism back to the theorist Peter Kropotkin who defined the term anarchy as signifying “without authority” (29). Emphasizing the anti-authoritarian in anarchism, the original

¹⁵ I will analyze The Home Alive project as well as the Grrrls Rock Camps in detail in Chapter Five.

meanings (according to Robynski) of “chaos and disorder” (ibid.) were lost. Implicitly he argues 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 emphasizes “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 Robynski outlined for the history of anarchism can be seen in gay culture. Once queers were aiming at social integration, queerness become structurally integrated into systems of law, and (at least partially) socially accepted. “Gone are the days when perverts were perverts – 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, did not only deradicalize the potential of the term queer, but shift the line of social unacceptability to different groups. “The cost of assimilation,” to quote him again,

has been borne by those who are still perverts, the Queer lumpenproletariat:¹⁶ 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, Agahta or MEN, Robynski points to the complicity of gay culture in capitalism and marks the pitfalls of contemporary gay politics. Today gay liberals “invariably do the bidding of the state, supporting anti-immigration efforts, and defending

¹⁶ 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 within 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, Nicholas. “The lumpenproletariat and the proletarian unnameable.” *Libcom*. Blog. 2 May 2012. <<http://libcom.org/library/deleuze-marx-politics-nicholas-thoburn-3>>; cf. also Thoburn “Difference in Marx: The Lumpenproletariat and the Proletarian Unnamable.” *Economy and Society* 31.3 (2002)) Within this group he saw the most potential for a socialist revolution.

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, referring to Israel’s national politics. Like Robynski, Erase Errata, MEN and so many other queer-feminist punks, Butler sees in queer anarchism an adequate counter-politics. Although Butler might not necessarily agree that an effective queer-feminist punk anarchism, should be “[i]ntellectually disrespectful, 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 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. (Robynski 30)

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

4.1.2. “Agitate for that class war? / Or agitate for the class war’s end?:”¹⁷ anarchism as intersectional approach

I want to mention the factors of economic oppression and classism as crucial aspects of queer-feminist punk activism again. Many queer-feminist punks like Robynski argue that a focus on economic systems is necessary to resist oppressive power structures. They understand economic oppression as multi-issued. Accordingly, they identify and denounce categories like color, racialization, sexuality and gender more than the mere category of class when addressing economic exploitation. Nevertheless, queer-feminist punks do address the category of class. However, as the next two queer-feminist punk examples will

¹⁷ Agatha. “Poverty vs. Pride.” *Agatha*. LP. Self-released, 2012.

show, class is understood as one of many categories for oppression, in its intersections with categories like sexuality, gender or racialization.

The first example is a performance by Alice Velasquez of the song *Class War* at Amoeba Records in Berkeley on 12 January 2012. Velasquez, better known as Alice Bag, former singer of the Bags and Cholita!, played together with queercore musician Martin Sorroundguy 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 on every reading of her autobiography *Violence Girl* in winter 2011/12.

The song *Class War*, originally written by the Dils, calls out 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 very well into the contemporary historic context. 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.¹⁸ The song *Class War* by the Dils, performed by Velasquez, is a strong reference to the 99% percent.

However, the song lyrics go further in the characterization of the revolutionary subject, making a reference from economical 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” implicate American foreign policy in their criticism of capitalism. “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 tightly connected within the United States. They emphasize that racialization and a more general ‘othering’ of certain parts of the population provide the ideological basis within the capitalist system for the maintenance of social, political and economic white hegemony, as scholars like Stuart Hall or Cornel West point out. The signification of the racialized other,

¹⁸ Cf. Kroll 17; also Occupy Oakland. Homepage. 17 April 2012. <<http://occupyoakland.org/our-general-assembly/>>

Slaves (West, *Genealogy* 90), Native Americans or more recently illegal Mexican American immigrants (Hall, *Race* 45f.), as inferior provided legitimacy to create a cheap labor force. Capitalism needs cheap labor power in order to constantly increase profit (61).

The othering of the cheap labor force provides not only the justification for their exploitation, but additionally manages to shift the focus from the economic level to a social and biological level. In other words, the battle for resources among the population, especially in economically difficult times, can be labeled as (unjustified) race rebellion, if the most struggling worker is predominantly signified first through race and only secondarily through class. The simultaneous understanding of capitalism as color blind on the other hand, provides a class system where poverty and economic struggle is a sign of laziness rather than structurally created. If the poorest population is racialized it follows that this population is lazy, and that the racial other as such is lazy. Thereby, capitalist discourses shift the attention from the failure of capitalism as a system as such 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 as such.

The relevance of the connection between class, racialization and the capitalist system, here exemplified by Velasquez 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 to empower each other in the struggle against oppression. The statement for alliances is further exemplified through the collaboration of the musicians Velasquez and Martin Sorroundgy. While Velasquez embodies the early punk rock movement that sprung up in Los Angeles, as well as contemporary Chicana feminism, Sorroundguy represents Latina punk politics as well as the queercore movement in the eye of the audience. The intersectionality of oppression as well as a call for alliances is also central for the already mentioned queer-feminist punk band Agatha.

Agatha question the rhetoric of ‘class war’ as well as concepts of the 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 Kaelen addresses included the Occupy Movement in Seattle.¹⁹ However, the band's critique is directed toward political activism in general. In the booklet of their LP, 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 about the message and explains that the reason it made her feel alienated was the one-dimensional focus of the slogan. She emphasizes, further, that such a single-issued approach to poverty is significant for the political left community she is engaged 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. Differences between the oppressed become erased, and white, male and heteronormative power structures are not addressed within 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 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.²⁰

Kaelen draws attention to the necessity of a reflection on structural "ableism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, border policing (of any kind) and all other oppressions" (Kaelen, *Comment to "Poverty vs. Pride"*). Moreover, she reflects on the meta level or ideology that lies behind working class politics within 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 capitalist logics and do not strive for

¹⁹ Though not explicitly referring to the recent Occupy Movement, they mention slogans, in the commenting notes to the song, which could frequently be seen at Occupy actions.

²⁰ Kaelen. Comment to "Poverty vs. Pride." *Agatha*. LP. Self-released, Seattle 2012.

equality for all people within the US. Moreover, she connects conservative ideologies around class to counter-cultural practice, arguing that class war rhetoric within the US paradoxically reestablishes neoliberal logics and economic exploitation because it is based around the individual and individual success.

Connecting the rhetoric of calling for a class war to other phrases she came across in 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. 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 the reason why liberal or even leftist politics end up reestablishing heteronormative, ableist and racialized structures is the focus on individual freedom, because this freedom 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 on social structures, hegemonies and their connection with economic issues. In other words, Kaelen asks for the questioning of the ideology behind every social interaction, and every social, cultural and political form of disciplining and regulation, the state included. 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 like 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 reflects on society from an intersectional position, demonstrating Butler’s point that “any minority has to make allies among those who are subject to arbitrary and devastating forms of state violence” (ibid.). Agatha favors queer-feminist punk anarchism, like many other queer-feminist punks, 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 understood as intersectional

criticism of power structures and hegemonies. Moreover, members of Agatha reject a politics of representation in favor of politics of cooperation and alliances.

4.2. Challenge the system ...

I want to come back to the connection between gay assimilation, capitalist systems and administrative institutions (like states) that the band members of Agatha as well as author Robynski made. Both examples show that queer-feminist punks understand the connection between assimilatory politics, like those represented in the struggles of gays for the right to marry, and the reaffirmation of oppressive systems like state laws. Furthermore, they argue that the actual integration of formerly excluded subjects like gays allows for the production of a racially and queer other, and furthermore, legitimates its oppression, as could be seen in *Anarcho Homocore Night Club* by Robynski. Scholars like Dean Spade or Lisa Duggan have argued that gay movements have contributed to the vulnerability of many queer subjects—like transgender, people of color, undocumented immigrants, sex workers, homeless or drug addicts—advocating for legal and social inclusion into a system signified through neoliberalism. Capitalism and US governmental politics of neoliberalism 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 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 byproduct of the assimilation of gays into American acceptability in the twenty-first century in their previously mentioned article “Monster, Terrorist, Fag.” While gay assimilation allowed for the US nation to be “depicted as feminist and gay-safe by 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 to reject Afghanistan, they produced the concept of the nation as patriarchal, masculine and heteronormative, and, furthermore, legitimated 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 emphasize. 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 the legitimation of a war on Afghanistan, as well as the introduction of a series of anti-terrorist laws²¹ within the United States, restricting traveling and immigration, as well as communication, and allowing for 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 culturally and racially other through partial integration of the former other into neoliberal societies, however, was not limited to queerness. On the contrary, it drew a connection from the topic of queerness to class, gender, racialization and ableism. The song *Tierra de Libertad?—Land of the Free*²² by the band Los Crudos,²³ for example, reflects on immigration. The band, well known for their anarchist, feminist, Chicana and Latina politics, as well as for their queer singer Martin Sorroundguy, 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 producing non-English speakers as un-American. Los Crudos criticizes the system of education for not providing sufficient education for school

²¹ 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” passed the US Congress and was signed into law by President George W. Bush in October 2001. It dramatically reduced legal restrictions for law enforcement agencies to gather intelligence within the United States and allowed law enforcement and immigration authorities to detain and deport immigrants suspected of terrorism-related acts. It additionally expanded the definition of terrorism to include domestic terrorism, opening the door for a number of human rights violations in the name of national security.

²² Los Crudos and Spitboy. *Los Crudos / Spitboy*. LP. Ebullition Records, 1995.

²³ Los Crudos was hardcore punk band from Chicago, IL that existed from 1991 to 1998. The band was one of the Spanish-speaking punk bands and can be seen as influential for the increasing participation of Latinos in the predominantly white punk movements. Moreover, they initiated discourses on racialization, homophobia and economic oppression.

kids to learn the language of their origins. Furthermore, they mark institutionalized education as the domain of white hegemony and oppression. This oppression becomes further emphasized 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 within these lines becomes marked as “state programs” that are “sponsors of state violence,” to use Spade’s words (21). Additionally, Los Crudos understand themselves in alliance with all immigrants—those with citizenship and those who remain undocumented. The passage “They use us only when it is convenient” connects state enforced institutional oppression to the legal sphere of labor. The “us” in those lines does not differentiate between citizens and non-citizens. Implicitly, it asks migrants with 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. 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 new legal burdens enforced 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 ideology 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*.²⁴ The lines “They say we’re milking the system / But the system has milked me dry” address false ideologies about the 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. Los Crudos write “We will not be fooled by two-faced lies of equality and fairness [...] we cannot waste our

²⁴ *Spitboy/Los Crudos Split LP*

energy hoping for their acceptance” in the booklet of their 1995 LP. 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. 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.²⁵

The “defense” Los Crudos talk about is punk rock understood as 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, and any complicity in it. “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,” Los Crudos continue. They use offensive and confrontational language, and reject a politics of integration. Accordingly, 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 point to the complicity of punks in oppression. The criticism of complicity is important, because it offends and therefore intervenes into punk communities. It does so insofar as it irritates the collective identity as opposition to the state and its ideological apparatus. Los Crudos performances of such oppositional and critical lyrics at punk venues can be understood as anarchist direct actions.

Queer-feminist punks, like Los Crudos, Spitboy, Robynski and many others emphasize the characterization of their music and writing as an activity, and use anarchist theory to explain the relation between punk’s aspect of activity to theory and ideology. One nexus of the multiple and inseparable aspects of punk, the theoretical, ideological and activity

²⁵ Comment in the booklet of the *Spitboy/Los Crudos Split LP* (1995).

centered 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 paradox double signification of two completely oppositional significations 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 psychoanalytical theory, suggesting that new social bonds are created through *jouissance*. Within psychoanalytical theory, *jouissance* becomes 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” (Evens 98). The legal system and juridical law, however, is included into 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-socially queer perspective.

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

Queer-feminist punk rock creates *jouissance*-like experiences that can, although 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). When such anti-social queerness becomes experienced together with others, paradoxically 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 origins or generic (cultural, national, gender, class, sexual etc.) identity. If such queer bonds are sustained through time, they can be understood with the help of Jean-Luc Nancy’s

theoretizations in his book *Being Singular Plural*²⁶ as community. Nancy emphasizes that social forms based on equality—equality under the law, human rights etc.—are necessarily highly selective for the very definition of what the communality of such a being-in-common or equality is. Furthermore, such concepts are not able to recognize the individual and at the same time the whole collective. They can only ever focus either on the individual—as in neoliberal societies—or on the masses—as in communism (ibid. 59). Communities following Nancy's model on the other hand, are able to recognize individual difference and provide for the collective as a whole at the same time.

Anarchism similarly theorizes community as based on solidarity and shared politics rather than on identity or similarity. Moreover, anarchism provides tools and methods to sustain communities that are not hierarchically organized. To this end, it can be argued that anarchism supports and politically validates the numerous efforts queer-feminist punks make to form and support their communities on a structural, intellectual and economic level.

This makes self-reflection on such collectives and communities 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 facilitated film screenings, and many punk shows—for example by 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 counter event to the annual Gay Pride celebrations. The speaker line-up included a variety of radical thinkers, theorists and artists, like Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, Eileen Myles, and Kiki and Herb (Justin Vivian Bond and Kenny Mellman).²⁷ Another example of a radical projects that partly emerged from and was housed by DUMBA was *Queerruption* in 1999.

²⁶ Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Being Singular Plural*. Stanford University Press, 2001.

²⁷ The event was documented by Scott Berry in his film *Gay Shame 98*, USA 1998.

Queer-feminist punk scenes are radical and anarchistic “because of the way that art is created—in d.i.y. 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 recent interview describing contemporary scenes 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, *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. Its 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 satisfy their intention to be self-reflexive and non-compliant in the reproduction of social hierarchies or exclusions. Queer-feminist anarchist spaces and scenes, accordingly, 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 in their intersection, to work against the reproduction of oppressive power structures and hierarchies within queer-feminist punk 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. ... Challenge yourself.

Two of the numerous examples for an intervention into queer-feminist anarchist punk communities from within the same communities were the zine *Ring of Fire*, from 1996 to 1999, as well as the more recent zine *Nothing About Us Without Us: One*

QueerFatGimpResponse to Ableism and Fatphobia in Queer Communities. Both examples point eloquently to the influence and continuation of hegemonic power structures within queer-feminist punk.

The zine *Ring of Fire* by Hellary Homosex points to the continuation of hegemonic power structures within her own queer-feminist anarcha-punk community in Seattle and questions the community's commitment to fight exclusions. Homosex lost her legs while train-hopping²⁸ in 1996. After her accident she was forced to move in a wheelchair, and later learned to walk with prostheses. She realized how inaccessible the punk spaces she used to frequent were after her accident. Homosex points out that she does not "feel 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. But additionally, *Ring of Fire Issue 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 her strength. Using the term *crip* as empowering, Homosex explains that she and her lovers appreciate her "fabulous" (*Ring of Fire issue 3*, 19) new limbs during their sex play, for example.

A similar approach on ablism within anarchist queer-feminist punk communities marks 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

²⁸ Train hopping also known as freighthopping describes the act of furtively hitching a ride on a railroad freight car. Train hopping's significance is tightly connected to the period following the American Civil War, when poor freed slaves tried to move north and westwards to find labor. During that time train hopping became a signifier for freedom and liberation. Train hopping is forbidden by law within the US. It is extremely dangerous, because the best chance to get on as well as off a train undetected is by entering and exiting the wagon while moving. Today train hopping is popular among anarchists and punks.

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 provokes. 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 Hellary Homosex have nothing but offensive words for the ableism of their community. Nevertheless, they constantly remind the reader, that they are part of the same communities and do not intend to leave them. Moreover, the ableism of their peers is analyzed as result of an ableist society at large and as intrinsically interwoven with other oppressive power structures. Tranny Gimp emphasizes 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.”²⁹ 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 logics of capitalism as an economic system as well as an 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 can be shown on examples of lyrics by Agatha, Erase Errata, and Spitboy. Furthermore, as could be shown

²⁹ *Spit and Passion* is the long-term zine-project and comic book by queer-feminist punk musician and artist Cristy Road (Feminist Press: New York 2012).

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, often referred to as anarchism. Anarchism, first and foremost means to criticize hegemonies as products of various intersectional forms of oppression for queer-feminist punks. Moreover, anarchism means to emphasize community and collectivity. Such a community or collectivity is defined through a collective fight against hierarchies and anti-authoritarianism, rather than through 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 emphasize that the “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) has it. Accordingly, their queer-feminist punk activism cannot 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 into today's neoliberal and capitalist social structures necessarily results in the affirmation of the same old power structures and hegemonies that initially excluded individuals with non-normative sexualities and genders. The crucial reason why such politics do so is their focus on individual freedom and liberty. The concepts of individual freedom and liberty comply with the capitalist logic of individuality, exceptionalism and steady progress. Simultaneously, it asks individuals to compete against each other. This logic is based on the binary of the self and the other in a hierarchical order. Distancing themselves from such politics, queer-feminist punk centers on community and collectivity. Although they focus on collectivity and community, they also understand that communities are gatherings of individuals with very different needs and desires. Therefore supporting each other must mean understanding 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, 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 and understand doing and theorizing as intrinsically connected. They use music and other performative forms like activism. Moreover, they refer to anarchist ideas when understanding art, including music and other performative forms as activism.

Queer-feminist punk communities “challenge the system,” to borrow the lyrics by Limp Wrist one more time. However, more often than not, the rejection of hegemonic power does not exceed criticism of mainstream society, institutions and capitalism. Internalized power structures, although addressed theoretically and rhetorically, lead to familiar exclusions and hierarchies within the queer-feminist anarchy-punk communities. The results of such movements are for example the lack of representation of disabled people within queer-feminist punk, as criticized by Hellary Homosex and Tranny Gimp in this chapter. Other results are white hegemony within queer-feminist punk for example. In the following chapters, I will address counter-measures against the reproduction of internalized power structures within queer-feminist punk communities from people within the different scenes.

5. “There’s a Dyke in the Pit:”¹ 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 feminist themes and politics within queer-feminist punk lyrics and writings, as well as female and feminist identified musicians within queer-feminist punk movements. Queer-feminist punks frequently and decidedly use the term feminist as 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 with the term “dykecore” from the mid-1980s until around 2000. Interestingly, the term is hardly ever 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 self-identify as feminists and what they attempt with foregrounding feminist topics in their music. Moreover, I want to analyze which concepts lie behind the usage of terms like lesbian, women, and feminism. I will start my analysis of feminist politics within queer-feminist punk rock by going back to the zines and other cultural productions of the 1980s, especially the work of J.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce. I will start with their examples to argue that queer-feminist punk rock, was decidedly feminist from its emergence within punk discourses. Thereafter, I will refer to various queer-feminist punk examples to prove that feminism continues to be a core concept within queer-feminist movements. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that the feminist politics within queer-feminist movements are not dogmatic ideologies, but characterized through change because such politics react to the broader social structures and socio-political discourses of their time. Besides offering an analysis of the production of meanings around feminism within queer-feminist punk music and writing, I will explore the place, value or influence such outspokenly feminist accounts had within queer-feminist communities or scenes, as well as the broader punk movement. Furthermore, I will investigate the specific relation of

¹ *There’s a Dyke in the Pit* was a compilation CD produced by Matt Wobensmith on Outpunk Records in 1994. It featured exclusively bands that identified either with the terms dykecore, like Spitboy, or bands with members that identified as dykes, like Bikini Kill

queer-feminist punks to (other) feminist, queer-feminist or lesbian movements, activisms and agencies. In addition to a semiotic analysis of my material gathered through collecting lyrics, zines, magazine articles, conducting interviews and participant observation, I will embed my findings into 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, *No Turning*; Lewis; Michelle). They understand third wave feminism as a feminism “that challenges the idea of dualism itself while recognizing diversity, particularity, and embodiment” (Mack-Canty 154). Although the creation of a linear time narrative implied in these “new wave” or “third wave” discussions seems highly problematic because it fit neatly with a neoliberal rhetoric of progress and optimization, and/or to conservative concepts of “generation(s),” two points of these discussions seem, nevertheless, useful for the investigation of queer-feminist punk rock and subcultures. First, these discussions do not doubt that queer-feminist punk is a political movement and theory (in other words, feminism). Second, feminists assigning themselves to the “third wave” criticize binary gender and sex systems while questioning the culture/nature duality as such (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”²—Dykecore and/as Feminism

I will introduce now very early examples of queer-feminist punk writings to show feminist themes and agendas within the first queer-feminist punk scenes in the late 1980s. Additionally, I draw attention to the continuation of feminism through the history of queer-feminist punk as such until today.

What brought the then ‘homocore,’ (later ‘queercore’) movement, attention from the broader U.S. hardcore punk scene and beyond was the very provocative article “Don’t be gay: Or, how I learned to stop worrying and fuck punk up the ass” in the widely distributed punk magazine *Maximumrocknroll* by Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones in April 1989, as mentioned in earlier chapters. In this article—which is arguably the most frequently quoted queer-feminist punk article ever—the artist, filmmaker, musician, and zine-editor G.B.

² Agatha. “Queer as in Fuck you.” *Panik Attack*. Audio Tape. Seattle: Rumbletowne Records, 2009.

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 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. (LaBruce and Jones)

Jones’s and LaBruce’s evaluation of contemporary gay politics is not a bit more appreciative 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 J.B. Jones in this article, which is frequently referred to as one of the most important influences for the formation of a queer-feminist punk movement. This emphasis supports my argument that female identified punks like G.B. Jones as well as their feminist politics played a crucial role in the emergence of queercore. The crucial role of female identified punks, dykes, and their feminist politics, however, is severely underrepresented by historians and academics writing about queercore or queer punk rock in general—with the one exception of Tribe 8. One of the few mainstream articles that accounts for the significant contribution of Jones to the queer-feminist punk movement is the SF Weekly interview *Riot Biiitch: G.B. Jones* (1994) by journalist Johnny Ray Huston. Huston emphasizes that “Jones’s efforts have certainly influenced a younger generation of female artists and performers” (13). He further argues 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 notes further 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 anti-social strategy. The emphasis on “fun with hair dye” can be understood as an appreciation of femininity as well as 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.).

Although Jones must be seen as a crucial figure for the emergence of a queer-feminist movement around the year 1986, I want to emphasize that Jones was certainly not the only one who initiated it. Equally important was Jena von Brücker, who played with Jones in Fifth Column, collaborated with her on the zine *Double Bill* and published her own project, *Jane Gets a Divorce*. Especially the later project is interesting because it used the “explosive rants” that have become so significant for queer-feminist punk writing, in reference to “Valerie Solanas’ SCUM manifesto” (Huston 12). But the queer-feminist scene in Toronto is not the only one that showed strong participation of queer, female and feminist identified punks. Similarly important for the distribution 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 for 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 role, but indeed a (queer-)feminist project as such. Therefore, it is appropriate to refer to punk rock with queer-feminist lyrics as ‘queer-feminist punk rock.’ Such a denotation 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 and artists. Nevertheless, it is a fact that individuals producing queer-feminist punk rock and writings are often referred to as “women” by society, no matter what their self-identification might be and they often experience misogyny.

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 adapted by bands who emerged all over the U.S., 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, or Seattle’s Agatha and My Parade. These bands 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 relations of the movement—is not uniform in its politics. It varies significantly from scene to scene, sometimes from band to band. Nevertheless, feminist politics and queer-feminist critique within queer-feminist punk must not be underestimated in their influence. Queer-feminist punks use various labels to identify themselves. Some refer to themselves as women, or female, some as grrrl, as gender-ambivalent or as gender-queer, as man or as trans, or as not identified, as lesbian, or as dyke, etc. Nevertheless, queer-feminist punk musicians understand contemporary societies as structured through a binary and hierarchical gender system, and as sexist. They emphasize that society’s sexism results in suppressing and discriminating individuals on the basis of the assumption of their female sex, no matter how the person identifies her/him-self. Furthermore, they argue that such oppressive power is a form injustice, and needs to be resisted. Oppression is not an individual habit or problem, but a structural one. Though most queer-feminist punks understand the binary gender system not as naturally given but as socially constructed, an equally large number 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 to individuals who want to identify as women and fight for the right to have an abortion and against domestic violence among other things.

The usage of the term ‘queer’ by queer-feminist punk bands and writers is no less multifaceted than their understanding of feminism. Moreover, queer becomes used in its negative or anti-social form, for example in the song *Not gay as in happy, but queer as in fuck* you by the contemporary band Agatha. Although queer-feminist punks acknowledge and use the term queer as not simply substituting for the terms ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ but rather representing a more open and critical understanding of the term that includes ambivalence and critique of fixed-identity categories, they often decide to use other terms and labels like the dyke, lesbian or feminist. They do so because the term queer bears the potential to reinforce male hegemonies by making feminist, inter- or trans-politics and individuals invisible. Similar to their usage of queer in reference to its derogatory meanings, queer-feminist punk rock reverts to the derogatory usage of other words like ‘bitch,’ or ‘slut,’

‘lesbian’ or ‘dyke.’ An early example for such appropriations of oppressive language was already introduced by the work of J.B. Jones who “provided gay women with the choice to identify themselves as bitches” (Huston 12), and the band Fifth Column that produced songs titled 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 additionally 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 have explained in detail in the previous chapters. The strategy of appropriating derogatory terms can additionally 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 relations 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. Especially, but not exclusively, female-identified punks like Alice Armendariz Velasquez emphasize that early punk rock was decidedly feminist in the 1970s. Velasquez used to be singer of the Bags, one of the first punk bands in Los Angeles around 1976, and performed in queer-feminist punk projects like *The Castration Squat* and *Cholita!* Like her, quite a couple of first generation punks consisted of strong female band members and showed feminist politics. Since its very emergence, female punks like New York-based Patty Smith or Poly Styrene (Marian Joan Elliott-Said) of the British band *X-Ray Spex* were not only very fierce and loud front women but influenced punk’s politics as such for generations. Their rejection of society and the affirmation of this negative status performed through punk music came not just from the standpoint of any outcast, but from

those of 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,” contemporary punk musician Lee Frisari emphasizes (Frisari, *Interview*). Those bands and performers like Patty Smith, X-Ray Spex, Siouxi and the Banshees, The Raincoats and The Slits, inspired several counter-cultural 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 outsider-status, their frank and unashamed usage of sexuality. Patti Smith, for example, “was all about sex,” referring to the 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. 74). Beeber interprets this anecdote as a demonstration of the usage of hyper-sexuality 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 exclamation can also be seen as reappropriation of society’s sexualization of women—as object for male desire—and embrace of themselves, their bodies and their desire. Another band that dealt with the demands of societies on women as well as female stereotypes was X-Ray Spex. Although they were less out front with the topic of sexuality, they played with sexual connotations, fetishism and sexuality in their famous song “Oh Bondage! Up Yours!,” focussing primarily on consumerism. Other songs, like *Identity*, address norms and regulations for women in a patriarchal capitalist society. Poly Styrene as well as Patti Smith rejected such norms and regulations through their lyrics, attitude and further contradicted expectations through their style. Styrene’s look, for example, her short features, 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” (LaBruce and Jones, *Don’t be gay*). Siouxsie of the Banshees also sang love songs to women or songs which can be interpreted as lesbian themed like “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 no taboo after the occurrence of Patti Smith, lesbians who were out and frank about their sexuality were still rare.

However, these strong females—no matter whether they were lesbian-identified or not—made excellent role models for they were brave enough to go on stage though they were young, untrained and above all female. Tragically enough, today’s female identified or as female ‘read’ musicians still describe entering the stage as a political move unto itself, because it violates genderroles and norms. In interviews, conducted in the process of this dissertation project, a common response to the question of whether queer-feminist musicians see their music as political at all was that for those musicians the mere fact of producing music as a female identified person is political as such. The same response was uttered by members of early riot grrrl groups, like Glynis Hull-Rochelle, members of queercore groups, like Mary Frazer from the 2000s queer pop-punk band Velvet Mafia, as well as contemporary musicians, like Emily Rems from the band Royal Pink or Lauren Denitzio, from the *For the Birds Collective*. Glynis Hull-Rochelle concluded 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, *Interview*).

All of my interview partners equally emphasized that the misogyny of mainstream culture as well as counter-cultures is the reason why 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 verbalization as critique, with a definitive political focus. Perhaps more than others, female-identified queers utilize punk rock music as a self-empowering strategy and a repulsion 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 oppositional to female roles within the cultural realm: it is loud, rude, angry, aggressive, energetic and dirty.

A very good example of anti-social behavior and verbalization 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 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 2009 recorded song “queer as in fuck you.” In Agatha’s song, queer indeed carries the afore mentioned 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 defining it against 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 usage 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 additionally address gay and lesbian liberation movements. They question gay rights oriented politics and appropriate the term queer to reject such assimilationist politics. Interestingly, they mention only the term ‘gay’ in combination with liberation and not lesbian, bi, or trans—like in the mainstream acronym ‘lgbt.’ It can be suggested that the absence of l (lesbian), bi (bisexual) and t (transgender) is an implicit critique of mainstream activism for its dominance of cis-gendered males.

Both the band Tribe 8 as well as Agatha include some female- and/or lesbian-identified band members, Leslie Mah in the first, Nein in the second case. Pedro, Muriel and Esther is fronted by the lesbian-identified drag queen Vaginal Crème Davis. The three decidedly feminist bands have lyrics about gender inequalities, violence against women, and lesbian sex and desire, among others.

The attendance 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 mark their politics as feminist 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 produce a documentation of the movement. However, in the final issue Wobensmith accounts for the important role of female or lesbian-identified musicians and writers within 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, *Issue 7* 46).

5.1.1. anti-social language, rejection, empowerment—the strategies of feminist punk rock

As mentioned earlier, female-identified queers—from Tribe 8 in the early 1990s to Agatha in the year 2009—took from punk rock their usage of music as a self-empowering strategy and an act of resistance against mainstream society, as well as an expression of anger. The political strategies of these queer-feminist counter-cultures and queer-feminist punks often get described with the formulaic expression “promoting the outsider status,” to use the words of cultural studies scholar Susan Driver (5). One of the aims of their promotion of the outsider status is certainly an increase in visibility for female, lesbian, transgender identified within subcultural environments. Nevertheless, the primary aim of queer-feminist punk rock is the repulsion or rejection of social hegemonies. The rhetoric and theoretical concept that underlies and motivates queer-feminist punk productions and activities is a politics of negativity or anti-sociality, as academic accounts like Susan Drivers’ suggest. Terms like queer, but also lesbian, dyke, bitch, whore and so forth, are used in their pejorative senses. These anti-social meanings, although very visible, are, however, never free of doubt. Words like bitch etc. 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 becomes 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, for instance beauty norms, where only able and white bodies are perceived as beautiful. Instead of giving a clear definition what queer, lesbian, dyke etc. mean to them, and fixing these terms to nonconforming sexualities as a response, they use those terms as a tool for their criticism. In other words, instead of asking who might actually belong to 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' usage of these sexually connoted terms, especially, but not exclusively the term queer, suggest an understanding of identification and desire as constitutive activities (Driver 10) and not as a priori or naturally given.

Queer theorists and historians working within the field of lesbian punk rock or dykecore like Judith Jack Halberstam, Angela Wilson, or Sara Marcus agree that understanding queer-feminist punk rock as based on a rejection of heteronormativity and a binary gender/sex system legitimates seeing the genre as an offspring of a feminist tradition, or at least as a phenomenon strongly connected to feminist ideals. Nevertheless, this acknowledgement of feminist agendas and methods and the integration of some of them into their own activities by queer-feminist punks did not automatically guarantee an easy relationship with other feminist movements. On the contrary, queer-feminist punks criticize and sometimes even reject feminist politics as practiced by the lesbian separatist scene or radical feminism—especially insofar as they do not appreciate their understanding of gender/sex differences as naturally given and/or a stable binary distinction. Their participation in a move “from the tenets of modernism with this notion of a unified subject” and “a universal (female) nature” (Mack-Canty 158), initiated through (other) lesbians, women of color, and “third-world women” (ibid.), like Gloria Anzaldúa or bell hooks, was not appreciated by all feminist groups as legitimate under the label of feminism. 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 into feminist movements

of their time, queer punk driven feminism during the 1980s and 1990s also “move[d] away from foundational theoretical schools, often accompanied by a loss of faith in the ability of established socio-political theories to account for women’s situations” (Mack-Canty 158), like anarchism or Marxism. This point is not only interesting with regard to feminist movements, but also considering punk ideology and punk subcultures, the members of which were not anarchists by accident.

Queer-feminist punk rock or dykecore was perceived as a threat to other feminist movements to such a large extent, and likely got noticed by them because it evolved (at least partly) within the same groups and scenes. However, as already frequently mentioned, the politics within queer-feminist punk were not homogeneous or non-contradictory as well. 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 understand riot grrrl as a distinct political movement that needs to be seen separately from other queer punk movements. I, however, disagree with such a view, because riot grrrl-identified musicians like Donna Dresch or G.B. Jones and many others were also significant 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 a reference to the term queer, and vice versa. Riot grrrl was a loosely organized network of newly politicized and mostly female-identified punks, sharing their disagreement with the gender relations within their punk cultures and beyond. As Matt Wobensmith concluded in the year 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, *Issue 7* 46). Considering bands like Fifth Column or zines like *J.D.s* by G.B. Jones, or *Chainsaw* by Donna Dresch, however, it could equally be argued that the uprising of riot grrrls was brought about by queercore. Riot grrrl and dykecore musicians did not only influence each other, use similar strategies, and produce on the same labels—for example *Mr. Lady* or *Chainsaw Records*—but 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* from Sara Marcus

proofs, some of the riot grrrl scenes between 1991 and 1993 where almost entirely queer, for example 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” (Marcus, *Girls* 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.

No matter if it is called riot grrrl or dykecore, central to the production of feminist punk music, zines and art was the empowerment of female-identified musicians and artists. The strategy for such empowerment was the expression of anger as an aesthetic motive as well as the appropriation of aggression, usually connected with masculinity. These usages of punk music as expressions of anger was inspired through earlier female-identified punk rock musicians, already mentioned. Furthermore, they referred to an earlier version of feminist activism as performed by Annie Sprinkle, Audre Lorde, and Kathy Acker. Anger, according to those feminists was seen as a source of energy and strength, as an origin of creativity (cf. Juno 5). Like their predecessors, queer-feminist punk musicians abandon the image of the caring woman and see themselves as rebels instead, feeling comfortable in this role. A song that became significant for this self-understanding as rebel 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, although they strongly related to some riot grrrl politics. The reason why quite a few rebellious female-identified musicians of the 1990s punk scene rather chose the label dykecore for their music than riot grrrl might be because they did not feel comfortable with the image of the “girl”. Even Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear, two bands often referred to as founding figures of the movement, did not feel comfortable with the label anymore and complicated their account on sex and gender by asking for a “Girl Boy Revolution” (Marcus, *Girls* 261) after one year of riot grrrl politics in 1992.

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; Marcus, *Girls*).³ Scholar Carisa R. Showden correctly observed that musicians who started identifying themselves as riot grrrls increasingly were “focusing on personal choices rather than political action” (Showden 172) in her article *What’s political about the New Feminism?* Moreover, she emphasizes 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 with corporate music productions like the British casting group Spice Girls, who became famous under the term girl power. Such an equation suggests that riot grrrl musicians were just another spectacular music trend within a neo-liberal market. It neglects the self-understanding of riot grrrl-identified punks as political agents or feminist activists, and silences their radical socio-political criticism. The category “girl”, especially as it became represented by the 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” (Showden 177). Accordingly, the strategy of impersonating the girl’s aesthetics while irritating the girl-role by means of aggressive behavior by riot grrrl musicians seemed too limited to most queercore musicians. They preferred other performance strategies, for example the concept of drag because it questions not only presumptions about and connotations of gender, but also of sex. Bands like Tribe 8 in the 1990s and the contemporary 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 both bands see themselves to some degree in a feminist and/or lesbian tradition. 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 themselves participated in the creation of normative power structures through their already

3 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 covered 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 only a very small percentage of them in the United States.

mentioned focus on personal experience without analyzing the intersectionality of multiple social factors besides gender. This led to a lack of self-criticism for the reproduction of exclusionary hegemonies within scenes and groups. The 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 usage 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 riot grrrl productions through their “re-telling of rape, incest, and girl-girl intimacy,” 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.). Riot grrrl, for some of its members, 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, for riot grrrl the slogan the personal is political was translated into 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’ usage of this strategy to create a familiar as well as exclusionary community; this kind of exclusion operated as a means of

safeguarding community. In their goal to build community, create a safe space, and their understanding of the personal as political, according to Nguyen, 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 issues 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 herself or Leslie Mah from Tribe 8, as well as some queer zinewriters like Margarita Alcantara-Tan and Selena Whang (zine *Bamboo Girl*) increasingly disagreed with these riot grrrl groups’ politics, which reinforced essentialist notions of gender and sex differences as well as white hegemonies (Nguyen, *Race, Riot Grrrls*; Marcus, *Girls*; 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, Whang and other punks of color and queer activists influenced riot grrrl-identified bands and writers to critically reflect on their own bias. 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” (1993) by Heavens to Betsy.⁴ The lyrics of the song announce

⁴ Heavens to Betsy was a band formed in Olympia, WA from 1991 to 1994. The members were fellow Evergreen State College students Tracy Sawyer, and Corin Tucker, who became vocalist 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 line up together with Bratmobile, Jean Smith of Mecca Normal and 7 Year Bitch. The concert was called “Love Rock Revolution Girl Style Now” and is widely considered one

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 critical whiteness accounts, as demonstrated on the example of “White Girl,” as well as interventions by punks of color within queer-feminist punk counter-cultures in chapters six and seven. At this point, however, I want to emphasize again that critical whiteness and people of color accounts were present within the queer-feminist punk movement. More dominant themes were anti-patriarchy accounts directed against mainstream culture, for example against violence against female-identified people, violence against lesbians, and transgenders. Additionally, 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, on the scene-internal power structures of riot grrrl, queer-feminist, queer punk and punk in general was very important and continue to be so, it is important to additionally 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 lyrics by The Butchies. In their song “Sex (I’m A Lesbian)” they sing “you’re sexy in my jeans baby / 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 within 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, for instance in the Katy Perry song “I Kissed A Girl”⁵ where a female to female kiss happens out of the curiosity of a straight girl, or it comes at the price of extreme gender-conformity, for example in the TV show *The L Word*.⁶ The Butchies, on the other hand, present a different kind of female

of the crucial events in the formation of the Riot Grrrl movement.

⁵ Katy Perry. “I Kissed A Girl.” *One of the Boys*. CD. Capitol, 2008.

⁶ *The L Word* was a U.S. television drama series on the TV channel Showtime that ran from 2004 to 2009.

identification, namely a butch one. Moreover, they draw attention to the gender-representations and question identity categories as such, for example through 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 from pornographic mainstream representations, and therefore withdraw themselves from a 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 to 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, for example. They show gender variance through depicting female masculinities as well as fat-positive images, among others. Not all of these themes are necessarily presented as angry 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 exemplary bands and queer-feminist zines in the following chapters. Starting with Tribe 8, I will explore the appropriation of anger and anti-social verbal expression. Moreover, I exemplify 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:”⁷ anti-social interventions into Second Wave Feminism

Named after the sexual practice of tribadism, Tribe 8 formed in 1990 and was a lesbian-

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 contains of exceptionally gender normative, tall and conventionally beautiful, predominantly white and rich people. The location is West Hollywood.

⁷ Tribe 8. “Neanderthal Dyke.” *Fist City*. Audio Tape. Alternative Tentacles Records, 1995.

only band from San Francisco, CA. Today, the band is considered to be crucial for the distribution and popularity of the term and concepts of queercore as well as 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, Jen Rampage, Mama T and Tantrum on the bass. They mostly toured through the United States but occasionally played a few gigs in Europe and Canada. Tribe 8 became famous especially due to their fiercely contested performances, even by other feminists and lesbians, within the queer-feminist punk movement and in feminist circles. During their performances, all band members used to strip off their shirts and underwear, and lead singer Lynn Breedlove, apart from donning countless leather belts with rivets and a black 'A' for 'anarchism' on her stomach, 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 signature anarchist "A" on her stomach and with 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 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. But they provoke not only by talking about unconventional sexualities and practices but also by pointing to taboos within these subcultures, such as S&M and abuse in lesbian relationships, even incest—topics that are hardly ever touched within lesbian autonomous groups and other feminist environments.

Though these performances caused outrage within the lesbian separatist and other feminist scenes, such performances do not necessarily signify a break with feminist scenes and strategies but can, on the contrary, 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 (*Girls* 146). And

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 For 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. (Marcus, *Girls* 304)

An additional example is feminist artist Lynda Benglis who had a famous photo of herself with a giant strap on. Tribe 8 take 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 *Snarcism*.

The reason why Tribe 8's performances caused such a huge amount of attention in independent media (e.g. Wobensmith, *Outpunk* 5) as well as in academic accounts⁸ was not only that the band carried these strategies to an extreme, but that they performed at places and stages where other feminist punk performers never did. 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 on the one side and to different feminist communities on the other. 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 of the festival accused Tribe 8 of imitating male behavior and criticized that as anti-feminist. Some even produced a banner with the slogan "Tribe 8 promotes violence against women" (Juno, *Anger* 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*); others judged the performance as too aggressive, too violent and as an attack on the safe space the festival offered (biological women only), within which lesbians/women should remain free from assaults, discrimination and harassment (Wilson 60).

The participation of Tribe 8 in the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival⁹ is significant for my

⁸ Cf. Juno et. al., *Angry*; Baldauf et. al; Kailer and Bierbaum; Halberstam, *In a Queer*; Wilson;

⁹ The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival is an international feminist music festival occurring every August since 1976 near Hart, MI. The event attendance can be assumed between five and nine-thousand women-identified people and has a womyn-only policy, based on biological categories, that is frequently contested by

argument that queer-feminist punk bands actively engaged in a dialogue with other feminist movements. As scholars like Ann Cvetkovich and Selena Whang 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” (*Don’t stop* 131). It can be assumed that Tribe 8 knew about the political importance of the festival and the implications of their performance there. The decision by Tribe 8 to play at the festival must therefore be understood as conscious and purposeful. The reactions to their performances described above, accordingly, can be understood as significant due to a much larger conflict within feminist movements. The core category of feminist action and politics, the category “women” was increasingly questioned for its usefulness, for it seemed that under this label white, middle-class privilege was perpetuated and differences and hierarchies among women were made invisible. Especially women of color and lesbians challenged feminist political and social groups for focussing only on white and heterosexual women and their experiences as well as their political demands. Self-identified lesbians and women of color demanded that white feminists reflect on their own privileges and the continuation of white hegemony. They question the assumption that there was an essence that all women shared equally and to the same extent in femininity. Furthermore, they criticized that the rhetoric of a universal femininity or womanness was an argument that white and heterosexual women used to erase differences and support their own desires as the universal agenda of 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 part should be the unifying force of feminism” (Showden 2009: 193). But not only the differences between women were emphasized. Indeed, based on those critical voices as well as on theoretical accounts like Judith Butler’s or Donna Haraway’s, the difference between men and women—whether understood as historical and/or natural—was increasingly questioned. While essentialists and lesbian-separatist groups insist on the distinction between the two sexes and structured their activism accordingly, deconstructivist activists and theorists question the binary of the gender/sex system fundamentally. Though Tribe 8 insisted on being

radically queer groups like Bash Back, for example (Some Totally Artificial Bitches 368-371). Although the festival is generally signified through difference feminist accounts, lesbian separatism and women’s spiritualism, it included Tribe 8, The Butchies, Le Tigre, Bitch and Animal, and Sister Spit during the 1990s.

routed within a lesbian-feminist tradition of music and activism like those of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, they proudly blurred gender boundaries and along with this the boundaries of lesbian-feminist music and politics (Wilson 2008: 60). Another hornets' nest Tribe 8 stirred up with their performance at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival is commonly known as the "Sex Wars" (see Chapkis 1997: 11; also Kailer/Bierbaum 2002: 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 until today. While feminists like Dworkin consider pornography as 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 and the pleasure in and erotics of power as such.

On their 1995 album *Fist City*, which was released in the year after Tribe 8's appearance at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, they comment in their very undiplomatic way on their performance and the reaction of the audiences there, as well as the radical feminist scene in general in their songs. In "Neanderthal Dyke" they sing for example:

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 McKinnon, 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 judge the lesbian separatist scene's unreflexive middle class privilege, their blindness to their boundaries and exclusiveness, but also their understanding of the term(s) "woman/women" or "lesbian" as too rigid, as these few lines show. Interestingly, Tribe 8 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 or Andrea Dworkin. Moreover they use the exact same language as these feminists—feminist key words like "political consciousness," or "woman identified"—with the aim to mock them.

Additionally, the position of Tribe 8 regarding 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 inside the framework of this space. The argument that Tribe 8 questioned essentialist notions of gender and sexuality as well as the feminist strategy to create safe spaces along those binaries is further supported through the fact that Lynn Breedlove and Lynn Flipper (Silas Howard) were reported to have rejected the label riot grrrl for its reference to gender binarism.¹⁰ 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 on gender and sexuality of most dykecore and other queer-feminist bands, I was surprised to find discourses around women-only spaces that did not only strongly advocate for such spaces, but also fall 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 2008: 62). Needless to say, this statement outraged many fans and Wilson had to face the accusation of being trans-phobic. “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 pull out of a prior commitment to play 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 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 in the page’s “Michigan/Trans Controversy Archive.” Although Tribe 8 criticized the exclusivity of the lesbian-separatist scene and their 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 considering the topic that the audiences were often left to interpret their songs as they pleased. Obviously, the band enjoyed the production of

¹⁰ Cf. *From The Back Of The Room*.

contradictory messages and did little to clarify their intentions. Whereas *Rise Above: A Tribe 8 Documentary* suggests an overall positive and open stance towards transgender, Halberstam mentions that “camp trans protestors” accused Tribe 8 of transphobia (Halberstam, *In a Queer* 181). Moreover, the lyrics on the 1996 album *Snarkism* are very ambivalent concerning the topic of transgender. Songs like following which is titled “Wrong Bathroom,” depict some experiences of women with ambivalent gender identities, criticizing gender norms and attributions from outside and favoring gender-ambivalent appearances. They sing:

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! (Wrong Bathroom)

This attitude also applies to Tribe 8’s performances, which blur and irritate traditional images of the passive and caring female sex with a rough and self-confident enactment. This is further portrayed in the picture of Slade in the booklet of *Snarkism*, in which s/he sports a big mustache, very short hair, and a very androgynous clothing style. Additionally, 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 transgender-friendly interpretation is further confused in the very controversial song “Tranny Chaser”, which is not easy to interpret. 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 Ru Paul 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. But 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 about the band’s intentions, but do not offer a definite answer. While the lyrics can be read as an affirmation of gender-bending and transgender, it can also be read as mockery. This strategy can be understood with Judith Jack Halberstam as “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 their already mentioned song “Frat Pig,” they sing about gang rape. 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 afore mentioned feminist art conventions, but by using homosexual desire as cause for the violence against women they also refer to something else. On the one hand, they implicitly reflect some psychoanalytical theories on male repression of homosexuality and sublimation, which—in a painfully simplified version—had 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, bad. But by using homosexuality and queerness in this derogatory way, Tribe 8 manages to draw attention to the error in such a usage. They manage to do so by using sarcasm, visible exaggeration and emphasizing the contradiction of derogatory language for queerness and at the same time being a group of ‘out and proud’ queers themselves.

No less violent are statements regarding some social and political fields known as male domains, like the music genre punk rock or the Republican Party. Tribe 8’s comment on the US-American Republicans “Eat shit—10 billion flies can’t be wrong” (*Republican*

Lullaby), and their verdict on Rock'n'Roll icons like Jimi Hendrix and punk rock legends like Darby Crash (singer of the punk band The Germs) or Sid Vicious (drummer of the Sex Pistols): “knocked yourself off—and did us all a favor” (*Jim, Darby & Sid*). Lyrics of this kind expose maleness as something ridiculous, something one must reject, and something they want to get even with. This attitude places Tribe 8 in the tradition of the lesbian-separatist feminist movement again.

A very humorous incident referring to Tribe 8's interventions into displays of patriarchy and machismo was their appearance on the MTV show *Luke's Peep Show*—organized by Luther Campbell of '2 Live Crew' in Miami. Producer Luke Skywalker had heard about this lesbian band performing topless and invited them for a live interview in his hip-hop-porn-show.¹¹ Of course, the producer, his crew and the female go-go dancer had no 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* 57).

But as should be clear by now, Tribe 8's criticism of society goes beyond the rejection of patriarchy. It is even more than an aim of empowering marginalized individuals with non-normative sexualities or genders. Tribe 8, like many other queercore bands, offer a perspective on whiteness, sexuality, gender and class that reveals 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 which violate beauty norms or social values, mentioning lesbian sexuality, colored skin and other racial attributes: “People hate me for the color of my skin and the shape of my eyes,” as well as anti-social behavior: “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 for punk rock in general, is not only a political but also an aesthetic attribute of the band. One should also add that this attitude in the case of Tribe 8 is very significant, as 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. In *Rise Above: A Tribe 8 Documentary*, drummer Slade explains that s/he floats between the genders, Leslie Mah sees herself between Caucasian and Asian,

¹¹ Cf. Baldauf et. al 110; Wobensmith, *Outpunk* 57

between hetero- and homosexuality, Tantrum between a professional musician and a 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, men are chained and forced to “play” with Breedloves strap-on dildo and stimulate it with their mouth. What makes these ambiguous scenes so extremely provocative is the fact that they are juxtaposed with radically unambiguous and clear statements and positions, as can be seen in the song *Republican Lullaby*.

Considering ambiguity in general, Tribe 8’s musical style, the melodies, rhythms, the choice of instruments, as well as their 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 are 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 articulation of notions of aggression and rage are usually connoted with maleness. The usage 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 leading guitars. Judith Jack Halberstam, referring to the band *Slater-Kinney*, 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 usage of two equally positioned guitars becomes interpreted as such a rejection of the male lead, this contradicts the reading of the punk aesthetic as a male musical form. As a result they again produce ambivalence, although admittedly not on the very surface. Moreover, another gender-ambivalent factor is Lynn Breedlove’s voice. Referring to Halberstam again, such a voice can be called a “butch voice,” as Halberstam coined Emily’s (Slater-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:”¹² queer bonds and the formation of a movement

Another band from the 1990s, which definitely needs some attention considering the feminist politics of riot grrrl, dykecore and queercore, is Team Dresch. Singer and

¹² The Gossip. “Fire With Fire.” *Standing In The Way Of Control*. Back Yard Recordings and Kill Rock Stars, 2006.

songwriter of the band Donna Dresch is, furthermore, an extremely good example for the fluidity of the usage of the labels queercore and riot grrrl and the intersection between those political spheres. The lesbian-identified musician and zine maker represented both riot grrrl as well as queercore politics, and actually was crucial for 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 Francisco collaborating with Tom Jennings and Deke Motif Nihilson who published the zine *Homocore*, which was one of the first zines using the labels homocore and queercore. Donna was also pen pals with G.B. Jones (Wobensmith, *Issue 5* 16) from Toronto in whose band Fifth Column she played occasionally. Donna is featured on the cover of issue five of *J.D.s*, the zine of G.B. Jones, and her occurs in Jones's film *The Yo-Yo Gang*. In the early days of riot grrrl, Donna, while working for K records, published her queer personal zine *Chainsaw*. In 1993, she started the dykecore band Team Dresch together with Jody Bleyle, Kaia Wilson, and Marci Martinez (Ciminelly and Knox 49) and soon after her independent record label *Chainsaw Records*. After producing their first album *Captain My Captain*, Kaia Wilson and Melissa York left the band but continued to make music with The Butchies. Team Dresch continued with the new member Amanda Kelly until 1998 (ibid. 53). Dresch, continued to release many recordings by newer queer-feminist punk bands, including The Need and Sleater-Kinney, on her record label, and stayed tightly connected with the broader queer-feminist punk scene. However, she stopped playing music herself 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 U.S together. Also in 2004, Donna, Jody, Kaia, Marci and Melissa reunited Team Dresch again 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 earlier discussed Tribe 8, as already mentioned. Their lyrics were more personal in some ways, but by no means less political. In their song "Don't Try Suicide" (1995), for example, they sing very honestly about emotions and personal problems, about 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 fans could easily identify with (Block 248). To prove that point, I refer to the *Captain My Captain* cover, which features letters from fans discovering their sexual identities. Moreover, Team Dresch's lyrics show once more that queer-feminist punks were not only well versed in feminist theory and history, but also in the history of punk rock and accounts of it within Cultural Studies (Marcus, *Girls* 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 non-conformity within the history of punk rock. The band frequently talked about early gender-bending punks as well as early 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 1970s and 80s Los Angeles punk scene with the Nervous Gender, functioned 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 emphasize again that queer-feminist bands like Team Dresch, but also anti-social and controversial bands like Tribe 8 actively created social bonds and relations to other lesbians, dykes, gender-nonconformists, and gay- and queer-identified punks through their politics. They created a fluid but very supportive network of distribution for their art-work and their ideas. Looking at some more recent examples of queer-feminist bands, it can be argued that queer-feminist punk rock or dykecore is still alive and that the strategies used by bands from the 1990s like Tribe 8 or Team Dresch to make queer politics are still in use.

A very recent queercore band from Brooklyn, New York, doing 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

about their role within their counter-culture 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 home page thhomewreckers.antiblog.com. The lyrics on their LP *Daydreaming About Assholes* (2009) 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 counter-cultures (Road, *Interview*). Although she always felt strongly connected to anarcho-punk politics, she often experienced feelings of alienation because most scenes were very male and very white dominated, she notes in a recent interview. The contemporary queer-feminist punk scene in Brooklyn, which “exploded” (Road, *Interview*) around 2008, however, does not only foreground queer-feminist and anarchist politics, but also focuses on anti-colonial and people of color politics, Road emphasizes. 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. She writes: “One of the most exciting things about Christy 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 qualities Wadkins refers to, the shouting and directly addressing sexual violence, are not only typical for punk rock but are also feminist strategies. Obviously, the Homewreckers continue queer-feminist punk politics like those of Team Dresch or Tribe 8 long before them. They criticize patriarchal social structures and embrace lesbian desire and sexuality. Additionally, they appropriate anger, ugliness and anti-social attitudes through their sound and visual representations. Cristy Road contributes artwork for the band’s CD and LP covers that shows women-zombies, lesbian sexual activities, often the lesbians depicted are violating each other with knives or razors, and landscapes of garbage and run-down houses. 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, as well as art shows, where she shows her lesbian-themed drawings, all over the U.S. Such events are often organized by scholars and held at Universities or Colleges. Moreover, Road does not only transgress and connect the spheres of academic and counter-cultural knowledge production. She also

participates in anti-globalization movements as well as the contemporary Occupy Wall Street Movement.

5.2.1. “Eat Shit and Die:”¹³ Grrrls of New York rioting again

The contemporary queer-feminist punk rock movement, although it has continually been active since 1986, enjoys the strong participation of musicians and fans at the moment, at least in the New York—and specifically Brooklyn—area. Bands like the aforementioned Homewreckers embrace their identification as females on stage and provide for a 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 as well as queer, lesbian and other counter-cultures. A band with intensively aggressive anti-social lyrics, and a fast and edgy punk sound is the Handjobs. In their song “Eat Shit and Die,” they repeatedly prompt somebody or insult somebody to “shit, eat and die / eat shit and die,” for example. Most of the lyrics of the Handjob’s songs are very anti-social and insulting. Furthermore they use the term gay in its derogatory meaning, for example in the song “Gay.” At the same time, however, the Handjobs produce ambivalence through their lyrics. Lyrics like “shit, eat and die / eat shit and die,” although they primarily suggest an interpretation as insult, additionally produce other meanings. “Shit, eat and die,” could be meant as a statement about the fundamental facets of existence in general, for example, because the phrase is followed by the word “lullaby.” The production of ambivalent and surplus meanings is a significant marker of queer-feminist punk rock, as already explained in reference to Tribe 8. Furthermore, it can be understood with Judith Jack Halberstam as an anarchy of signification. In the song “Watch Out,” they warn someone, singing “watch out baby, he’s right behind you.” Through the fast tempo of the song, the screamed lyrics and the emphasize on the drums, the Handjobs create the experience of being chased. However, because the song is performed and experienced in a non-threatening queer-feminist punk environment by outspokenly queer artists, they also create 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

¹³ Handjobs. “Eat Shit and Die.” *Cassette Split with Tagora*. Audio Tape. Self-released, 2007.

Webpage 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 strongly connected to the queer-feminist punk scene in Manhattan and Brooklyn as well as to the other lesbian music scenes. Drummer Lee Frisari aka Lee Free additionally plays in several other queer-feminist punk and pop-punk projects, among these the band Exciting Conclusion of Bitch, and who used to be part of the dykecore band Bitch and Animal, and Circus Amok Band. In May 2012 she toured with J.D. Samson and her band MEN. Surprisingly, Frisari also participated in the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, playing in several bands in 2009. This fact is surprising because the politics that Frisari makes with the earlier 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 s/him about his/her participation, Frisari noted that s/he feels that Inner Princess was still not welcome on the festival according because of their politics, but that s/he supports the festival as a feminist cause anyway, regardless of the festival's official bio-politics (Interview).

In their songs, Inner Princess addresses conflicts they have with mainstream society because of their "queerness" as well as other pertinent topics in their counter-cultures. Their songs have not been released on a record thus far but can be downloaded for free on the band's webpage. Central to the politics of Inner Princess is the topic of gender-nonconformism. In their song "Pink Bits," for example, they embrace non-normative gender through lines like "If you're a boy with a big clit / Girl with a 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 the binary opposition male/female on biological grounds, which clearly marks their queer-feminist agenda and rootedness in queer-feminist counter-cultures. In addition to the oppression of people with non-normative genders through social structures, they also address oppression through institutions and the legal and administrative apparatus. The political strategy they use to express their criticism is the anarchy-punk sound, high volume and fast music, shouted lyrics and a strong emphasis on the drums. Similar to Tribe 8, Inner Princess also have a

song about a discriminating and painful bathroom experience that addresses counter-cultural spheres and environment 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 eeeeeee.

What Inner Princess describe 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 harassment, which can be viewed as gender policing, questions the gender-non-normative person’s biological sex and her ability to define her own gender-identity. Hence such verbal chicanery minimizes her agency, the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices. This scene is instructive for the everyday struggle of people with non-conforming or ambiguous gender appearances. It is a very simple and understandable example for the fact that most areas and subjects of the Western world are built on or divided by the 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 gender policing creates through the words of reaction by the person who was harassed, Inner Princess manages to empower the discriminated subject, in spite of being a target, and somehow turns the situation to the benefit of the harassed. The song does so 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 to describe and criticize gender policing by both Tribe 8 and Inner Princess use the situation’s comic potential; this is best exemplified by Inner Princess’ slogan and chorus of the song “stand up for your right to pee!,” where a phrase in the language of protests 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 emphasizes the potential of comedy to skillfully express queer-feminist

views, a strategy already introduced by Tribe 8 and perfected by Lynn Breedlove in her new profession as fulltime comedian. Comedy according to these examples can be understood as form of queer-feminist (political) agency.

Another political strategy that is used by Inner Princess in their lyrics is the usage of the shockvalue of sexuality and profanity. This quality additionally represents their connection with both the punk as well as the queer traditions. In their song “PLS (panty liner snatch),” Inner Princess use sexuality to shock, when they sing “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 often referred to as “street language,” they violate social norms by violating language norms. Clever phrases with multiple levels of meaning, such as “lick it out loud,” emphasize both the violation of norms and their intention to empower the marginalized.

In their already mentioned song “Pink Bits,” they clearly mark their position in the queer scene, politically speaking. At the moment, pink (and black) are probably the most frequently used colors within anarchist queer-feminist do-it-yourself environments, especially in combination with black, like on the webpage of Inner Princess. The song refers to queerness, gender-nonconformity and sexual abnormality and embraces them, as already suggested. Moreover, the line “Everybody’s pink on the Inside” questions the concept of normality or norms in general. Combining the most popular meaning of queer “pink” with the specific category of bodily nonconformity, Inner Princess simultaneously broadens the spectrum of queerness, which is still primarily understood as being connected with sexuality within mainstream accounts, and focuses on a specific ‘group’ of queer-feminists that is often underrepresented within queer scenes.

Subtler than their reference to the contemporary queer-feminist counter-culture by using the color pink, is the criticism of some examples of contemporary hip-hop culture by Inner Princess. In their song “Tiara MC,” they make fun of the attitudes of so called “Masters of Ceremonies” (short MCs), men who host hip-hop performances, introduce the performers and entertain or motivate the audience. MCs usually perform a macho version of masculinity, and in a lot of hip-hop songs and counter-cultures women are not represented well on stage and often have to face sexist treatment. When Inner Princess sings “Come ride with me,” they address 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 within the genre. In addition, driving cars or “riding” also has a very strong sexual

connotation, i.e. intercourse, which Inner Princess utilizes. But by titling their song “Tiara MC,” which is an American van type, a family-car and not sexy at all, they poke fun at the male hip-hop attitudes and values. Looking at the metaphoric connotation of riding as sexual intercourse more closely, the mockery becomes even more pointed, because a minivan stands for safety, family, and responsibility and is arguably not how a male hip-hopper would want to represent his sexual skills. Inner Princess also ridicules the tendency within 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 use a hip-hop metaphor to describe lesbian desire and practice. The fact that BLT is also used as acronym for a bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich, they also show some self-irony. “Tiara MC” can be read 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.

Taking this into consideration, the song “Suburban Angst” needs to be mentioned. What is interesting about this song is that it not only criticizes patriarchy and the exclusion and abuse of women by male institutions, such as Christian religious groups, but also mentions their whiteness. 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 addresses both the pressure on queers coming from the family-loving environment of suburban areas, where sexuality is only encouraged for procreation, as Edelman has described it, and the fears these societies have of queers.

Inner Princess can be understood as strongly connected to the broader queer-feminist punk movement in Brooklyn and beyond 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 beyond, who connects artists, bands and their 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 view years and, in so doing has built a bridge between new bands and activists and 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 uprising of queer-feminist punk activism, and focused especially on the participation of female-identified punk musicians. She wrote that between 2007 and 2009

New York in general, but specifically Brooklyn, has blown up with lady-bands. [...] 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 started efforts to document the history of riot grrrl and queer-feminist punk rock in general 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?*, and—in the course of this production—the Knitting Factory in Williamsburg, Brooklyn hosted *Rah! Rah! Replica!* a Kathleen Hanna tribute show (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 next to The Roulettes among others—including the youngest generation of punks who are outspoken feminists, with the teenage Rock Camp for Girls graduates Care Bears on Fire. Additionally, Kathleen Hanna formed a new band and started organizing concerts, hosting some feminist punks who started playing in the 1980s like the British group The Raincoats, for example. Such events, although they invite criticism for the production of a certain star-cult and sometimes lack the once so highly valued anti-capitalism and d.i.y. ethics, are a good example of the transgressing of generational and age boundaries as well as emphasizing collaborations of the queer-feminist punk movement. Regarding intergenerational feminist exchange, the Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls merits another mention. Quite a few of the queer-feminist bands playing in New York at the moment are Rock Camp graduates. One of the latest is the already mentioned teenage-band Care Bears on Fire. Another example is Royal Pink, a band that describes its style as “feminist slut rock” and “punk burlesque” (Pittelman, *Interview*). The band-

members of Royal Pink are “connect with [punk] aesthetic and a [punk-]way of looking at the world” (Pittelman, *Interview*). The Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls was founded in 2004 and is a non-profit music education program with the aim 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 their Webpage *williemaerockcamp.org* states. Though the attending girls have to pay a participation fee, organizers try to provide a minimum of fifty percent of participants with scholarships, “[i]n order to ensure that girls from a broad range of economic backgrounds are served.” Besides its core task—the girls Camp—the organization also offers music education for adult women called Ladies Rock Camp among other things. The volunteers who run the Camp are rooted in the diverse lesbian, queer, feminist or anarchist scenes of New York, a lot of them are musicians themselves, and quite a few are queercore punks or riot grrrls. Among the many guitar, bass, drum, vocal and keyboard teachers, band coaches and counselors are feminist queercore musicians like Cristy Road from The Homewreckers, volunteering next to country, gospel, soul, or rock musicians of various ages and styles. Further supporters are Kathleen Hanna, and Kaia Wilson, Joan Jett as well as Tori Amos, and Melissa Ferrick.

Interestingly, the (re)occurrence of feminist punk bands in the contemporary US scene goes along with significant academic attention to the historic riot grrrl movement. The book *Girls to The Front* by Sara Marcus, for example, which was already mentioned several times, garnered considerable academic as well as media attention and can be found in any of New York’s book stores. Kathleen Hanna and her queer bandmate from Le Tigre Johanna Fateman just 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 started zine collections, one of the most interesting in regards to queer-feminist politics and dykecore is the zine collection at Barnard College’s Library at Columbia. The academic attention to feminist punk counter-culture is not coincidental. Quite a large amount of the earlier riot grrrl and queercore protagonists, who show interest in saving their productions

and politics for future historians, are academics themselves now or are friends with some. Moreover many contemporary riot grrrls and queer-feminist punks are studying or working at colleges or universities. I want to emphasize at this point that the relationship between the queer-feminist counter-cultures and academia is not a one-way movement, though. Although many cultural productions become incorporated into the academic institutions, academic institutions and knowledge get additionally expropriated to benefit queer-feminist counter-cultures. 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 the earlier mentioned Kate Wadkins. Wadkins also used the knowledge and facilities her university-affiliation provides to produce the zine *International Girl Gang Underground*, which is a compilation zine about the influence 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, can be understood as a further 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 arts. The collective aims to empower and support radical action and built feminist networks. According to their self description on their webblog forthebirdscollective.org, they want to “maintain[.] a more inclusive feminist practice while staying true to our DIY roots“ under the title “Queer Eye for the DIY.” Together with other feminist curators and show bookers like the group *Strenght in Numbers*, who organize “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.). The For the Birds Collective, though its members are not exclusively queer, includes a lot of 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 the shows of the For The Birds Collective, explains beautifully in her blog rockandthesinglegirl.blogspot.com why the events are so much more interesting for her than lesbian bars or clubs. She writes:

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:”¹⁴ queer-feminist punk rock on the East Coast**

Contemporary queer-feminist punk is not restricted to Brooklyn or New York. Another epicenter for queer-feminist punk rock and d.i.y. 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 went to Evergreen College and she and her friend Tobi Vail decided to spread their feminism through loud and aggressive punk music. Following Kathy Acker’s advice (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” (Marcus, *Girls* 34). The two musicians were surrounded by a strong queer-feminist punk community of friends and fellow activists, as discussed earlier. Just one of them was Donna Dresch, whom I have already identified as a crucial figure in the rise of queercore and dykecore some pages earlier. Seattle, Portland and Olympia became the homes for various queer-feminist punks around 1990 and continue to be homes to a lively queer-feminist punk scene until today. A fact that makes this region especially interesting in the context of queer-feminist punk is that queer scenes there seem to identify themselves to a broader extent with feminism than in other places, that feminist punk rock plays a crucial role in queer-feminist activism and that some great queer-feminist projects were established in this geographic area that cross generational boundaries. In her widely known essay “What’s that Smell,” which is on queer counter-cultures, Judith Jack Halberstam mentions 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 one of these projects, whose participants can be seen in “lines of affiliation with an earlier moment in feminism” and at the same time “set themselves up against an earlier conception of white lesbian community, which included elements of sex negativity, gender

¹⁴ The Shondes. “Ocean to Ocean.” Searchlights. CD. Exotic Fever Records, 2011.

separatism, cultural feminism, and womanism” (ibid.)—that 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—“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* was released at Epic, a spawn of SONY, and sold approximately 150,000 copies (Kailer and Bierbaum 220). A lot of well known artists contributed to the album, including Pearl Jam, Nirvana, Joan Jett, and Jello Biafra among others, but two thirds of it featured local bands. The following compilation, which was not released at Epic, consists of a very interesting mixture of musicians, most of them indie or punk, among them queer-feminist punk bands like The Gossip, The Butchies, or The Need (Brokenrekids). *Home Alive* can be understood as inspiration for numerous other anti-violence community projects initiated by queer-feminist punks. A recent example of such an anti-violence initiative is *Support NYC*. The Brooklyn-based 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 the *Support NYC* Home page supportnyc.org reports. Differing from *Home Alive*, which prioritized prevention, *Support NYC* focuses primarily 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 can frequently be found in riot grrrl as well as other queer-feminist songs from the movements emergence on until now. It is significant that these subcultures and bands in their activities and songs, where they frequently thematize violence, also refer to feminist theory and strongly relate to older feminist traditions and artists, demonstrated best in the case of—at that time college student—Kathleen Hanna from Bikini Kill and Le Tigre, who worked as a stripper, did an internship at “Safespace, a domestic violence shelter” (Marcus, *Girls* 38), founded the first riot grrrl group to initiate feminist activism and girl empowerment and actually got the impulse for her forms and style of activism from Kathy Acker. Looking at songs against violence in more detail it is significant, that although lyrics might be graphic

and performances provocatively explicit, both riot grrrls' as well as queercore's view on violence is never one-dimensional. Bands reflect on differences within feminist world views in their lyrics and their own role as player within such discourses. In this context their sex-positive discourse needs to be mentioned again, along with gender bending performances and styles. Examples of these sex-positive anti-violence accounts are Bikini Kill and their songs, like "Suck My Left One," or Tribe 8's "Frat Pig," but also The Homewreckers' "Daydreaming about Assholes" from their 7" with the same title. In their song The Homewreckers sing:

[...] 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 within queer punk culture, it is worth looking at Agatha again. Agatha is one of the fiercest and most political bands at the moment. Moreover, their music style represents best the anti-social qualities of punk music. Their music is fast and loud, their songs short, and the vocals shouted or screamed, the guitar-parts show a limited variation of chords and the emphasize is on the drums, and they do not attempt to reduce the feedback of their monitors to a great extent.

The band members of Agatha are truly committed to d.i.y. principles and punk attitudes on a social as well as political level. The guitarist Nein runs a punk house in Seattle called gay camp with several other lesbian and trans people. They host almost everyone who is in need of a place to sleep and try to produce their own food in the backyard, most likely for financial reasons as well as for political ones. They are all committed to the punk lifestyle and the gay campers are well educated, holding university degrees, and shareing 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 to have 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 while at the same time criticizing the bureaucratic hurdles 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 album are anti-social, question consumer culture and mainstream as well as counter-cultural norms.

5.3. “Oh, I'm just a girl, all pretty and petite:”¹⁵ Queer-feminist punk rock and third wave feminism

Queer-feminist productions and their protagonists, especially riot grrrl-identified, are increasingly referred to as ‘a third wave feminism,’ by numerous scholars,¹⁶ as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. The term ‘third wave feminism’ became popular with an article entitled “Becoming the Third Wave” by Rebecca Walker in 1992. Briefly summarized, what is usually understood to be third wave feminism is a kind of feminism that challenges or rejects essentialist notions of gender, often including a strong questioning of sex as well. A strong influence for such feminisms were post-structuralist models of gender, sex and sexuality, which emphasize that gender and sex are performatives, acts or doings, produced through discourses and not the effect of particular bodily markers (cf. Butler, *Gender Trouble*). Post-structuralist accounts additionally draw their attention to the dissonances or incoherencies between sexual preferences, gender identity and bodies (ibid.). The emphasis on, and the embrace of sexuality, including non-normative desires and sexualities (Johnson, *Jane* 13-25), as well as gender ambiguity became markers for third wave feminism. Accordingly, queer theory is often counted among third wave feminisms (Showden 181). Other theories that are occasionally considered third wave feminisms are sex-positive theories, women-of-color consciousness, post-colonial and decolonization feminism, libertarian feminism, and new feminist theory among others (ibid.), regardless of the fact that those are very different from each other and

¹⁵ No Doubt. “Just A Girl.” *Tragic Kingdom*. CD. Trauma and Interscope, 1995.

¹⁶ Cf. Freedman, Grrrl; Michelle; Lewis.

often contradict each other. Third wave feminists understand the history of feminism as defined through generations. Implicit in such accounts is an understanding of the periods of change between those generations as times of conflict, where the younger generation overcomes the outdated ideologies of their mothers.¹⁷ Moreover such models understand time as progress, which is equally problematic.

Although the significance of the conflation of different theoretical feminist accounts as well as movements can and should be questioned, some implications of such labeling and most importantly the assignment of queer-feminist punk rock to third wave feminisms should be taken into account: first to label queer-feminist punk productions with the term ‘third wave feminism’ acknowledges the political aspects of the music and writing. Second, it understands queer-feminist punk in relation to earlier feminist movements but pays attention to variation.

Indeed, the examples of queer-feminist punk rock and writing discussed in this chapter did not only illustrate forms of queer-feminist activism and agency, but also a critical continuation of feminist strategies, styles and structures. Bands such as Team Dresch, Inner Princess, The Homewreckers, and Agatha use the genre of queer-feminist punk rock or dykecore to communicate their queer-feminist positions and criticism—a criticism which is highly aware of academic discussions within (Queer-)Feminist Theory and is 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” (Halberstam *In a Queer* 180f.). References to earlier musicians, writers and artists belonging to second wave feminism could be identified in the castration performances and lyrics by Tribe 8, the fierce and angry play by Agatha or the engagement in anti-violence activism by The Homewreckers, to name just a few examples. Even their usage of punk music as such is already a reference to earlier feminists, as could be seen in the example of the article *Don’t be gay* (1989) in *Maximumrocknroll*, where G.B. Jones discusses the feminist politics of Poly Styrene.

Dykecore’s cultural texts are self-conscious adaptations of punk rock as well as of lesbian-separatist language, sex-positive feminism, and what Carisa R. Showden marks as

¹⁷ Cf. Freedman, E.; Henry; Gillis, Howie and Munford.

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 critique or identifying and articulating political aims. By analyzing some queer-feminist punk music and writings it has become clear that queer-feminist punk rock does not exclusively focus on oppression based on sexual deviance, but 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. In doing so, its agendas can be meaningfully interpreted as being closely connected to the queer movement as well as to earlier forms of feminist movements, while at the same time focusing their blind spots and transgressing their limits. 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. But 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 has expressed 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 of forming a lesbian identity. Cultural production 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). Academic accounts of contemporary feminisms, like Showden’s, though they acknowledge their theoretical and ideological feminism, demand models for how to incorporate subcultural productions into 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. Though she does admit 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 as such 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 how queer-feminist punks already responded to her request for a successful relation of cultural productions to grassroots political power. Projects like *Home Alive*, as well as *Support New York* and 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 skill-share. [...] 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, *Interview*) to borrow the definition of political activism from Karen Pittelman, band-member of Royal Pink.

The critique of Showden, 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 different movements, generations and social platforms of political action, and furthermore through a critical perspective on the inherent hierarchies and blind spots of the queer-feminist punk movement. As queer theory scholars like Halberstam or Wilson have stated, queer-feminist punk scenes acknowledge the works done by 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. But they do not celebrate their predecessors in blind admiration, at least not the bands discussed here, and, furthermore “[...] 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 set dykecore or queer-feminist bands in a kind of a dilemma—as could be seen 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 “have 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 but also social affiliations to feminist groups and movements, queer-feminist punks’ critique of norms and power structures reaches not only queer environments but also feminist and/or lesbian subcultures and beyond. Via their critical stance towards practices and values within subcultures, queer-feminist ideas challenged multiple worldviews and continue the queer-feminist dialogue.

Analyzing a selection of songs of bands like New York-based Inner Princess, or The

Homewreckers, Agatha from Seattle, Team Dresch from Portland, or San Francisco-based Tribe 8 in detail, numerous issues and points of critique that queer-feminist punk and especially dykecore expresses have become evident. Some of their goals could be identified as core second wave feminist issues in legal, political, and social equality, like sexual harassment, rape, domestic violence, and reproductive rights, but additionally include criticizing heteronormativity, HIV/AIDS awareness, and sexual health, sexual abuse within sexual minorities, self-mutilation, globalization and anti-globalization movements, and a critique contemporary anti-capitalist elites.

5.4. “Don’t you stop, We won’t stop:”¹⁸ Conclusion

I want to conclude this chapter with the lyrics from the song “Hot Topic” of 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 name dozens of historic and contemporary feminists 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 as well. Le Tigre mention multiple actors from various different feminist movements, waves and political brands at the same time. Their seemingly random enumeration of so many diverse feminists, however, is neither random nor undifferentiated. Their lyrics, on the contrary, also draw attention to their difference, the endless variation 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 within 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, using feminist strategies itself, as references to early queercore by Jones, LaBruce or the band God Is My Co-Pilot have proven.

¹⁸ Le Tigre. “Hot Topic.” *Le Tigre*. CD. Mr. Lady Records, 1999.

Though outspoken feminists within 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 queer-feminist punks feel the need to appropriate for themselves. This is reflected in their queer-feminist politics, as well as their ways of self-identification, where words like “bitch,” or “slut,” “lesbian” or “dyke” are highlighted. The general strategy of appropriating derogatory terms as well as the raw and anti-social aesthetic of punk is the point of reference for queer-feminist musician 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 stress upon the participation of female-identified musicians in first generation punk, as well as feminist agendas, or gay and lesbian themes. Queercore musicians, in other words, understand themselves as continuing punk’s feminism, represented through Patti Smith, X-Ray-Spex, Siouxi and the Banshees or the Raincoats, to name but a few.

Investigating the question of 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 as such. Additionally, this political quality of self-emancipation, the production of visibility for the female-identified or lesbian become identified as feminist politics. What further makes queer-feminist punk rock political, as my analysis shows, is the usage of anti-social verbalizations and behavior as criticism and rebellion against female social stereotypes. Beyond the 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 activism. Indeed, many of the same features binding 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 or Chicana feminism. Again, this reference is not unconscious but becomes highlighted by queer-feminist punks’ themselves, as the example of Nguyen, Mah, Whang (*Bamboo Girl*) or the 1990s riot grrrl New York chapter showed.

The participation of certain queer-feminist musicians in feminist movements, like the connection between riot grrrl and Team Dresch, or socio-political events like the attendance at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival by Tribe 8 or Lee Frisari, further indicate that queer-feminist punk is embedded in broader feminist movements.

Nevertheless, queer-feminist punk and dykecore does not simply continue (other) feminist discourses. As the example of Tribe 8 shows, queer-feminist politics do challenge feminist movements by drawing attention to mechanisms of exclusion and normative structures within or through feminism. Points of queer-feminist punk critique are especially essentialist notions of sex, class related as well as racist structures. Accordingly, it is legitimate to relate queer-feminist punk rock to what has become defined as third wave feminism. The allocation of queer-feminist punk rock and communities to broader discourses, like a wave, can be useful to acknowledge the political nature of cultural production and their locatedness. 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 as such carries neoliberal connotations of progress, and turns on outmoded ideas about youth and generations.

6. “A Race Riot Did Happen!.”¹ Queer Punks of Color Raising Their Voices

6.1. Introduction

It can be argued that mainstream meanings of punk rock within the US and Europe are structured along the lines of the significations anger, youth, masculinity, working-class backgrounds or affinities, and white skin. My effort and 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 already frequently mentioned. In this chapter, I focus on anti-racist and decolonial aspects and interventions within queer-feminist punk activism. I will 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, such acknowledgment cannot be achieved without additionally focusing on their position within punk rock in general as well as within queer-feminist punk spaces, like riot grrrl or queercore as always precarious and compromised by white hegemony and racialization.

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 as well as a social phenomenon. Hence, I will revisit the origins of punk rock as such, or rather the origins of the myth of punk’s emergence, and thereby go beyond the queer-feminist parts of punk in order to clarify the discourses of meanings around punk.

I will start my enquiry with the first academic research on punk rock by Dick Hebdige. Along with his work and the work of other critics I will explain in detail how punk rock became understood as signifying whiteness. Emphasizing the production of punk as white, I will simultaneously provide a semiotic analysis of the production of meanings, the embeddedness in racist discourses, while highlighting the resistance against such significations and racist social structures. A consideration of the rich history of people of color contributions to punk from the 1970s on is important to understand how punk rock

¹ Atoe, Osa. “A race riot did happen.” *Maximumrocknroll* 313 (June 2009). (Capitalization added)

could simultaneously function as a cultural medium for punks of color politics as well as participate in racialized oppression. I will focus on bands like the North-American all black punk band Bad Brains, who are rarely discussed in detail in punk anthologies, despite their success at their time and their role model-function for hardcore punk, to additionally highlight how punk history writing continues the oblivion of representations and politics by people of color. A crucial point of my analysis is that, although a lot of 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 or silencing anti-racist and queer-feminist politics, and queer punks of color themselves.

However, focusing on queer-feminist anti-racist punk productions, their politics and their 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 into progressive punk discourses like riot grrrl or queercore to weaken criticism or worse, create an illusion of a space of total equality without barriers, and 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 east Los Angeles-based butch performers 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 relate 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 and examples of the alienation with punk rock by people of colors to analyze the ambivalent place queer punks of color had within their scenes. By drawing on José Muñoz's concept of "disidentification," I am going to 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 punk's whiteness. Nevertheless, some are drawn to punk, because punk also signifies anger, a rejection of mainstream society, of oppression, of power structures,

or queer desire or queer pleasure.

(Queer) people of color gained and continue to gain space within punk rock communities through disidentification. This space, however, is fluid and uncertain. Throughout this chapter, I will use insights of post- and decolonial theory by Homi Bhabha,² Adela C. Lincona,³ Laura Pérez,⁴ and others to explain the cultural spaces queer people of color inhabit within punk communities and which coalitions of people, theories and politics such spaces open up. I will suggest that the place or space queer-feminist punks of color inhabit within punk communities can be best framed by stitching together the theoretical constructs of “third-space” by Homi Bhabha and the concept of “(b)orderlands” by Adela C. Lincona.

Bhabha’s concept of “third space” signifies a location in-between subject-positions, which is disrupting and displacing hegemonic, colonial and essentialist notions of identity and original, or culture. Third spaces are cultural locations where different political discourses and theories intersect, but at the same time modes of articulation. They are hybrid and this hybridity “enables other positions to emerge” (Bhabha 211). It is a hybrid space where the oppressed become empowered, new knowledge gets produced and activism emerges. Part of the political activism that emerges at third spaces is a “cultural translation” (ibid.), so Bhabha. Cultural translation uses or imitates hegemonic language, cultural practices, aesthetics or strategies from the position of the oppressed. Thus, cultural translation is not assimilation. On the contrary, it “denies the essentialism of a prior given original or originary culture” (ibid.) and therefore fundamentally deconstructs the category culture, and the basis for hegemony. Adela C. Lincona uses concepts of third space to describe the location from which feminist zine-producers articulate their aims (cf. *(B)orderlands’ Rhetorics and Representations* 104-129). She analyses the discourses and strategies of feminist zines, which she understands as opening up third spaces. However, she does not refer to the particular discourses as cultural translations, but theorizes them as “(b)orderlands’ rhetorics.” “(B)orderlands’ rhetorics”—equally like Bhabha’s cultural

² “The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha.” *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* ed. by Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990: 207-221.

³ “(B)orderlands’ Rhetorics and Representations: The Transformative Potential of Feminist Third-Space Scholarship and Zines.” *NWSA Journal* 17.2 (Summer 2005): 104-129.

⁴ “Enrique Dussel’s *Ética de la liberación*, U.S. Women of Color Decolonizing Practices, and Coalitionary Politics amidst Difference.” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 18.2 (Spring/Summer 2010): 121-146.

translations (cf. Bhabha 211)—represent fluid, ambivalent or uncertain identities and subjectivities (Lincona 105). Lincona refrains from the usage of the term or concept of culture in preference 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. 105). At the same time, she signifies crossings and inbetweens as well as the actual violent reality of crossing borders.

Donating queer punks of color places within queercore “third spaces” and “(b)orderlands” is appropriate, because these theoretical concepts take into account the fluidity that marks queer people of colors’ (in)visibility and experience in queer-feminist punk scenes. Moreover, a reference to concepts of third space, allows understanding punk rock as providing queers of color with an environment for political and cultural agency, which, nevertheless, is also a very precarious environment. Punk communities, whether queer-feminist or not, are not outside the broader social hegemonies that structurally oppress people of color. Moreover, punk’s signification as white and anti-racist dissembles equality where there is none. Therefore, it can be argued, that queer-feminist punks of color have to proceed constantly with their anti-racist and decolonial politics to resist their oblivion and racialized oppression. I draw on Lincona’s concept in addition to Bhabha’s notion of third space, because her terminology and theoretical account marks the violent reality for (queer) punks of color more explicitly than accounts of third space, and still offers tools to analyze their agency. In other words, her concept enables 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” (Lincona 106), to resist phallogocentrism and colonialization with the “potential to build and inform community” (Lincona 109).

In the final part of this chapter, I will focus in greater detail on the decolonial politics of queer-feminist punk rock in reference to queer-feminist postcolonial theorists, like Gloria Anzaldúa or José Muñoz. I will take up theoretical work by these and other theorists on the interdependencies and interrelations of racialization, patriarchy, homophobia, and heteronormativity, to explore the ways in which my examples of queer-feminist people of color engaged with queer-feminist punks to participate in anti-racist

queer-feminist politics. Moreover, I will show that anti-racist queer-feminist activism by self-identified people of color and their allies was and is itself informed by theoretical academic work and discourses, like Black queer-feminist critique, postcolonial, or “third world feminism,” and Chicana feminism, by radical queer women of color. Furthermore, queer punks of color are in dialogues with contemporary queer theory.

6.2. “Whitestraightboy Hegemony:”⁵ How Punk Became White

6.2.1. “Punks are N...:”⁶ the Appropriation of Derogatory Terms and Racism

Punk rock, most theorists and historians agree, is characterized by notions of anger, or signifies anger as such. Moreover, punk rock’s anger is characterized through whiteness, and punk rock mostly marks whiteness itself, as contemporary punk historians and scholars like Daniel S. Traber have noted. This signification within the cultural realm seems paradoxical, considering punk communities’ awareness and critique of racialized social structures from punk’s origins on, as scholars like Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay in *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race* have documented (114).

However, I argue that this seeming paradox is not paradoxical at all, but that it was exactly the awareness of racialized power structures that led to the signification 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 through a misunderstanding of a gesture of white incorporation as an appropriation of negativity.

Coming back to the formation of a collective consciousness of racialized power structures and the production of whiteness as the main signification for punk, the popularity of the first academic analysis of the then new music scene by Dick Hebdige 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 e.g. Marcus, *Lipstick*). Although it would certainly be misleading to argue that Hebdige was wrong, it is important to emphasize that his account was too general. While Hebdige

⁵ Nguyen, Mimi Thi. “It’s (Not) a White World: Looking for Race in Punk.” (Punk Planet) *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*. ed. by Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay. London: Verso 2011: 257.

⁶ Hebdige documented in his study *Subculture* the statement “punks are niggers” (62) by Richard Hell in an interview to the *New Musical Express*.

analyzed punk rock as a class riot primarily, 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 punk as such, and reflect on the socio-political and cultural environment it moves within, while simultaneously considering the processes of crafting punk history from Dick Hebdige's famous first account in the late 1970s onward. Although the very first punk researcher Dick Hebdige identified a precarious relation between punk rock and racialized categorizations as early as 1979, neither academic nor popular discourses on punk paid much attention to aspects of color or ethnicity until the early 1990s. Furthermore, until the recent release of Stephen Duncombe's and Maxwell Tremblay's anthology *White Riot*, pieces on punk's racial biases had never really been brought into a transnational, interdisciplinary and intertextual conversation.

Hebdige argued in his analysis that punk adapted elements of black Afro-Caribbean British culture and placed them within a white context of underground culture. Young white Britons took up political as well as musical aspects of reggae, translating them into a format that fit their experience. To be more precise, the emergence of punk can be understood as a reference to Afro-Caribbean music as something political, as utterances from a minoritized position, as expressions of general otherness by British working class teenagers. Young white male punks, according to Hebdige, picked up the most different, most 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. 64). 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 carried a trace-like signification of blackness. Interestingly, this invisible blackness continued to stay within 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 among 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). Implicitly, he drew attention to the violence of such counter-identification, which was only possible through white privilege. He did so through his language choice, framing punk’s blackness as “imprisoned” and “arrested.” But although his work must be understood as foundational cultural narration for future generations of punk-identified people as well as theorists, his critique of white privilege has seldom being picked up by punks or scholars.

Hebdige understood punk’s cross-identification with blackness as a primal identification with an outsider status. In this manner, he additionally positioned utterances like “punks are niggers” (Hebdige, *Subculture* 62) stated by Richard Hell, who was one of the first New York-based punks, in an interview to the *New Musical Express*. In overlooking the racism of such provocative expression, Hebdige failed to sufficiently 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 the meaning of the sign punk as free from racisms. Ironically, he thereby paved the way for future historians to signify leftist punk rock as anti-racist in general, while at the same time, viewing such politics as 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 US-American scenes and the British context. In the specific context of New York, where Richard Hell uttered the infamous sentence quoted above, however, the cross-identification with blacks and the usage of the “n-word”⁷ has not only a different history and reference, but it has

⁷ In contemporary US-America the “n-word” is racist. Although there are 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 reappropriation should be undertaken or not. As recent events demonstrate, for instance when a white feminist in New York held a sign, quoting John Lennon’s and Yoko Ono’s song “Woman is the Nigger of the World,” from 1972, a lot of queer-feminist women of color are decidedly against the usage of the word. Moreover, the appropriation by a white person of the word becomes experienced as patronizing and violent by some queer-feminist women of color like the Bay Area located Black feminist and scholar Andreana Clay (*Endorsing*). Therefore, I decided to use the phrase “n-word” instead, to draw attention to the word’s violence.

additionally served slightly different purposes.

It can be argued that the cross-identification by New York punks with blackness was a violent appropriation, and the usage of derogatory terms related to blackness was a re-introduction of derogatory language into a cultural climate that had already incorporated a positive or neutral usage of them into the language of neoliberal capitalism. Although it can be assumed that Hell's usage of the "n-word" was not intentionally racist, it can be also assumed that he was aware of its offensive quality. Race/ethnicity was an openly discussed issue within the scene at CBGB's⁸ 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, as Hell experienced himself when the African-American musician Ivan Julian joined Hell in the Voidoids. Bangs reported in the same article that "Richard [Hell] got flak from certain quarters about Ivan Julian, a black rhythm guitarist from Washington, DC [...]" (107).

Punk theorist Steve Waksman analyses Hell's statement "punks are n[...]," as equation between himself and African-Americans and as identification with blackness. Furthermore, Waksman understands such cross-identification as a partial continuation of the US tradition of blackface and minstrel shows. He sees this continuation as a process where the overt racism of impersonating blackness as a comic stage act, using dark skin make-up and stereotypical postures shifts into a more subtle usage 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 "envision[s] 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 spectacle the derogatory and violent power of the word needs to be addressed.

⁸ CBGB (Country, BlueGrass, and Blues) was a music club in Manhattan, New York City. Hilly Kristal opened the club in 1973, to feature country, bluegrass and blues music. Because of his club policy that allowed basically everyone to play, it became a venue for the punk scene instead. Bands that played regularly at the CBGB were the Ramones, Television, the Patti Smith Group, The Dead Boys, The Dictators, The Voidoids, Blondie, and Talking Heads, among many others (Beeber 77-87).

To put it differently, the two white punks could only use the “n-word” as provocation and irritation, because it was a derogatory and hurtful word. Therefore, the usage 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. And through the emphasis of their own white outsiderdom and ignorance of their own internalized racism, they unwittingly prolonged particular misguided color-politics into the year 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 already be found in the musical scenes of the hipsters of the 1940s and 1950s, as well as in early rock’n’roll. Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation and their contemporary Norman Mailer are additionally well known for this kind of counter-identification and productions of spectacular otherness. Mailer spun his fatally idealized ideas about blackness and black experience in his infamous essay “The White Negro,” analyzing hipsters’ attraction to blues and jazz music, and scenes, and influenced generations of other poets and artists in doing so. Mailer synthesizes the white hipsters’ interest in black music, their self-labeling as “white negroes” and their life-style into one phenomenon, which he then analyses as a nihilistic search for meaning. He fatally binds the hipster’s sexual life-style, which may or may not have been promiscuous for the time’s standards, to blackness and African-Americans. Blackness and African-Americans, accordingly, are not only characterized through primitivity, sexuality, and virility, but also through rebellion. “The White Negro” designates the black body as ecstatic, primitive and potent, and blacks as pre-civilized. The hipsters’ nonconformity and rebellion in the text by Mailer becomes not only an identification with blackness, but an adoption of the African-American experience of everyday life as war. Understanding societal oppression and hegemony as caused through over-civilization, Mailer identifies with the position of African-Americans as the cultural and social other and desires to emulate the constantly endangered black existence, a precarious position he seems to romanticize as exciting rather than threatened by real danger. Mailer’s narration of black existence was of course not only fueled through 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 a prolonging of white hegemony. Like the white punks following him, Mailer’s identification with an outsider status was a personal choice and not a reflection of oppressive power structures.

Coming back to the 1970s, it can be assumed that the proto-punk Patti Smith had read Mailer’s infamous essay. In her book *Just Kids* Smith marks Mailer and the Beat Generation as an important influence of her pre-punk era status as a poor newcomer to New York, although she does not mention the essay in particular. It ought to be emphasized again that however well intended or indeed harmless the counter-identification of early punk’s with blackness might have been, the usage of the “n-word” was definitely not naïve. While the violence of those words might not have been of great concern to Beat poets or Mailer’s hipsters, by 1978 their derogatory quality was certainly consciously reflected within US discourses. Hence the reference to racist stereotypes with these words was not on a structural or unconscious level, but was purposeful. Considering their cultural environment and politics, it can be assumed that Patti Smith as well as Richard Hell used the “n-word,” first and foremost, intending to shock.

The reaction of mainstream societies as well as the punk scenes to this usage was not much of a shock, though. The primal intention to mark an outsider status by referring to the most socially oppressed, namely African-Americans or British-Caribbeans, became accidentally the foundation for the appropriation of punk by white supremacists. It did so, because it introduced racist language that had previously been a taboo in most counter-cultural spheres and beyond to the punk environment. Furthermore, 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, did not only not prevent punks from benefitting from white privileges and 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. Similarly abandoned from history writing, like punk’s queer elements, or what Hebdige called “gender confusion” (ibid. 25), black and other people of color were erased.

Nevertheless, punk’s invisible blackness seems to haunt punk’s leftist scene just as

punk's queerness haunts the usage of the term "punked" referring to African-Americans, according to contemporary queer punk theorist Tavia Nyong'o and his article *Punked 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. For the music scenes and circles, however, punk's queer and black meanings lingered on the edge of consciousness, and in fact it demanded great labor from its protagonists to reproduce punk as synonymous with straight white boy culture.

6.2.2. From Spectacular Otherness ... To Open Racism

Coming back to the usage of racist language and signs in punk lyrics during the 1970s, it needs to be emphasized that the ambiguity of those usages worried some commentators right away. In his previously mentioned *Village Voice* article in 1979, Lester Bangs, for instance, uttered his worries about the direction New York's punk scene had pursued since its emergence. He argues that the appropriation of fascist emblems through punk, like the swastika, which had originally been adapted because of its shock value, had smoothly transferred into carrying racist meanings as well as attracting 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 assessed (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 is very worried about lyrics and remarks he identifies not only as anti-Jewish, but additionally as anti-Black and anti-Roma within the New York-based scene.

Greil Marcus subscribes to Bang's early verdict of racism within punk scenes 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 transferred into a repudiation of what the mainstream signified as "the other, the powerless" (*White*, 80). To make his point about the racism and homophobia within the scene, Marcus quotes lyrics by the popular punk band

X, which he sees as representative for the whole scene. The lyrics are: “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” (222) and a friend of Exene’s who participated in Los Angeles’ early scene. 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 (223). Armendariz Velasquez, who is Mexican-American and an outspoken queer-feminist Chicana activist, and former singer of The Bags, was friends with Exene. While her anecdote rehabilitates Exene from the accusation of outspoken racism, it also gives record to the dangerous side effects the ambiguity of such punk lyrics enabled. The ambiguity of the lyrics and the performances by Exene, who was white, made usurpation by racists very easy. What furthered such usurpation was that the early punk scenes showed tolerance or ignorance towards unambiguous racism among their circles. Moreover, it can be assumed that unconscious racist bias among early punk scenes built a solid foundation for the outspoken racism and misogyny that followed with white power punk, Nazi rock and right wing Oi! movements in England, Germany and the US (cf. Ducombe and Tremblay 114).

While Greil Marcus analyzes open racisms within 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” (Traber 31). Self-marginalization, Traber explains, is the conscious choice for a 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 appropriate what they think was the opposite of all of this, the subordinate. Ironically, thereby radicalized stereotypes become reactivated and their meaning fixed (cf. Traber 31). The analysis by

Traber refers to Hebdige's concept of spectacular otherness. Significant in his account, however, is that Traber focuses more in depth on the effects of the appropriation of blackness. In the context of Los Angeles, the choice of punks to identify as subordinated 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.

Along this train of thought we can also 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 Nguyeng's *Evolution of a Race Riot*,⁹ 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 you hear people bragging about how [...] 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)

Without any consideration of these discourses of punk counter-cultures on a structural level, punk activism was not able to intervene into the politics of white middle-class conservatism. Hence punk came to signify 'otherness' without a necessary surplus meaning of anti-racism, anti-capitalism etc., and, furthermore, became attractive to proponents 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 as such. Nevertheless, they simultaneously recognized and held on to the potential of punk activism to resist

⁹ *Evolution of a Race Riot* was an anthology edited by Mimi 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's publications among contemporary punk discourses and scenes (c.f. Atao, *Maximumrocknroll* 313).

hegemonic power structures.

6.3. “hey look around there’s so much white:”¹⁰ Early Role–Models

It is necessary to emphasize the role punks of color played in the creation and continuation of a punk movement again in order to fully understand the structural violence of their oblivion from punk’s history as well as from punk’s meaning and to further theorize punk discourses as racialized as well as structured through white privilege. The analysis of productions and politics by (queer) punks of color provided here will roughly cover the last thirty-five years. It attempts to map out some significant discourses within the broader punk movement within the US, but is by no means representative of all discourses on racialization or queerness. Furthermore, the collection of artists introduced in this chapter is not exhaustive.

Considering 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 by mainstream media during the 1990s is Skin, the black, boldheaded, bisexually identified singer from Skunk Anansie. Both Elliott-Said as well as Skin were not only singers but also in fact key figures in their bands and much appreciated by their fans.

Despite their popularity and partial success through their feminist anti-racist

¹⁰ Heavens to Betsy. “Axemen.” *Calculated*. LP. Kill Rock Stars, 1994.

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 to reggae and Afro-Caribbean anti-racist politics and did react to the increasing popularity of punk among racists with the explicitly anti-racist projects Rock Against Racism as well as in the Anti-Nazi League. However, in contrast to their US-based colleagues, their political activism did not include a fight against attacks on Asians, Hispanics, Pakistani and other British minorities. Moreover, as Sabin shows in his analysis of the British punk movement—from the Sex Pistols to Clash and Crass—did leftist punk rock not only not focus other than Afro-Caribbean minorities, but 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 bias was highly supported by its history writing of punk from Hebdige on. When Hebdige focused on punk rock’s proximity to the British Afro-Caribbean scenes and reggae in his *Subcultures: 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 while still being 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 inclusively, nor prevent punk rock as such from becoming increasingly used as medium for open racism. On the contrary, punks alliance with Rock Against Racism as well as the Anti-Nazi League, as well as with 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, it can be argued that early theorizations of punk rock as participation in anti-racist left-wing politics also influenced the view on US punk rock. Again, particularly Hebdige’s work can be seen as creating the meaning of punk in such a manner, because he included

punk productions and statements from US proto-punks like Richard Hell in his otherwise British centered analysis. Because of the influence such a signification had within the US, punk became simultaneously understood as anti- or at least not racist, while punks of color were made invisible in historic writing and punk's meaning.

Nevertheless people of color, like the "NDN Navajo group Blackfire" (Duncombe and Tremblay 207) did participate in US-based punk rock from the beginning on. Important African-American musicians were Spearhead, who headed the San Francisco-based The Beatnigs (Malott/Peña 2004, S. 103), or 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 oblivion of punks of color regardless of their importance within their communities and beyond. Moreover, revisiting writings about Bad Brains clearly shows the construction of punk as white that started with the punk movement as such. Bad Brains formed in Washington, D.C. in 1977. Their musical influence on hardcore punk cannot be overestimated, as they become known and appreciated for their extremely fast and energetic hardcore punk songs. Moreover, it can be argued that they established the cultural meaning punk rock as political act as such. Already their stage names H.R.—which stands for Human Rights—, or Dr. Know, Darryl Jenifer and Earl Hudson clearly indicate their politics.

The fact of Bad Brains' popularity within the punk movement brought Greg Tate, the self-proclaimed "Black Bohemian Nationalist" (213) to the conclusion, that Bad Brains disenfranchised themselves from their black community. This is remarkable, because it shows that punk already signified a white form of music in the early 1980s. Although Tate seems to implicitly criticize Bad Brains for betraying their African-American community by participating in white culture, he also pointed out that Bad Brains did not only master what he understands as "white rock" (214), but that they also 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 identifies the most challenging question, which dozens of future punks of color came to articulate, “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” (Tate 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 challenged a simple identification of queer punks of color 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” (Kisha 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 was organized that featured Afro-punk identified bands. When Spooner filmed his documentary, his aim was simply to 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, and thereby supported the growth of an international movement. Since then, institutions started being interested in the movement, like the Brooklyn Academy of Music, which hosts a yearly film and music festival and Afro-Punk has gained some recognition by mainstream media, and attracted commercial sponsoring, much to the criticism 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 to create cultural homes and agency for the oppressed, as the example of Spooner's documentary shows. *Asians Storm British Music* by Vivek Bald as well as Martin Sorrondguy's *Beyond the Screams: A US Latino Hardcore Punk Documentary* were other influential examples of people of color representations in documentaries—both largely unrecognized by mainstream media. I want to emphasize Sorrondguy's film here, because it supports my point that queer-feminist punks of color influenced many beyond their small circles, to which I will return 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 Sorrondguy traces the historical trajectory of Chicano/Latino punk rock and more, its always-emergent body politic, with brilliant skill. (Nguyen, *Race, Riot Grrrl* 2010)

Another film and book that lately gained quite some attention by underground media was *The Taqwacores* (2003 and 2010) by Michael Muhammad Knight. Knight's projects brought Taqwacore¹¹ scenes, which are basically punk rock scenes of Muslim-Americans, dealing with Islam culture through their music, to an audience beyond their own rows?. Independent writer and journalist Siddhartha Mitter phrases 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 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 line of ideology or belief. Some Taqwacore bands foster anti-capitalist, feminist and queer politics in their stage performances and lyrics. Two queer-feminist Taquacore bands are the afore mentioned contemporary Secret Trial Five and The Kominas, "which eviscerates a

¹¹ Taqwa means God-fearing, which includes the protection from Allah's anger by obeying the law.

conservative Brooklyn imam for his homophobic statements” (237) in their songs *Suicide Bomb the Gap* or *Rumi was a Homo (But Wahhaj Is a Fag)*.

Queer-feminist identified punks of color gathered together within these very diverse white and non-white groups and scenes from punk’s beginning onward. A number of them urged anti-racist queer-feminist politics and demanded from their peers that they should 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 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, Chicana feminist Alicia Armendariz Velasquez. Although Armendariz Velasquez does not identify as queer herself, she is not only an outspoken Chicana feminist, but also 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” (Habell-Pallán 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” (Habell-Pallán 225). She performed in high heels and mini dresses, but her attitude was far from feminine.

Velasquez, Vogel and Covarrubias can be understood as role models for future queer Chicana and Latina feminist like Taina Del Valla, the Puerto Rican singer of Anti-Product, a late 1990s punk band from upstate New York, or punk musician Cristy Road from The Homewreckers and Jamie Varriale Velez (Rock and the Single Girl), zinester Daniela Capistrano (*Bad Mexican*), or *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 Ataque, Bread and Circuits, Zeros, the Plugs, The Adolescents,

Huasipungo, and Los Crudos.

Especially Los Crudos deserve a closer look considering the history of queer-feminist punk rock. The band gave a remarkable example of anti-capitalist and decolonization politics within punk as already demonstrated in Chapter Three. Additionally, their vocalist Martin Sorrondeguy played and continues to play a key role within 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 within the scenes 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 working for *Maximumrocknroll* and his support for Latinos within the scene through his record label *Lengua Armada Discos*, or the bands 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 had 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 contemporary queercore band Limp Wrist. Interestingly, Sorrondeguy never gave up his strong position within 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, for example in Scott Treleaven's documentary film *Queercore: A Punk-U-Mentary*, where he discussed his position as gay man in the US-based hardcore punk scene, or 2002s *Queer Punk* issue of *Maximumrocknroll*. His fluid but nevertheless very strong position as a gay, straight-edge, punk of color, floating between white queer-feminist punk scenes, straight-edge male dominated scenes and people of color environments can be analyzed using Homi Bhabha's concept of third space.

A theorization of third space is able to account for the metaphorical and structural fluidity that signifies the alliance and belonging of queer-feminist people of color to punk circles.

Accordingly, punks like Sorrondeguy occupy a hybrid third space where there are “new structures of authority, new political initiatives” as Bhabha has it (211). However, applying this concept to punk and view it as a fluid third space also bears the danger of supporting the ignorance to cultural difference and different experiences of oppression within and outside of the punk movement. Therefore, it is inevitable to emphasize that the participation and identification—or rather disidentification as José Muñoz has it—with punk rock in general, and with queer-feminist punk rock in particular, demands a constant production of self-visibility or representation, or awareness raising of white hegemony and structural oppression against people of color to maintain not only queer-feminist but also antiracist politics.

Such efforts require a language of self-representation that uses not only categories like queer or women, but also the appropriation of markers like color, Blackness, as well as identities like Latino/Latina, Mexican-, African-, Asian-, and Native-American, Chicana/o, Latino/a, or 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, Cherrie 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.¹² Nevertheless, such usage runs the risk of creating an image of similarity that homogenizes the experiences and politics of individuals into undefined otherness, if read from the outside, or ignorance towards inequalities and differences within groups and communities. Therefore, some punks, like Akiko Carver, editor of the

¹² 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. Presenters were Mimi Thi Nguyen, Osa Atoe, Jamie Varriale Velez, Daniela Capistrano, Mariam Bastani, and Jordan Alam.

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. (Akiko Carver 38)

Other punks like 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 themselves 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.”

6.4. “This Fight Is Ours:”¹³ 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 Bruce LaBruce and J.B. Jones, two of the earliest self-identified queercore participants documented through their work (LaBruce and Jones, *Don’t*). Although queer-feminist punk rock can be seen as successfully creating a cultural safe-space 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

¹³ Condenada. “This Fight Is Ours.” *Discografia*. Audio Tape. Self-release. Chicago, 2006.

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 and 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 actually was the medium and community where 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 as such, 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 average person, we was just doing some white shit. (qtd. in Duncombe and Tremblay 252)

Especially during the last couple of years, queer-feminist punks of color 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 *Disidentification, Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* José Muñoz explains why queers of color chose punk rock to articulate themselves musically. He understands the choice of queer people of color as initiated through the identification with what I have framed as spectacular otherness in punk. He describes such a 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 will take a closer look at Muñoz’s concept of disidentification in order to investigate in detail why queer-feminist punks and punks of color have chosen punk rock as an aesthetic form and politics.

6.4.1. “Life changed when I discovered my first true love—PUNK ROCK:”¹⁴ The Politics of Disidentification

In *Disidentifications*, Muñoz describes various examples of different artistic performances and how and why individuals experiencing oppression identify with (more) hegemonic cultural forms. Interestingly, when explaining an identification with punk rock, he draws on his own experience as an adolescent. Muñoz describes the 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 towards the oppressed, and/or participates in hegemonic oppression.

Nevertheless, Muñoz, like the black lesbian Kisha, author of *A terrible, horrible, no good, very bad life*, quoted in the subheading, identified with punk rock and made it his (temporal) cultural location. Like the queer theorist and cultural studies scholar Michelle Habell-Pallán, Muñoz picked Los Angeles’ band X as his favorite band, despite their homophobic, anti-Semitic and racist lyrics. Such identification, as Muñoz, as well as Habell-Pallán explain, was not driven through internalized racism or homophobia, though. On the contrary, both identified with X and punk in general as meaning relatively undefined ‘otherness,’ an otherness they shared because of their queerness and racialization by their environment. Furthermore, both identified with the meaning of cultural critique and rejection of hegemony.

Because Los Angeles’ punk scene “was the only cultural critique of normative aesthetics available to” him (Muñoz, *Disidentification* 93), Muñoz transformed his blackness and gayness to a more general signification of ‘otherness’ or difference to make an identification with punk possible. He names this form of identification “disidentification,” to differentiate it from both counter-identification 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 similar in their structure, because they are an identification that is not based on

¹⁴ Kisha. *A terrible, horrible, no good, very bad life* 2. Chicago, 2010: 3.

sameness. Furthermore, they both recognize the complicated ways in which identification works, in reference to and beyond class, culture, gender, and racialization. But the most relevant difference is that the British punks' identification was from a privileged position, while people of colors' disidentification with punk is 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 within punk culture frequently requires ignorance against punk's homophobia and 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, *Dis* 95). Muñoz takes up the notions of misrecognition and manipulated identification to develop his conception 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" (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 actions of agents inhabiting what can be theorized as the 'third space' of punk rock. It recognizes agency among oppressed and at the same time, it recognizes 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 prime 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 counter-cultures, as well as increasingly recognized by academics.¹⁵ Best known as a drag queen, Davis uses multiple cultural forms and genres to produce her cultural politics including being a producer of

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. Muñoz, *Disidentification and Cruising*; Siegel, "Vaginal Davis's Gospel Truths."

independent videos, working actress, zinester, performance artist, short fiction writer and musician during her ongoing career. Davis is not only one of the initial figures of the early homocore/queercore movement, she is also one of the few who explicitly address(ed) and criticiz(ed) 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 wide spread throughout the US and Canada, and continue to be distributed within queer-feminist punk circles. They can be seen as models for contemporary queer-feminist people of color punk zines. Their influence positions Davis as one of what Muñoz calls relying on Antonio Gramsci's concept "organic intellectuals" (*Disidentification*, 110).

The queer-feminism Davis is influenced by Black and Chicana feminisms, 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 visible in her name, which is an ironic homage to Angela Davis and the Black Power movement (Muñoz, *Disidentification* 98). By referring to Angela Davis, Vaginal Crème Davis (re)introduces the black feminist to predominantly white queer discourses and punk scenes. Introducing past and contemporary powerful feminists of color, or women of color artists like La Toya Jackson, as well as queers to the 1980s and 1990s punk movements (see e.g. Davis 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. She thereby refuses the logic of oppression. Such logic paradoxically perpetuates and stabilizes "racialized and sexist bias," as "self-fulfilling" (Pérez 131) prophecy, which additionally exacerbates the participation of queers and women of color in progressive activist, academic, or queer-feminist thinking. Her conscious citation of and references to women and queers of color and other oppressed subjects, accordingly, can be understood as a queer-feminist strategy of decolonization, as developed by Laura Pérez (129) for the field of US academia.

Thus, Vaginal Davis always makes her references 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, *Dis* 99). Her name invokes an amalgam of meanings and discourses—black feminism, signified through the reference to Angela Davis and Black Power discourses, as well as

queer activist and punk discourses—that are historically viewed to oppose or succeed each other. Davis’ politics thereby withholds the creation of a linear historic narrative or an ideology and can be framed as critique rather than as a firm agenda. Nevertheless, her critique marks a very specific location that is a location 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: Pedro, Muriel, and Esther. PME was “named after a cross section of people that Davis met when waiting for the bus” (97), as Muñoz writes. Given that information, which sets the stage for a working class environment through the reference to public transportation that is stereotypically understood as being populated by migrant workers, it is to assume that those three clearly culturally or ethnically marked names are more than just a random joke. The Jewish name Esther, the Spanish and Portuguese Pedro, and the Irish, Breton and Scottish Muriel represent three of California’s largest minorities. Introducing these names within 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 usage of the acronym PME to introduce themselves. The usage of acronyms evokes the genre hip-hop, which is stereotypically understood as a black-American cultural format, as already suggested in chapter five, referring to the band Inner Princess. The band’s musical style, which is aggressive punk rock, further, contradicts the expectations of their audience. The drag performance by Davis adds to this irritation, and can therefore be understood as a queering 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 against 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 proceeds with this anarchic production of meanings in her zines. Through cut and past style she produces a form of Hollywood and punk scene gossip that floats between truth and fiction. In her d.i.y. punk productions *Yes, Ms. Davis* or *Sucker*, for example, she narrates 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, mostly reports about sexual encounters with famous people, from Andy Warhol

(Siegel 155) to Gwyneth Paltrow,¹⁶ is not whether it is true or false, as Siegel notes. “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 reimagining the self and the social” (Siegel 155). Besides functioning as a critical intervention into 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, essence and mask, is further reflected in her drag performance, a “drag that is neither glamorous nor strictly comedic” (103). José Muñoz analyzes her particular way of performing as drag that is a mask without an essence, a continuous perpetuation of camouflage (*Dis* 103). Muñoz explains the concept of her performances in reference to a concert of PME titled *White to be Angry*¹⁷ at the Squeezebox in New York City, hosted by the drag queens Miss Guy and Mistress Formika (ibid.). During this concert the 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 performing as boy, Davis manages to keep her initial 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. (Muñoz, *Dis* 103)

With her performance, Davis draws on the “picture of paranoid and embattled white male identity in the multi-ethnic city” (Muñoz, *Dis* 105) to mock ultra right wing ideology. Moreover, Davis also intervenes into the “[...] predominately white post-punk queercore spaces such as Squeezebox and, further, the spaces of predominately white masculinity that are associated with hard-core [...] music” (110), through her disturbing drag, an impersonation of a white supremacist performed by a black drag queen. Davis points to the

¹⁶ Davis tells about a lesbian encounter with Gwyneth Paltrow on her homepage www.vaginaldavis.com.

¹⁷ *The White to Be Angry* is also the title of PME’s CD from 1996.

exclusions that white punk and white queer spaces create by interrupting the discourses of political correctness through her impersonation of a white supremacist. She emphasizes that her blackness and queerness already mark her as different, as a “freak among freaks” (111) and appropriates this extreme position or “exploits its energies and its potential to enact cultural critique” as José Muñoz put it (ibid.). Emphasizing her intersectional self-positioning between discourses of queerness, blackness, and punk Muñoz argues that these discourses themselves become visible as ideological discourses. Additionally, she visualizes these discourses as ambivalent, because both are not only “liberatory” (115) but also produce exclusions, hierarchies and perpetuate discriminatory power-structures (ibid.). Muñoz’s lens of disidentification enables the reader to understand the performance of PME as “a parodic and comedic demystification; [a third space from which] the potential for subversion is planted,” (115) and additionally visualizes “subjects as constructed and contradictory” (115), but nevertheless active. Equally disturbing as Davis’ live performance are the lyrics of the songs on the album *White to be Angry*. 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 (115). While Muñoz concentrates on the “desire within uneasiness” (ibid.), I want to argue that PME does not only create desire but also *jouissance*, as elaborated in Chapter Three, through their irritating and confrontational acts. Their particular combination of violent language, disturbingly loud music, anti-social and political incorrect behavior creates a pleasure that deconstructs the social structures and politics of the environment they are located in as well as self-destructs with regard to their own identifications. The performers appropriate racist, sexist and homophobic language and embodiment and thereby target themselves—their bodily and sexual identification—as well as their audience. Although they and their audience enjoy PME’s performances, the confrontation of the queer scenes with their homonormativity and whiteness is necessarily painfully interrupting 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 112).

Although I want to emphasize the destructive quality or *jouissance* of PME’s

performances, I also want to point to their ‘productive’ potential. I argue that the productive quality is a surplus value of the same jouissance-like performance. PME address 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 are ambivalent or hybrids in their self-identification, their art genre and political location. Therefore it can be argued that they open up a cultural third space or (b)orderland, where new queer social bonds can emerge. Other cultural locations of third spaces or (b)orderlands are queer-feminist zines. In the following subchapter I will take a closer look at queer-feminist zines. I will argue that queer-feminist punks of color use zine-writing as political strategy for fluid and ambivalent self-representation, and representation of subjectivities as well as anti-racist and decolonial interventions.

6.4.2. “Q. Are you black or punk? A. Both (and yes, FUCK YOU):”¹⁸ The Third Space within Queer-Feminist Punk Rock

To analyze my concrete examples of zine-writing I want to briefly sum up the key aspects of Homi Bhabha’s concept of third space and Adela C. Lincona’s (2005) concept of (b)orderlands’ rhetorics again. Homi Bhabha theorizes third space as a place where different political discourses and theories intersect. It is a hybrid space where the oppressed become empowered, new knowledge gets produced and activism emerges. The third space is not a simple connection of “two original moments from which the third emerges, rather [it] enables other positions to emerge. [It] displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives [...]” (Bhabha 211). Part of the political activism that emerges in third spaces is a “cultural translation” (ibid.). Cultural translation uses or imitates hegemonic language, cultural practices, aesthetics or strategies from the position of the oppressed. Thus, cultural translation is not assimilation. On the contrary, it “denies the essentialism of a prior given original or originary culture” (ibid.) and therefore fundamentally deconstructs the category culture, and the basis for hegemony.

¹⁸ Spooner, *Foreword* xvii

Adela C. Lincona (2005) goes even further in her effort to signify ways of deconstructing fixed notions of culture within third spaces. She refers to the concept of third space to describe the location from which feminist zine-producers articulate their aims in her article “(B)orderlands’ Rhetorics and Representations: The Transformative Potential of Feminist Third-Space Scholarship and Zines.” However, she does not use the term third space to signify the location from which rhetorics are uttered, but prefers the term “(b)orderlands.” She argues that feminist zines are third spaces, where “representational rhetorics emerge” and terms the emerging rhetorics “(b)orderlands’ rhetorics.” The representations within feminist zines must not be understood as representations of fix identities. (B)orderlands’ rhetoric rather represent subjectivities in their full ambivalence and uncertainty, as shifting and changing. Lincona 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 implicitly cultural belonging. “Unlike dualistic language structures, (b)orderlands’ rhetorics move beyond binary borders to a named third space of ambiguity and even contradiction” (Lincona 105). This interruption through the parentheses opens up the term for a usage that calls up metaphorical crossings and inbetweens as well as acknowledging the actual violent reality of crossing borders. It acknowledges 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” (106).

Lincona developed her concept to account for the subversive strategies of resisting hegemonic power by analyzing oppression from an intersectional position as well as the “potential to build and inform community” (109) through zine-writing. She argued 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” (Lincona 109).

Examples for queer-feminist punk zines that explicitly refer to the ambiguity and potential Lincona describes are easy to find. Jackie Loneberry Wang for instance describes

her work in the second edition of her zine *Memories of a Queer Hapa*¹⁹ 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” (Loneberry Wang 1). Not all queer-feminist punk zines are as explicit in their references to (b)orderlands’ rhetorics as Loneberry Wang’s writing. However, queer-feminist punk zines by people of color need to be understood as (b)orderlands’ rhetorics in general. Moreover, such queer-feminist (b)orderlands’ rhetorics are predominantly anti-social politics as well. The anti-social quality of *Memories of a Queer Hapa* can be seen in the appropriation of the derogatory term hapa to irritate hegemonic power.

In the next section I will introduce another contemporary example of (b)orderlands’ rhetorics by Osa Atoe. Analyzing Osa Atoe’s impressive corpus of work I will show in detail what (b)orderlands’ rhetorics can look like, and what their aims can be. Moreover, I will 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.”²⁰ 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, who was already 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 *wemakezines.ning.com* Atoe describes the third space or (b)orderland from which she speaks:

Shotgun Seamstress is a celebration of every side of myself. The punk part, the

¹⁹ “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).

²⁰ Atoe, Osa. “Everyone’s not welcome.” *Maximumrocknroll* 321 (February 2010).

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.

Based in New Orleans, Atoe transgresses places as well as artistic formats with her political activism. She is involved in local as well as trans-regional projects, edits her zine, writes a column in *Maximumrocknroll*, as well as a weblog. Furthermore, she plays in the band Deny It, and organizes queer punk shows in New Orleans, which she calls *No More 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" (Atoe, *Everyone's*). In a reflection of 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. Though 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. Atoe criticizes discourses of "metronormativity,"²¹ which privilege coastal cities like New York and San Francisco and the lack of interest in the US-South among most US-based queer-feminist punks. Implicitly, and on a deeper level, her rejection of metronormativity criticizes the elitist, middle-class, well educated background of most queer-feminist punk activism 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" (Atoe, "I can't believe," *Shotgun Seamstress*. Home page.

²¹ 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 Time* 36). Theorist Scott Herring argues that the US-American South becomes framed as opposition the progressive metropolitans – backward, homophobic, anti-queer and racist—in his article "Southern Backwardness: Metronormativity and Regional Visual Culture."

September 2009. <http://shotgunseamstress.blogspot.com/>).

Atoe aims to build an inclusive punk scene in New Orleans, and foster queer-feminist decolonization. Central to anti-racist queer-feminist politics like Atoe's is the question of how to move from punk's agreement that racialization is oppressive, beyond imagining that this democratizing aim is accomplished by merely identifying the category "race" in "a laundry list of oppression," as Laura Pérez has written, arguing for gender and sexuality within theories and politics of decolonization.

Pérez argues, "that gender and sexuality critique is at the heart of decolonizing politics and that [this, through the awareness of a racialized gender and sexuality informed intellectual labor of decolonizing] must [be] undertake[n] collectively, in solidarity, and alongside of [one's] own subject formation" (122). 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 about 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," referring to her positions not as 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 or beyond, 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 on her webpage that she:

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. (wemakezines.ning.com)

Since 2006, Atoe has already influenced and educated 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. Additionally, 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. 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 follow the discussion. The initiative showed that there are very engaged and committed punks of color in a lot of punk scenes around the US, 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* do not only connect individuals, but also actually interlink movements and discourses with each other. One movement or

feminist concept Atoe, the *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 of those 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 the scenes have to punks of color because of the lack of awareness surrounding white privilege. Another strategy to decolonize punk communities is, as described in the previous sections, to uphold past punks of color and their productions. Although riot grrrl groups and archivists of riot grrrl's history needs to be criticized for their unawareness of their white privilege and blindness to their hidden racism, a simple focus on 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*), to borrow the words of Mimi Nguyen. Contemporary punks like Atoe or Purnell agree with Nguyen that many initially well intended grassroots scenes, riot grrrl and queercore chapters, continued white privilege and exclusionary politics by ignoring the multiple factors of oppression in creating a group identity. Nguyen analyzed her own experience within the 1990s in a paper called "Aesthetics, Access, Intimacy, or Race, Riot Grrrl, Bad Feelings" held at Sarah Lawrence college in 2010, to explain riot grrrl's failure to continue progressive queer-feminist activism by focusing too much on the personal experience as discriminated 'women' and not questioning the whiteness of this imagination 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 (*Like 58*) pointed out. Tamara Spivey,²² who used to be an active punk of color within the Los Angeles-based riot grrrl scene during the 1990s, noted 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,” commenting on Nguyen’s rejection of riot grrrl scenes as completely white environments on *threadandcircuits.wordpress.com*.

Like Spivey, and in contrast to Nguyen, contemporary queer-feminist punks of color Atoe, Velez, Capistrano, and Bastani emphasize the participation of queer-feminist punks of color within queer-feminist punk cultures, while at the same time addressing its structure of white hegemony. Furthermore, they attempt to intervene into white hegemony through a politics of consciousness-raising for the work and activities of earlier queer-feminist punks of color like Mimi Nguyen herself, who edited the 1997 queer-feminist punk anthologies *Evolution of a Race Riot*, and *Race Riot II*. Atoe, for example, wrote in her column in *Maximumrocknroll*:

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. (Atoe, *A race riot*)

Taking up Atoe’s critique of the continuation of whitewashed history writing, 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* or Lauren Martin from the zine *You Might As Well Live*, fiercely reject racism from within riot grrrl and queercore scenes. Martin harshly criticized the language of shared “sisterhood” and “girl-love,” within her riot grrrl chapter, but ended her criticism always with notes like “p.s. I still love you. I still believe” (*Open letter* 16). In the following section, I will analyze examples of queer-feminist, female-, and Asian-identified punk writers and musicians from the 1990s and early 2000s. I will focus on Mimi Nguyen,

²² Spivey published the feminist punk of color zine *Housewife Turned Assassin!*

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 and beyond.

6.5.1. “for colored girls who have considered homicide:”²³ Resistance Against White Hegemony and Racism

Sabrina Margarita Alcantara-Tan started to publish her zine *Bamboo Girl* in 1995, and continued to publish her punk writing on *bamboogirlzine.blogspot.com*. She emphasized on her blog her intention 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 d.i.y. communities in the US. Her politics targeted her broader socio-cultural environment, but also and explicitly the counter-cultural punk scenes 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)

Alcantara-Tan continued publishing her print zine until 2001, and published articles on *bamboogirlzine.blogspot.com* until 2010. In her publications Alcantara-Tan and her contributors criticize the implicit racism of the feminist punk scene and cry out for a different thinking in a 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 anti-racist efforts to criticize mainstream society, for instance when some scenes

²³ Wahng qtd. in Wobensmith, *Queercore* 7.

“produced some shrewd analyses of US foreign policy [...], effectively organized huge protests against apartheid or the Persian Gulf War” (Nguyen, *It's (Not)* 259). Nevertheless, punk movements fail to realize their own racisms. Selena Wahng takes this point up when writing about the queer punk scene in a copy of *Bamboo Girl*. “[I]t seems,” she provokes, “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 *Bamboo Girl* originator Alcantara-Tan reject the assumption of a shared “lesbian” identity based on sexuality. Describing their personal experience and identification, they emphasize that “heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification are impossible to understand apart from each other,” (Lugones, *Heterosexuality* 187) to use the words of scholar María Lugones. Rejecting an incorporation of queer punks of color into groups constituted around 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 participated in 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 identify the strategy and efforts of their punk communities towards the inclusion of people of color into their communities as a structurally violent incorporation, and a form of assimilation. They do so because 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 with 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 do not only produce a notion of punk scenes as white and reestablish white privilege; they additionally 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, or Alcantara-Tan need to be understood as what Lugones called “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. As the title for an article in *Outpunk* (Wobensmith, *Queercore*), a widely distributed self-published queercore zine, Wahng refers to the experimental play *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (1975) by Ntozake Shange for example. Turning the phrase into “Bamboo Girl: for colored girls who have considered homicide,” this reference must be understood not only as actively producing 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 or scene to scene, the individual’s phenomenological microanalysis are always developed into a broader reflection on 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 such a 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 homogeneity 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 (though claiming to fight against racism) attitudes. Although Nia

King, at least as a rhetoric move, rejects punk and punk communities because of her personal experience of racism and sexism, her writings need to be understood as important media for a 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 beyond 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 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 counter-culture she grew up in. She does not shy away from addressing less obvious forms of racism among 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 into punk counter-cultures, 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 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 located within those discourses and social spheres. Therefore, they affect queer-feminist punk discourses. King, Wahng, Alcantara-Tan, or Nguyen, were important role models for

many queer-feminists of color. Their examples encouraged others to start a band, zine or 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, *Maximumrocknroll* 313) or 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 yellowcore and other queer-feminist punk activists chose to communicate their decolonization politics. Bands like the all-Asian band Emily’s Sassy Lime, Los Crudos and Spitboy challenged punk communities with their lyrics and also influenced many queer-feminist punks, including punks of color until 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 Trembly 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!.”²⁴ Queer-Feminist Punk as Decolonizing Project

My Parade and NighTrain are two very interesting examples of the artistic and poetical expressions with which punks of color confront their peers about their white privileges and try make themselves and their art visible today. Moreover, their songs can be understood as the production of knowledge and awareness about the US history of colonialism. My Parade and NighTrain teach their punk community about colonialism by exceeding the thematic boundaries of punk and punk counter-cultures by addressing other musical genres, as well as historic periods. In other words, they create an archive of colonial history in the field of counter-cultural music production. Moreover, by addressing colonial history within their songs while emphasizing white hegemony within their scenes and beyond

²⁴ NighTraiN. “Black Love.” *Derailed*. CD. Self-released. Seattle, 2010.

today, they clearly mark the continuation of colonialism.

The first example I will analyze is the song *Handjobs on Freight Train* by the Seattle-based band My Parade. It is a fast and aggressive punk song about ambivalent topics like homelessness and freedom, danger and excitement. The song is a reference to the popular folk song *Freight Train* by the black US-American blues and folk musician, singer, and songwriter Elizabeth Cotten from North Carolina, from the early 1900s. The original song *Freight train* written 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 words of a fleeing African-American from Southern States on a night train, anxious about getting discovered. Making this reference, My Parade honors a piece of folk music written by a female African-American working class person and remembers violent colonial US history. Moreover, by transforming the folk song into punk rock, the song implies that colonization, oppression and racism are not over yet. Giving the song a sexual imagery through the “handjobs,” My Parade calls on discourses about modern forms of slavery and sexual violence. Although *Handjobs on Freight Train* evokes all these discourses of violence and oppression, it also draws on a very different set of meanings. The sexual acts, the handjobs in the song, become a very distinct quality referring to the sex trade and violence 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.

My Parade continues their song with the lines

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 perspective on sexualization again and suggest that everyday labor—a 40 hour a week job—is a form of prostitution, a selling of one’s own body. Especially seen 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 reference to Elizabeth Cotton and pre-Civil War America, slavery and modern slavery, sex trade and sexual violence are transformed into agency by the energetic music and performance, which becomes additionally emphasized by 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 again addresses and involves everyone in the audience and on the stage in the discussion of the different topics. The song does not only allow for multiple readings of the lyrics and music, but forces multiple meanings on the listener at the same time. It seems that 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 this history into the present, My Parade historicize their own oppression and resistance against it. They exceed a monolithic and linear narrative of the experience of racialization and sexualization. Hence their song *Hand Jobs on 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 has it (Lugones, *It's all* 49). My Parade are in line with academic decolonial feminists, describing their own experiences and histories as complex and as themselves “interrelated beings in multiple relations, including both relations of power and relations of resistance, of exuberant excess” (ibid.). Moreover, like the academics, My Parade frame themselves as “historical beings” (ibid.) within colonial history and implicitly argue that their experience and place within society can only be understood within 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 bandmembers Selena “No Pick” Paquiet, Nicole “Christ Child” Peoples, Taryn “Hot Legs” Dorsey and Rachael F. play a very melodic and pop-influenced version of punk rock,

calling their sound “Locomotive Punk” in their profile on *www.sonicbids.com*. The band’s name already marks their politics. It 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 be read as ironic statement against racist discourses in popular culture and rock’n’roll. Moreover, it can be read as strong signal of queer-feminist people of color agency.

The song *Black Love* by NighTraiN follows this trajectory. In general, *Black Love* is about white men’s love and desire for black women. Like the afore discussed “Freight Train” by My Parade, it speaks to the listener, analyzing 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 women and her master Thomas Jefferson, 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 address discourses of slavery and sexual abuse. Historians often narrate Jefferson’s relationship with Hemings as romantic and loving, but doubts about the possibilities of romantic love under the conditions of slavery cannot be erased, as scholar Annette Gordon-Reed emphasizes throughout her book *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*. The feminist author Octavia Butler addressed these complicated questions in her work about the possibilities of love, desire and sexual pleasure for enslaved women who had no power or control over their bodies and their actions, for instance in her novella *Kindred*. Such literature suggests that sexual or even romantic relationships were survival strategies that cannot easily fit into either of categories rape or free love, because they were beyond (or maybe just different from) such concepts.

NighTraiN does not give a certain opinion of the relationship between Jefferson

and Hemings either, although the band clearly points to the unequal power relations with the line “She took his shit faithfully and produced for him fruitfully / And made him a fore-father, truly. Black Love!” Moreover, the song transfers this difficult question to romantic and sexual relationships between black women and white men in the present time. It concludes that “White men, Black girls; Black men, White girls. / [are] Always struggling in a not, not right world.” Nevertheless, the lyrics do not propose that such relations are impossible or wrong in general. On the contrary, they suggest that such relations might have a 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 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 afore mentioned “ebony honey,” or “Chocolate” that “melts in your mouth.”

In the last stanza of the song, NighTraiN mention 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 or the band New Blood in his music shows. *The Vim Crony Studios* have been producing professional music videos and documentaries for over ten years, supporting mainstream artists as well as independent projects and young d.i.y. artists. Ending the song with this reference to Crony and, implicitly, an example of a successful queer-feminist black community activist, NighTraiN calls on white man to become allies and supporters.

6.6. “Rise up – No one is going to save you.”²⁵ Queer-feminist Punks of Color and the Queer-Feminist Punk Revolution

To conclude this chapter, it can be stated that queer punks of color are part of past and contemporary punk scenes, despite punk’s signification of and through whiteness. Thus, the signification of punk as white anger is neither neutral, nor does it circulate solely within the musical or genre discourses. In other words, punk’s whiteness is neither a mere result of its origins within groups of working class kids and Marxist-oriented avant-gardes in London and New York, nor a socio-linguistic problem. Rather, as music critics and theorists from Lester Bangs to Roger Sabin or Greil Marcus (*Crimes*) have pointed out from the 1970s on, much of early punk rock was not only unconsciously racially biased, but also actually meant to be overtly racist.

Going back to the early era of punk rock and punk communities, I was able to show why punk became signified as white. Analyzing the specific development of the punk scene within the US context, I could explain how early punks like Patti Smith and Richard Hell identified with blackness as a spectacular otherness, producing punk as white and simultaneously reproducing racist power-structures. The appropriation of blackness as well as fascist emblems like the swastika, was motivated through their shock value by most of the first generation of punks. What used to be provocative, however, ended up being smoothly transferred into carrying racist meanings as well as attracting white supremacists. Though such punk strategies need to be understood as abusive utilizations of white privilege, their structural racism was never unchallenged within the scenes. Revisiting historic articles on the 1980s’ punk scenes in the US showed early interventions into such usages and resistance against such appropriation.

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 white bourgeois hegemony at play within punk communities, people of color did gain space and agency within punk scenes. Among very early punk subcultures and within the 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

²⁵ Los Crudos. “Levantate—Rise up.”

queer-feminist movements, but indeed played a major role in its creation and challenged it with their critique.

Using José Muñoz's concept of disidentification, I was able to explain why and how queer-feminist punks of color appropriate punk as 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 *Bamboo Girl* editor Sabrina Margarita Alcantara-Tan, or musicians like Sorrondeguy or Cristy Road work hard to create their spaces, and build new communities through opening up queer-feminist punk alliances. Furthermore, they produce and communicate an incredible corpus of theoretical thinking, reworking academic and other queer-feminist theories with their do-it-yourself punk approach.

The punk narratives queer-feminist punks of color like Mimi Nguyen or 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 put it. “This is not food to be consumed,” she writes in a review of her engagement 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 her many colleagues created a network of people of color within the US and beyond, 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 for 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.

The places queer punks of color gain through disidentification with punk rock are (b)orderlands or third spaces. Analyzing such spaces in reference to theorizations of third

space and (b)orderlands by Homi Bhabha, Gloria Anzaldúa, Adela Lincona and others, the great potential of such positionality for anti-racist and decolonizing politics and social alliances can be demonstrated. However, such places are also places of deep uncertainty and the danger of queer people of color's identification losing visibility. The danger of becoming invisible lies in the general power-structures of white hegemony, as could be seen in every single-issued effort like feminist struggles 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. The danger of the oblivion of racialized and ethnicized difference, I argue, is significant for third spaces as such. Such spaces require constant efforts to address racism and white dominance and keep people of color visible. This is very exhausting work for those punks of color who undertake it. Accordingly, punks of color like Nia King, or Mimi Nguyen left their scenes after many years of anti-racist and decolonial activism because of lack of response by their peers. Although they retreated from their punk rock scenes, their cultural productions like zines and recordings continue to be influential for the consciousness building of punk circles. Within their productions, their zines and music, their legacy lives on and influences new generations of queer-feminist punks (of color). The knowledge about their prior participation within 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, but also, queer-feminist punk communities and groups, and queer-feminist punk as such. Queer-feminist and punk counter-cultures of the present time show a high degree of non-white queer-feminist punk participation and anti-racist queer-feminist politics. Many bands, like My Parade, NighTraiN, Stage Bitten or Inner Princess, The Homewreckers, and Royal Pink are driven by queer punks of color and foreground queer-feminist anti-racist themes.

7. “WE R LA FUCKEN RAZA SO DON’T EVEN FUCKEN DARE.”¹ 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 Dictator*)

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 will transgress from the level of verbal forms of queer-feminist politics to look closely at punk performances. I argue that punk embodiment on stage—the dancing, the way of singing, or screaming, and the way of playing music 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 one example of a queer-feminist decolonialization performance by the band 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 Other Words* in Portland, OR. The show was sponsored by the *People of Color Zine Project* and was promoted with the phrase “support brown punx!” Included in the line-up were the Seattle-based band NighTraiN, whose decolonial queer-feminist lyrics I have analyzed in the course of 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 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 was the vocalist, a female-bodied person of color, who screamed into the microphone from 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

¹ Sugar. “I am chicana ...” *Race Riot II*. ed. by Nguyen, Mimi. Berkeley, California, 2002: 41.

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. Asked to describe this punk rock performances, the singing, dancing and playing instruments with a single word, most people to whom I spoke after the show answered with the word “angry.”

Locating the performance by Stag Bitten and the experience of the audience watching it, in a broader context, it can indeed be argued that punk rock music is not only culturally signified as angry music, but actually experienced as anger by most audiences. This performed and embodied anger, moreover, corresponds with verbal references to anger by musicians and writers. Such writings and other verbal expressions often address the different strains of punk rock forms, its aesthetic and sound as to articulations of anger.

The following analysis provides a detailed reflection on queer-feminist punk rock as angry expressions and expressions of anger—the emotional color of addressing social and political subjects as well as anger as primary topic and meaning of 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 a focus on anger allows to understand the critique, interventions and resistance of queer punks of color 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 political strategy and combined it with accounts of black feminists to challenge their predominantly white punk scenes. Accordingly, a brief analysis of theorizations of anger within black feminism, especially works by Audre Lorde and bell hooks, is appropriate. I will analyze their accounts not least because queer-feminist punks of color frequently refer to those theorists themselves. Through their engagement with black feminism for example, queer punks themselves 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” (72).

I will relate black feminist theory to people of color theory, cultural studies and psychoanalytical accounts in order to explain why and how queer-feminist punks of color,

like the just mentioned anonymous writer, appropriated their anger as an artistic and political strategy for their social criticism. Moreover, pointing to the analysis and problematizations of feminist and decolonialization theories, and black and Chicana feminisms by queer-feminist punks of color, I show again how those counter-cultural 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 exceeds a focus on verbal expressions. Such analysis has to consider musical forms, the sound and bodily expressions of the performer. Using work on emotions and emotionality I will show that the politics of anger and negativity work their force on the intersection between rational, emotional and bodily cognition and meanings. Subsequently, the politics of queer-feminist punk rock affect its social and political surroundings through all of these multiple forms as well. Moreover, the effect of queer-feminist punk music is not sufficiently or exclusively explained as cultural criticism, intervention into racialization and white hegemony or political resistance. I will 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 within an audience who are then able to 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 2011), I will focus on the possibilities of 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 will 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 will resume my theorizations on *jouissance* to explain how queer-feminist punk negativity manages to irritate and violate, while at the same time creating social bonds. My point is that the relationality or collectivity queer-feminist punks experience and build 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. Additionally, I argue that the queer bonds that queer punks of color and their allies form exceed the limits and norms of conventional understandings of community, yet are valuable and sustainable by pointing to the intersection of bodily, emotional and cognitive forms of pleasure and lapses into jouissance.

7.1. “We speak in a Language of Violence:”² The Aesthetics of Anger

The most prominent connotation of punk rock as an aesthetic form or genre carries within mainstream as well as counter-cultural spheres is anger, as already indicated. Moreover, historians, sociologists, and feminists theorists, starting with Dick Hebdige, identified the reason for punk rock as anger and its messages as angry. In an interview conducted by scholar Michelle Habell-Pallán, Alice Armendariz Velasquez, one of the very first punk musicians in Los Angeles, confirms the association of punk with anger by theorists, describing her musical performances the following:

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 angry expression seems to be popular and unquestioned within the US and beyond, the relationship between anger and the field of the political within mainstream discourses as well as within theoretical accounts—similar to the relationship between the political and cultural realms—seems to be very ambivalent, sometimes even contradictory. The political in general continues to be perceived as belonging to the sphere of rationality, which is the opposite of emotionality. Contradictory to this signification, a certain aggression and angry initiative are highly appreciated qualities in politicians. It can be argued that most mainstream media and political commentators appreciate anger by (white) males on the political right. Democrats, liberals

² Agatha, *Language*

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 on the left, promote their politics as always attached to emotions. Thus, while democratic and more left oriented politicians tend to address feelings of community and hope, like 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 affirms expressions of anger. Scholar Neil Nehring goes as 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 in the House and Senate. And indeed, until very recently, right wing hate speech, like the diatribe against the “Axis of evil” in his *State of the Union Address* by George W. Bush in January 2002 was not only part of mass media, but seemed to be generally approved or at least ignored. The unopposed usage of hate speech in political commentary and promotion, was interrupted slightly in January 2011, when Gabrielle Giffords, a democratic Congresswoman, was shot in an attempt at assassination. Shortly after the attack, a media debate about the usage of hate speech, especially by conservative politicians like members of the Tea Party, and right wing politicians was triggered, but public outcry did not last very long.

However, both the perception as well as the usage of anger changed with the uprising of the ongoing Occupy Movements in October 2011. Since then, anger—the word and its representation—became synonymous with the anti-capitalist movements that sprung up in so many US-American locations. Political anger and anger as politics dominated the Occupy Movement, as well as its media coverage, at least in the first months of their existence. While public representations of anger in a politicized context were mostly understood as counter productive—at least when addressing them publicly and explicitly—the representation of anger within the Occupy Movements became acknowledged to an astonishing degree. Even the White House and President Obama felt the need to address and acknowledge the display of collective anger through the Occupy Movements. President Obama recognized the display of “frustration” by the Occupy Movements in a speech given in New Hampshire on 22 November 2011. Earlier in the year 2011, the White House Press Secretary Jay Carney had already established that the

President “understands people’s frustrations,” in a public speech on 28 October. Nevertheless, though media and representatives alike state 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 or Sara Ahmed have established that the rejection and negation of emotions, especially negative emotions like anger, within the political field, despite the continued usage of emotions within the same, is a political tactic that serves multiple purposes. The distinction between the political and the emotional needs to be upheld within the symbolic order, the register of meaning, according to these feminist theorists, to continue hegemonic power and keep the “disruptive power of emotion” (Nehring, xi) in check. This strategy serves to continue white male colonial hegemony. It can be understood against the background of queer theory, queer of color critique, black feminism, and other feminist accounts, which draw attention to the cultural construction of emotions along the lines of the categories 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 which problematize anger. Audre Lorde and bell hooks emphasize in their work 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 furthermore 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 especially of 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 degrees of disciplining as well as punishment must not be misunderstood as similar. Anger among some angry white women, for instance when articulated 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 abjection 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” (ibid.) African-Americans to “repress” (ibid.) their anger about racism.

Queer-feminist punks of color diagnose 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. (Martin, *On Being* 33)

Martin as well as hooks emphasize in their writing that anger from non-white individuals and groups continues to be understood as uncivilized, inappropriate, marking a status of 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 strong positions against racism and sexism. The only acceptable forum of foregrounding racialized and sexualized oppression, accordingly, is from a weak position as victim. This strategic maneuver of keeping anger in place—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, and therefore necessarily needs to be disciplined rigorously.

The common belief in the revolutionary potential of anger within the US became currently very visible through the ongoing Occupy Movements. The word anger dominates mainstream media reports on Occupy as well as the huge network of independent media the movements have set up. The online edition of the *New York Times* for example headlined on 17 October 2011 “Countless Grievances, One Thread: We’re Angry,” trying to find a common demeanor among the very diverse movements.³ Additionally, countless blogs and home pages appropriate the word anger to express their political views, for instance *oneangryqueer.blogspot.com* or *www.angryblacklady.com*. Moreover, it seems as if the word anger had become a signal word for occupiers to find each other throughout the web.

Coming back to the theorization of anger, a focus on the account of Audre Lorde in *Sister Outsider* is productive. In her book, Lorde reflects on the strategic norms and ways of self-disciplining, which 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” (*Sister* 145). Lorde emphasizes that self-disciplinary measures like suppressing anger towards white supremacy guarantee a maneuvering through the imitation of violence in every day life, and must be seen as survival strategies. However, such self-discipline leads to an internalization and sublimation of anger, and directs black anger against other black women and children. “As Black women, we have wasted our angry feelings too often,” Lorde writes, and she says 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)

³ The edition featured the article *Countless Grievances, One Thread: We’re Angry* by journalist Marc Lacey.

Although Lorde describes the hostile environment of North America of the mid-1980s, it can be argued that the described norms and values, the disciplining of anger as well racism and sexism are still at play. The suppression of anger, especially the anger caused by the experience of racism, often leads to a 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 the writing of Lorde influenced queer-feminist punk of color activists until today. Such activists follow Lorde to examine this anger, and to direct it where it belongs, against racism and sexism as a political strategy and a therapeutic way of healing. Like Lorde, who explicitly marked her politics and theory as anger (*Sister*, 132), bell hooks understands the embrace 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,” hooks states. “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,” according to hooks. 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” (*Killing*, 8). Nevertheless, she also warns that such militant resistance by a person of color “ha[s] no real place in the existing social structure” (*Killing*, 15). Accordingly, 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 and others, researcher like Andrea Juno, Neil Nehring, Martha Nussbaum, or Sara Ahmed, see the potential to irritate hegemony of emotions. They agree that the precondition for the appropriation of anger, as a creative and appropriate way of making politics, is, as already suggested, to experience this emotion on a conscious and reflected level. Unconscious and unreflected anger and rage on the other hand, mostly results in violence and hatred against the self or others, as hooks described it. Only conscious forms of anger can become channeled into a creative form of political action. Furthermore, a reflection on their initiating reasons as well as their

purpose supports a successful appropriation. The forms of anger most interesting in terms of queer-feminist, anti-racist and decolonialization politics within punk productions are not triggered in the concrete moment of production, while writing, singing, or performing. Queer-feminist punk critic Lauren Martin reflects on the anger of her punk writings. She emphasizes 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). Her anger, although it speaks through the clearly framed form of an article, is a strong emotion in relation to her experience of and knowledge about her surroundings as well as past and contemporary society. It is highly reflexive as well as 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*. Because they are emotional, they are forms of *jouissance* and never fully under control. Accordingly, performances of anger are dangerous to the self or ego. The feminist punk singer Alice Armendariz Velasquez speaks to the *jouissance*-like character of her music, noting that her “performances were coming from a place that [she] didn’t fully control” (*Violence* 310). Despite this fact, Armendariz Velasquez emphasizes also 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 and black power movements practiced anger as a political strategy, as suggested earlier. Although the different movements are very distinct in their goals, political forms and protagonists, a unifying feature of all of them was an understanding of anger as “against-ness” (Ahmed 174), that reflects and responds to the history of subordination, violence and oppression. Moreover, and again like in the case of Armendariz Velasquez, their anger represented not only a reaction but also a creative source of agency. Armendariz Velasquez describes this creativity or productiveness, emphasizing that her stage persona “Alice Bag was born from chaos” (ibid.). The word ‘chaos’ in her text describes 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 partly her control over herself, 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 gets seen as “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” (Nehring, xiii). Other cultural studies researchers like Chérie Turner or Simon Frith agree with Nehring’s thesis that subordinate groups, especially young people, focus their politics on leisure activities and forms like music, instead on institutionalized politics, not the least because they do not have access to political institutions (Nehring, xiii). The choice for music over other forms of art by riot grrrl movements is motivated by the belief that it is the most successful means of communication of political ideas, as Sara Marcus has emphasized (cf. 34).

Riot grrrls chose the particular style of punk rock, as already suggested, because it is 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 musical genre developed into an apolitical direction after its high in the late 1970s, when it became appropriated or incorporated by mass culture, the emergence of riot grrrl changed the cultural studies perspective on punk, as well as on the potential of music as such. Against the cultural studies verdict that punk rock during most of the 1980s and early 1990s was apolitical (cf. Marcus, G.), I argue that a good amount of punk productions and scenes continued to be understood as political by their producers and recipients equally. Queer theorists like José Muñoz, Michelle Habell-Pallán or 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 forming of their political consciousness.

The reason for the potential of punk rock to politicize individuals and, moreover, communicate concrete political ideas is that the meanings of rebellion and resistance attached to punk, although often just empty signifiers, and without consequences in many cases, stayed within the cultural knowledge on a mainstream scale. Punk, at its beginning was connoted as “the persistent nemesis of the authoritarianism that emerged in the 1970s”

(Nehring xxvi) and this meaning stayed throughout the years, although other meanings were added. The meanings of music, however, as musicologists like Philip Tagg, Simon Frith or Phil Ford argue, is 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 a part of every performance, every reception of music, as well as every writing and reading process. The affective experience cannot be detached from the meaning of the product, no matter 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 has pointed out. I analyze anti-social queer-feminist decolonialization punk rock as politics that are articulated on the intersection of embodiment, sound and verbal articulation. I understand the production of meaning through music with Simon Frith, 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). (Frith *Why*, 120)

In reference to musicologists like Frith, Tagg, and Ford I want to emphasize again that meaning does not prevail over sound and vice versa and that sound does not dominate over lyrics, or performance within queer-feminist punk rock. Rather they are all factors carrying meaningful politics – on the level of emotions and affect as well as on the rational level. Which meaning gets through to the audience is different from person to person and to a large degree out of the control of musicians. The listeners’ own ideological background, as well as her/his openness and mood at the moment of listening is as important as the performers’ intention and the content of the lyrics.

Especially in queer-feminist punk rock, the sound, the physical experience and the social context during a concert might be actually more meaningful to the audience than the lyrics themselves, because punk is usually more screamed than sung and therefore very

hard to understand. But this is not to say that the lyrics do not matter. A few words usually are articulated enough to be understood. The distinguishability of signal-words like ‘queer,’ ‘homo,’ ‘sex’ in the context of queer-feminist spaces are sufficient to create a political atmosphere, where 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 through the choice of location, or because there is a further purpose like fund raising 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 analyze some examples of angry queer-feminist decolonialization within contemporary punk rock communities, I want to emphasize again that considering scholarly theorizations of anger is useful for understanding the political impact of queer-feminist punk rock. They are useful, because they consider the politics of negativity at the intersection of bodily expression, layers of artistic articulations, as well as communicative channels—lyrics, sound, and performance. Hence, such an account enables 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, a move beyond the place of queerness within the symbolic order is necessary, because psychoanalytic accounts like Lee Edelman’s are insufficient to fully analyze the experience and expression of queerness and queer political agency and action. One argument for why a focus on the symbolic needs to be broadened is that such a focus on the social meaning of queerness does not include the body or physical experience. Analyzing punk rock—or any other music—as well as political activism, on the other hand, necessarily needs to focus on bodies and (physical) experience.

The appraisal of the anti-social meaning of punk rock by Lee Edelman as well as his understanding of politics as always in the name of the Child generally relies exclusively on

the level of language and semantics.⁴ Feminist theory on anger, on the other hand, has argued that anger, although it can be a very cognitive process if conscious and reflected, is also a very bodily experience. Andre Lorde, for example, as I have explained, emphasizes the bodily implications and expressions in *Sister Outsider*. Such a focus on anger, as an emotion as well as experience, in combination with the account of queerness as anti-social by Edelman is able to detect 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:”⁵ Anger, jouissance and screams

To analyze my concrete examples of queer-feminist punk lyrics, performances and other forms of expression, I have to outline some important general points about the anger of queer-feminist punk, its connection to jouissance and the function of screaming within punk performances.

7.2.1. “he went through life like a cocked and loaded gun:”⁶ 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 analyzing the example of Martin, who theorizes her anger as “a legacy” (*On Being* 33). The causes of such forms of anger lie in the past or in a general reflection of/on 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. It rather means that the anger is felt (again) purposely. 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 to what psychoanalytical theorists have called jouissance. To fully understand the politics of queer-

⁴ A detailed analysis of Edelman’s view on punk rock, and his rejection of punk rock as negativity is provided in chapter three.

⁵ Angries, *Arrange*

⁶ Armendariz Velasquez, *Violence* 28

feminist punk rock, it is necessary to focus on *jouissance* within the music, lyrics and stage performances again, by considering theorizations of anger.

A consideration of queer-feminist punk politics as anger, first of all, requires a perspective on anger as a legitimate form of political articulation, as already explained. If anger is understood as a form of politics, such politics exceed the level of language. Anger is a bodily expression and reflection of and to experience. It is always at the intersection of the body, the mind and the social. In fact the angry articulation—the screaming, the violent movements of the body and the fast sound—need to be understood as political as such. Furthermore, not only the production of queer-feminist punk is political, but also the experience of it can be very political, no matter 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 and allows for a focus on queerness in its intersection with multiple other determinants. As discussed earlier, anti-relational queer theory, like Edelman's, analyzes queerness exclusively within the sphere of the symbolic. Such accounts, as can be shown in reference to queer scholars of color Juana Maria Rodríguez and José Muñoz in Chapter Three, are limited on various levels. Anti-relational queer theory supports a version of queerness as implicitly gay male and white, and hampers a reference to non-normatively gendered and racialized factors within discourses of sexuality as well as 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 as in the tradition of Michael Bakhtin or Walter Benjamin, they argue that language is interdependent with materiality and embodiment (cf. Nehring 129). Anger, accordingly, is a signification of the constitutive interdependence of the body and the mind. Like other emotions, anger is language-like itself, as Sarah Ahmed (175) has pointed out, while it connects the body with language and meaning. In other words, anger rests on the very

intersection of the body, the 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 a politics. In *Cruising Utopia* José Muñoz argues that queerness can be experienced or felt during a concert. While his account of queerness as experience focuses predominantly on the relational and communal aspect of such mutually shared feelings—the queer bonds it creates—during concerts, I want to emphasize that queerness as felt experience is also relevant for the individual subject 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. A shared experience of queer otherness, in other words, creates an atmosphere of communal rejection of hegemonic society.

I want to emphasize again that feeling queerness needs to be understood as a simultaneously mental and physical experience. This focus on anger and queerness as experience must not be misunderstood as a move towards authenticity, of an essentialist notion of feelings or bodily experience. Anger needs to be understood as “a social form, rather than individual self-expression,” or something naturally determined, as Sarah Ahmed has asserted for emotions as a whole (9).

7.2.2. “This rage it feels so good to say/This rage it takes me so far away:”⁷ Screaming, Jouissance, The Psyche and The Body

How tight the conjunction between emotions (or the body) and language is, can be seen in language’s actual manifestation through the voice. The voice is a medium that connects the body to language and society. It is in the voice that the body becomes noticeable, through intonation, tempo and individual sound, and meaningful language becomes communicated. Thus, the voice is never authentic or genuine (see Nehring, 133), because it is always

⁷ Agatha, *This Hate*

formed by society through of social communication. Nevertheless, physical speech, like musical expression, especially through 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 its articulations. Contesting the theory of Lacan, 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, it is never exhaustive. In other words, the body is not a mere construction of meaning. Feminist theorists like Ed Cameron and Julia Kristeva emphasize 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.”⁸ 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 or rest is *jouissance*, the force that tears the Lacanian subject back and forth “between being and knowing, between drive and desire” as Ed Cameron puts it. In her books *Revolution in Poetic Language* and *Desire in Language* Julia Kristeva argues that what could be called a bodily rest can be found in the poetic voice. Kristeva’s account, as Nehring has observed, allows for an understanding of the voice as “exceeding rational meaning through a tactile ‘grain’ and *jouissance* [...] or a corporeal signifiante (as Julia Kristeva puts it)” (Nehring 131).

Although Kristeva’s account adjudicates bodily expression, like the voice, a political value, it only does so by detaching it from the act of producing meaning consciously (cf. Cameron). The meaning of the embodied voice accordingly is detached from the intention of the subject. In the concrete example of the queer-feminist punk singer, the account of Kristeva indicates that the meaning and effect of vocal utterances are entirely detached from the intention of the individual. And although the bodily quality of music could be understood as access to *jouissance*, this access must be understood as involuntary and therefore useless as means of political agency.

I, however, argue that queer-feminist punk music and writing must be seen as ‘successful’ political activism, although or rather because these forms access *jouissance*.

⁸ Cameron, Ed. “Severing Sound from Sense: The Sacrifice of Drive in Butler’s Critique of Kristeva.” *Women Writers: A Zine*. Home page. 1 January 2010. <<http://www.womenwriters.net/index.html>>

My thesis is based on my own experience within queer-feminist punk counter-cultures as well as prior theoretical analysis for example by Judith Jack Halberstam, José Muñoz, Susan Driver or Neil Nehring. The combination of psychoanalytical theorizations of the voice with theories of anger, allows us to understand the interruptive force, or *jouissance*, as both conscious and at the same time exceeding the symbolic as well as consciousness. It allows for an understanding of *jouissance* as both bodily as well as on the level of the psyche. Accordingly, it can be argued that 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 as they are conscious, they go beyond the mind, on a temporary ecstatic ride on the death drive. The experience and production of *jouissance*, furthermore, results in politics with 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. Understood as a political tactic, angry punk rock accordingly has the potential to connect people, ideas and efforts beyond a facile identification or group affiliations.

The potential of anger, negativity, and *jouissance*, within queer-feminist punk rock can be best illustrated by framing them around the physical activity of screaming. Screaming in punk rock, researchers of punk agree, has a meaning beyond the delivering of lyrics. To a degree screaming is a pleasure for the singer, but moreover, especially for women and other subordinated groups, it is negativity. 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 a norm for punk performances itself, I want to emphasize that the meaning of screaming, as violating norms, which originated in the beginning of punk in 1976, is still present today. Furthermore, the sound of punk occasionally offends the norms quite literally, as when residents complain to the police about loud noises nearby.

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. I will thereby extract the specific meanings queer-feminist punk performances by people of color

can have and further concretize features of queer-feminist punk of color politics.

7.3. “Screaming Queens:”⁹ The Voice, The Body, and Meaning

Stag Bitten, as already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, is a contemporary hardcore punk band from Portland, OR that frequently performs in contexts with outspoken queer-feminist people of color politics. Their presence on the Internet as well as in pertinent punk publications is very minimal. Their *LastFM* description does not indicate their sexual self-identification or politics, other than their commitment to d.i.y. ethics and self-releases. In fact, no verbal expression of Stag Bitten’s politics has been recorded at all. During their concerts they do not speak to the audience, at least not during the concerts I participated in, 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 argued that Stag Bitten foster 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 lineups with bands known for their queer-feminist decolonizing politics. The queer-feminist decolonizing politics of Stag Bitten, however, become 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 be read 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 uncovers the continuation of colonialism in contemporary North America through the exploitation of racialized labor, migration policies or neoliberal discourses on multiculturalism, for example. Although there are multiple indigenous nationalist philosophies, a common denominator is the advocacy for self-determination or independence from European colonialism. Furthermore, these movements all foster

⁹ 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 emphasize that their name indicates their punk style as well as their queer-politics, which are representative for queer-feminist punk movements in general.

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 Cherrie Moraga takes up and reworks 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 refers to those seemingly static concepts of shared land, history and blood, she blurs them through multiple strategies. Moraga emphasizes that the term land, especially the politics of the Chicano movement, are more than a mere struggle for territory and must be analyzed in the concrete and broader socio-historic and cultural context of the United States. Beyond the struggle for territory, the term Nation within the Chicano movement refers to a ‘land.’ Land, accordingly, means “more than the rocks and trees, the animal and plant life [...]” (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. Additionally, 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 consciousness of being in-between. Through the implication of *mestiza* consciousness, Moraga irritates binary conceptions of sexuality once more and simultaneously extends 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 in her text, 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” (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 implicitly rejects some concepts of Chicano/a nationalism.

Stag Bitten, by using the synonym Negro Nation, refer to the historic and contemporary colonialism within the United States. Moreover, by playing cover songs from the most popular white punk and grunge bands like Crass, and Nirvana, among others, they criticize 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 additionally ironically question prior and contemporary attempts to fight misogyny within punk communities. Furthermore, Stage 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 into predominantly white queer-feminist punk politics and spaces. At the same time, the consciousness around queer-feminist agendas and politics within such spaces subverts the reference to politics in the name of Nations in similar ways as described along the example of the writing of Cherrie Moraga. Combining queer-feminist politics with political movements in the name of Nations accordingly can be understood as a decolonialization politics that aims at decolonizing bodies from heteronormativity as well as territories from white hegemony.

Besides or beyond their usage of the pseudonym Negro Nation, the politics of Stag Bitten can be seen in the places and line-ups they choose, as already briefly indicated. They regularly perform in line-ups with bands like NO/HO/MO, NighTraiN or MyParade 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 I am analyzing 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, MyParade, and Kusikia. These three bands all include or entirely consist of queer people of color and they 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 punk of color, according to the promotion material for her shows. She performed every single song of the set in a very high energetic, intense

way, screaming and shouting from the top of her lungs. It can be argued that it is 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*.¹⁰ 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 a very intense pleasure. During every song she seems detached from the place, in a stage of agitation, and yet she does not only communicate with her fellow band mates, but also makes a connection to the audience surrounding her. This allows the listeners to participate partly in her ecstatic rage, which can be understood as drive. It is exactly the word ‘drive’ or force that describes McSwain’s performance best.

Researchers writing about riot grrrl, such as Joanna Gottlieb, Gayle Wald and Neil Nehring suggest that dynamic and force-like punk rock performances as in the example of Stage Bitten constitute forms of jouissance. They argue that the pleasurable drive towards the deconstruction of the self becomes clearly visible in such performances. Screaming, as in the case of McSwain’s performance, bares the danger of resulting in pain or a status where the performer temporarily loses control over the lyrics, rhythm and melody (or his/her own body). Nevertheless, 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. These facts distinguish punk screams from most other forms of screaming, like screams triggered by frightening or horrifying situations, or through physical pain.

It can be argued that screaming in punk rock performances is tightly 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 for anger as well as for punk performance. Because anger is a speech act (Ahmed, 177), it follows certain conventions and norms. The danger of anger becoming an unconscious force, enacted in screaming, is already a cultural constructed script. Accordingly, the jouissance of the performer is not only conscious, but also creative. It

¹⁰ The Portland Mercury is a weekly print newspaper that is predominantly focused on the diverse local popular music scenes. Additionally, it is an online Newspaper with the same focus.

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 additionally destructive or bares the danger to become so, because it is never fully controllable. Screaming can potentially harm the body and mind of the singer, and 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 or violate social norms on various levels. Screaming in public is, with a few exceptions, for instance in sport arenas, understood as disturbing and 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 personae 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 private as well as in public.

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 socio-cultural stereotypes. Moreover, it can be understood as thematizing sexuality. Additionally, it can be argued, queer-feminist punk screams do not only signify sexuality on the level of criticism indicated by Wald and Gottlieb. Rather they 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 about punk concerts by punks themselves. In a recent issue of the *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 be found in the punk screams by people of color. Moreover, screams by people of color signify and imitate sexuality similarly. Although the socio-cultural discourses around people of color and screaming are very different than around white women, non-whites are equally both signified as screamers and excluded from social acceptance of screaming, or 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 becomes identified as a woman. Moreover, her screams violate class norms, because only lower classes are associated with screaming, as well as racialized norms. At the same time, it is also an appropriation of stereotypes, because women are associated with screaming, and emotionality in general in certain contexts, and so 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 analyzed according to 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 relations between her and the audience. She can establish such a social bond through the sensual quality of her performance, the screamer's bodily presence and the sound. Additionally, 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 queer-feminist punk screams by people of color as *jouissance*, I will shift my focus from the irritating and violent potential of punk anger to the music's potential for initiating queer bonds. I will do so by picking up Elizabeth Povinelli's concept of *jouissance* in combination with José Muñoz's concept of queerness and collectivity.

7.4. “We’ll start a demonstration, Or we’ll create a scene.”¹¹ The Creativity in Negativity

Queer-feminist punk rock, as I have described throughout this study, is equally 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. Moreover, it creates criticism on a cognitive level, 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. Additionally, queer-feminist punk rock also obscures normative systems of categorization through the production of surplus meanings or ambivalent meanings that are not necessarily negative. Although they are not negative, they carry the potential to irritate as well.

Nevertheless, as I have emphasized through the previous sections, the effect of queer-feminist punk is not only to be found in irritation, rejection or mockery. One other effect queer-feminist punk *jouissance* can have is an experience of non-normative or queer time, as Muñoz has conceptualized 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 in understanding this effect as creative, we come to recognize punk as a negative force, while imagining a queer-feminist and punks of color existence and resistance against violence and oppression. It does so, because Muñoz argues that in the moment when normative time is suspended, a queerness becomes possible, whereas anti-relational queer theory understands queerness in general as structurally impossible. Accordingly, Muñoz’s account allows for the imagination and recognition of sustainable queer bonds or communities. Moreover, his emphasis on the bodily quality of queer-feminist punk participation, the imagination of a queer bond, a relationality or alliance, becomes thinkable, that is, able to connect individuals despite their differences and structural privilege/inequality while not ignoring them.

¹¹ The Gossip. “Pop Goes The World.” *Music for Men*. CD. Columbia Records 2009, Audio Recording.

7.4.1. Ecstasy: bodily and emotional jouissance, time and the formation of queer bonds

As already emphasized 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 such moments 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 why 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 very related stage of being.

Punk performance as jouissance is irritating to perceptions of time, while being productive or creative at the same time, as the following report in *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. (Bryony Beynon, no pagination)

The “truth” of existence the author is reporting about is less referring 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,” the other notes, lies in the feeling of collectivity, or a “total sonic something.” A phrase to pinpoint experiences of time like these is indeed “ecstatic time,” according to Muñoz.

Ecstatic time, following Muñoz, or moments of jouissance, is a time beyond the past, the present and the future, that becomes experienced when someone “feels” (ibid. 32), rather than knows. In other words, these moments can be located on the body and 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, also on 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 Stage Bitten or the rhythmic force of the Locomotive Punk by NighTraiN, 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, MyParade and Stag Bitten make room for 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. The recognition of different individuals, accordingly, is not a question of identification or experience. It is rather a question 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 of the United States more explicitly than most other contemporary punk or pop-punk bands. When NighTraiN draw on the history of slavery through their lyrics and their way of playing and performing in their song *Black Love*, they build on collective knowledge about the sexual relationship of Thomas Jefferson to Sally Hemings, one of his female slaves, on a cultural signification of trains as way to flee from a slave state to an abolitionist state and so on, and extend it to the present. In other words, they focus on a contemporary form of oppression, while relating this oppression to socio-cultural politics throughout time and teach history at the same time. Hence, I want to argue that NighTraiN halt normative time and create experiences of queer time, like Muñoz has described it. 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 emphasizing the drums and therefore rhythm, they also go beyond the meaning of their words. Through their performance they create a space where individuals, no matter if 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, connecting with other bodies beyond sexual intimacy. They function as communication tools, as queer theorists like Muñoz or Sara Ahmed, have emphasized, because of their emotionality. In the moment of queer-feminist ecstatic time, or shared *jouissance*, the possibility of "different ways of living with others" as Ahmed has put it (165), becomes thinkable. Yet, such experiences of ecstasy or *jouissance* are not delusional. On the contrary, such emotional and bodily experiences are a reflection of the here and now. The anger which 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," Alice Armendariz Velasquez (better known as Alice Bag) wrote, "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 read with Muñoz, Ahmed and others, as "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 rooted in critique and highly reflexive as the queer-feminist punk of color Mariam Bastani wrote in the editorial of the *Maxismumrocknroll* edition in 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. (Bastani, "The Dictator" no pagination)

Bastani's comment is part of a longer letter of reply to a male punk who was not aware of 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 classical 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, but on the contrary, 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 social forms that are not based on a common identity, origin, nation, etc. The concept of community according to Nancy emphasizes that the very meaning of being (as an ontological status that carries meaning) is always a being singular plural. Whereas politics based on concepts of sociality referring to equality, as in the example of the white punk critic are, according to Nancy, 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 other through an emphasis on differences. Accordingly, such communities are not only more inclusive, but additionally manage to avoid hierarchies and hegemonies within them 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, it can be argued that punk music is a 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 stipulated not only on the level of verbal expressions, but additionally within 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.

Focusing on queer people of color critique and participation in queer-feminist punk rock, I was able to analyze my examples of musical and verbal anger, emotional negativity and *jouissance* as anti-racist, decolonial and queer-feminist political action. Referring to theories of anger within black feminism, especially works by Audre Lorde and bell hooks, people of color theory, cultural studies and psychoanalytical accounts, I was able to provide further arguments for understanding anger as political form. Briefly referring to prior feminist politics of anger, I provided some explanations for queer punks of color's choice of the cultural form punk rock. The most important reason why queer-feminist punks of color chose punk rock, I have argued, lies indeed in punk's connotation of being a political form of anger and outrage caused by social injustice and oppression. Moreover, pointing out connections to feminist and decolonialization theories, to black and Chicana feminisms, I was able to show again how queer punks of color developed and practiced non-normative forms of intellectual labor. Pointing to textual references to black feminist work within queer-feminist punk writing and music—for example, bell hooks or Gloria Anzaldúa—I was able to show how queer punks themselves drew 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 decolonial and antiracist practices and resistance. Nevertheless, such criticism affects its social and political surroundings not only on the rational or cognitive level. Taking 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 their performances need to be additionally located on a bodily and emotional level.

Moreover, I argued that the effect of queer-feminist punk music is not exclusively criticism. Referring 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. Thereby it creates moments, where queerness can be experienced or lived and shared with others. Hence, relating theories on ecstatic time to work 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 queer punks of color and their allies form exceed the limits and norms of conventional understandings of community. Like anger and criticism, the relationality or collectivity queer-feminist punks create in concerts and other social gatherings, are located on a bodily and emotional level, as well as on a cognitive one. Such communities promise anti-hierarchical structures and collective resistance of oppression. Although such communities should not be idealized, it can be noted that they not only create through resistances towards white hegemony, racism, queerophobia and sexism, but indeed enable a politics of resistance and anti-racism.

8. “We’ve got to show them we’re worse than queer:”¹ Epilog

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. It is a grassroots movement that uses the terms queer and punk as anti-social terms to irritate neoliberal ideologies of inclusion and raises awareness about the ongoing homophobia, transphobia and misogyny within mainstream society as well as gay and lesbian scenes. It criticizes and rejects neoliberal politics. Moreover, it questions identity-politics and aims to irritate normative concepts of sexuality, sexual norms and genders within the cultural register of meaning 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 the specific artistic forms of activism through music and informal forms of writings, queer-feminist punk irritates and communicates ideas on the cognitive as well as the emotional level. It works on the level of emotionality because it communicates meanings through sound and embodiment during performances. The mode of queer-feminist punk meaning production through sound, performances and verbal expressions must be understood as an anti-social drive, or *jouissance*. Queer-feminist punk *jouissance* is a (self-)destructive enjoyment that is not only political but also powerful, because it is able to attract attention and at the same time manages to disturb normative values, beliefs and self-perceptions. In other words, queer-feminist punk performances as well as 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 socio-cultural and political context of the US, its domestic policy as well as foreign policy. It emerged as a

¹ Bikini Kill. “Suck My Left One.” *There’s A Dyke In the Pit*. CD. Outpunk, 1994.

reaction and counterposition to the cultural and political shift toward 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 trans-activist and scholar Dean Spade. I want to emphasize that queer-feminist punk emerged as a reaction to the socio-political environment of the US and its crucial role in globalization on a structural or reflexive level. Additionally, queer-feminist punk rock does not only react to and analyze the social, cultural and political environment but also actively works against the continuation of oppressive forms of power. Many queer-feminist punk communities, although they are counter-cultural spheres, with distinct political and social values that regulate membership in these spheres, proactively build alliances and bonds to other oppressed groups.

In recent times, queer-feminist punks additionally reached out to a large part of the US society, which can be understood as mainstream, and created social bonds and alliances with a percentage of the population it previously rejected. This is a new development within the movement. While queer-feminist punks of past decades generally rejected mainstream society, for instance with expressions like “This society isn’t my society” in the first *Bikini Kill: A Color and Activity Book* zine editorial line, recent queer-feminist punk publications suggest that the usage 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 within the United States and beyond, who are oppressed by capitalism and by the small minority who benefits from the system. Some even identify as mainstream, like J.D. Samson in an article published in an edition of the online newspaper *Huffington Post*. In this article Samson calls on her fans to realize that she is one of many struggling mainstream Americans.

Queer-feminist punks like Marissa Magic attempt “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). Examples of the outreach or point of contact between queer-feminist punk movements and mainstream society are contemporary Occupy movements. Musicians and writers like Mariam Bastani (Interview to the author), Cristy Road (Interview to the author), or J.D. Samson (*I Love*) participated in Occupy movements as protesters and contributed their punk art. Many other queer-feminist punk groups and

individuals followed their example, especially in the area of San Francisco and Oakland where most punks identify with the movement, as Mariam Bastani (Interview) estimated. Additionally, many queer-feminist punk bands produced songs about and for the movements, for example Samson's band MEN, the Pariah Piranha or the Mynabirds. But punks do not only identify with or participate in Occupy movements. Punk musician, writer and Chicana feminist Alicia Armendariz Velasquez argues 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 emphasizes,

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. (Armendariz Velasquez, <http://alicebag.blogspot.com>)

I agree with Armendariz Velasquez that queer-feminist punk rock influences other social movements, individuals and also the mainstream. Contemporary counter-cultures continue punk strategies, like Armendariz Velasquez suggested. But 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 and methods, as well as critique. In other words, although it is important to emphasize that the queer-feminist movements changed over time, their protagonists continue to identify themselves as (queer-feminist) punk activists.

In this final chapter of my analysis I will briefly reflect on queer-feminist punk activism within Occupy Wall Street as well as Occupy Oakland, to summarize the most important aspects, strategies and agendas of queer-feminist punk politics. Moreover, I will analyze the similarities of Occupy movements and queer-feminist punk movements on a more general level to argue that queer-feminist punk rock needs to be credited as one of the most influential antecedents to these new social uprisings. I start with a short description of the social uprisings in New York City and Oakland to provide the socio-political landscape

in which queer-feminist punks engaged.

8.1. “I am sickened by your money lust / and all your fucked-up greed.”² A Movement without Leaders and Goals

The first of various public political actions, which later became known as Occupy movements, was a gathering of a few thousand people in the financial district of New York City on 17 September 2011.³ This first assembly happened as a surprise to most people within the US and beyond. It happened in a way so “unexpected that no politician or pundit saw it coming,” Sarah van Gelder, occupier and Occupy Wall Street archivist has documented in the first printed documentation of the movement (1). Furthermore, no one expected that the encampment would encourage thousands more to protest, inspire other occupations in cities throughout the US, and would occupy public spaces for the next two months and in some cases longer. Yet, the uprising did not come out of nowhere. The final initiative to assemble concretely on 17 September 2011 at a location close to Wall Street was given by the Canadian *Adbusters*⁴ magazine through a mailing list (Writers 10). Furthermore, some of the initial figures of Occupy Wall Street migrated from prior political groups and projects, and brought those groups and projects into Occupy Wall Street.⁵ More importantly, however, the political form or strategy to occupy a public space was inspired through and in exchange with other global movements all over the world.⁶ At about the same time the encampment in Zuccotti park emerged, people started rallying, and finally camping, at Franz H. Ogawa which was renamed Oskar Grant Plaza⁷ in downtown Oakland.

² Spitboy, *Fences*

³ Demonstrators set up tents, information points, an improvised kitchen etc. at Zuccotti Park, which they renamed Liberty Plaza.

⁴ On 13 July 2011, “the Vancouver-based, ecological, anticonsumerist magazine *Adbusters* released its call to action: # OCCUPY WALL STREET [emphasis in the original] Are you ready for a Tahrir moment? On Sept 17, flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street” (Writers 10).

⁵ Moreover, prior to Occupy Wall Street, there had been a smaller, “much humbler occupation against Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s proposed budget cuts,” “called Bloombergville,” organized by “the New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts (NYABC), the International Socialist Organization (ISO), and a few other groups” (Writers 8).

⁶ The *Adbusters*’ proposal referred decidedly to the protests on Cairo’s Tahrir Square earlier that year. Many respondents to the magazines’ call for action, moreover, referred to social and political actions for example in Tunisia, the street riots of Spain, Greece, France and Chile, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela for example (Writers 10).

⁷ The plaza in front of Oakland’s city hall has been in-officially renamed Oskar Grant Plaza, honoring the young man shot in the back by a Bay Area Transit System police officer on New Years day of 2009.

8.1.1. “If there ever was a time to get on your feet / take it to the Streets.”⁸ Rejection as Political Agenda

The first political message the occupiers communicated at Zuccotti Park in New York’s financial district and in downtown Oakland articulated through chants and protest signs was a dissatisfaction and frustration with the current socio-political inequality in the US; they made references to recent revolutionary movements in Egypt, Tunisia and other countries. Soon after the first protestors had settled at the two locations they set up the media platforms *occupyoakland.org* and *occupywallst.org*. On those Webpages the protesters declared having assembled at Oakland’s Oskar Grant Plaza and New York’s Zuccotti Park to protest the influence of corporations on democratic systems, the striking and increasing disparity in wealth, and the legal system’s lenience towards the financial elite responsible for the global crisis of monetary insolvency. The first exhaustive political declaration or statement was the *Declaration of the Occupation of New York City*, which was accepted by the New York City General Assembly on 29 September 2011. The document proposes: “[w]e come to you at a time when corporations, which place profit over people, self-interest over justice, and oppression over equality, run our government.” Naming all sorts of social fields of inequality, and oppression, the document points to “inequality and discrimination [...], based on age, the color of one’s skin, sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation” (Writers 36), income, humanity, wealth, citizenship and so on.

The form or mode of politics the two chapters of Occupy movements used was a politics of rejection and anger very similar to the queer-feminist punk politics I described previously. They rejected inequality within the workplace and education, US military actions, the police forces, the government, and, most importantly, corporations and the rich. They clearly declared what they are against. What their declarations and chants did not declare, and no publication agreed upon through the General Assembly ever would, was what kind of future they desired. Although some participants like Eli Schmitt, Astra Taylor and Mark Creiff expressed their aim or “desire” “to restore government to citizen control, to regulate finance for the common good, and to get banks out of the business of buying legislators and influencing the law,” in their personal writing, this was never

⁸ The title “If there ever was a time to get on your feet / take it to the Streets” is a line from the lyrics of the unrecorded song *If There Ever Was A Time* by the San Francisco-based rock band Third Eye Blind. The contemporary band wrote the song as a call to their fans to support the Occupy movements and performed it on various Occupy locations.

articulated as a shared desire or aim. Marina Sitrin frames the movements' politics as desire to "pull the emergency brake" on the contemporary social and political development in her recent article "Pulling The Emergency Brake." She further emphasizes that this rejection of participation in the economic, political and social system," did already "open up and create something new." But no one can be sure yet "what that something is" (Sitrin 6). Accordingly, I argue that the politics of Occupy Oakland and Occupy Wall Street can be understood as a politics of jouissance.

8.1.2. "we're nobodies and now we're in charge:"⁹ The Refusal of a Group-Identity

The movement additionally never specified 'who' they were in terms of a political or social group-identity other than 'The 99%.' This refusal to label their movement with a group-identity included the rejection to elect a representative, like a speaker. It was additionally reflected in the political method to occupy a public space as a collective. Furthermore, the political method of a communal gathering and collective rejection of the present was not only a method, but a goal of the movement. Judith Butler emphasized this point in a speech she gave at one of the Occupy Wall Street rallies. "[W]e are not just demanding economic justice" (*Bodies in Public* 193), Butler argued. "We are assembling in public, we are coming together as bodies in alliance, in the street and in the square. We're standing here together making democracy, enacting the phrase 'We the people!'" (ibid.)

Many participants of these early public gatherings self-identified as punks, as already pointed out. Queer-feminist punks actively participating in Occupy New York included J.D. Samson and her band MEN, or the punk musician and artist Cristy Road. Additionally, many punk collectives supported the movement through the distribution of information, for example The For The Birds Collective on *forthebirdscollective.org*. Another example was the organization of OCCUPIED: Occupy Wall Street Art Show at the anarchist, queer-feminist book store *Bluestockings* in November 2012.

Especially in Oakland punks were very visible contributors to the movement. *Punks! Punks! Punks!: The Valley Punk Perspective* zine emphasized punks' participation in the movement, arguing that "[t]he Occupy Oakland encampment has struck a chord with the local punk community" on *punkspunkspunks.com* in December 2011. Many local bands

⁹ MEN. *Make Him Pay*. not-released.

started playing at occupy sites and rallies, for example the Side Effects, the 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, for example supporting the Occupy Oakland Rise Up Festival on 28 and 29 January 2012.¹⁰ Local bands like Fucktard, Acid Fast, or Bad Blood contributed songs to Occupy, and the band Neon Piss, wrote a full length album about Occupy. One of the most interesting among the numerous engagements of punks within Occupy Oakland are the contributions to *Slingshot*, the quarterly, independent, radical, East Bay newspaper.

Before I move on to trace what I understand as the roots of such engagement in Occupy Oakland and Occupy Wall Street, and before coming back to the details of these engagements, I want to emphasize that punks' participation to Occupy movements is not limited to Occupy Oakland and Occupy Wall Street. Queer-feminist punk of color Mariam Bastani, feminist punk Ivy Jeanne McClelland, and the band NOFX, for example, were engaged 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.¹¹ Famous punks like Jello Biafra of the Dead Kennedys, or Ian MacKaye from Fugazi additionally supported the Occupy movements through press releases for example on *undertheradarmag.com*.

However, not all of these punk contributions were always politically in line with the social developments of the different chapters, and their political messages. On the contrary, it was predominantly queer-feminist punks who challenged the movements from within them. In the case of Occupy Oakland, such interventions were successfully creating consciousness among the protesters to a large degree. In the case of Occupy Wall Street, however, the frustration on the side of some queer-feminist punks led to alienation with the local movement. I will explain some of the criticism of queer-feminist punks on the Occupy Wall Street movement referring to an interview with Cristy Road. Before further engaging with the political interventions of queer-feminist punks into Occupy Oakland and Occupy Wall Street, I will briefly point out the common features of both queer-feminist

¹⁰ Although Alabaster Choad were 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 planed to squat the building and transform it into a community center. People on 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.

¹¹ For example 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.

punk politics and my two examples of Occupy movements.

8.2. “A mortgaged future lies on the floor / goddamn all the money men / making deals with a government / to sweep your hopes right out the door:”¹² A New Movement with Punk Values

Like queer-feminist punks, many anarchists and a surprisingly large number of other left-oriented people had been analyzing the US-American social, economic and political environment and their place within it for a long time with constantly increasing frustration and anger. People increasingly concluded that the established political and economic systems of democracy and capitalism, its tools, protocols and proponents, were 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 among US citizens to go to the streets and protest. Although it seemed that a disbelief and distrust in the state as social system and political entity was widespread within the US prior to the Occupy movements, they were explained largely by disinterest rather than by politically motivated disagreement. Furthermore, North-American’s distrust in social systems, like healthcare, seemed to be solely attributed to a strong belief in capitalism and social Darwinism, and an insatiable desire for success. Moreover, the disbelief in institutions like the state seemed to be in line with the already discussed “North American affliction” of positive thinking (Halberstam, *The Queer Art*, 3), 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 as well as Occupy Oakland, and many other Occupy chapters, however, seems to signal an end to the belief to the ideology of “American exceptionalism.” Judith Jack Halberstam defines American exceptionalism as a “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).

I want to emphasize again that Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Oakland and many other Occupy movements within the US were characterized by expressions of anger and grief, as well as rejection, and not through signals of willingness to negotiate or reform.

¹² The West Generation. “A Call to Arms.” *Elevator Generation*. CD. Self-release. Issaquah, 2011.

Their unwillingness to present demands and negotiate with the authorities about reforming or reworking the current economic and social systems, I argue furthermore, can be understood as a rejection of positive thinking, as well as rejection of an imagination of any form of future under the current hegemonies. Despite this similarity of strategies and causes between Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland, it needs to be emphasized that the two movements showed many significant differences. For one, the political and demographic makeup of Occupy Oakland was significantly different from the situation in New York. Oakland has a strongly politicized black community, due to its long history of the Black Panther party and the recent riots around Oskar Grant's death and the unjust trial against his murderer, and many Black Panthers as well as those rioting on Oskar Grant's behalf participated in the local Occupy movement. Furthermore, tensions between the police and the African-American population nurtured anger and a willingness to speak their minds through civil disobedience. The Occupy Wall Street participants, on the other hand, were predominantly white, young, male, mostly educated through higher education systems and economically relatively well situated, as punk activists like Cristy Road (Interview), and many others occupiers have pointed out.¹³

8.2.1. "I'm not kidding / i threaten everything you hold dear:"¹⁴ The Politics of Negativity

Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland, as already established, communicated anger and rejection through their activism. The already mentioned scholar Marina Sitrin described the common demeanor of the Occupy uprisings as shouting "No!" (Sitrin 6). This strategy to use politics of negativity, to form resistance rather than negotiate a place within the existing systems as I have laid out throughout my analysis, is the prime strategy of queer-feminist punk rock and punk in general. Moreover, while other movements, like anarchist movements or black feminist movements also share these strategies, punk is signified through anger and rejection within the cultural register of meanings in US societies as such.

¹³ C.f. Ford, Glen. "Wall Street as Public Enemy Number One." *Black Agenda Report: News, commentary and analysis from the black left*. Home page. 5 October 2011. <<http://blackagenda.com/content/wall-street-public-enemy-number-one>>; Maharawal, *Standing Up* 34-40.

¹⁴ Heavens to Betsy, *Terrorist*

I understand the actions of Occupy participants—the angry chanting and marching for instance while rallying, the screaming against helicopter sounds while giving a speech, or kicking back against an attack from the police—as dispositions to *jouissance* (Povinelli, *The law*). Like angry punk rock music and writing these dispositions to *jouissance* irritate and destroy meanings, coherence and normativity, and can sometimes result in psychological as well as bodily damage. But they also create new social bonds. Such newly formed social 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.

The cultural reference I am making through the comparison between the angry politics of Occupy movements and punk movements is further reflected through punk visibility within the movements. Although verbal discourse at Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland focused on traditions of angry politics within black feminist theory, for example through references to Audre Lorde and bell hooks, as well as Black Power, and mainstream media 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 punk theory and activism actually played within both movements. Furthermore, theories of negativity like black feminism or 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’ the contemporary socio-cultural and 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*, where they chant “cut the string / kill the dream.” Furthermore, most queer-feminist punks do not only reject American ideology but rigorously *Reject All American* (Bikini Kill), American culture, politics and its administrative apparatus. Lines like Bikini Kill’s “Regimented / Designated / Mass acceptance / Over rated,” or “If you work hard / You’ll succeed / Reject all American” (*Reject All American*), anticipate the slogans of Occupy Oakland and Occupy Wall Street as early as the mid-1990s. Such lyrics, as well as Occupy chants, refuse compliance in national ideologies and beliefs, denouncing them as

myths that lead to the oblivion 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 Occupy movements can be read as a wake up call and awareness raising for the relationship between the construct of an American nation, its values and structural oppression.

The queer-feminist punk movement as well as my examples of Occupy movements, show a high degree of self-understanding as a political revolutionary movement. Moreover, they all use creative forms of cultural production like music, writing and visual art to communicate their ideas and messages. They further appropriate literary forms most often appropriated to communicate anger on a textual level like pamphlets, zines and chants. The *Riot Grrrl Manifesto* is one of the most articulated statements of such a self-understanding as revolutionaries as well as proof of the appropriation and understanding of artistic forms as political tactics, declaring that "[...] every time we pick up a pen, or an instrument, or get anything done, we are creating the revolution" (Hanna 2). Examples of the usage of artistic forms to communicate politics within the Occupy movements are the hardly comprehensible mass of 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. Furthermore, they have an additional surplus value. The performances of anger, through music as well as writing or marching must be understood as *jouissance*, as I have explained in chapter three. The value of such performances is an irritation of normativity, as José Muñoz has pointed out in *Cruising Utopia*. Muñoz explains that heteronormative time can become interrupted through what he calls "feelings of ecstasy" (*Cruising* 185-189). I argued that his concept can be understood as a *jouissance*-like experience in the context of the queer-feminist punk movement. Combining the concept of Muñoz with Elizabeth Povinelli's work on *jouissance*, I further argued that *jouissance*-like "rides" on punk rock, while dancing at a concert or screaming on stage, are not only political but can also form bonds among participants. Taking my examples of Occupy movements into account, I argue that the *jouissance* like performances, verbal expressions and modes of Occupy Oakland and Occupy Wall Street are similarly establishing new social bonds. Furthermore, I argue that through Occupy movements as well as queer-feminist punk movements a different future becomes imagined in the moments where new bonds become

formed and experienced. In both cases the term that signifies such a different future is community.

The irritating or interrupting qualities of Occupy movements as well as queer-feminist punk rock are not additional to or alternating with the creative aspects of such negative politics. 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,” as Sitrin has written about the dynamics within Occupy movements (Sitrin 6). She further writes: “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 Sitrin points to can be understood with Judith Jack Halberstam as 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 of Failure* 2), as he has emphasized in reference to contemporary academic as well as counter-cultural political activism and art in *The Queer Art of Failure*. While the feminist, queer and people of color discourses in academia, as well as counter-cultural activism and art movements Halberstam refers to have a relatively long history of making efforts to resist neoliberalism and oppression, the participation of a mass-scale of mainstream Americans in the Occupy movements must be understood as a new and surprising development, as already mentioned. Interestingly, the mass of people who came together to articulate their anger and participate in direct democracy did also share and articulate new interest in community and collectivity.

This new interest in community and collectivity can be seen in *The Principles of Solidarity* (Writers 22), a document that Occupy Wall Street participants formulated to give themselves guidelines for their communal gatherings. *The Principles of Solidarity* declared a commitment to “direct and transparent participatory democracy,” “exercising personal and collective responsibility,” the recognition of “inherent privilege” and the “influence it has on all interactions,” “empowering one another” (ibid.). Like 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” (Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 2). I want to emphasize again that people started occupying public space and coming together primarily to articulate disagreement

and rejection of the present social structures and politics. Through their political anger, people started building their communities at the newly established public gatherings. Within the chaotic Occupy encampments, the busy crowds of people, signs, banners, symbols, chants and conversations, music and beats, people inhabited the liminal space between thinking and doing, art, and politics and imagined new and different social relations. This is a striking parallel to the historic development of queer-feminist punk communities, as I described them in the previous chapters. It was precisely, though not exclusively, through their shared anger and counter-establishment politics, that people at Occupations in New York City and Oakland formed coalitions despite their differences of background, classes, and personal identifications. Some aspects of these newly established bonds and feelings of community within the two Occupy movements were identified, reflected and labeled with a group identity, as the “99%” – the majority of people who did not benefit from contemporary political, social and economic systems. The “We” within the notorious slogan “We Are the 99%,” however, delineated the movement clearly from individualism. Actually, the “We” was as much a signification of a political oppositionality as a gesture of creating collectivity, very similarly to the labels punk and queer to delineate musicians, writers and other political activists. Furthermore, it can be argued that the terminology for and concepts behind the new social bonds and new forms of community and collectivity that emerge through 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 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 small self-published pamphlets, in 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 cases, the Occupy movements as well as queer-feminist punk rock, the terms and concepts carry multiple meanings. Furthermore, I want to emphasize again that in these movements the tactic of keeping the terms and concepts of community, collectivity and solidarity is an intentional, or/and productive strategy, as Halberstam calls it, an “anarchy of signification” (*The Anti-* 142).

Anarchy of signification creates 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, which it evokes nevertheless. The ‘positive’ perspective or future queer-feminist punk politics as well as Occupy politics evoke is community. However, this perspective of new social bonds is without references 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.

I was able to show that such anarchic, negative and ambivalent signification through anger and rejection is an immensely productive political and artistic strategy in the context of queer-feminist punk rock. Such a strategy comes often in musical and theatrical form and is a drive toward endless production of meanings. It indeed opens up space for new and queer meanings, 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 their participants. Hence, it allows a broad variety of people to engage in the queer-feminist punk movement, and to build new alliances. In the context of Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland the usage of anarchy of signification to signify such newly built communities is equally productive. It irritates the establishment and draws further attention to the revolutionary uprisings. This irritating effect can be seen in the comments of mainstream news, and politicians alike, who could not 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 with Elizabeth Povinelli as queer social bonds, as already emphasized. Additionally, these new notions of community can be understood along the lines of Jean-Luc Nancy’s theorization in his book *Being Singular Plural*. Nancy, and queer scholars like Antke Engel, Julie Gibson and Katherine Graham, or Tavia Nyong’o theorize social forms that are not based on a common identity, origin, or nation, etc. Nyong’o understands 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 closely in a conference paper he recently presented. Nyong’o’s most recent recourse to

Nancy's concept of community supports my argument that queer-feminist punk notions of community and collectivity are distributed at Occupy Wall Street, because I argue that the concept of "being singular plural" best describes the social bonds within the queer-feminist punk movement. Moreover, it is additionally applicable to analyze the community that emerged through the Occupy Oakland movement.

Nancy concept of community as a "being singular plural" manages to mark individuality and difference, while also accounting for 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 referring to an origin are never able to reach beyond the logics of exclusion and inclusion (Nancy 23). Identifying a politics of equality—equality under the law, or human rights as such, politics based on origins—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 hetero-patriarchal models for society – like states, nations, families and even humanness—, because such models are only able to address this ontological status of being singular plural through attaching it to a communality of the single parts by assuming the same origins and a generic (cultural, national, gender, class etc.) identity. A representative example of such rejection is the statement of Occupy Wall Street which says that "[t]he one thing we all have in common is that We Are The 99% that will no longer tolerate the greed and corruption of the 1%" on *occupywallst.org*. This statement rejects any form of communality other than the political rejection of the current economic oppression. Though implicitly emphasizing the communality of their financial struggle as mainstream—99% percent of all US citizens—, Occupy participants insist on their participation in the movement as individuals. This can be understood as rejecting both, politics that prioritize individuality like neoliberalism, as well as theories that ignore differences, like communism, which are factors that Nancy emphasizes as crucial for the formation of new forms of community (59). I want to emphasize again that occupy participants, like queer-feminist punks reject tracing their community to a shared origin or a form of generic identity. They emphasize their differences, and at the same time embrace their social formation in crowds and acknowledge the force of their masses. What binds them together, as already explained, is negativity. But the shared negativity is not a simple identification with each other in terms of seeing oneself in the other. It is rather what Nancy pictures 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 (Nancy 61). Interestingly, the political form the Occupy Movements chose, the encampments, reflects exactly this notion of co-appearing. Queer-feminist punks equally focus on their community as a co-appearing to a large degree, through the organization of live shows, concerts and activism, and the high validation they give those forms of social and political gatherings.

Using Nancy's account of community as co-appearance, the political significance of physical presence at a space, like a General Assembly¹⁵—the Occupy movements' decision-making platform—or during a queer-feminist punk concert can be grasped. 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 individual—in contrast to the oblivion of the individual within the masses—or the creation of a new agency for the individual, that is explicitly political. Such impact can be discernible in personal life-stories, in personal development, building self-esteem, feeling more comfortable with oneself, or throwing prejudices over board, as could be seen in queer-feminist punk history,¹⁶ or the creation of hope in the recent Occupy history. Participants of Occupy movements as well as queer-feminist punks were looking for models to organize their communities that accounted for their emphasis on difference and co-appearance, to avoid the reinscription of hierarchies through social organization.

Despite such reflections on and theorizations of the new social bonds created it needs to be emphasized again that the communities or futures created through jouissance-like moments are often felt rather than conceptualized within Occupy movements similarly to queer-feminist punk rock. Such feelings are often random, temporal, confusing or overwhelming, and not signified through longevity or permanence. Nevertheless, although temporal, they are important initiatives to establish different concepts of relationships, social bonds and structures, that do not necessarily end in the long passé concepts of social organization, like the patriarchal family, marriage, and oedipal generation as Judith Jack Halberstam has pointed out (Halberstam, *The Queer Art* 72f). Valuing temporalities like bonds through jouissance as community, however ephemeral such a construct might be,

¹⁵ "Our General Assembly is a participatory gathering of Oakland community members," can be read on the Home page 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."

¹⁶ Cf. Ciminelli and Knox; Driver; Marcus, *Girls*.

allows us, furthermore, to understand how people can work with and for each other despite their differences.

The problem or challenge for both the Occupy encampments as well as queer-feminist punk communities, however, is how to maintain such fluid anti-hierarchical social bonds that do not fall back on normative and hegemonic models of sustaining communities. These movements found ways to keep the communities horizontal and supportive to as well as aware of individual difference through direct democracy and anarchist strategies. Many concepts both parties frequently referred to derived from anarchist thinking (cf. Schneider 39-40). Anarchist methods of direct democracy, and decentralization like Working Groups or General Assemblies were adapted to maintain horizontal social relations. Popular public figures were seen as role models, for example Angela Davis, Boots Riley¹⁷ and Scott Olsen¹⁸ while the movements continued to refused to elect a representative or name any leader.

However, the new social forms created through *jouissance* are not perfect and need to be constantly reflected upon in order not to develop into familiar hierarchical structures. Scholar, activist and recent Occupy Oakland-participant Angela Davis raises awareness on this crucial point in a short speech that she gave at a visit to an Occupy Wall Street event on Washington Square park on 30 October 2011. Davis emphasized differences among the protesters saying that “[a]ll minorities are the majority” (Davis qtd. in Writers 121). As a result of this fact she calls 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 emphasizes the importance of a constant reflection on individual and structurally established differences and the different needs they create. Additionally her comment 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 show a long history of emphasizing such an intersectional analysis

¹⁷ Boots Riley is a Oakland-based musician, writer and anti-racism activist.

¹⁸ Scott Olsen is a 24-year-old Iraq War veteran, and a member of Veterans for Peace, who suffered a skull fracture caused by a projectile fired by the police during an Occupy Oakland rally on 25 October 2011.

of oppression through hegemonies within and outside their own circles as I have analyzed in great detail in chapters five, six and seven. They decidedly pointed to (and continue to point to) the crucial factor of racialization. Especially queer-feminist punks of color, but also other queer-feminist punks challenge white hegemony within the broader punk rock movement. Moreover, queer-feminist punks and queer-feminist punks of color also challenge Occupy Oakland and Occupy Wall Street through their rejection of white hegemony.

8.3. “Homofobia ... a cover by a band that no longer supports the message of their own song:”¹⁹ Challenging a Movement From Within

Activists as well as scholars like Judith Butler,²⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak²¹ or Slavoj Žižek²² have highlighted, and at times praised, the Occupy movement for its revolutionary actions that brought the topic of inequality to the front pages of newspapers and into national debates. Furthermore, scholars and activists alike emphasize a new interest in community and solidarity. While I agree that Occupy Oakland as well as Occupy Wall Street created new social bonds, and made important efforts to deconstruct hegemony, I want to emphasize that the movements were not utopian spaces without oppressive power structures in themselves. Both Occupy Wall Street as well as Occupy Oakland showed internal hierarchies or hegemonies. And in both cases Occupy attendees intervened right away to challenge their peers and confront white and economic privilege and oppression. One of the first and strongest interventions into Occupy Oakland came from Angela Davis and other people of color activists, who pointed to the colonial violence within 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” (Davis, *(Un)Occupy* 133). Other interventions came from queer-feminist punks. Occupy Oakland participant Marissa Magic for example intervened into the designation of the protesters as “99%” in her *Maxismumrocknroll* column in January 2012. Despite the intentions of the movement to forgo hierarchies or work against already existing privileges to create a

¹⁹ Condenada, “Homofobia”

²⁰ Butler. “So, What Are the Demands?” *Tidal: Occupy Theory, Occupy Strategy* 2 (March 2012): 11.

²¹ Spivak. “General Strike.” *Tidal: Occupy Theory, Occupy Strategy* 2 (March 2012): 12-13.

²² Žižek. “Don’t Fall in Love with Yourself.” *Scenes from Occupied America*, 66.

horizontal and egalitarian community, the subsumption of all oppressed under one label establishes the illusion of equality where there is none, Magic argued. She wrote 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.

Similar interventions were previously made by queer-feminist punks and queer-feminist punks of color like Mimi Nguyen, Mariam Bastani or Osa Atoe within punk movements. One of the many and not yet mentioned examples of such interventions by people of color, which I analyzed in chapter 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, where 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 argue that the label punk, although it manages to address and include people of color, queers and other structurally oppressed individuals, makes their differences invisible and covers up inequality and internal hierarchies. They loudly articulate their disappointment about 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 express their will to continue to confront homophobia until “The face of hardcore has changed.”

Many other queer-feminist punks, like Marrisa Magic, show a similar devotion to challenging Occupy Oakland. They argue 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 a 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. (Nyong'o, "Occupying Gender in the Singular Plural." *Bully Bloggers*)

What Nyong'o points to is the psychological process of building a (group) identity through the rejection of an "object a," or an other. Through such rejection of the other, the self – or a group, in case of Occupy – is able to create the illusion of wholeness, where in reality there is fragmentation. Such a politics of negativity and rejection does have great potential to escape what could be described in chapter three, with the help of Lee Edelman, as heteronormative futurity (cf. *No Future* 9). Nevertheless, it is not immune to the reestablishment of heteronormativity, white supremacy or even capitalism. On the contrary, to avoid familiar oppressive structures, counter-cultural movements need to make great efforts to question their own privileges, biases and hierarchies.

Additional hierarchies were established within Occupy encampments, though sometimes under new paradigms, in very similar ways as I have described in reference to queer-feminist punk communities in chapter six. The availability of time and the possibility to gain 'insider' knowledge were crucial factors for such hierarchies. The contingency of attending working groups and General Assemblies on a regular basis for example privileged the younger occupiers, the college students or freelance workers. The constant danger of being evicted, interrogated or arrested by police privileged those without a prior criminal record, or those who just did not fit the profile of a criminal according to the police by their look, sex, gender, class, citizenship or ethnicity. These and other factors privileged white, economically relative stable, male and heterosexual participants.

I want to emphasize again that although such structures became reestablished within Occupy Wall Street as well as Occupy Oakland, many participants within the movements pointed to the issues of white privilege, homophobia, transphobia and sexism. Besides the already mentioned Angela Davis, the group Decolonize Oakland, raised awareness for the history of settler colonialism within the US and the connection between colonialism and occupations. Reina Gossett challenged the Occupy Wall Street movement with an open letter, demanding respect for gender self-determination and a stop to biological determinism in November 2011, and queer-feminist punk Cristy Road and other people of color participants established a People of Color Working Group and tried to raise

awareness for white and heterosexual hegemony within the Occupy Wall Street movement. Her emphasis on the necessity to reflect on the influence hegemonic discourses have within the movement and the efforts she made to educate occupiers is similar to the efforts prior and contemporary queer-feminist punks make 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* emphasizes that “the possibilities for radical social change” cannot reside on 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” (21). I want to argue that the history of intersectional queer-feminist punk and punk of color interventions into punk communities, as exemplified by Crass, does not only show how contemporary queer-feminist punk scenes become educated, but indeed prove that queer-feminist punk politics are significant for the broader Occupy Wall Street context. The example of the engagement of queer-feminist punks within Occupy Oakland further supports this thesis.

An activist group with a good amount of queer-feminist punk involvement is Oakland Occupy Patriarchy. Oakland Occupy Patriarchy members participate in most Occupy Oakland actions and initiatives. Some of them used to live in the encampment at Oskar Grant Plaza, where they established a *Women and Queers Only* zone after some participants were harassed. They are instrumental in organizing *Community Outreach BBQs*, where Occupy Oakland members gather in poor areas of Oakland with free food, and offer a space for workshops, art and education during spring and summer of 2012. Moreover, Oakland Occupy Patriarchy members were crucial in the planning and facilitating of the *Move-In Festival*, which was supposed to result in the occupation of a building. Oakland Occupy Patriarchy meets weekly since October 2012. They are additionally part of the Glitter Block, which uses bright outfits and glitter, and performs fun choreographies and collective dance performances as political action at rallies and demonstrations. They additionally bring a sound-system to most rallies – either on a bus, bike or a small hand cart – and provide the movement with punk tunes (for instance by the Gossip, like on the *Justice for Oskar Grant Rally* on 1 January 2012). Many queer-feminist punks are involved in Occupy Patriarchy events and meetings. Some are organized in other collectives like the *Long Haul Collective* and radical library in Berkeley, the radical

newspaper *Slingshot*, *Maximumrocknroll*, the squatter scene or one of the various other Bay Area punk communities.

The politics of Oakland Occupy Patriarchy, as already indicated, are decidedly intersectional. Moreover, they are politics of negativity and anger. In their *Points of Unity*, which can be read on oaklandoccupypatriarchy.wordpress.com, they explain that the US capitalist society is “based upon a racist, white supremacist, patriarchal order.” They call for a confrontation and attack on white supremacy and structural racism in public as well as private spheres. Addressing “Women, Trans people, Queers, Fags, Dykes,” they claim social space within the Occupy movement. Although addressing a particular variety of identifications, they reject a specific group identity. Instead they explain that their group consists of a variety of people with different “needs and desires.” They emphasize that social relations need to be understood as “structured by the intensified oppression of people of color, trans people and poor folks.” While emphasizing differences they call on their peers to “support each other and increase our power by working together.” Additionally, the politics of Oakland Occupy Patriarchy are decidedly anti-institutional. “We are against Non-Profit Organizations,” they further point out in the *Points of Unity*.

They support the system we want to destroy and pay less than lip-service to the communities they claim to aid. Non-profits have created a style of political organizing that will never really threaten capitalism, patriarchy, or white supremacy. [...] We 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. We do not seek to reform, negotiate, or work with this system; instead, we work with each other.

Oakland Occupy Patriarchy shows the politics of negativity I explained in context of the broader Occupy movement. It actively creates and facilitates community, not just for their women and queer identified peers but way beyond. Additionally, the group intervenes into the Occupy Oakland movement, pointing to structural and internalized forms of white supremacy, racism, sexism and homophobia. Moreover, it can be understood as a great example of the influence that the politics and experiences of queer-feminist punks have in building community beyond punk scenes and circles.

8. 4. “We can not do this alone. We need this choir. We need this team.”²³ To Be Continued

I want to end my study with the recently posted words of the New York-based queer-feminist punk band MEN. On their Web page www.menmakemusic.com MEN announced their performance at Union Square on 1 May 2012 and their participation in the *Occupy Wall Street May Day Rally* that followed the show. The band explained:

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 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.

Queer-feminist punks like Cristy Road, Marissa Magic or the band MEN, the members of *The For the Birds Collective*, or the *Lang Houl Collective*, create theory and provide knowledge and education for each other. They understand themselves as activists, or protesters to use MEN's words and their cultural products as political actions. They create queer-feminist punk spaces where they can engage with each other. However, as their interaction with Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland shows, they also reach out to a broader social sphere. They intervene into punk scenes as well as into Occupy Oakland and Occupy Wall Street and remind the newly built communities that their coming together under the label punk as well as the label of the 99% must not ignore differences and privileges. They urge that their collectivity must remain “a multitude composed out of antagonism, not identity” as Tavia Nyong'o has pointed out, to avoid the movement's transgression into familiar hierarchical structures and forms of oppression. Moreover, it must remain a movement that analyzes hegemony from an intersectional point of view. Queer-feminist punks, people of color and “transgender activists reminded those who would hear that [...] privilege is not restricted to the 1%” or the mainstream, “but necessary fractures within” (Nyong'o *Occupying*) those movements. Nyong'o emphasizes in reference to the engagement of queer-feminist musicians in Occupy Wall Street that

²³ MEN. Homepage. 1 May 2012 <www.menmakemusic.com.>

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 of precarious bonds that stitch us together [...]” (ibid.).

According to Cristy Road, however, such interventions were not always successful. The resistance among many occupiers to realize their own white and heterosexual privilege finally led her to distance herself from further participation in Occupy Wall Street. Different dynamics could be seen in the Occupy Oakland movement. Decolonial, anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homophobia politics were not only deployed by groups like Oakland’s queer people of color meeting group or the decolonize Oakland event group. Queer-feminist punk knowledge educated and influenced the movement and continues to do so.

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Abstract (English)

This doctoral dissertation provides an historic overview over queer-feminist punk productions, protagonists and scenes within the US from the 1980s until today. Moreover, it offers a detailed analysis of lyrical content, sound, performances as well as social forms. The works core argument is that queer-feminist punk produces alternative forms of queer-feminist politics as well as theory.

Queer-feminist politics—although unique through their specific combination of punk and queer-feminist strategies—need to be understood as a continuation of and in alliances with other queer and feminist movements. The emerging intersectional queer-feminist punk discourses, are assemblages of different feminist and queer accounts and punk philosophies. They center sexuality, more precisely queerness, as analytical category as well as point of departure for agency. This queerness is signified as negative, anti-identitarian and anti-social. Interestingly, such queerness parallels anti-relational queer theory, for example by Lee Edelman and other psychoanalytically informed queer theorists. Anti-relational and anti-social queer theory, like queer-feminist punk theory, understands queerness as a negative force in sexuality that irritates a subject's psychic coherence. However, academic theory, in contrast to countercultural theory, argues that queerness as negative force is unable to support social relations and can never be used for political actions.

To account for the political aspects of queer-feminist punk rock, countercultural protagonists draw to feminist and especially black feminist theorists like bell hooks and Andre Lorde. Additionally, these feminists' theorization allow for a thinking through of the anti-social and queer at the intersection of racialization. Equally drawing on feminist, black feminist and (queer) people of color theories to analyze queer-feminist punk rock allows to account for anti-social queer politics beyond the realm of symbolic meaning, to focus action, feelings, experience and the body, and thereby explain the new and exciting forms of sociality at play.

Abstract (Deutsch)

Die vorliegende Dissertation bietet einen historischen Überblick über queer-feministische Punk-Produktionen, -Protagonist_innen und -Szenen in den USA von 1986 bis 2012. Im Zuge einer detaillierten Analyse von Liedtexten, Sound und Performances wird dem Argument nachgegangen, dass queer-feministischer Punk alternative Formen queer-feministischer und antirassistischer Politik und Theorie produziert. Queer-feministische Aktivismen und Theorien verbinden die Punk Bewegung und Diskurse mit antirassistischen, queeren und feministischen Bewegungen und Diskursen. Ihre queer-feministische Politik kann nur im Wechselspiel mit anderen queeren, feministischen und Antirassismus-Bewegungen verstanden werden.

Im Zentrum der gesellschaftlichen Analysen und als Ausgangspunkt für Handlungsmacht queer-feministischer Punk-Diskurse ein Konzept von queerness als Negativität, anti-identitäre und anti-soziale Kategorie. Dieses Verständnis von queerness ähnelt in vielen Aspekten akademischen anti-relationalen Queer Theorien, vertreten beispielsweise durch Lee Edelman. Edelman und andere Vertreter_innen psychoanalytischer Ansätze definieren queerness als negative Kraft, welche die Autonomie und psychische Kohärenz von Subjekten irritiert. Solche akademische Ansätze konzipieren queerness als Opposition zum Politischen generell. Queer-feministische Punks halten dagegen am politischen Gehalt von queerness als Negativität fest. Um queerness für politischen Aktivismus zu verwenden, greifen queer-feministische Punks auf Feministinnen, wie bell hooks oder Audre Lorde zurück. Diese Theoretikerinnen erlauben darüber hinaus auch Rassisierung zu analysieren.

Im Zuge der Dissertation werden feministische und postkoloniale Theorien zur Analyse queer-feministischen Punks herangezogen, besonders, um den antirassistischen und dekolonialen Politiken nachzugehen. Darüber hinaus werden feministische und antirassistische Ansätze mit Ansätzen zu anti-relationaler queerness verbunden, um über die Ebene der symbolischen Ordnung hinaus auch Erfahrung, Körper und Empfindung analysieren zu können. Durch die Verbindung verschiedener theoretischer Zugänge wird ein intersektionaler Analyseansatz entwickelt, der auch den sozialen Strukturen queer-feministischer Punk-Szenen gerecht wird, wo anti-relationale Queer Theorie Sozialität generell ausschließt.

Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION

- since 03/2009 **Doctoral Candidate** at the Department for **English and American Studies**, University of Vienna
- 26.11.2007 **Graduation** in German Studies (graduated with honors)
Diploma Thesis: *Transgressing Genders—A Queer Reading of German Literature. Judith Hermann's "Sonja" and Annemarie Schwarzenbach's "Lyric Novella."*
- 2003-2004 **Internship** to teach German Language and Literature and Studies of Russian Language at **Lomonossov/State University** Moskau, RU.
- 2002-2005 Studies in **German as a Foreign and Second Language**, University of Vienna.
- 2000-2007 Studies in **German Studies**, with emphasize on Modern German and Austrian Literature; **History**, with emphasize on Women's history; **Gender and Queer Studies**, at the University of Vienna.
- 2000 **High School Diploma** at Mary Ward Academy (Englische Fräulein), St. Pölten.

PROFESSIONAL HISTORY

- 08/2011 – 08/2012 **Visiting Researcher** at the **University of California Berkeley**, Gender and Women's Studies Department to do research for the doctoral dissertation on Queer-Feminist Punk Rock and Subcultures, women of color feminism, and contemporary queer theory.
- 11-12/2010 **Visiting Researcher** at **New York University**, Center for the Studies of Sexuality and Gender, to do research for the doctoral dissertation on Queer-Feminist Punk Rock and Subcultures.
- 05/2010 **Visiting Scholar** at Charls' University Prague, Department for Gender Studies, to teach Subculture, Queer and Gender Studies
- Spring-Term 2009 **Lecturer** for Gender Studies, University of Vienna. Course title: "Body-Regimes and the category Sex/Gender"
- since 04/2008 Employee at the **Gender Research Office**, University of Vienna (part-time). Responsibilities: publications, editing, organizing gender studies conferences and workshops, student exchange (for MA Gender Studies), international contacts and research support. (2011/2012 on Sabbatical)
- 07/2003-01/2004 Teaching assistant at Lomonossov/State University Moskow, RU, Faculty of Foreign Languages, to teach German Language and Literature, as well as Austrian Culture.
- 03/2003-06/2004 **Lecturer for** German as Foreign Language at Plaice and Pascal, Vienna and VHS Brigittenau, Vienna.

GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

- 09/2011 – 08/2012 **Marietta Blau Scholarship** by the Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (OeAD-GmbH).
- 04/2012 **Grant** from the University of Vienna to participate in the conference **Southeastern Women's Studies Conference**, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia.
- 03/2011 **Grant** from the University of Vienna to participate in the conference **Queering Paradigms III**, at **SUNY**, University of New York, Oneonta.
- 11-12/2010 **Scholarship** to become a visiting research at **New York University** by the University of Vienna (Programm zu Förderung einer wissenschaftlichen Kooperation mit Partneruniversitäten in Nordamerika).
- 07-09/2010 **Short-term grants abroad** (KWA) from the University of Vienna, to do Research on queer-feminist Punk Rock and Subcultures in New York, New Orleans, Seattle, Portland and Olympia.
- 05/2010 **Erasmus Scholarship** for **teaching exchange** at the Gender Studies Department, Charles University Prague, to teach Gender, Queer and Subculture Studies.
- 04/2010 **Grant** from the University of Vienna to participate in **31st Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Texas Popular culture and American Studies Association**.
- 02/2010 **Grant** for **"International Communication,"** of the Austrian Scientific Community, to participate in the conference **"Queering Paradigms II**, at Queensland University for Technology, Brisbane, Australia.

VOLUNTARY WORK

- 12/2011 – 07/2012 Volunteer at **Rock, Paper, Scissors Art Collective** in Oakland, California.
- 12/2000 – 11/2007 Student Representative for **lgbtq issues Austrian Student Union** (Österreichischen HochschülerInnenschaft), University of Vienna, Student Representative for **Gender Studies**, member of the **Gender Studies MA** program **Working Group**; Representative at the **German Studies** Department.
- 03 – 07/2003 Volunteer Teacher for German as a Second Language at **EFDÖ** (Evangelischen Flüchtlingsdienst / Refugee Support Organization of the Evangelian Church Austria).

PUBLIKATIONS (SELECTION):

ARTICLES

- (forthcoming): "I don't give a shit where I spit my phlegm" (Tribe 8): Rejection and Anger in Queer-Feminist Punk Rock. Transpositions: musique et sciences sociales. <<http://transposition-revue.org/>>.

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Ging aus der Diplomarbeit hervor.

- Respondenz zum Vortrag von Araba Evelyn Johnston-Arthur. (Arbeitstitel) In: Babka, Anna: Dritte Räume. Homi K. Bhabhas Kulturtheorie. Anwendung. Kritik. Reflexion. Wien/Berlin: Turia + Kant (voraussichtlich 2009)

- (2008): Respons zu Dagmar Finks Vortrag: Lese ich Cyborg, lese ich queer? In: Babka, Anna/Hochreiter, Susanne (Ed.): Queer Reading in den Philologien. Modelle und Anwendungen. Vienna University Press by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p. 171-178.

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EDITINGS:

Mesquita, Sushila, Katrin Lasthofer and Maria Katharina Wiedlack (Ed.) "Import-Export-Transport. Queer Theory, Queer Critique and Activism." Wien: Zaklosus.

Wiedlack, Maria Katharina/Lasthofer, Katrin (Ed.) (2011): Körperregime und Geschlecht. Gendered Subjects VI. Studienverlag: Innsbruck/Wien.

Bidwell-Steiner, Marlen/Wiedlack, Maria Katharina (Ed.): Gender, Science and Technologie. (Online Reader) www.univie.ac.at/gender (Dezember 2009)

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