

## **From Riot Grrrl to CrimethInc: A Lineage of Expressive Negation in Feminist Punk and Queercore**

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Feminist zines and punk are often described by their producers in terms of their ability to liberate creative potential in girls while combating sexism, objectification, and passivity. This is seen as an intensely pleasurable and empowering process for the women who create DIY zines, music, and art. And yet, much of the imagery at work in these forms of cultural production is intentionally ugly, angry, and critical of mundane pleasures and practices. I see this as evidence of a politics of expressive negation. In this paper I will explore the work of expressive negation in the 90s explosion of riot grrrl, queercore, and zines and attempt to show it as part of a lineage that includes more contemporary DIY feminist and queer projects. Much has been written about the absorption of riot grrrl into mainstream forms such as the Spice Girls. Less has been said about the legacy of this movement in contemporary radical cultures that are well beneath the radar of the mainstream. The critique of the media and spectacular, patriarchal forms of culture in 90s riot grrrl has contributed to the ethos at work in contemporary DIY communities. Here, the ethos and aesthetic of negation expands from the performance of music and the creation of zines to the performance of everyday life practices such as squatting and modes of protest. In this expansion we can see critical negation to be aimed at specialized realms of culture with the implicit goal of expanding radical practice to the sphere of everyday life. In looking at two generations of DIY feminist practice I will argue that these politics are fruitfully seen as a part of a longer historical project rather than simply in terms of their immediate cultural impacts and political efficacy.

Both Dick Hebdige and Greil Marcus looked at the cut n' paste aesthetic of punk in this framing, as a form of critical negation in continuation with older politicized modes of avant garde aesthetic practices such as dada and surrealism. Here negation is seen as an aesthetic of distantiation "through perturbation and deformation to disrupt and reorganize meaning." For Hebdige, this form of performative estrangement creates a rupture between the natural and the constructed, resonating with a tradition of revolutionary performance in which the boundary between artist and audience stands as a metaphor for the division between art and life (Hebdige 110). Here, the

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Michael LeVan and my anonymous reviewers who contributed greatly to the formation of this paper. I would also like to thank Christopher Connery for his invaluable advice.

destructive, apocalyptic aspects of punk rock performance are seen in a utopian light, offering evidence “that things could change, indeed were changing: that performance itself was a possibility no authentic punk should discount” (Marcus 9).

The view of negation in these readings of punk correspond to Guy Debord’s understanding of culture as negation. Here, the idea of culture as an autonomous sphere is seen as supporting ideological presuppositions. Culture itself is inadequate to fulfill human needs and the course of utopian history is a course toward an idealized moment of unity, where culture will negate itself as an autonomous sphere and creativity will infuse everyday life. Debord hopes that this cultural transcendence will end in genuine social critique rather than a mere appearance of subversion. He sees aesthetic practices such as *détournement* as means to negate these reified modes of expression and subversion (Debord 144). This practice avoids appealing to authority by replacing quotation and other forms of mimicry with decontextualization. The cut n’ paste aesthetics of punk rock correspond to this practice, which for Debord leads to a detachment “from the overall frame of reference of its period and from the precise option that it constituted within that framework” (146). Rather than appealing to authority, this form of communication’s power generates from its own internal logic: “its internal coherence and its adequacy in respect of the practically possible are what validate the ancient kernel of truth that it restores”(146). Through this method, Debord hopes for the development of forms of expression that can flexibly negotiate preconceived categories and move toward a new organization of everyday life. The claims for this form of expression may be idealized, yet they provide a sense of the mode of critique at work in punk negation.

Refusal and *détournement* can be seen as implicit in riot grrrl’s feminist tactics. In an analysis of the uneasy relationship between Riot Grrrl and girlhood, Wald notes that critical reappropriation is often used as a framework to understand the two-fold work of subaltern culture, “a means of actively confronting and resisting marginalization in the ironic repossession of signs otherwise meant to reinforce marginality” (Wald 591). At the same time, she qualifies these gestures as partial: “these struggles to specify and potentially even radicalize girlhood are inseparable from late capitalism’s desire for new, youthful markets” (Wald 593). In the riot grrrl scene, negation often takes the form of the ironic performance of girlhood in which the cut n’ paste aesthetic consists of a bricolage of “recuperative iconography of girlhood,” with topics such as “incest, the violence of heteronormative beauty culture, and the patriarchal infantilization and sexualization of girls” (Wald 604). Here, the stark juxtaposition between innocent imagery and violent lyrics illustrates representational impasses. It is here that Debord’s critique of the “society of spectacle,” that is the commodification of even rebellious forms of art, meets feminist critiques of positive female representation. Critical negation in feminist theory consists of an argument that a stable conception of woman is impossible to construct as representation is limited to what is already acknowledged as a subject (Butler 4). Thus the subject and therefore representation is limited to terms produced according to the requirements of juridical systems of power. Even the feminist subject, then, is

discursively circumscribed by these systems she seeks to dismantle. Despite their different premises, in both Butler's feminism and Debord's Marxism, this recognition of the limits of representation leads to a theory of resistance that privileges negation and critique over positive assertions.

This aesthetic politics of negation comes in the wake of second wave feminism, a dismantled and partial feminism, wrenched from its original context as a radical challenge to patriarchy in the midst of more widespread social movements challenging imperialism and economic exploitation:

what was truly new about the second wave was the way it wove together, in a critique of androcentric state-organized capitalism, three analytically distinct dimensions of gender injustice: economic, cultural and political. Subjecting state-organized capitalism to wide-ranging, multifaceted scrutiny, in which those three perspectives intermingled freely, feminists generated a critique that was simultaneously ramified and systematic (Fraser 99).

Second wave feminism has attenuated as these distinct dimensions were separated and in some iterations became a ballast to the demands of an emerging new form of capitalism—"post-Fordist, 'disorganized,' transnational." Feminism arguably provides a necessary role in 'the new spirit of capitalism' as it is used to legitimate structural transformations that are antithetical to women's liberation (Fraser 88). Not only do new forms of economic feminization of labor exploit supposedly liberated working women but hawkish justifications of war in the Middle East are launched in the name of feminist liberation.<sup>2</sup>

Thus another valence to feminist punk expressive negation is that it registers the failures and occlusions of second wave feminism. Recent generations of young women are not able to envision a financially secure future as either worker or homemaker. They have witnessed their mothers' domestic chores diminished by the dishwasher, washing machine, and microwave and yet all this freedom has not benefited them. The new quasi-feminist economy is one in which women are integrated into the labor force more frequently but not in equal conditions to men. The modern woman contributes disproportionately to the market, helping stoke growth in profits and national income overall and yet is personally less well off, no longer supported by men or the state. She is told that it is her individualism or lack of nurturing instincts that has corrupted feminism and undermined female prosperity. A spectacular appearance of women's independence and autonomy masks the disintegration of social and legal framings for women and families' support. The same forces that mark the ability of women to divorce and explore their own sexual desires also point to the demise of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) which represents the dismantling of obligations to women and the avoidance of new

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<sup>2</sup> For a description of the feminization of labor under current regimes of accumulation see David Harvey *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford, New York: Blackwell, 1989. For a critique of "Hawkish and Mawkish" bellicose feminist discourse see Nina Power *One Dimensional Woman* The Bothy, Deershot Lodge: Zero Books, 2009.

commitments (Thistle 10-1). In this regime, women are pushed into low wage jobs and the informal economy while family is no longer seen as integral to the reproduction of labor but a luxury: “Time and space for home and family treated not as rights but privileges enjoyed by some at the expense of others (11). Women’s access to culture is not necessarily an antidote to this feminization, as the feminization of labor has corresponded to the saturation of culture during a period that is marked by what Fredric Jameson calls “the cultural turn,” that is the penetration of all realms of culture which were previously autonomous, by the capitalist mode of production. This impasse contributes to feminist punk’s gravitation to expressive negation.

From its inception punk gave women the ability to refuse patriarchal and capitalist modes of expression, even if they were not provided with positive alternatives. This was done by estranging female roles as objects of the male gaze through parody or refusal (Leblanc 36). Punk was an early example of a musical genre in which women were not typically limited to the chanteuse role and instead often played instruments or sang in a dissonant scream or shriek. Punk rarely had a positive political platform and instead operated as a form of nihilistic refusal, opposing “mainstream politics, propriety, and taste.” Clothes and style were always at the center of this form of expression and women often were central shapers of style. An inaugural moment of punk was a shocking bondage clothing line at the shop Sex. Most narrations of punk begin with the Sex Pistols and the fact that Malcolm McLaren owned the store, but the style itself was created by a woman, Vivian Westwood. Her clothes were at once revealing, overtly sexual but also designed “not to titillate, but to provoke ...not to entice but to horrify” (Leblanc 37). The music that opened the door to women was shocking and dissonant, “a cacophony of near deafening but politically passionate, punk rock” (Leblanc 47). Thus, here the destruction of pleasure is the means to critical negation, which is in itself pleasurable and creative.

The occlusion of female experience leads to negative strategies of representation. Punk figures do not advance a positive politics but rather semiotically represent a “politics of style.” Early punk performers such as Patti Smith, Debbie Harry, Poison Ivy, Tina Weymouth, Chrissie Hynde and Polystyrene operated parodically to map the limited possibilities of female self representation. In the first wave of punk, the styles for women ranged from androgynous figures such as Mo Tucker, to hypersexual performers like Debbie Harry, and hyperstylized women like Jennifer Miro (Leblanc 35). Punk female musicians were likely to play an instrument or develop a persona that was ugly or aggressive. Patti Smith’s explosive mode of performance points to the negative, sublime pleasure in feminist DIY. She was not a singer but a poet, an ecstatic in search of “naked performance” (McNeil 159). She sought to be blown apart, to be imbued in ritual. For Smith, poetry is seduction, a creation of consciousness, having power over people, making them love you, an expansion of consciousness that becomes a collective experience (McNeil 162).

Punk’s sublime negative aesthetic is one of sublime fear; often punks are the objects of moral panic. In the eighties a wave of talk shows and sensational news

depicted punk as a dangerous subversion. The “Back in Control training center” advised parents to “depunk” subcultural teens by removing posters, albums and clothes, and changing their style (Leblanc 57). Eighty-three percent of psychiatric institutions approved the treatment of punk style even if the teen did not display any other subversive behaviors (Leblanc 58). At the extremes of this panic Leblanc tells of one girl who spent more than 10 months in psychiatric hospitals solely for being a punk.<sup>3</sup> The publicity surrounding the punk scare drew in disaffected youth even if they did not have access to punk scenes. Feminist zinester Mimi Nguyen describes discovering punk through TV “Punksploitation” (shows such as *Dragnet* with plots that villainized and distorted punk culture):

Here I was, Asian with slanted eyes, feeling visually out of sync, so seeing punks on TV being visually out of sync struck a chord. I felt, wow they’re in control of how freaky they look. Looking other is something that’s always been imposed on me, now I can turn that around. And of course, there was always some editorial about punk being dangerous and offensive to “good people. I had lots of revenge driven fantasies of offending “good people.” After all, the same people who blew up our mail box in Minnesota went to church on Sundays (Vale 85).

In the late eighties and nineties a new wave of female punks revolted against sexism in the punk scene and in general. The University town of Olympia became a new center of activity where K records became an important independent label. In Washington the Dischord label also gained traction. Riot grrrl emerged out of this context of independent production and distribution. In Washington riot grrrl began in 1988 when Sharon Cheslow, Cynthia Connelly, Amy Pickering and Lydia Ely organized discussions on punk and gender related issues noting that the supposedly alternative punk community did not question a gendered division of labor, with men in bands and women working behind the scenes in distros or as the writers of fanzines. In Olympia the beginning can be marked by Tobi Vail’s punk feminist zine *Jigsaw* and Sonia Dresch’s queer zine *Chainsaw*. In 1989 Bikini Kill formed with members Kathleen Hanna, Billy Karren, Toby Vail, and Kathi Wilcox and this was soon followed with the formation of the popular band Bratmobile. Shows began to include bands with female members such as Bikini Kill, Mecca Normal, Heaven’s to Betsy, Lois Mafeo and 7 Year Bitch (Leblanc 57).

This new wave of female punk developed new forms of expressive negation as the performers adopted looks that created discord and confusion. They appropriated sexist insults, scrawling epithets like slut and bitch on their torsos and wearing provocative “kinder whore” clothes. They called for “revolution girl style now” and appropriated hardcore punk, in all its abrasiveness, developing a mode of expression that included:

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<sup>3</sup> This panic can be located in relation to political markers such as the 1991 race riots in Mount Pleasant, which incited three days of riots and massive police presence and the gag rule instituted by the Bush admin, threatening *Roe v Wade*.

confrontational and realistic representational strategies of key binaries, of fantasy and real life, positive and negative imagery, liberated and contained sexualities, aesthetics and politics while calling attention to the mediated nature of all representations (Collins 67).

Suzy Corrigan situates riot grrrl as a creative form that directly negated traditional male-centered forms of pleasure, in which “women are brought to life in the eye of male beholders” (Corrigan 147). This contradictory semiotics of riot grrrl self-presentation stemmed from the material conditions of these women. Many of the initial riot grrrls, including Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill, were art students who survived by stripping or sex work. By navigating the contradiction of using sex work money for feminist creativity, they developed an ironic and flexible view of female objectification (Corrigan 150). Inspired by a previous generation of feminist performance artists such as Karen Finlay and Annie Sprinkle, they negotiated sexual performance and transgression. “Kinderwhore” fashion at once embodied a critique of rape and a sex positive response to conservative “parent culture;” it operated as both a critique of porn and critique of censorship (Corrigan 159). This flexibility often led to adaptation of queer, camp style. Suzy Corrigan notes the influence of filmmaker John Waters whose shock cinema challenged social mores through extreme scatological and grotesque humor (Corrigan 163).

This negative aesthetic recognized and denaturalized women’s commodified bodies rather than posing a positive alternative. In riot grrrl aesthetics, the marketing of women’s bodies is seen as allegorical to commodification as a whole, and the point of self-expression is to at least preserve self awareness of this condition:

I can sell my body if I wanna/God knows you already sold your mind/I may  
sell my body for money sometimes/But you can't stop the fire that  
burns/Inside of me/You think I don't know/I'm here to tell you/I do (Bikini  
Kill, “Jigsaw Youth”).

Name Red Chidgey points out that this dark, self aware modality is comparable to the “youth violent literary” mode in other genres such as the work of Anthony Burgess and Irving Welsh as well as a legacy of black satirical humor in the works of H.L. Menken, Jello Biafra, Kathy Acker, Valerie Solanas and Henry Rollins (Chidgey 109-10). In riot grrrl lyrics, liberation lies in “the seedy underbelly of the carnival” where 16 year old girls give carnies head “for free rides and hits of pot” (Bikini Kill, “Carnival”). The riot grrrl is drawn to negation and underworld culture; when travelling she skips the museums and revels in found objects and disaffected graffiti. Riot grrrl musician and scenester Huggy Bear wanders the streets and into a book store, she opens a book, finds a seemingly personalized message:

THIS BOOK YOU HOLD IS VERY GOOD .....AT UPHOLDING  
CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND THAT CULTURE’S RESISTANCE  
TO ANY SORT OF EMOTION ...ENJOY...(Huggy Bear 2010).

The complexity of representing pleasure positively for feminist punk is explicitly alluded to in Bikini Girl’s song “Anti-pleasure Dissertation.” The lyrics are comprised

*Johanna Isaacson*

of a long invective against a boyfriend, indicating that she knows his pleasure in sex is seeing her as a conquest. She accuses him of using her for power and status in a game that is still played between men. The song posits that punk rock is losing its critical potential when this kind of mainstream sexism persists:

did you tell them everything I said...Did you get a good laugh?...Tell me.. /Was it good?/Was it good for you?/Did you win that race?/Did you score that point?/Are you so fucking cool fucking cool now?/Go tell yr fucking friends/What I saw and how I felt/ How punk fucking rock my pussy is now!

The song continues as a relentless, hopeless rant about the lack of possibility of female pleasure, the inevitability of passivity and objectification. Then, a twist at the end:

I don't care I don't care/I don't care I don't care/Honey baby baby this I know.../Maybe I like you/Maybe I do.

A temporary solution is found in humor, in negating her own thesis and positing a possible different outcome. The pleasure here is in negation of male sexism but also negation of the idea that this sexism is interminable, thus instilling a sense of flexibility where male punk objectification of women has stalled and rigidified in a new stage of reification. The victory here is negative, giving women the power of refusing the arbitrary judgments of the male gaze, as in Bratmobile's song "Affection Training":

See Mr. Whatever describe himself/It's frightening to feel worthless/In the eyes of worthlessness/My fear has nowhere left to go/Impossible- I can't get me no no.../All the girls are fighting over/The dumbest boys who run this town/I watch myself get watched like TV/But I'd rather run you down.

The politics of pleasure in DIY feminism cannot posit a positive politics beyond the possibilities, the "maybes" of "Anti-Pleasure Dissertation." Rather, pleasure is usually expressed as a sublime moment of anger or negation. Women's traditional role in music is as that of passive, pretty fangirl. The riot grrrl instead chooses ugly imagery, often seeing herself in violent opposition to the now-canonical and reified star system of male-dominated punk: "I will become the murderer if there's only two choices. I am mass murdering all rock stars in my head..." (Hanna n.d.).

She demands the end of patriarchal forms of cool which now represent the absorption of her own subculture into spectacular, commodified, and specialized forms of cultural production. Thurston Moore, a well known and style setting musician in the DIY underground scene, is depicted and villified as the representative of a hidden star system and male dominated influence in an ostensibly egalitarian milieu as in the song "Thurston Hearts The Who," which critiques the kind of fan knowledge that creates hierarchy in the punk scene:

Thurston hearts The Who/How about you?/Thurston hearts The Who/Do you heart The Who too?/Thurston hearts The Who/How about you?/Thurston hearts The Who/Do you heart The Who too?

At the same time that she rejects Thurston Moore's reified persona, she embraces his agency. This dialectical form again points to the aesthetic of negation as detournement, the recontextualization of fragments as a mode of critical representation. In Sleater Kinney's song "I Wanna be your Joey Ramone" female agency is depicted as the power to dismiss punk's stale influences and products. At the same time, the speaker imagines herself as having the power of Thurston Moore, which serves as a placeholder for an unrepresentable female sexual agency:

I wanna be your Thurston Moore/wrestle on the bedroom floor/always leave  
me wanting more/throw away those old records.

This critique of reification, however, cannot be completely accomplished in a context where survival and expression are inextricable from marketing and media. In 1992 the riot grrrl movement attained mainstream coverage and soon there was a media frenzy with articles in many publications including *Off Our Backs*, *Newsweek*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, *LA Times* and *Playboy*. This was seen as a form of cooptation where queer bands and threatening aspects of the movement were downplayed (Leblanc 30).

We have been written about a lot by big magazines who have never talked to us or seen our shows. They write about us authoritatively, as if they understand us better than we understand our own ideas, tactics and significance. They largely miss the point of everything about us because they have no idea what our context is/has been (Jigsaw n.d.).<sup>4</sup>

Fear of recuperation by the media became a common trope in riot grrrl lyrics. Often notions of community were set against the anonymous, isolating realm of fame. The theme of many songs was selling out, getting famous, trading in friends for employees and sycophants:

Who is gonna put in our tape-deck?/Who is gonna carry the bass-amp?/Who is  
gonna buy us a van?/It could be you/It will come true...oh (Bikini Kill  
"Hamster Baby").

This temptation to "sell out" becomes an impossible impasse for those who want to expand the influence of riot grrrl, as the garnering of attention and resources is often harshly judged in the community. There is a sense that there is no available mode of mass expression that can keep the collective identity of riot grrrl intact. Thus in

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<sup>4</sup> Marina Gonick notes the way that the ideas behind girl-centered subculture have made their way both into popular culture and popular sociological discourse about girls. In comparing "Girl Power" as found in the imagery and cultural impact of such role models as The Spice Girls and what she characterizes as a prevalent Ophelia discourse, as seen in the popular book *Reviving Ophelia*, she sees important contributions to focusing on girls empowerment, but ultimately two sides of the same coin in that they both fall into an ultimately individualist logic in which girls tend to hold themselves fully responsible for their lives in the face of dwindling resources and opportunities.



Johanna Isaacson

Bratmobile's song "90s Nomad" we see a simultaneous lament for not having "made it" while at the same time a more popular band is harshly criticized:

1-2-3 it's been going great guns this fiscal year but I still haven't made it/  
anywhere I go I see your face and I hear your name all over the place...Now  
you're crying about too many fans and trying to tell me that it wasn't/ your  
plan, oh well. I can never feel sorry for you, in times like this, it's/ always you.

The impasse is partially overcome by forming independent forms of distribution. This marks a significant step toward a movement of DIY feminism from the realm of circumscribed forms of culture to more generalized everyday life practices and was expressed clearly in Kathleen Hanna's riot grrrl manifesto. In answer to the question "why riot?" we see a list of urgencies for feminist behavior that culminates with the seizing of the means of production and distribution as a way to transform daily life as a whole:

BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own meanings.

BECAUSE viewing our work as being connected to our girlfriends-politics-real lives is essential if we are gonna figure out how we are doing impacts, reflects, perpetuates, or DISRUPTS the status quo (Hanna 2006).

Even with the demise of riot grrrl in the face of debates about recuperation, this goal will persist into later forms of feminist punk production.

Punk zines and music with explicitly queer content in some ways fared better in their attempts at critical negation, as they were never threatened by this fame. An example of this can be seen in the performance tactics of the queercore band "Tribe 8", which could be qualified as an aesthetic politics of ludic negation. The band uses shock and a self-reflexive playful violence in order to navigate impasses in representation that are found even in queer and punk spaces. Lead singer Lynne Breedlove demands that "straight boys" fellate her dildo on stage, with the comic motto: "There's nothing wrong with penises, as long as they're detachable. And they're all detachable"(Flannigan). Her novel *Godspeed* looks at the queer junky underworld, depicting the romance and sexuality of criminal culture and grasping the aesthetics of a subculture refusing any form of positive representation. Here, Breedlove depicts anomie, perverse sex, and unfulfillable desire in the face of the banal gentrifying city. A typical scene depicts a violent tryst with a beautiful, jaded stripper in an alley "on someone's cardboard house, behind a Dumpster (sic) in the broken glass and disposable lighters spent on crack pipes." The sex is curtailed by lack of will to go on and gives way to poetic reflection on anonymity and loss in the postmodern city:

I like her. She doesn't care. Nobody gives a shit, nobody gets hurt. A live body under me is all the danger I can stand anymore. I climb up the last hill to the squat, sweat and fog clinging to me. Blue lights flash down in Hunter's Point. I'm invisible, safe from cops and love. My throat is bruised where she tried to

rip my jugular with her teeth. I don't like anybody, really (Breedlove 90).

This refusal to give an affirmative, positive depiction of lesbian desire in the works of many punk lesbians serves as a mode of guarding an outlaw sexuality from recuperation and gentrification.<sup>5</sup>

The degeneration and anomie depicted in *Godspeed* can only be understood in relationship to Breedlove's quixotic brand of humor and her overall belief in an ecstatic creativity. Her persona is never somber; rather it is always mischievous and energetic. Her philosophy is one of embracing life and self-invention:

the meaning of life is to experience the rapture of being alive... which is basically to be carried away, to be transported by something—ecstasy bliss, pleasure that's all good but also by power, creativity, when you create your own destiny that is meaning in your life. (Flannigan)

This emphasis on autochthonous self-creation is linked to the intrinsic, economically-based connection between DIY and lesbian culture. The lesbians in Tribe 8 must use their own ingenuity to support themselves and invent a livable culture for women who are not supported financially or emotionally by men. For them, queer identity is integrally entwined with punk rock because both signify economic disenfranchisement and non-assimilationist modes of daily life:

This is the first all women's punk band that's totally queer. Being out and being queer goes hand and hand with punk rock. This is who I am I'm not like you. (Flannigan)

Queercore culture pushes the limits of acceptable culture, not just in the straight community but in the queer community as well. At the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, Tribe 8 became a subject of controversy and protest. For many, this controversy was seen as an extension of the explosion that occurred in a previous year of the festival when transsexuals were banned from the gathering and it was established that only "womyn born women" could attend. For many, this decision implied a feminist philosophy that naturalized gender dichotomies and conflated sex with gender. The aesthetic of negation in Tribe 8's performance was seen as a confrontation of this ethos. This is framed by Angela Wilson and Evelyn McDonnell as a generational divide between second and third wave feminism. Many of the protests against Tribe 8 came from women concerned with pornography and violence who saw violent imagery and violent expression as patriarchal values (Wilson 2008, 61). Punk feminism has a different view of some violent imagery, seeing the generic

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<sup>5</sup> If Breedlove's novel shows the poetic side of this refusal, *Bimbox* exemplifies the militant side of this: "BIMBOX hereby renounces it's [sic] past use of the term lesbian and/or gay in a positive manner. This is a civil war against the ultimate evil, and consequently we must identify us and them in no uncertain terms, a task which will prove to be half the battle." du Pleissis, Michael; Chapman, Kathleen "Queercore: The distinct identities of subculture." *College Literature*. 1997.

association of women and pacific imagery as confirming a reified binary view of gender (63).

In Evelyn McDonnell's account of the festival she interprets Tribe 8's performance as similar to Bob Dylan's electric performance in 1965, one which divided the generations and in which a gentler and perhaps more literal political folk music is challenged by a sonic politics of negation (McDonnell 1994, 78). Tribe 8 replaces rational political arguments and, McDonnell implies, "bland professionalism" with a "raw, do it yourself, expressive aesthetic" as "all dyke, all out, in your face, blade brandishing, gang castrating, dildo swinging, bullshit detecting, aurally pornographic, Neanderthal pervert band of patriarchy smashing snatchlickers" (79). Interestingly, hours of discussion in a workshop about Tribe 8's performance gave birth to an understanding between the two camps with one former protester calling Tribe 8 "today's warriors (82). Ann Cvetkovich notes that although many of the protesters initially saw Tribe 8 as promoting sexual abuse, discussions gave rise to an understanding that some members of Tribe 8 themselves were abused and that this S&M performance was a form of catharsis. This brought on a "conversion experience" in many of the workshop participants who realized that the performance was about addressing violence rather than promoting it (353). These conflicting and converting views of Tribe 8's aggressive performance shows expressive negation as a form that can enable the representation of complexities. The cut n' paste aesthetic is one that uses contradiction and decontextualization to disrupt stable forms of thought. Thus, Tribe 8 insists on transforming the punk lesbian into an uncodable "walking paradox":

Struttin on an I-beam in her steel boots and tool belt, telling all the boys what  
to do/Takes off her hard hat,/ runs her hair through her crew cut,/but don't let  
all those muscles fool you./She's a walking paradox in her jeans and her docs,  
...She's a butch in the streets, /femme in the sheets.

In this reading of Tribe 8's aesthetics we see punk's inbuilt tendency to violate circumscribed realms of cultural production. Here, the discussion at the festival itself affects the meaning of this performance and the ensuing conversations become an extension of Tribe 8's performance.

The form of riot grrrl and queercore I have discussed hit its peak and declined in the 90s; however, these forms of everyday performance can be seen in a new wave of anarchafeminism and related practices. This form of critical negation can be seen in the more contemporary anarchist collective CrimethInc. This group is not exclusively comprised of women but integrates feminism with much of its theory and practice. Like earlier waves of riot grrrl, CrimethInc produces music and zines. However, its core message is that art should be extended to the everyday. To this end, the group mobilizes a popularized form of situationist rhetoric and theory to advocate DIY projects, wage-work refusal, infoshops, zines, Reclaim the Streets, black bloc affinity groups, squats, Food not Bombs, and independent distros. Here, as in much of punk

culture, expressive negation takes the form of invocation of a sublime lawlessness or criminality, but in CrimethInc's case this is put in explicitly revolutionary terms:

When poets and radicals stay up until sunrise, wracking their brains for the perfect sequence of words or deeds to fill hearts (or cities) with fire, they're trying to find a hidden entrance to it. When children escape out the window to go wandering late at night, or freedom fighters search for a weakness in government fortifications, they're trying to sneak into it—for they know better than us where the doors are hidden. When teenagers vandalize a billboard to provoke all-night chases with the police, or anarchists interrupt an orderly demonstration to smash the windows of a corporate chain store, they're trying to storm its gates.

For many years, all CrimethInc zines and other material would be delivered with supplemental “gender subversion material,” implying that anarchism is not complete without an interrogation of a primary oppressive structure: the sex/gender divide. The feminism implied in this gender subversion poster, one which is commonly found on the walls of radical social spaces, is an encompassing critique of gender binaries:

For every girl who is tired of acting weak when she is strong, there is a boy tired of appearing strong when he feels vulnerable. For every boy who is burdened with the constant expectation of knowing everything, there is a girl tired of people not trusting her intelligence. For every girl who is tired of being called over-sensitive, there is a boy who fears to be gentle, to weep.<sup>6</sup>

The long time zine *Doris* can be seen as a map of this expansion of the everyday. Author Cindy Crabb began mobilizing and influencing the riot grrrl and perzine forms as a teenage zinester. From this personal rebellion her zine charts her deepening integration into an anarchist drop-out scene. In an interview with *Maximum Rocknroll* she charts the progression of her experience from DIY as remaking the self to DIY as remaking the community, as she gradually read about anarchism and adopted it as a life philosophy:

It changed the whole way I saw my life. Every fundamental thing, like the way we sectioned our lives off - work time and learning time and leisure time. The way we viewed growing up as becoming numb and giving up. It talked about how people have been turned into consumers - how our identities are formed by the products we buy, or the products we want. It talked about becoming human again. Forming community, self-reliance, community reliance. Gardens on rooftops, no more cars, no more suicidal despair. (Crabb 2006)

This reading led Crabb to seek out other punks who had adopted a life of anarchism and she became key to developing a community in Ashville North Carolina. Here, she helped transform the town into a counterculture mecca with thriving show and social spaces, developing a detailed plan to create public, radical space:

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<sup>6</sup> “CrimethInc ex-workers propaganda poster.” Adopted from Nancy K. Smith.

Hanging out...Create a visible public presence...Show space...Dance Form bands...Freak + Punk unity... Inviting strangers...Treating bands... Dealing with Nazis, sexist assholes or speedfreakhippypunkgutterscumbags....Events and Projects to draw people in. (Doris 2007)

In Crabb's trajectory we can see a lineage from expressive negation in riot grrrl to a critique of the constriction of those politics to particular spheres. At the same time, punk music and zines are always integral to these communities.

The contemporary group Gay Shame have also taken the punk aesthetic to the streets, developing the "gay shame awards," a mock pageant that lambasted what they considered hypocritical gays and gay supporters for criminalizing the homeless. Benjamin Shepard sees the group as a fusion of radical activist and aesthetic practices: "the theatricality and pageantry of the seventies drag troupe the Cockettes, the militancy of the late eighties, early nineties Act Up and the anti-capitalist direct action of Reclaim the Streets." They perform expressive negation through direct action strategies: disrupting the Gay Pride Parade, politicizing gay bashing, and violently reacting to any attempt to co-opt or gentrify their own radical gay image, such as in the Gay Shame academic conference at Ann Arbor Michigan (Sycamore 2004, 135). Benjamin Shepard discusses the life of one of the central members and chroniclers of Gay Shame, Mattilda (a.k.a. Matt Bernstein Sycamore) in terms that exceed any circumscribed view of politics or culture. Here Shepard's use of the concept of play converges with my understanding of expressive negation (and these concepts intersect in situationist theory as well). Both Shepard's understanding of play and my reading of critical negation in Gay Shame are a way of describing the flexibility and negotiation of contradictions that comprises the strategy of this kind of radical representation:

Play meanders through Mattilda's narrative in any number of ways: as public sex, direct action, even anti-capitalist spectacle; from here, such ludic activity finds expression as rule breaking, tension, release, and of course, social eros. Yet, more than anything, her play involves a freedom of body and mind. She was one of the first of 1,200 arrests in protests of the police shooting of Amadou Diallo in 1999. In many ways such forms of direct action can be understood as a performance in libratory play, as a defiance of convention. (Shepard 2010, 244)

This form of militancy is meant to confront views of identity politics that would limit the sphere of rebellion to a narrow realm of politics, a view that is central to much of contemporary queercore rhetoric. In this vein, queercore zinester Larry Bob asks "Are You a Boring Mainstream Homo?," emphasizing the need to keep gay politics uncompromisingly anti-sexist and critical of oppressive forms of culture. In his zine *Holy Titclamps*, he satirically points to the retreat into conformist forms of identification in gay culture, implicitly advocating a politics that would exceed narrow, acceptable categories of behavior and friendship through a first person "quiz":

I only listen to dance music. Any form of music that I liked before I came out I have completely forgotten about./I only hang out with guys who are my same

body type -- if I'm a muscle guy, only with other gym guys, if I'm a twink with other twinks, if I'm a bear only with bears or chubs or chasers. /I don't like lesbians, and I make anti-women comments/ I have the exact same tribal tattoos as everyone else/ I am not interested in politics, except maybe I donate to the HRC when they come to the door. Who cares if George Bush is ruining the planet? (Larry Bob 2007)

Because of enduring widespread homophobia, this politics of the everyday in queer culture is often not optional, and queerness itself becomes a means by which other radical anarchist projects ensure that their collective projects will remain liberatory and inclusive. The Two in One Club, a radical British squat, was founded by a riot grrrl and often hosts girl bands. Although it houses many projects other than queer and feminist events such as a garden plotting, veggie café, hunt sabotage Earth First meetings, and an anti criminal justice bill coalition, the queercore/riot grrrl scene came to define the space, becoming a “screening device for assholes” who would not enter the space because they thought it was for homosexuals (Sarah and Alec 2003).

The concept of queer as itself the politics of the everyday has led to nebulous and generous usages of the term amongst DIY identified people, again associating representation with critical negation rather than any concrete positive identity as I found in an interview with Sissi DeVicious, a member of a performance group Tudancesmachou. She had come from Lyons, France, and was visiting Elaina, long time local Santa Cruz anarchist and co-founder of The Fabrica, a community textile cooperative in town. They had met at a dance party hosted by Tudancesmachou in Barcelona, where Elaina described a large street party forming around the group's DJ performance art, involving prop computers and gender bending costumes. The group consists of two older “sugar daddies” called “Johnny Chou” and “El Professor,” and the two younger members Eustache McQueer, a young “twink,” and Sissi, a young attractive woman with short hair who alternates her costume from that of a hypersexual woman to a boy.<sup>7</sup> Sissi felt no need to explain the dynamics of the group, one that does not conform to any conventional gay or lesbian politics. She focused on the fun and playfulness of the band and her expressive life lived outside normative regimes of work and social formalities. When I prodded her, trying to interpret the gender or sexual politics of the group, she admitted that her persona stems from her lack of identification as a woman, her feeling that she had to construct her gender. But all this seemed to occur to her offhand, a side-note to the group's playful collective mission:

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<sup>7</sup> A “twink” is gay slang for a young, feminine and attractive gay or bisexual man. Sissi described the relationship between El Professor and Eustache as playing with this, since El Professor is much older but Lucian has a beard and the couple seem to enjoy and “play” with the concept of this twink/sugar daddy relationship, rather than conform to its rules, which can be fairly rigid in more conventional gay culture.

SV: The real thing is to start the show dressed like a boy, with a tie and then to undress on stage and have something really sexy, really girly under. Just mixing all that stuff

JJ: So a lot of it is about gender?

SV That's funny because we made a small tour in Germany, and all the people who were making us play just announced us like a queer band. And we've never tried to be a queer band before that tour. I mean we know what is queer, we are queer but in that band we never tried to do that. That wasn't the fact...

JJ: How do you identify?

SV: I guess it depends what the one in front of me wants to know, if it's about my sexuality or my political opinion.

JJ: Do you think it's more a political thing about the stability of gender? Like you're kind of challenging the idea that being a woman is being one thing? It sounds like you're playing with it.

SV: I like the idea that you have to build your... the fact to be a woman. You wear woman clothes or you put some make up or you have long hair. I think I feel like a un garçon manqué, a missed boy. I get boobs really late, menstrual really late, I have a big brother and he has male friends and I was always a little sister. You know? ...I was feeling that I need to construct the affect to appear a woman. Some women say I feel my femininity inside with my hormones and I don't feel that... Even when I feel my hormones, it's not as a feminine.

JJ Do you feel like you have an overall approach that allows you not to conform to gender normativity but allows you to express yourself how you feel?

SV I guess I try to express something about me. I don't stick with any politics. I don't feel like involved in a political movement. I just feel like I find something close to me and something less close and try to mix all that together and see what happens...I realize it really helped me to feel more free.

Here, there is less an embrace of queer identity, than a queer rejection of identity itself as a passive element of a spectacular culture. Even queerness can be "boring," in the situationist sense, if it settles into a codified and static identification. Projects like *Tudansemonchou* illustrate expressive negation through aiming beyond tolerance to a negation of the passivity at work in all given forms of sexuality.

In my exploration of two waves of DIY feminism and queercore I have attempted to chart continuities between forms of critical negation and radical forms of everyday life. This is not to say that expressive negation has achieved a full transformation of daily life for the participants, or that it can do so in the near future. In my methodology I take a cue from Perry Anderson's assessment of the role of historical materialist thought in the present era. Expressive negation has a correlate in the kind of dialectical thought at work in Marxist readings of culture. Like Anderson, I see historical materialism as a capacious and flexible mode of analysis, allowing a

pragmatic utopianism. This view sees strong, promising openings and agencies in new forms of cultural and political expression while still registering the barriers we face to reaching a moment of mass resistance. Christopher Connery draws on this type of analysis to suggest that the endurance of countercultural practices are evidence of a “humanity’s long history of refusal” and may signify the emergence of a new historical dynamic (Connery 107).

In her article “Zines, Half-Lives, and Afterlives: On the Temporalities of Social and Political Change,” Janice Radway lays out the thesis and progress of a long term study she has been conducting on the social effects of zines. She sees the current debates on authenticity and political efficacy as vital to the forms of community building and political development that take place in DIY communities. Yet she believes the import of the long term effects of zines supersedes the questions of immediate political efficacy that occupy and sometimes torment those involved in debates and studies of DIY. She argues that zines are central to the building of communities, serving as texts “but also acts to be engaged and passed on” (142). For Radway, zines serve as a form of communication rather than simply activism and build to new discursive formations. She sees potential for zines to affect women’s transformation as subjects and also as “intersubjects,” new forms of congealed collectivities that emerge from these forms of networking (148). Many readings of DIY offer an understanding of the immediate impact of zines and other projects. Following Radway’s sense of temporality, I see expressive negation as pointing to a gradual form of transformation of everyday life. To this end, I have attempted to look at DIY negation as a tactic that has enduring effects on the everyday life of both the participants and the culture at large. In this sense, the politics of the feminist, queer, and anarchafeminist punk expression can be seen as both a prefiguration and an allegory for a future, as-yet unimaginable transformation of everyday life.

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