

Approaches to gender, power and authority in contemporary anarcho-punk: poststructuralist anarchism?

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This paper is concerned with the gender politics of the contemporary international anarchist punk scene which extends the punk ‘Do It Yourself’ (referred to as ‘DIY’ from now on) ethic to gender. This DIY ethic originates from the rejection by punk bands of the apparent compromise of signing to major music labels, choosing instead to record, release and distribute music, and organise gigs, themselves. It has been extended by participants in the punk scene to other cultural creations and to everyday politics, wherein participants avoid the ethico-political compromise of participation in institutions and practices they consider exploitative, doing as much as possible themselves, according to an autonomous anarchist ethos. This results in a politics that seeks to deconstruct gender as a site of authority and reconstruct it on autonomous non-hierarchical terms. Contemporary anarcho-punk and hardcore politics often engage with gender politics in a way that demonstrates congruence between understandings of power and authority in poststructuralist accounts of gender and the anti-authoritarian or autonomous politics of DIY anarchism. This is reflected in domains considered to be ‘political’ and the way that the term ‘power’ is understood, as well as the modes of political action and ‘resistance’ considered to be effective. I suggest that DIY anarcho-punk shares with poststructuralism a productive notion of power, specifically in terms of gender, resonating with Judith Butler’s notion of gender as a process or performative. Further, intervention is undertaken at discursive levels, resonating with poststructuralist assertions of the discursive production of power.

The dominant understanding of punk used in traditional subcultural theory has focused on the ‘spectacular’ aspect of punk, and serves to privilege a structuralist semiological framework for analysis which tends to

assign fixed meanings to the style and activities of punk. Such studies tend to focus on the '78 'spectacular' aspects of punk in order to proclaim 'it' dead. In post subcultural theory, however, Dylan Clark has posited this early type of punk as 'simulated "anarchy"... performances of anarchy' (Clark, 2003, p.233) which he distinguished from the thriving international network of the self-consciously political anarchism of contemporary anarchist punk and hardcore.

From my experience, the DIY anarcho-punk scene is a flourishing international culture, attested to by the volume of punk 'kids' (scene participants), zines (handmade publications), distros (DIY distributors of music, zines and other cultural creations), bands, festivals, squats, shows (concerts), tours, and various other DIY creations which make up this culture. This is a self-consciously political culture which valorises the direct self-creation of anarcho-punk culture, and demonstrates the attempt to foster particular values through the propagation of a particular mode of cultural perception. Gender politics are a passionately prioritised topic in the scene and are thus useful for demonstrating the types of political approach entailed in the DIY anarchist ethos.

It seems that many zines concerned with gender from the anarcho-punk scene assume gender to work as follows: those social actors designated 'men' or 'women', while not constituted in a structure per se, are both enabled and limited by the institutional contexts within which they act. This resonates with Hindess' approach, itself influenced by the work of Foucault, in his emphasis on the historical. The following quote from an Australian anarcho per-zine¹ demonstrates the limited agency of such an approach:

I can feel her fighting in there...she wants to be independent, free thinking, secure and confident. But there's the other side...the one they've taught her to be...whimsical, needy, insecure, pleasing. She desperately tries to cling to the person

¹ per-zine: a zine dealing with the personal life of the writer.

she identifies as when there is no boy around (Amy, [n.d.] *No More Waiting*).

Interestingly the quoted passage does not posit either identity as the true Amy to be uncovered, but rather the possibility of both existing simultaneously, which points towards the ongoing constitution of subjects. Amy's core identity is, after all, simply one 'she identifies as'. What is also interesting is the value-judgement which attaches different levels of desirability for the different selves. The passage can be understood as part of a feminist ethical practice that asserts the desirability of becoming the 'independent, free thinking, secure and confident' 'she' which Amy 'wants to be', demonstrating the ethical practice of anarcho-punk gender politics.

Ethos / Telos of anarcho-punk

Generally anarcho-punk literature takes a critical deconstructionist approach to gender, describing it as: 'another false division of life into arbitrary categories, none of which can adequately describe or contain any of us...There is no male. There is no female.' (CrimethInc., 2001, p.107). This is evocative of Foucault's assertions of sexuality, and Butler's assertions of gender, as discursive productions which categorise disparate characteristics. A poster/zine made by US based anarcho-punk collective 'CrimethInc.', entitled the *Gender Subversion Kit*, which has been circulating in anarcho-punk distros internationally, uses as its text a poem that suggests that it is through the realisation and the subsequent subversion of the constructedness of gender that 'liberation' and 'freedom' is to be gained:

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. For every boy for whom competition is the
only way to prove his masculinity, there is a girl who is called

unfeminine when she competes. For every girl who throws out her E-Z-Bake Oven, there is a boy who wishes to find one. For every boy struggling not to let advertising dictate his desires, there is a girl facing the ad industry's attacks on her self-esteem. For every girl who takes a step towards her liberation, there is a boy who finds the way to freedom a little easier. (CrimethInc., [n.d.] *Gender subversion Kit*)

The project of anarcho-punk in terms of gender, then, is to reveal the constructedness of gender and to foster different ways of being that are more adherent to the normative ethos of contemporary anarchism. This ethos, from the DIY anarcho-punk valorisation of self-creation, leads to a telos of *identity self-creation* that is not restricted by arbitrary and authoritarian gender binaries. This resonates with the telos of many queer and poststructuralist feminist theorists such as Judith Butler who asserts the 'variable construction of identity as...a political goal' (1990, p.5). Elsewhere in queer theory we see 'multiple and fluid' identity as the goal of Fuss (1989) and chosen, non-binary gender as the goal of Halberstam (1998).

I now wish to look in more detail at the congruences between this anarcho-punk ethos and that of poststructuralist feminism. I would argue that the anarcho-punk approach follows those feminist approaches that adopt poststructuralist analyses of power to an extent, yet retain an adherence to the notion that there is an overarching gender structure or patriarchal symbolic order which *discursively* constitutes and thus limits subjects.

These feminist approaches to discourse, then, are emblematised by Judith Butler's poststructuralism, and by Teresa de Lauretis' deconstructively subversive approach to gender. One of the primary elements of poststructuralist conceptions of power, which have been adopted by feminists and specifically Butler and de Lauretis, are theories of how power operates productively to constitute and mobilize specific fields of action. Particularly relevant to feminist ideas has been the notion that discourses constitute us and thus both enable and limit us through the

subject positions they make available to us. Thus the limits of discourses within which subjects can 'be' represent the limits to subjects' agency. Feminists have adapted this account to theorise the conditions and effects of gendered subject positions. This is emblematic of a "subject position" theorisation of poststructuralist agency, of which subversion is paradigmatic of the resistive potential of such a delimited agency. In terms of gender, then, Butler posits that we are limited by a 'discursively conditioned experience' (Butler, 1990, p.9), the limits of which:

are always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality. Constraint is thus built into what that language constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender (Butler, 1990, p.9).

In maintaining that 'the patriarchy' or 'gender' structures determine action, these feminist approaches are working with a notion of hegemony. However, this can be historicised, in part, through the limits to agency which occur from our need for discourses with which to 'act' and through the domination of particular discourses to the detriment of others, which constitutes a form of hegemony. This is analogous to Foucault's assertions of an historically congealed discourse of sexuality which, while contingent in its illusory unity on an economy of productive discourses and technologies, still affects conduct through what Butler would call its 'citational authority' (1993, p.225).

As Butler (2004, p.11) writes of the meta-discourse of gender, it 'figures as a precondition for the production and maintenance of legible humanity'. The approach to gender in punk can be read within this specifically feminist approach to poststructuralism in that, despite frequent invocations to the foundationlessness of gender, the categories of women and men are often invoked in what could be understood as strategic political acts. I will come back to this 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 1994, p.167)

in discussing the particular forms that resistance to gender take in anarcho-punk.

Everyday Resistance

Keeping in mind the notion that because ‘the “I” that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them’ all we can hope for, as actors, is to ‘endeavour...to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them’ (Butler, 2004, p.3), what possibilities are there for resistance, for deconstructing and reconstructing gender on the terms of the DIY anarchist ethos?

By de-universalising the system of gender but maintaining that it still affects action in some form through developing ‘citational authority’, just as Foucault did with sexuality in *The History of Sexuality*, feminists are able to talk about ‘a specifically modern (as opposed to an eternal and essential) patriarchy’ (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p.124). Thus Butler holds that while the effects of power are a totalising and hegemonic system of gender, the approach to intervening in its mechanisms should acknowledge their micro-political productivity: ‘The effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms’ (Butler, 1990, p.13).

DIY approaches to gender politics acknowledge the micro-political in their focusing on ‘everyday action’ (lyrics from female fronted hardcore punk band *I Object*, 2005) and on prefiguration, that is ‘the demonstration or rehearsal or sample of how life could be in a better world [which] is usually but not always transgressive’ (Greenway, in Bowen & Purkis, 1997, p.175). This prefigurative approach is neatly summed up by USA mixed gender anarcho-punk band *1905* in the lyrics to their song *Can't Change Everything*:

Just because I can't change everything
Doesn't mean I can't change anything

Dance on the ashes of what was
 Fall head first into what could be
 Beyond the barricade
 Is there a world you long to see?
 To envisage a world without chains but recognise that we, as
 individuals, can only chip away at the links one at a time, day
 by day. To have the ability to wage quiet wars in our everyday
 lives and recognise the subtle victories when they happen.
 An opinion changed by something you said.
 A lifestyle adjusted by what you suggested
 A brighter path taken by directions you gave.
 A world revealed by what you did.
 One brick today
 Is one less for tomorrow (1905, 2002).

This idealistic prefiguration, however, does not negate the material reification of gender hierarchy and by recognising that we can't 'be without doing gender' (to paraphrase Butler), it shares with poststructuralist feminist approaches the delimited agency of subversion and of ironic or strategic essentialism.

Strategic Essentialism

I propose that the delimited agency apparent in poststructuralist-feminist notions of gender, where our agency is allowed but limited by gendered subject positions, is a basis for the practice of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 1994, p.167). This refers to an attempt to find a way forward within these discursive limits towards a 'double-visioned' (de Lauretis, 1994, p.10) consciousness which could acknowledge and transcend these limits to agency. Such a tactic aims to deconstruct gender while working from within it, and makes this deconstruction apparent in order to foster subversive readings, and avoid those which reinforce what is intended to be subverted, so that this practice can indeed function as deconstruction. It is therefore possible to understand invocations to historicised symbols or 'spurious aggregates' (Hindess, 1986, p.116) such as patriarchy or gender structures as 'mobilized unit[ies] to do something specific' (Spivak, 1994,

p.167). Thus poststructuralist feminists are willing to ‘take the risk of essence’ (de Lauretis, 1994, p.33) in order to maintain their ethical project:

If feminist theory remains unwilling to take the risk of essentialism seriously while continuing to gesture toward it from a respectable distance, call it post-structuralist/deconstructionist...or simply anti-essentialist, it will remain unable to be both feminist and post-structuralist... And the question is, in that case, can it remain feminist? (de Lauretis, 1994, p.33)

Those feminists working within the framework of the identity politics of women, towards a post-gender ethos, refuse to subscribe to the poststructuralist corollary that ‘if there are no women as such, then the very issue of women’s oppression would appear to be obsolete and feminism itself would have no reason to exist’ (de Lauretis, 1994, p.10). This ethico-political project is based on the point of departure that I outlined above, that while there may be no essential woman, there does exist a historically congealed gender structure. Thus we find the ironic but coherent corollary in anarcho-punk gender politics that ‘feminists fight to put an end to gender’ (CrimethInc., [n.d.] *Hunter/Gatherer*, p.2).

In feminist anarcho-punk there are many activities which engage with the ‘spurious aggregates’ of gender, but remain ontologically founded in anti-essentialism. For example, there are regular international ‘*Ladyfests*’, music based festivals in which each band must include women, which also include workshops (many of which are women only), zine distros, and exhibitions of art by women. Likewise, Australian annual festival ‘*Belladonna DIY fest*’ in Wollongong, advocates wimmin-only and wimmin-centred spaces, a specific example I will return to in discussing the ‘fostering of capacities’ later.

In Mary Celeste Kearney’s (1998) study of riot grrrl² as a feminist practice, she frames riot grrrl’s invocations to gendered separatism in this

² Riot grrrl was a feminist sub-genre of punk from the early 1990s which encouraged women’s participation in punk bands and scenes.

very context of ‘strategic essentialism’. This strategic essentialism has been posited as a feminist ethico-political practice, articulated by Rosi Braidotti (1994, p.3) who describes various poststructuralist-feminist critics’ valorisations of essentialism as ‘political fictions’: invocations to foundationalist terms with built in rejections of this very foundationalism. Indeed, it has been emphasised that anti-essentialism ‘does not mean that we cannot speak of truth or identity. Rather, it points to them as being not universals of nature but productions of culture in specific times and places’ (Barker, 2000, p.21). The ‘feminist figurations’ that Braidotti groups together as emblematic of an approach which acknowledges the limits within which we can ‘be’, yet which seek to re-construct these limited discourses on feminisms’ own terms, are all instances of ironic (in the sense of lacking fixed foundations) ‘strategic essentialism’, undertaken in the name of a subversive and deconstructive ethico-political aim. Braidotti cites as examples of this project Monique Wittig’s ‘lesbian,’ Judith Butler’s ‘parodic politics of the masquerade,’ Nancy Miller’s ‘becoming women,’ Teresa de Lauretis’ ‘eccentric subject,’ and Maurizia Boscaglia’s “‘fellow-commuters” in an in-transit state’ (Braidotti, 1994, p.3).

Subversion

Having stated that ‘an *uncritical* appeal to such a system [of gender] for the emancipation of “women” is clearly self-defeating’ (Butler, 1990, p.2, emphasis added), Butler’s work on performativity, subversion and parody then demonstrates what such a *critical* appeal could look like. These refigurations in the guise of an ironic tactical essentialism are perhaps examples of what Butler envisaged when she called for ‘a new sort of feminist politics [...] to contest the very reifications of gender and identity, one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite, if not a political goal’ (Butler 1990, p.5).

An example of subversion in anarcho zines is the ‘centre-fold’ of A4 sized Australian anarcho zine *Ugly Duckling* #7. This image reflects a common approach (in terms of form and content) in zines more broadly: a collage featuring a reappropriated image of a Hollywood actress, with the literalising caption ‘A message from Hollywood’ and a bubble from the actress’s head reading ‘Thank God I’m not FAT’. This intends to interrupt conventional readings of centre-fold images and reinscribe them through the tactics of exaggeration and literalisation to reveal the congealed discursive subject position of femininity. Literalisation is also apparent in an example of ‘queering’ in the same zine, in an image reprinted from *No Frills* zine that shows generic people as symbols of a heteronormative family group (adult ‘male’ symbol, adult ‘female’ symbol, female ‘child’ symbol and male ‘child’ symbol) with the word ‘BREED’ printed below, again fostering new readings of familial discourse. *Queen Psychotic Rage* zine also undertakes subversions of visual discourses through recontextualisation. The creator of this zine ‘queers’ old-fashioned illustrations of schoolboys under the title ‘the uncensored boy’s own’, using images such as two schoolboys holding hands and sitting with their legs crossed, the original context now lost by this act of *detournement*.

In the broader punk context Lynn Breedlove of queercore³ band *Tribe 8* suggests that a seemingly aporetic enactment of reverse valorisation or affirmative action can also be a temporary tactic towards a deconstructive ‘queer’ ethical goal: ‘We’ve been excluded for so long that we have to balance out the imbalances...It’s like affirmative action; *for a while*, you have to go to the opposite extremes’ (in Arnold, 1997, emphasis added). A similar reversal of dichotomous gender hierarchy is a feature of much contemporary anarchist literature, where, for example, the default second

³ Queercore definition: “**Queercore** is a cultural and social movement that began in the mid 1980's as an offshoot of punk. It is distinguished by a discontent with society in general and a complete disavowal of the mainstream gay and lesbian community and what those involved believe to be its oppressive agenda. Queercore expresses itself in DIY style through zines, music, writing, art and film.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queercore>)

person of 'he' is replaced with 'she', in an act which presumably aims to disrupt, denaturalize or decentre readings and interrupt conventional readings of the 'universal personhood' of the default male. This tactic is also present in many *CrimethInc.* publications. This is especially notable in reference to *CrimethInc.* book *Days of War, Nights of Love* (2001), whose (initially seemingly aporetic) aims are unmistakable when read in conjunction with their explicit analyses of the socio-historical nature of 'gender'. It is from this same book that I earlier quoted a post-gender stated aim, predicated on genders constructed-ness, that gender identities and categories cannot 'adequately contain any of us' (*CrimethInc.*, 2001, p.107).

The by now paradigmatic act of drag, referred to perhaps too simplistically when invoking performativity, is nonetheless an example of the subversive reiteration of gender. In the Australian anarcho-punk scene, a group of women became the *Shitty Rail Cops Dance Troupe*, taking their name from Sydney's City Rail Officers. They enacted parodic, hypermasculine dance routines at protests such as *Reclaim the Street*.⁴ There have also been similar interventions with parodical performances by drag king macho tough guy hardcore bands at DIY punk fests which more directly deconstruct the masculinity of the hardcore scene (the broader, less political and less anarchist hardcore music scenes tend to be male dominated, 'tough' and un-concerned with gender politics).

⁴ 'Reclaim the Streets often stage non-violent direct action street reclaiming events such as the 'invasion' of a major road, highway or freeway to stage a party.'
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reclaim_the_streets)



(*The Shitty Rail Cops Dance Troupe*, Sydney, c/o Moz
<http://www.moz.net.nz/photo/2006/04/08-rts-rta/>)

Fostering Capacities

In order for ‘radically participatory’ DIY culture to operate, it needs to enable its ethos of autonomy or self-creation. It should be pointed out that the intended reading of the subversive tactics I have outlined above, like those employed by poststructuralist-feminists in their ethico-political project, requires a particular capacity to read. A prerequisite of this is the ‘doubled vision’ with which they create such ‘double intentions’ (Derrida, 1976, pp.xvii-xix). It has been proposed that the extension of such specialised practices to a paradigmatic political aim is a universalisation of the particularly, institutionally fostered capacities of the critical intellectual: a ‘philosophico-historical projection’ (Hunter, 1988, p.70). *Coughing Up*

Legomen zine is likewise keen to emphasise the contextual limits of universalist adaptations of these specialist modes-of-reading:

Empowerment can only occur within the limits of a person's material circumstances. It's one thing for a bourgeois intellectual such as Pat Califia to embrace queer and then to have F-to-M gender reassignment, but the actual difference...queer will make to the life of a working class woman with two children who decides that she might not be heterosexual is highly questionable (Chris, [n.d.] *Coughing Up Legomen* #13).

Thus in this context, it is not discourse, in the sense of languages or 'notations' which are of interest for an ethico-political project, lacking as they do a transcendental signified which can guarantee a subversive reading. Rather it is how these discourses are used, how they 'take their form and function from their deployment in ensembles of other techniques, institutions and practices.' (Hunter, 1991, p.51)

In relation to DIY anarchism, then, I ask how it is that the DIY scene utilises particular discourses to foster certain capacities in order to work towards its ethico-political goals. Institutional limits to reading are a potential flaw in the prefigurative practices within DIY anarchism which attempt to implement gender deconstruction or post-gender language without context. These practices are nevertheless potentially transformative in how they open the space of prefiguration. As I have previously emphasised, deconstructive revelations are integral to the project of political and social change. In this way, the moment of revelation is important, but only in the wider context within which the intent of such subversive tactics can be understood.

My participant observation within anarchist environments has shown attempts to make the temporary and tactical nature of invocations to essentialism 'scrupulously visible' (Spivak, 1994, p.153). For example, a 'womyn only' music workshop at anarchist / DIY festival *Belladonna DIY*

Fest in 2003 acknowledged its contingency and contextualism in the write-up for the workshop which asserted that ‘Unfortunately the Hardcore/Punk/DIY music scene is dominated by males. As a means of addressing this issue this workshop is designed to create a space by womyn for womyn’ (*Belladonna DIY Zine* 2003). This context is also demonstrably accepted by some men in the scene who acknowledge that the ‘privilege still hangs towards boys being encouraged to sit around and play guitar and girls aren’t given the encouragement and support in that’ (Aaron, [n.d.] ‘*Pure Evil*’ in *On Fire III zine*). In 2004, the first day of the festival was wimmin-centred, and contained the workshops ‘anti-patriarchal living and loving’ for all genders and ‘Why is punk rock so straight? aka. Queercore’ for people of all sexualities, demonstrating a desire to encourage people of all genders to deconstruct their normative subject positions.

Having discussed this issue with a self-described wumun who was a festival co-organiser of *Belladonna*, I believe that the deliberate choice to make the day wimmin-centred as opposed to wimmin-only was a tactic to evade appealing to a natural ‘essential difference’, to encourage men to engage with the political terrain of gender and to expose the invisible ‘universal personhood’ (Butler, 1990, p.9) of maleness within punk, anarchism and hardcore. This precludes the frequent assumption that wimmin-only space always represents an *aim* of separatism (which would necessarily be predicated on essentialism) by demonstrating a desire not to exclude men, but rather to include them in the process of working towards a common poststructuralist-feminist ethos. Indeed, the co-organiser stated that this decision arose from debates within the scene as to the essentialising reversal of a wimmin-only day, in order that the aims of such a tactic may be clarified, may be made ‘scrupulously visible’. Again, the wimmin-centred day at *Belladonna* 2004 exemplifies the aim of deconstructing gender, within the tactical acknowledgment that we cannot be without doing gender.

More productively, within zines and the broader DIY, queer and anarcho-punk scenes there have been prefigurative attempts to implement post-gender languages to reflect the post-gender ethos generally adopted. *Belladonna DIY Zine* and an article in *Ugly Duckling #7* reprinted from *Ember zine*, for example, use the term ‘humyn’ in attempts to eschew gender binarism. From my participant observation, I noted that there are also attempts to apply the use of non-gendered pronouns and non-gender specific names in radical punk (but mostly radical *queer* punk) scenes. For example, an untitled zine I obtained through the Australian punk scene, by Anika Vinson, uses the pronouns ‘co’ and ‘ze’ in place of him/her or s/he. Likewise, a CrimethInc. *DIY Guide* has a guide to ‘DIY Pronouns.’ The guide to non-gendered pronouns, while proclaiming itself to be a ‘guide’ to ‘DIY pronouns’, while being ‘do-it-yourself’ not ‘do-it-how-we-do’, is in reality an exemplification or prefiguration of a particular use of post-gender pronouns.

Additionally such an exemplification is employed without claims to being any more ‘true’ than other approaches, but rather represents an argument for its particular use. This non-coercive ‘developmental power’ (Patton, 1994, p.66) engaged in by such ‘guides’ represents an attempt at fostering capacities towards the autonomous aims of a *DIY* anarchism, making the means by which it attempts to do so as ‘scrupulously visible’ as possible, in keeping with this ethos of autonomy. The implementation of post-gender language, then, demonstrates how languages play an ‘instrumental role in a particular form of calculation or technique of living’ (Hunter, 1991, p.41). In this case that technique of fostering an autonomous ethos is done through the non-coercive approach of ‘scrupulously visible’, ‘developmental’ power.

A male vocalist and guitarist of Sydney hardcore band *Pure Evil* demonstrates *his* subversive capacity when he says that:

[a friend] was saying that, at the end of the day, there's nothing challenging about a bunch of boys getting up and rocking out, its something that is age old. And I argued that there are certain things challenging about it, from my perspective a lot of what I am rocking out about has to do with trying to break out of typical moulds of male activity, but at the same time its done through a stereotyped 'angry male' display. (Aaron, [n.d.] in Dxxx, *On Fire* #3)

This statement expresses the band member's intent to engage with such a masculine vernacular, as a self-conscious and subversive political fiction. According to poststructuralist critiques of a transcendental signified, the capacity to comprehend this performance as intended requires a pre-existing and operating ethico-political stance on questions of gender, which would make one *want* to read as such. But for this performance to function in fostering such a capacity, that is, for the moment of revelation to sufficiently confuse normative readings, it would also require pre-existing knowledge of the absurdity or aporia of such a hyper-masculinity coming from this particular man; it would require some knowledge of the context of his moral and political stances.

Hutcheon's study of irony identified similar limits to such a practice, in that the 'only way to be sure that a statement was intended ironically is to have a detailed knowledge of the personal, linguistic, cultural and social references of the speaker *and* his audience' (Guant, in Hutcheon, 1994, p.116). And herein lies the limits of such ironic 'political fictions': the gamble of communication is contingent on one making these fictions so 'scrupulously visible' (Spivak, 1994, p.153) as to ensure or *foster* an ironic reading. In the words of Nehring – writing in specific reference to riot grrrl – 'whether the audience get the joke, of course, is always the sticking point' (1997, p.170). Elsewhere Michael Hurley (1990) has articulated what Hutcheon presents as a contextual contingency in more productive terms - which go further to address the causes of and possible interventions in these contingencies - as 'reading formations'. He quotes Catherine Greenfield to

the effect that the ‘reader is the bearer of these discursive forms according to various and changing institutional trainings which confer special competencies’ (Hurley, 1990, p.158). Like Hunter (1991), Hurley makes a broadly poststructuralist argument when he first asserts that the ‘meanings generated do not come from the text itself’ (Hurley, 1990, p.157) and then points towards ways of reading as specific techniques, the uses of which require particular kinds of intellectual and moral training.

The contextualism and ‘detailed knowledge’ which Hurley refers to as a ‘reading formation’, and the resulting capacity to read these practices as ironic, were fostered for me in the specific case of the band *Pure Evil*, quoted above, through various DIY practices. These included the lyric sheets accompanying hardcore-punk shows and musical releases (which often include explanations of the songs), the spoken word explanations between songs, and the zines which are all such an integral aspect of this ‘decentralized, radically participatory, do-it-yourself underground’ (CrimethInc., [n.d.] *Hunter/Gatherer*, p.3) culture. This complex of supplementary information means that the capacities to read subversively are restricted and require heavy participation in the scene in order to be a member of ‘the audience [to] get the joke’ (Nehring 1997, p.170). Indeed, zine maker Kylie Lewis noted this important contextualising function of zines for the culture when she claimed that:

Zines are the essential lifeblood of punk and...we have to work towards zines having higher importance in our community. Although I think it’s possible to be politicised by music, zines give you a sense of the community and the communication and how global it all is. Zines are the place where all the radical thoughts that get condensed down into song lyrics [sic] and paragraph explanations get explained in further detail, and they show that punk is so much more than music, or ‘more than noise’ if you will. (Lewis, [n.d.] *Personality Liberation Front* zine)

In terms of gender, then, the reading formations apparent from *Pure Evil* seek to foster a reading subject armed with the ‘doubled vision’ to deconstruct the invocations of gender on the part of *Pure Evil* as revelatory of the performativity of gender. The gradual ‘rewrites’ revealed after the initial acts by *Pure Evil*, through the spoken word, lyric sheets and zines, embody the ethico-political ideal envisaged by Gutterman in his article, ‘Postmodernism and the Interrogation of Masculinity’:

By utilizing the fluidity of identity and the shield provided by cultural presumptions of normalcy, profeminist men can...gain access to other men and then reveal the ‘rewrites’ they have made in the cultural scripts of masculinity as well as encourage, challenge, and nurture other men to rewrite the scripts of their own identity. (Gutterman, 2001, p.67)

Conclusion

The unique thing about anarcho-punk’s use of poststructuralist tactics is the bold application of them to the normative telos of autonomy, self-empowerment or self-creation. And this telos is ideally adapted to gender politics which seek to posit and transcend gender as a tyrannical, authoritarian discursive site of undesirable order. Without compromising its ultimate goals in terms of self-creation post-gender ethos, the DIY culture is able, through the prefiguration of preferable ways of being, to embody the necessary ‘alternative, minority versions of sustaining norms’ (Butler, 2004, p.3) that Butler identified as pre-requisites in any project for change.

Anarcho-punks concerned with deconstructing gender engage in specifically *feminist* poststructuralist tactics, which work from the assumption of a historicised, reified gender order and evade a simplistic, voluntaristic solution. For example, I have cited many instances of ironic mobilisations of gender categories or gendered behaviours, engaged with in order to foster subversive and deconstructive readings. These deconstructive readings are ensured either through the tactics of exaggeration or literalization or through the fostering of a critical framework

of perception for scene participants (via the wider cultural creations of punk) to be able to read gendered acts ironically and anti-foundational. This fostering of modes of perception stay true to the DIY anarchist ethos of autonomy and remains non-coercive and non-authoritarian by making these tactics ‘scrupulously visible’, relying on participants’ ethico-political choice that the post-gender ethos is indeed preferable.

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