

# **DIY Queer Feminist (Sub)cultural Resistance in the UK**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in Gender Studies

The University of Leeds  
Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies

SEPTEMBER 2009

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Acknowledgements

First of all this PhD would not have been possible without the support of the Economic and Social Research Council (1+3 Award PTA-030-2004-00034), my parents Gill and John Downes (for covering my rent in those crucial final months), Sarah Hill and all at Independent Domestic Abuse Services based in York. I am indebted to the awesome-rad support of my supervisors Brendan Gough and Rachel Cowgill as well as the many others who shared their advice and thoughts with me in the often bewildering world of academia, including Sheila Whiteley, Susan C. Cook, Luke Windsor, David Bell, Sally Hines, Natalia Gerodetti, Shirley Tate, Rachel White, Simon Warner, Lizzie Lidster and Elizabeth Keenan. On a personal level I want to thank Heather Crabtree, Melanie Maddison, Rachel Kaye, Emma Ledger, Jenny Howe and Sian Williams for being the ultimate fire-tits girl gang, as well as James Hall, Madeline Hunter and Nazmia Jamal for being the truest friends a girl could have. Of course, this research would not have been possible without the input from so many: Amelia Fletcher, Allison Wolfe, Andy Brown, Andy Roberts, Anna Peaker, Amy Brachi, Bidisha, Boitel, Bob Henderson, Cara Holmes, Cazz Blase, Claire Adams, Charlotte Cooper, Delia Barnard, Daniel Cuzner, Debi Withers, Emily Jane Graves, Emily Aoibheann, Erica Smith, Everett True, Fergus Evans, Gary Walker, Guy Crouch, Heena Patel, Humaira Saeed, Irene Revell, Jacob McMurray, Jen Denitto, Jon Slade, Karren Ablaze, Kathleen Hanna, Len Lukowska, Lianne Hall, Lisa Cupcake, Liz Naylor, Lucy Thane, Lizzie Guinness, Layla Gibbon, Michal William, Paul Cox, Pete Dale, Rachel Holborow, Rosie Hadrill, Red Chidgey, Rosey Hill, Sarit, Sam Lowe, Sarah Bag, Sarah Dougher, STS, Shelley Jenkin, Siobhan Fahey, Suzy Corrigan, Tammy Denitto, Therese McKenna, Tobi Vail and Victor Grayson.

A popular version of oral history material contained in chapter three has been published in the book chapter 'Riot grrrl: The legacy and contemporary landscape of DIY feminist cultural activism'. In, Nadine Monem (ed.) (2007) *Riot Grrrl: Revolution girl style now!* London: Black Dog, pp. 12-49. A preliminary exploration of issues discussed in chapter five has been published in the book chapter "'Let me hear you depoliticise my rhyme": Queer feminist cultural activisms and disruptions of conventional protest'. In, Zowie Davy, Julia Downes, Lena Eckert, Natalia Gerodetti, Dario Llinares and Ana Cristina Santos (eds.) (2008) *Bound and Unbound: Interdisciplinary approaches to genders and sexualities*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, pp. 181-200. Material contained in chapter three has been adapted for the journal article, "'The Expansion of Punk Rock": Riot Grrrl Challenges to Gender Power Relations in British Indie Music Subcultures' to be published in the forthcoming special issue of *Women's Studies* guest edited by Sharon Becker.

## Abstract

This thesis examines the role of music, power and DIY (sub)culture involved in resistance to hegemonic discourses of gender, sexuality and feminism (re)circulated within dominant society and culture. In particular, attention is focused upon young peoples' experiences within riot grrrl and contemporary queer feminist music (sub)cultures situated within the fabric of social change and protest cultures of contemporary Britain. A critical interdisciplinary approach and set of qualitative methodologies were employed to understand music as collective social action that incorporated (i) oral histories of British riot grrrl, (ii) an auto/ethnography of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural life, and (iii) case studies of queer and feminist amateur music-makers. I argue that music provides participants with a set of vital spatial, emotional and sonic resources to provoke radical political imaginaries, identities, communities and life-courses into being. In the context of a neo-liberal post-feminist consumer society, the creation of DIY queer feminist music (sub)culture attempts to resist the disarticulation of feminism and the dominant regulation of gender and sexual diversities. These social practices offer critical insights into the continuities of the (sub)cultural resistance of girls, young women and queers throughout modern history and demands the recognition of (sub)cultural resistance as crucial to British feminism within the wider transformations of protest and activism in contemporary society.

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## Introduction

The central goal of this thesis is to conduct a comprehensive exploration and analysis of the significance of young people's music participation within the context of wider social change in genders and sexualities in contemporary Britain. I demonstrate how everyday lived participatory practice in riot grrrl and queer feminist (sub)cultures are central to the construction of a radical political imaginary (McRobbie 2009). Young people collectively struggled to rework their immediate (sub)cultural situations, to bring new politicised possibilities into being that resisted the dominant regulation of diverse genders, sexualities and feminisms, and disrupted the (re)production of a hegemonic social order in their everyday lives. This offered participants the possibility to challenge phobic hetero-gendered representations produced in dominant consumer cultures embedded within neo-liberal, post-feminist and normalisation agendas. Innovative spatial, sonic and visual tactics were used to disrupt the (re)production of compulsory heterosexuality and masculine entitlements within (sub)culture and wider society. Participants, predominantly girls and young women, articulated subversive non-normative genders, sexualities and feminisms to co-produce different ways of being and living beyond the constraints of heteronormativity, homonormativity and hetero-femininity. This historical continuity of (sub)cultural participations of girls, young women and queers is termed 'DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance' to acknowledge a widespread legacy of unconventional activism and creativities that span other eras, social groups and places. Therefore, this thesis argues that a greater recognition of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance promises a more comprehensive insight into contemporary transformations in feminist activism and queer life in Britain.

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one comprises a critical assessment of literature that interrogates the dialectic of power and resistance in the negotiation of genders, sexualities and feminisms within culture. I critically evaluate relevant scholarship from a range of disciplines, including queer cultural theory, girl studies and sociology, to mark out an alarming absence of the comprehensive study of the music participations of radical girls and young women within (sub)cultural life. I then outline the enduring legacy of girls' cultural subversions within self-publication, cyberspace and film-making. In particular I link girls and women's use of music, and the processes involved in securing public space for non-normative genders and sexualities, with the emergence of feminist and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) social movements. I also survey current research on riot grrrl and queercore music (sub)cultures to reveal a dominant bias towards a historically specific US origin narrative of riot grrrl. The absence of adequate knowledge and understanding of the (sub)cultural resistance of girls and women in other geographical locations and historical eras motivated an exploration of the

continuities of radical girls and young women's music (sub)cultural resistance within contemporary British culture.

Chapter two provides a detailed analytical discussion of the methodological peculiarities and challenges of this interdisciplinary project. As a (sub)cultural producer and scholar, I reflexively assess how my position has shaped the current research project in relation to access, data production, ethical dilemmas, research with friends, and a lack of boundaries between the 'home' and 'field'. I then critique disciplinary boundaries that have restricted the study of girl and young women's (sub)cultural participations to privilege the analysis of a particular cultural object. I argue against a conventional tendency to understand music as an object and chart the development of feminist and queer musicologies to construct 'no wave' feminist music studies. This approach situates music as collective social action. It advocates the study of the social uses of music by non-expert audiences, fans and music-makers within a range of ephemeral spaces and moments. Studying music in this situated manner opens up possibilities for understanding the role of music and music (sub)culture in the (re)articulation of feminism in a global society in which music-makers are increasingly recognised as contemporary feminist leaders (Reger 2007). I then outline my methods employed in the study as three interrelated empirical studies involving, (i) oral histories of British riot grrrl, (ii) an auto/ethnography of DIY queer feminist (sub)culture, and (iii), case studies of queer and/or feminist DIY music-makers.

Chapter three focuses on British riot grrrl and draws upon oral histories with a variety of participants to explore the critical challenges that riot grrrl posed to dominant norms of hetero-feminine girlhood and masculine entitlements in (sub)culture. In particular I emphasise the construction of a distinctive British riot grrrl discourse situated within the specific socio-political climate and protest cultures of Britain in the 1990s. I then address the contentious struggle over riot grrrl representation that was particular to British riot grrrl. I emphasise how close relationships between riot grrrl protagonists and music journalists, alongside dominant media production practices, created an explosion of publicity that inevitably (re)produced cultural fears of feminism and counter-hegemonic femininities. I then develop an in-depth discussion of the Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear joint UK tour in 1993 to explore how riot grrrl, as a set of fluid and contested participatory actions, was used to produce a communal emotional experience of feminism for girls and young women that could be applied to their everyday lives. I also assess the decline of riot grrrl and emphasise how riot grrrl experiences enabled the negotiation of radical life-courses and participation in political activism.

Chapter four explores the contemporary continuation of riot grrrl within the actions of contemporary (sub)cultural producer-fans and music-makers. I argue that the presence of Ladyfest and Queeruptation at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century reinvigorated interest in the face-to-face organisation of politicised music events and enabled the formation of small-scale DIY queer

feminist collectives across Britain. These social processes enabled the co-creation of DIY (sub)cultural solutions to address various problematic experiences within everyday social, cultural and political spaces. The construction of intimacy was critical within small-scale sonic spaces and informed the construction of sonic, spatial and stylistic tactics in DIY (sub)cultural productions. Producer-fans and music-makers reordered sound and space to produce emotional and embodied experiences of intimacy, activation and participation. Music was a crucial transformative resource for queer feminists to articulate queer genders, sexualities and feminisms that questioned the viability of dominant categories. DIY (sub)cultural resistance offered a grassroots tool with which marginalised queer feminist subjects could attempt to regain control over a phobic society.

However chapter five – ‘DIY Fragilities’ – takes a critical look at the redeployment of power within queer feminist collectives and small groups. In particular, problematic experiences of burnout, crisis, trashing, and the (re)production of ‘race’, class and gender, embedded within everyday social processes of DIY queer feminist (sub)culture, are critically discussed. Nonetheless I emphasise the productive role of crisis in social movements, and remain optimistic of the potential for future transformations of feminism into a multi-agenda praxis. I then challenge the dominant frameworks available to comprehend social movements and take issue with the tendency to evaluate social movements based on narrow definitions of protest and activism that discount (sub)cultural resistance. I conclude the chapter by contemplating the long-term impacts that DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance has had, and still has, upon British culture and society.

Overall this thesis makes various innovative contributions to the current academic study of gender, sexuality, music (sub)culture and feminist social movements in contemporary Britain. In an era in which prominent feminist subcultural scholar Angela McRobbie has dismissed the relevance of feminist subcultures to the experience of contemporary young women, and US-based accounts of contemporary queer subcultural life in the work of Judith Halberstam dominate the study of queer subcultures, this thesis addresses the alarming absence of academic attention to girls’ and young women’s (sub)cultural productivity in riot grrrl and queer feminist music (sub)cultures based in Britain. The critical interdisciplinary ethnographic approaches employed in this study of music and music (sub)culture advocate a shift away from the traditional analysis of a sound object – created by professional musicians within the music industry – towards the study of amateur and DIY music as collective social action in everyday life. This perspective enables a situated and comprehensive understanding of young people’s music participation to emerge as a set of fluid cultural, spatial and emotional processes that can be used to transform social situations, identities and life-courses. In relation to the riot grrrl and queer feminist music (sub)cultures explored, musics offer a crucial medium to resist hegemonic discourses of gender and sexuality and the disarticulation of feminism perpetuated in dominant

phobic consumer cultures and validate different ways of being and doing diverse genders, sexualities and feminisms. In contrast to the widespread academic and popular rejection of riot grrrl musics, this thesis discusses the long-term and wider positive impacts of girls' music participations. These impacts – including the creation of a generation of politicised individuals and agitation of a girl-positive 'collective consciousness' within British society – illustrate the productive connections between music and broader social change. Taking into account wider transformations in sociological understandings of protest and activism, the arguments presented make a case for the recognition of the radical role of music and music (sub)culture in the history and contemporary presence of feminism, LGBT and queer activisms. However, it is important to acknowledge that riot grrrl and queer feminist (sub)cultures represent only a couple of moments within a vast continuum of 'DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance'. This long-standing legacy of radical girls' and young women's politicised cultural productivity – currently unrecognised as feminism – present throughout history often occur within unanticipated groups outside and alongside publicly recognisable feminist organisations. Despite the personal devastation experienced within internal crises over gender, 'race' and class in collective structures, the study of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance offers vital glimpses into the future transformations of feminist politics and social movements.

## Chapter One

### Literature Review: All right, this time just the girls

This chapter aims to assess the current academic landscape that interrogates the relationships between music (sub)culture, power and resistance in the negotiation of genders, sexualities and feminisms in contemporary society. Twisting and turning through intersections of cultural studies, girl studies, sociology, popular music studies, queer geography, queer cultural theory, gay and lesbian studies, and queer histories, this chapter provokes an increasing sense of urgency over who and what is being obscured from current narratives. I argue that a nuanced consideration of the continuous and situated (sub)cultural resistance of queer girls and young women is crucial for British feminist scholarship and queer feminist possibilities. Everyday music participation in DIY queer feminist (sub)cultures represents vital contemporary sites for resisting, reworking and reordering dominant life trajectories and models of gender, sexuality, and feminism in the UK.

#### *1.1 Theorising contemporary (popular) culture, hegemony and power*

##### *1.1.1 Culture in the Frankfurt tradition*

In his 1981 book *Culture*, Raymond Williams explored the development of the study of culture from a sociological perspective. He argued that the meaning of 'culture', which once referred to the processes of cultivating crops, animals and the human mind, shifted in the eighteenth century to signify a spirit that informed a general way of life for a particular society. Early understandings of culture attempted to comprehend how this generalised spirit was manifested in specific cultural activities. Studies asked questions about how the interests and values of a social group were expressed through its art, language and intellectual activities. In this formulation the flow of power took a 'top down' approach, where culture was conceptualised as the direct manifestation of an established social order. A critical twist in the study of culture came from the recognition that culture may not derive from an established social order, but rather, that culture is implicated in the constitution of the social order. Culture could then be understood as 'the signifying system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored' (Williams 1981, p. 13). This paradigm shift extended the field of culture to include the role of activities like fashion, advertising, popular music and journalism in shaping our experiences of social order.

This expanded meaning of culture was particularly attractive for critical theorists who emerged within the Marxist-inspired Frankfurt tradition. These theorists linked the manipulation of

culture to the bourgeois dominance of working-class populations. Control of the working class could be assured through the consolidation of 'high' culture in which bourgeois norms, values and aesthetics were elevated as the dominant common sense. This misidentification with, and privileging of bourgeois norms, meant that the working class became invested in reproducing, rather than resisting, the dominant status quo. Mass-culture theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1995 [1944]) focussed on the role of the cultural industries in the reproduction of hegemony via 'low' culture. In this pessimistic account the cultural industries were held responsible for the creation of a market of escapist pleasures that could effectively pacify the wider population and reify capitalism. In his influential paper *On Popular Music*, Adorno (1990 [1941]) argued that mass-produced popular music is standardised, pseudo-individualised and pre-digested. Adorno believed that the music industry manipulates music for mass consumption, under a guise of free choice, in order to initiate conformity in its listeners. Within these accounts the Frankfurt school subscribed to a 'top-down' repressive conceptualisation of power, focussing on culture produced by, and invested in, the interests of dominant institutions and industries. Mass culture was constructed as a monolithic capitalist machine engineered to induce conformity in populations of cultural dupes. Mass cultural theorists remained unable and unwilling to account for the pleasures people gain from consuming popular culture, considering enjoyment as an expression of false consciousness. Mass cultural theory also denied the potential for resistance within the fabric of popular culture.

Other theorists did manage to open up the possibilities for culture to be used in 'bottom-up' resistance to the status quo. For instance, Gramsci (1971 [1929-1935]) stressed the importance of the working classes in the creation of their own culture that could resist the naturalised common sense advocated by the dominant order. Additionally, the writings of Walter Benjamin permitted brief glimpses of the political potential of popular culture. Benjamin (1936) argued that the technological advances of photography and film challenged traditional notions of authenticity in art and created new modes of cultural participation, active spectatorship, and mass political mobilisation. Furthermore, for Benjamin (1934), art became detached from its original aesthetic function to take on a new politicised role - to articulate revolutionary relations of production and consumption.

To summarise, within the Frankfurt school, culture could be broadly understood as a social practice involved in the negotiation of class hegemony. Probably owing to the historical, social and political contexts in which the Frankfurt tradition developed, mass culture was commonly characterised as the puppet of dominant ideologies. This approach leaves little space to think about cultural resistance within hegemonic power structures. In order to articulate a more satisfactory conceptualisation of culture and power in modern society the work of Michel Foucault and John Fiske becomes crucial.

### 1.1.2 Foucault & Fiske: Popular culture and power beyond the dupe

One major element of Foucault's groundbreaking work was his capillary model of modern power. Foucault argued that in modern society power no longer emanated from one centralised elite authority that ruthlessly controlled the life choices of some groups over others. Instead, according to Foucault, power is dispersed and deployed from diverse positions throughout society:

Power is exercised from innumerable points. Power is employed and exercised through a netlike organisation [...] individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in a position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power. They are not only its inert or consenting targets; they are also elements of its articulation (1988, p. 54-5)

In Foucault's genealogy of modern power, cultures and identities have no fixed meaning, innate nature, or ideology, but are instead understood as sets of historically contingent practices. Consequently, the trajectory of Foucault's work has followed the discursive processes through which knowledge, sexuality, madness and criminality are regulated and controlled (1972; 1973; 1977; 1979; 1986; 1988). In society, 'different ways of speaking about and knowing the world' (Driscoll 2002, p. 4), known as 'discourses', are thought to circulate and compete for hegemonic status. These discursive regimes are inflected with forms of social constraint. For instance, in the realm of popular culture, cultural industries harbour a powerful ability to reproduce, rework and resist hegemonic discourses of gender, sexuality and feminism within society. Industries embedded within global capitalist interests need to regulate the production of profitable new products and marketable demographics. Questions have been raised concerning the hegemonic representations of gender, sexuality and feminism within cultural objects produced within these networks (Hinds & Stacey 2001; Kruse 2002; Whiteley 2000; Bayton 1998; Leonard 2007). Various researchers differently aligned within the 'production of culture' perspective (see Peterson & Anand 2004) have interrogated how wider shifts in employment practices and global economic pressures have impacted on the cultural industries (Forde 2001; McRobbie 2002, 2009; Negus 1998). The strategies and practices at work within cultural industries can (re)produce discourses that perpetuate inequalities in society. Within this context the symbiotic and conflicted interplay between cultural industries and subcultural producers can be understood as *(sub)cultural* production. Therefore, incorporating Foucault's ideas of power and discourse within the situated constitution of culture and identity, *(sub)cultural* production refers to the processes whereby differently positioned groups and individuals compete to assert representational power in the public consciousness in the context of an increasingly sophisticated struggle of power and resistance between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses.

Foucault described how new tactics and techniques of power had developed within institutions in order to discipline problematic subjects and preserve the status quo. One well-known tactic that Foucault elaborated on is the idea of a new visibility, 'the gaze' (1977). This technique made people visible in new ways, as a case, object and target, to be surveilled and regulated by a spectator. In modern situations, Foucault argued, constraining forces can no longer be thought of as external to the self as individuals internalise this gaze and engage in self-surveillance; effectively regulating their own gestures, actions, bodies and desires in relation to discursive regimes. In this manner modern power relations are invasive, taking hold of us at a subjective level in the constitution of our identities, bodies and everyday practices. Foucault's sophisticated notion of modern power troubles the idea that culture can be controlled by a single authority and consumed by a population of cultural dupes: power and resistance are actively negotiated in the textures of everyday life and culture. In her critique, Nancy Fraser (1989) argued that Foucault's notion of modern power provides the empirical conceptual basis for a politicisation of everyday life, allowing for an expansion of the boundaries of activism beyond state-centred political orientations, to explore how people can confront, understand and seek change in their own lives. Therefore, Foucault helps us understand how culture and everyday life can be implicated as sites for the negotiation of wider structures of power and social order.

The work of communication and arts professor John Fiske elaborates on the importance of culture in the construction of meaning and identity in society: 'culture is the constant process of producing meanings of and from our social experience, and such meanings necessarily produce a social identity for the people involved' (1990, p. 1). Subsequently my notion of culture is grounded within a desire to understand the social processes whereby individuals and groups discursively construct lifestyles, artefacts and modes of expression that give contemporary life meaning. Culture is a critical site of discourse and meaning production; it helps us elucidate our experiences and subjectivity in a specific time and place. Furthermore, Fiske recognises that culture is embedded in struggles of power, situating culture as a rich sphere for negotiating resistant and productive pleasures. He reminds us that, although the processes of creating culture will always take place in relation to a social system of 'white patriarchal capitalism', culture can intervene in the future of this system through maintaining and disrupting the normative flow of power: 'culture (and its meanings and pleasures) is a constant succession of social practices; it is therefore inherently political, it is centrally involved in the distribution and possible redistribution of various forms of social power' (1990, p. 1).

Fiske argues against mass-culture theorists' negative conception of a population of passive cultural dupes, and, alternatively, insists that popular culture contains the potential for pleasurable, progressive and empowered readings dependent on a reader's position within the wider social structure. The meanings of popular culture do not solely derive from an established hegemony, but are instead fractured, contradictory and contain an uncontrollable excess that can

lead to numerous unpredictable interpretations. Fiske (1989) points to an example of a woman's acquisition of an empowered reading of the television series *Cagney and Lacey* based upon her own everyday experiences of gender discrimination, a reading that someone who is more complicit with a patriarchal system may fail to access. This finding is similar to the arguments put forward by feminist researchers interested in women's consumption of ideologically questionable popular culture. Jacqueline Bobo (1989; 1995; 1998) elucidated black women's active recuperations of potentially negative representations of black women in the film adaptation of *The Color Purple*. Similarly, Janice Radway (1991) described the possibilities for subversive pleasures within women's acts of reading romance novels. Therefore, the pleasures that people experience from popular culture arise only through the viewers' ability to create meanings based upon their experiences of marginalisation. Popular culture and media, as a set of available institutional resources, can be used to construct and produce identities (Kelly 2004). Popular cultural participation can be thought of as a crucial social process, negotiating the link between everyday experience and wider structural forces. Everyday cultural participation can be reconceived as a 'series of tactical manoeuvres against the strategy of the colonizing forces' (Fiske 1989, p. 161).

### *1.1.3 Power & Resistance: Controlling radical pleasures*

Foucault regarded power and resistance as highly interdependent; like two sides of the same coin, as he asserted, 'there are no relations of power without resistance' (1980, p. 142). Modern power is also 'self-amplifying', meaning that power does not attempt to quash or negate any opposition, but instead accommodates it within its practices. Modern cultural history is littered with examples of the co-optation of avant-garde countercultures into 'high' cultural and political institutions. For instance, Caroline Levine (2007) details how in the late 1940s the CIA supported several funding bodies and cultural organisations in an attempt to glorify the US. Central to the US national identity were the concepts of democracy and the American dream. These ideologies championed neo-liberal beliefs that construct America as a fair and equal society within which the most marginalised voices in society can achieve success and legitimacy. The CIA covertly supported a number of radical abstract expressionist artists, like Jackson Pollock, to promote the idea of America as a crucial site for artistic freedom and expression. Consequently, any popular rejection of these artists further bolstered the idea that the US was truly a free democracy. This accommodation of radical countercultures and avant-gardes can amplify the grip of discursive regimes upon the public consciousness, as Nancy Fraser states: 'modern power [...] increases its own force in the course of its exercise. It does this by not negating opposing forces but rather by utilising them, by linking them up as transfer points within its own circuitry' (1989, p. 24).

This leads to a dilemma over claims of political agency and complicates the traditional agency/structure binary that dominates sociological thought. Many sociological theories view identity as the product of an interaction between individual agency and wider social, economic and political structures (e.g. Blumer 1969). However, the notion of agency itself can be considered a social construction - a construct derived from social, cultural and economic forces maintained through the conscious and unconscious enactment of discursive materials (Valocchi 2005). An individual is constituted through discourse and cannot escape or stand apart from the wider social order. Therefore it can be argued that the types of resistance and subversive identities made available are simultaneously constrained by the wider social order.

Power can accommodate radicalism by constructing what Fiske has termed 'controlled pleasures' (Fiske 1989). This concept refers to the introduction of cultural productions that attempt to substitute a radical, dangerous and uncontrollable countercultural production for more acceptable adaptations that can be easily accommodated in the wider social order. 'Controlled pleasures' impose preferred readings and dissuade radical readings that would enable the development of a politicised consciousness that link individual experience with wider social structures. For instance, Kirsten Schilt (2003a) described how the radical feminist subcultural dissent of riot grrrl became diluted and repackaged by the music industry in their promotion of feminine singer songwriters and pop acts like Fiona Apple, Suzanne Vega, Alanis Morissette and the Spice Girls. Schilt argued that the press representation and lyrical content of these major label performers reinforced traditional feminine norms, and worked to portray the social problems of sexism, rape and child abuse as individual problems, thus minimising audience desire for engaging in collective political resistance. Similarly, social movements which centre on identity politics have fought to challenge the dominant cultural meanings and representations of a particular social identity. For instance, a dominant tactic in the gay rights movement focused on homophobic readings of gay identities as deviant and pathological, and attempted to rearrange the meaning of gay identities as normal, legitimate and healthy. However, such a shift, it can be argued, will simply 'reverse the discourse' (Foucault 1980) as social change will be accompanied with the (re)production of dominant frameworks. For instance, the growing social acceptance of homosexuality has reinforced the idea that homosexuality is the marked binary opposite of heterosexuality; reductive notions of sexuality are retained and sexuality is re-stabilised as an identity solely defined by a personal 'choice' of a partner's gender (Valocchi 2005). Any sense of threat that non-heteronormative desires could present to prevailing economic, social and political structures is contained, neutralised and disciplined. Gay and lesbian identities can be assimilated into the wider social order, as long as 'we are gender conventional, as long as we link sex to love and marriage-like relationships, as long as we defend family values, personify economic individualism, and display national pride' (Seidman 2002, p. 189).

Culture is a complex battlefield of disputed meaning systems, normative structures and culturally constructed categories through which power acts to (re)constitute the self. As people internalise norms generated by discourses that circulate through social and cultural institutions, these meaning systems and discourses become critical sites for the contestation of social inequalities, including class, gender, sexuality, 'race', ethnicity, ability and age. Power and resistance operate as a dynamic dialectic. As resistance attempts to disrupt dominant discourses to expand cultural space, radical identities and subversive practices, power accommodates this resistance, reconfiguring and remobilising discourses to imprint traces of dominant hegemony within new configurations. Subtle (re)productions of power pervade gains made by social change, leaving resistance no option but to continue to struggle.

To summarise, in this section I have outlined key critical theorisations of the connections between contemporary culture, power and resistance. Culture represents a site in which groups and individuals struggle to control the character of the social, economic and political climate. Although mass-culture theorists confine culture to a notion of a channel for the dominant coercion of subordinate groups, Benjamin, Bobo and Fiske have concentrated on the fissures within popular culture to provide a foundation for understanding the political potential of culture. Informed by Foucault's sophisticated model of modern power one can begin to comprehend the complex interplay of power and resistance in the production, circulation and consumption of popular culture. This overview has emphasised how power can be exercised from numerous positions, opening up the possibility of considering cultural production as a tactic and technique of power and resistance. However, despite this excellent work on the complexities of popular culture, my own interest lies in exploring the processes and participation within cultural production and grassroots communities that take place across the boundaries of the 'popular' and the 'subcultural' in society. I understand these activities as *(sub)cultural* resistance to describe how culture 'is used, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and/or change the dominant political, economic and/or social structure' (Duncombe 2002, p. 5). I turn now to critically appraise studies of 'subculture', to further explicate how everyday life and culture represent crucial sites for the contestation of modern power relations.

### ***1.2 Re-reading Subculture: Moving resistance from style to participation***

In current literature the term 'subculture' is slippery and ambiguous. Often it refers to a small group of individuals who operate collectively within society: 'subcultures are smaller groups within larger cultural collectives, which form group identities and have distinguishable systems of knowledge and signification' (Driscoll 2002, p. 207). It can also be used to refer specifically

to practices of subcultural production of a distinct marginal community that produces, circulates and consumes cultural forms within its own boundaries (Fiske 1989, p. 171). Subcultural communities, dissatisfied with hegemonic representations in popular culture, can be thought to express their opposition by creating their own 'unpopular' culture, rearranging their immediate localities and everyday lives to increase their social power and agency. The majority of subcultural theory tends to conflate youth with subculture; subcultural formation is motivated by a desire to construct and define a community distinct from 'adult-defined' dominant culture. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that subcultures are simultaneously bound to the parent culture from which they seek differentiation as a 'diverting spectacle within the dominant mythology from which it in part emanates' (Hebdige 1979, p. 94).

However, this long-standing association of rebellion, youth and radicalism within subcultures is not fixed; subcultures can consist of any self-identified group with shared knowledge and signification (Driscoll 2002). Subcultures can include a wide variety of group formations, from teenyboppers and crafters, to public-school boys and goths. However, in 'classic' subcultural studies it is the political *resistance* of youth subcultures that is the main focus; resistance is located in the deliberate strategies of *style* from *working-class* positions. For example, in Phil Cohen's (1972) pioneering ethnographic study, the stylistic tactics used by working-class youth in new housing estates in East London were considered the key features of a subculture. Involvement in a subculture allowed its participants to explore 'magical resolutions' (Cohen 1972, p. 23) to the social and material situations they faced in their everyday lives. In this situation, stylistic tactics were used to resist the breakdown of traditional working-class communities exacerbated by government urban regeneration policies.

Alongside the work of Cohen, the highly influential study of British working-class youth subcultures began to flourish at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham. Influenced by Marxist concepts, the CCCS was interested in how the rise of 1960s and 1970s youth culture in the United Kingdom was linked to wider post-war social and cultural change, as 'spectacular youth subcultures raised questions about the necessarily contested and contradictory character of cultural change, and the diversity of forms in which such "resistances" might find expression' (Hall and Jefferson 2006, p. viii). In this tradition visible heroism, manifested in the look, sound and attitude of British youth movements like punk (Hebdige 1979), reggae (Hebdige 1974), skinheads, mods and rockers (Cohen 1973) was linked to political, economic and socio-cultural change.

Although heralded as breaking new ground, the CCCS approach has been criticised on a number of levels (see summaries by Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004; Weinzierl & Muggleton 2003; Blackman 2005; Thornton 1995; Hall & Jefferson 2006). The traditional sociological binary that pits agency against structural forces is taken for granted within subcultural theory: the

subcultural participant is constructed as partly autonomous from wider structural constraints and capable of enacting 'magical resolutions' to change how wider forces impact on their lives. However, taking into account the complex interplay between resistance and power within culture, it could also be possible that hegemonic power structures are also complicit in the proliferation of entrepreneurial youth cultures. Research in the US has indicated how the post-war social and cultural context led to the rise of a lucrative teenage commercial market (Cohen 2003). To take punk, briefly, as a point of departure, central figures such as Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren were poised to capitalise on this new market as cultural entrepreneurs from the initial stages - Westwood in producing punk fashions and McLaren managing the New York Dolls and the Sex Pistols. The first gig the Clash played was to journalists, and many key punk bands including The Clash, Sex Pistols and Siouxsie and the Banshees were signed to major music labels. Punk practices were a far cry from the anti-establishment stereotype punk was meant to embody. Furthermore, the working-class identity of punk was undermined with Dave Laing's finding that 43% of punk musicians came from middle-class families (1985). A key component of the visibility of post-war British subcultures like punk may be related to the construction of a distinctive British national identity. Recent articles on punk have discussed the recent recuperation of bands like the Sex Pistols into a hegemonic nationalist British history (Adams 2008).

The CCCS failed to understand how as an institution of power it was implicated in the powerful processes of categorisation, regulation and control of youth culture. As a privileged centre for knowledge production, the CCCS negotiated its theoretical contributions within wider structures of academe, as well as the overarching political, economic and social order. This could be reflected in its preoccupation with constructing youth culture within categories of identity, class and style. A coherent class identity, usually working-class, preceded subcultural involvement and became the main frame of reference for interpreting subcultural tactics. However, the working-class statuses of individuals involved in the subcultures studied by the CCCS were rarely substantiated (Muggleton 2000; O'Connor 2004). Contemporary sociological studies of subculture have diffused the significance of class to one of many 'status positions' amongst an array of factors, including age, gender and sexuality, which, along with social context, influenced involvement in subcultures (Blackman 1995). Although defenders of the CCCS approach emphasise that studies did attend to gender (McRobbie & Garber 1997 [1975]) and 'race' (see assessment of Stuart Hall in Procter 2004) alongside class, it has been argued that in 1960s and 1970s late-industrial British society class was a more pronounced structural feature than it is in contemporary post-industrial Britain (Hall & Jefferson 2006). However, the CCCS desire to understand subcultural practices as class-bound phenomena could be a product of the theoretical and political climate overriding the meanings assigned to practices by subcultural participants themselves. Furthermore, as studies of subcultures proliferated in different places

and times, subcultural tastes and stylistic preferences were seen to be more unpredictable, contradictory and fragmented, frequently interrupting and intersecting the assumed coherence of the categories of class, 'race', ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

### *1.2.1 Looking beyond Subculture: Post-subcultures, invisible girls and hidden participation*

In the 1990s a branch of theory dubbed post-subcultural studies attempted to create and circulate more fluid terms to succeed subculture, such as 'neo-tribe', 'lifestyle' and 'club culture', in an attempt to capture the complexities of these less structurally bound post-industrial formations (Maffesoli 1996; Bennett 1999; Thornton 1995; Weinzierl & Muggleton 2003; Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004). This new field attempted to build on and challenge CCCS subcultural theory, by analysing the plethora of contemporary youth cultures that have emerged in a post-industrial, neo-liberal, consumer-centred, globalised western society. These moves have troubled the resistant class identity embedded within subculture; for instance, Anita Harris argues that in consumer-driven contemporary culture the concept of resistance has been decoupled from subculture and that spaces for resistance have diminished (2008, p. 3). Post-subcultural theory has developed new ways to think about how people organise and construct their identities and cultures through consumption and leisure. Subcultural formations in a post-industrial context can be expressed through engagements with commercial enterprises as part of a global, technological, commercial 'youth market' (Nayak 2003). On first glance it might appear that the pendulum may have swung too far, as these post-subcultural theories can position subculture within a socio-political vacuum, rejecting connections between subculture and wider social change. Post-subcultural practices can be theorised as a field of 'free-floating' signifiers from which individuals pick and choose from a multitude of ephemeral commodity-centred trends. Various theorists have argued that post-subcultural pleasures and identities are expressed through practices of consumption (Redhead 1990; Muggleton 2000). Researchers have explored how young people appropriated and reconfigured commodities to cohere with their own understandings of authenticity (Miles 2000; Bennett 2000). The evolution of new drug and dance cultures in 1990s Britain allowed subcultures to be re-conceived as spaces for hedonistic escape and loss of self (Redhead 1993; Melechi 1993; Reitveld 1993, 1998; Malbon 1998).

Post-subcultural approaches complicate traditional readings of subculture as enclaves of class-bound resistance to explore the other roles that subcultural practices can play in everyday life. However, this can often be at the expense of a sophisticated understanding of how power shapes subcultural options. In terms of dance subcultures, the authoritative forces, which included new government legislation, tabloid media and police control, and which sought to discipline and repress dance subcultures, were denied a role in understanding subcultural activities (Bidder 2001). It is also possible that what has previously been recognised as political is changing in

accordance to a shifting late modern context. Contemporary subcultures may be shifting away from class bound identity politics, towards other kinds of political and cultural expressions: 'some key features of late modern life have brought about a shift from conventional subcultural resistant practice. These include deindustrialisation, globalisation, the growth of transnational youth culture industries, and the breakdown of old-style protest politics' (Harris 2008, p. 4-5). Whilst some post-subcultural theorists retain a sense of resistance and possibility for social change in late modern subcultural practices (Brabazon 2002), others have argued that subcultures have been co-opted, depoliticised and sold back to a 'youth market' by consumer industries, to promote neo-liberal, individualist, post-industrial forms of citizenship (Guidikova & Sirurala 2001; Miles 2000).

CCCS subcultural studies tended to focus on the visible and tangible aspects of subcultures, foregrounding semiotic analyses of the fashions, lyrics, sounds and public representations of youth subcultures. This had the effect of perpetuating the invisibility of the subcultural activities of girls and young women that can occur within different structural boundaries. The exclusive focus on public symbolic acts of subcultures failed to interrogate the difficulties women faced in achieving similar escapes. Angela McRobbie (1990) noted that girls' subcultural activities, especially those from working-class backgrounds, were limited by responsibilities in the home and the pressures to achieve a respectable hetero-feminine identity that dominated girls' leisure time. The symbolic verve of subcultures frequently depended on a rejection of the feminine embedded in patriarchal discourse. Subcultural life was defined through a rejection of the stifling domesticity of the home, in favour of romanticised Kerouac-inspired sprees in the urban landscape.

When girls and young women were included in subcultural accounts they were negatively represented. Girls were characterised as 'dumb, passive teenage girls, crudely painted' in Teddy Boy culture (Fyvel cited in McRobbie & Garber 1997 [1975], p. 112). Girls were associated with conformity and confined to a role dependent on male protagonists in Donna Gaines' ethnography of heavy metal youth subculture. Girls were thought to 'derive their status by involvement in school (as cheerleaders, in clubs, in the classroom). And just as important, by the boys they hung around with. They were defined by who they were, by what they wore, by where they were seen, and with whom' (Gaines 1991, p. 93). Subcultural studies were in fact predominantly the study of *male* subcultures; as McRobbie and Garber note, 'girls' subcultures may have become invisible because the very term "subculture" has acquired such strong masculine overtones' (1997 [1975], p. 114). Girls and young women only became relevant to the subcultural conversation through recourse to heterosexuality, thereby reproducing heterosexism within British subcultural studies. Within this formulation male subcultural participants face the threat of eventually becoming contained within domesticity, usually in the form of marriage and children. Subcultural activities thereby became associated with masculine

adolescence, represented as a time in which 'boys could be boys', free from the constraints and responsibilities of a domestic sphere. Just like adolescence, the subcultural period was thought to be a limited phase or stage, as something that boys would eventually grow out of as they advance through hetero-temporal logics of employment, marriage and the family.

The privileging of style also neglects the less spectacular, or 'behind the scenes', processes of participation that constitute critical aspects of resistance in subcultures (Moore 2007). Studies that address only the visible outcomes of subcultural life in theoretical relation to structural change run the risk of undervaluing the continuous creative work and cultural participation that is involved in the construction of a subcultural sphere. Not surprisingly supportive roles in subcultures are predominantly occupied by young women. Women are found documenting the subculture as photographers and fanzine writers, working within independent record labels, as well as organising and attending shows (Andersen & Jenkins 2001). Young women are called upon to provide emotional, sexual and financial support for subcultural players (Des Barres 2003; Reynolds & Press 1995). This tendency to undervalue mundane everyday participation may also be linked to an inadequate use of ethnography to address the complexities and experiences of subcultural life. Despite gaining a reputation for ethnographic approaches, only a minority of CCCS studies were adequately rooted in ethnographic methods. Unfortunately this often led to a troubling dilemma, as the theoretical account of subcultural significance often surpassed the lived experiences of the subcultural participant (Clarke 1981; Hall & Jefferson 2006). CCCS accounts of subculture tended to ignore the contradictions and internal inconsistencies within subcultures, leading to the distortion and romanticisation of subcultures (Clarke 1981). This may have led to various researchers interested in exploring subcultural experiences to turn to Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of culture and cultural production.

### *1.2.2 Bourdieu and DIY cultural production*

Pierre Bourdieu was an eminent cultural sociologist who, in his key work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), resisted the Marxist impulse to automatically link a person's cultural tastes to their class position. Instead Bourdieu argued for the recognition of a complex process in which the acquisition of cultural capital helped explain the correlation between taste and social position. Bourdieu conceptualised the individual as occupying a particular space within a multidimensional society; this social space is defined by the amount of cultural capital an individual possesses and displays, in order to distinguish a sense of status over others. Bourdieu allows us to understand a person's everyday aesthetic, stylistic and consumptive practices as a dynamic process of social differentiation. This avoids reducing class to a static identity and instead opens up class as a process of negotiation within a broad field of possible social and cultural identifications. He argued that processes of cultural capital start early in life, to be accumulated through a person's upbringing and education. This process of

acquiring cultural capital leads to the development of social structures of distinction, in which cultural forms are afforded varying amounts of prestige, validation and taste to become markers of class. In *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) Bourdieu developed his ideas of cultural struggle within the complexities of cultural production. For Bourdieu, modern society is divided up into different fields, each a network of social relationships organised around a particular practice. Each field pivots around an idiosyncratic form of capital, with individuals occupying a hierarchical structure invested in a struggle to claim, define and defend this capital. Fields are also defined by their degree of autonomy from the overarching social structure, and a field's main struggle is to preserve its independence and avoid assimilation into the wider social structure. Bourdieu's theory of cultural production has been used to understand how subcultural producers and communities shun the centrality of economic capital in dominant cultural fields and construct alternative symbolic capital, or what Sarah Thornton (1995) termed 'subcultural capital'.

Bourdieu's work has been taken up and used to explore the subtleties and contradictions of resistance in subcultural life. For instance, in his ethnography of 1990s DIY punk culture in San Diego, Ryan Moore (2007) drew on Bourdieu's ideas to argue for the recognition of the resistant intentions of cultural producers in their anti-corporate media production practices focussing on the production of independent music, fanzines and record labels. DIY, or do-it-yourself, culture refers to a social and cultural movement dedicated to challenging the symbolic codes of mainstream culture through amateur media production practices, not-for-profit economics and informal collective organisation. As the cultural jammer Carly Stasko elaborates; 'at the roots of DIY culture is the simple act of doing things independently in creative ways so as to compensate for a lack of finances, infrastructure, professional training, and often permission. DIY culture nurtures communities where people share skills, ideas, and creative expression, thereby fuelling connectivity' (2008, p. 200). Broadly, DIY culture can encompass a diverse array of 'self-organised networks, with overlapping memberships and values', including grassroots cultural festivals, organic-food box schemes, fanzines, music communities, radical social centres and local exchange trading systems (Purdue et al 1997, p. 647). However, more specifically, a DIY ethos is typified by an urge to create and circulate culture on one's own terms, unregulated by the grasp of globalised corporate 'media power' (Couldry 2001; Spencer 2005). Participants are encouraged to utilise available resources and interrupt the boundaries between producer and consumer through the exchange of information (in music, writing, film and art) with others to build up a 'participatory culture' (Duncombe 1997). DIY participatory cultures can produce the necessary space, tactics and support networks for the realisation of counter-hegemonic identities and practices. The continuous activities of submerged DIY networks shift dominant understandings of social movements away from the

public, national and state-centred, to position (sub)cultural DIY communities instead as critical sites for everyday acts of resistance (Melucci et al 1989).

Typically, studies of DIY cultures focus on the discursive constructions of value and authenticity that emerge within the process of defending subcultural capital and field boundaries from dominant incorporation. For instance, Robert Strachan's (2007) study of micro-independent record labels in the UK looked at how DIY cultural producers justified and legitimated their aesthetic and economic choices. Strachan explored how micro-independent record-label owners constructed the music industry as an exploitative enterprise primarily motivated by profit, whose structures constrained creativity and disempowered musicians<sup>1</sup>. This provided a powerful construction against which these small-scale producers could redefine the purposes of their practices. Micro-independent cultural producers sought rewards beyond financial success, and aimed to develop a world which revolved around alternative rewards. Independent record label owners were seen to foreground aesthetic value and creativity within music, and rejected frameworks that judged music primarily on its commercially viable status. Energy was directed into the small-scale production and promotion of music and community outside of the music industry; 'dialectic elements of DIY discourse champion the possibility that people other than media professionals can engage with, and successfully promote, symbolic goods which fall outside of the tastes and economic imperatives of the established or mainstream media industries' (Strachan 2007, p. 254). Crucially this cultural production became politicised, as small-scale cultural production is driven by the desire to add, albeit in small ways, marginalised voices to the wider cultural conversation.

The subcultural producers in Moore's (2007) study of San Diego punk cultural production, articulated their dissent at the wider social order's incorporation of music countercultures, through reordering their immediate social spaces, rules of music making and creating alternative infrastructures for the circulation and enjoyment of 'unpopular' culture. Subcultural producers are savvy and critical of attempts to incorporate DIY discourse into the music industry where the 'appearance of spontaneity and separation from large media conglomerates' (Strachan 2007, p. 259) is utilised as a central marketing concept<sup>2</sup> and implicated in the calculated rise of acts like the Arctic Monkeys and Clap Your Hands Say Yeah. Likewise, in her ethnography of 1990s British club cultures, Sarah Thornton (1995) identified specific processes of subcultural

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that studies conducted within the music industry have complicated the conflict between creativity and commerce; instead, in practice, the two are often conflated into 'a struggle over what is creative, and what it is to be commercial' within popular music (Negus 1995, p. 316; see also Weinstein 1999). The music industry is highly dependent on audience responses in the production of successful bands and artists; as audience responses are difficult to predict, a majority of signed bands and artists fail to command a mass audience and are designated as failures (Frith 1983; Negus 1992). Nonetheless the music industry is a hard place for a band invested in DIY discourse to tolerate, see Steve Albini (1993)

<sup>2</sup> For further discussion of the use of DIY underground subcultural actors and ideas in US marketing campaigns for Tylenol, Nike and Star Wars see Anne Elizabeth Moore (2005)

capital which allowed subcultural participants to reorder their immediate worlds to distinguish themselves from mainstream interpretations of dance culture epitomised by the 'television-advertised compilation album of already charted dance hits' (1995, p. 118). Contemporary subcultural processes represent key sites for exploring the enduring dialectic between power and resistance. Subcultural fields can engage in a radical questioning of the subtle (re)productions of power in popular culture and attempt to disrupt dominant discourses in order to open up cultural space for radical identities and subversive practices. A growing number of cultural theorists have argued that the tactics and targets of protest are changing in contemporary society. DIY subcultures can be considered critical sites of possibility within this new political framework, as Jeffrey Paris and Michael Ault argue in their introduction of a special issue of *Peace Review* on subcultures and political resistance:

Subcultures [are] not just symbolic actors engaged in signifying behaviours to remove themselves temporarily from dominant culture, but [are] agents of political change - political forces to be reckoned with, long after the ecstatic experiences of a particular scene have passed. Subcultures are a salient source of political socialization; for many young people, subcultures are the means by which they initially come to voice. With the ever-expanding neoliberal institutions and free-market processes dominant in today's world, subcultures will continue to provide a vital political critique and alternative political vision not often heard in mainstream society (2004, p. 405)

To summarise, in this section I have argued for an expansion of our current understandings of resistant subcultural practices, to move beyond a focus on tangible elements of style and identity, towards a focus on the internal logics, continuities and hidden participations within lived experiences of DIY cultural production. Restricting attention to the visible and public aspects of the subculture has obscured and distorted the subcultural practices of girls and young women and served to undervalue the hidden processes of production in subcultural resistance. Meticulous contemporary studies have gained valuable insights into subcultural life through the application of Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital and field of cultural production. Ethnographic studies of subculture have elucidated subtleties, contradictions and struggles that take place within subcultural boundaries as well as in the overarching social order (Moore 2007; Strachan 2007; Thornton 1995). However, theories of struggle between the subculture and wider social order have tended to pivot around issues of class and capital in a modern capitalist society. Subcultural conflict has stagnated; an underground subculture's main role has been characterised in the struggle of maintaining autonomy from the threat of incorporation within a corporate mainstream cultural industry. But what happens to the experiences of girls, young women and queers in underground communities if subcultural capital is defined within hetero-masculine boundaries? What happens to (sub)cultural resistance once the hetero-gendered elements of cultural struggle are considered?

Many researchers have commented on how mass, commercial and popular cultures have been constructed as feminine spheres from which subcultural participants aim to distinguish their practices (Davies 2004; Railton 2001; Huyssen 1986; Thornton 1990, 1995). For instance, feminised mainstream chart-pop spaces were derided as places where ‘Sharon and Tracy dance around their handbags’ (Thornton 1995, p. 99). Therefore, in subcultural spheres girls and young women have to negotiate with common understandings of women as uncool, unhip and indiscriminate. It is no surprise that in these subcultural situations, girls and young women frequently fall short of achieving the authenticity and legitimacy dictated as necessary for full participation within subcultural spheres. Subcultural involvement may reproduce girls’ and young women’s cultural subordination by opening up only a limited range of roles for girls (McRobbie & Garber 1997 [1975]). A great deal of social change has occurred since the CCCS group initially studied subcultures. This begs a series of questions: how have escalating transformations in gender relations and LGBT rights been negotiated within popular and subcultural spheres? How have subcultural negotiations of gender and sexuality been accommodated by the wider social order? If social and cultural change is dialogical, as a process of ‘people making sense of what was making sense of them’ (Hall & Jefferson 2006, p. xxiii), how have subcultures opened up and/or closed down the possibilities of resisting, reworking and (re)producing hegemonic genders and sexualities?

### *1.3 Queering Feminism: Complicating sex, gender and sexuality*

Before I commence a review of the current literature on girls’ and young women’s (sub)cultural participation, I want briefly to outline the feminist and queer theoretical framework of gender and sexuality with which I am working. In general, feminist approaches critique the imbalances of power between men and women, known as patriarchy, that are perpetuated throughout a majority of societies. Patriarchal discourses construct and promote an understanding of gender based around a binary set of oppositions mapped onto masculinity and femininity. Qualities like emotionality, passivity and the body are attributed to femininity, whereas masculinity would be associated with rationality, activity and the mind. Crucially, patriarchal discourses privilege meanings associated with masculinity over femininity, to create a social and cultural climate in which masculine qualities are considered more important, valid and desirable than their supposedly ‘inferior’ feminine counterparts. Masculine attributes become universal, elevated to become the most desired qualities of personhood. Furthermore, through discursive tactics and social pressures these patriarchal discourses are embodied, normalised and naturalised; gendered meanings are internalised within genitally defined male and female bodies to produce masculine men and feminine women. This hetero-gendered social order attains a dominant status; its participants reinforce the status quo as the natural and normal arrangement.

The social construction of gender is connected to the production of sexuality, as masculine men and feminine women are subjected to the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990). 'Proper' sexual desires for the opposite sex are produced as legitimate and normal. Heterosexuality is reinforced and controlled through heteronormativity - the mobilisation of norms that construct heterosexuality as normal and correct, alongside the simultaneous expulsion of homosexuality as its opposite, reproducing heterosexuality as the taken-for-granted and natural organisation of desire described as 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Warner 1993; Rich 1980a). In this production of the 'natural order' gender and sexuality become essentialist traits, meaning that gender and (hetero)sexuality become fixed within the appropriate body. Any digression from the categories of 'men', 'women' and 'heterosexuality', or any deviation over different historical periods, is suppressed. Through the complex tactics of modern power, sexuality and gender become fixed, stable and self-regulated within the bodies and identities of individuals.

Until the 1990s a dominant theme within feminist theory perpetuated the distinction between fixed biological categories of sex (male and female) and the culturally constructed, and thus changeable, categories of gender (masculine and feminine). As Simone de Beauvoir famously summarised in *The Second Sex*, 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (1988 [1949], p. 295). The logic followed that if gender is made, gender could also be unmade, so feminists fought to challenge the inevitability of biologically deterministic gender roles at a societal level. However, following the work of Judith Butler in her landmark text *Gender Trouble* (1990), the traditional idea of biological sex being an indisputable given was challenged. Butler's work, amongst others, has been heralded as opening the floodgates for what has become known as queer theory, a strand of critical thought that deconstructs the categories and binaries of gender and sexuality. Butler argued that 'natural' sex, like gender, is discursively produced within scientific and legal discourses to appease particular political and social interests. The notion that sex is prediscursive as 'a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts' (1990, p. 11, author's italics) was deeply disputed. In contrast, the routine alignment of sex, gender and sexuality, that guarantees feminine gender identity and heterosexual desire are contained within a female sexed body, was argued to be culturally constructed through a performative process; 'gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler 1990, p. 43-44). Inspired by Foucault's work on the historical contingency of sexuality, Butler linked these performative formations of gender and sexuality to socially and historically dominant discourses and institutions; 'it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained' (1990, p. 3).

The development of queer theory was animated through the emergence of key works that renounced the stability of sexual and gender categories and binaries. Queer studies linked the

social construction of homosexual and transgender categories to the interests of particular historical and medical regimes (Seidman 2002; Lacquer 1990; Feinberg 1996). Dominant identity categories were questioned and exposed as inadequate in their ability to comprehend the complexities of gender and sexual subjectivities. The limits of a sexual category, as exclusively defined by the gender of partner, were critiqued as the complexities and diversities of individual desires, embodied experiences and sexual practices were explored. Initial attention was focused on 'deviant' cases where anatomies, gender identities and sexual practices defied the normative alignment of sex, gender and sexuality. Unexpected formations of gender and sexuality were studied, giving rise to theorisations of female masculinities, lesbian masculinities, queer fem(me)inities and gay femininities (Halberstam 1998; Kennedy 2002; Maltry & Tucker 2002; Brushwood & Camilleri 2002; Silverman 1992). A variety of queer urban subcultural groups and sites – including drag kings, drag queens, lesbian and gay bars and alternative music communities – were seen to challenge conventional sociological understandings of gender and sexuality in subcultural life (Halberstam 2003, 2005a; Rupp & Taylor 2003; Feinberg 2006; Schippers 2002). Increasingly work turned to previously unmarked and normalised categories of heterosexuality and masculinity that have been deconstructed, denaturalised and complicated through a queer and feminist lens (Wilkinson & Kitzinger 1993; Jackson 1999; Connell 1995). The queer turn also considers the complexities of intersectionality, remaining sensitive to critical nuances within identifications that span multiple axes of difference (Muñoz 1999; Ferguson 2004). Within queer cultural theory, categories and interrelationships of sex, gender and sexuality are reconsidered as fluid and open to transformation

Controversy has raged between queer theory and feminism as the two schools have tended to be conceived as polarised and incompatible paradigms (Richardson et al 2006; Weed & Schor 1997; Jeffreys 2003). One key tension centres on the separation of gender and sexuality within queer theory, which diverges from a feminist approach that analyses the two together, and tends to prioritise gender as the key structural force that shapes sexuality. The postmodern approach of queer theory that promotes the discursive construction and linguistic contingency of identities often grates with the material, embodied and structural concerns of feminism. Suspicions surround queer theory's embrace of fluidity and ambiguity for those who want to challenge global material inequalities. For some feminists, queer theory ridicules the need for an organised identity politics with which to resist global oppressions to such an extent that queer theory has been criticised as an anti-feminist practice, for its ability to re-inscribe sexist and racist exclusions and ironically reinforce a universal white male homosexual narrative subject (Halberstam 2005b). Queer theory and feminism have been cast with different political strategies and goals for social transformation. For instance, queer theory focuses on deconstructive and fluid identity work expressed within local cultural acts of performative transgressions; whereas, feminism highlights the lived impact of structural limitations of

patriarchy and capitalism on women and emphasises a global struggle for equality that seeks participation and transformation in political and economic arenas. However, these rhetorical arguments tend to obscure the diversity within queer, feminist and queer feminist work. For instance, such claims ignore queer theory's theoretical inheritance in relation to feminist work on the social construction of gender and sexual identities. Furthermore, the supposed apolitical nature of queer theory is disrupted through the presence of queer scholars grounded in HIV/AIDS activism (see Wolfe & Sommella 1997; Cvetkovich 2003).

Other critics have cast the tension between a queer-identified 'third-wave' feminist generation and lesbian feminist 'second-wave' generation within a heteronormative oedipal logic, often in the form of a mother-daughter conflict (Henry 2004). Troubling ideas of legacy plague feminism as the older generation are assumed to possess the disciplinary power to decide which 'dutiful daughters' are allowed to continue as the new voices of feminism (Purvis 2004; McLaughlin et al 2006). Unfortunately this can be to the particular detriment of young queers of colour who are more likely to be excluded from mainstream feminism. A common point of contention in contemporary feminist activist and academic circles concerns the place of transgenderism within feminism. 'Women-only' spaces frequently become symbolic sites for the contestation of the limitations and possibilities of feminist investments for transgender-queer subjects (Hines 2005). In activist circles across Europe it has become increasingly commonplace to collapse queer and feminist ideas to produce documents that herald a new queer feminism invested in queering the meanings of 'men', 'women', 'girl', 'boy', 'femininity', 'masculinity' and 'feminism' (see Withers 2008; Gržinic & Reitsamer 2008). Some activists and scholars ground queer feminism in practices of cross-gender transgenderism (Withers 2008; Halberstam 2006); however, I wish to expand queer feminism to encompass counter-hegemonic practices of same-gender and both-gender subversions, a process of queer fem(me)inism I will elaborate on later. Queer feminism has also previously been described as a distinct form of defiant cultural politics embedded in the legacy of British feminist activism; in her analysis of the women's protest peace camp at Greenham Common, Sasha Roseneil introduces her take on queer feminism:

Much less acknowledged and documented than feminism's straighter tendencies, these are feminism's anarchic, unruly elements, which seek not to enter the corridors of power but to relocate power. They ridicule and laugh at patriarchal, military and state powers and those who wield them in order to undermine and disarm them. Feminism's queer tendencies are loud and rude. They embrace emotion, passion and erotics as the wellspring of their politics and revel in spontaneity and disorderliness. In contrast to straighter feminism, they are less concerned with achieving rights for women but more concerned with the *cultural politics of opening up and reconfiguring what it means to be a woman, in expanding the possibilities of different ways of being in the world beyond modes which are currently available*. They queer gender, un-structuring, de-patterning and disorganising it." (2000 p. 4, my emphasis)

This blurring of the boundaries between traditional political engagements and cultural resistance reconfigures feminism as a dynamic, diverse, contradictory and intergenerational project; 'queer might also signify as a form of critique that identifies and exposes contradictions within universalizing discourses of identity and politics' (Halberstam 2006, p. 104-5). For the production of nuanced understandings of queer feminism, research needs to engage with the intersections and mutually productive aspects of both queer theory and feminism, to explore the grassroots and popular practices of queer feminisms. This would entail a fusion of the local and the global, the material and the discursive, the cultural and the political, the 'underground' and the 'mainstream', and a critical collusion between different 'waves' of feminism, to produce new spaces for social and political transformation. In a novel analysis of the popular cultural narratives in *Finding Nemo* and *Fifty First Dates*, Judith Halberstam (2006) opens up the importance of constructing a queer feminist imaginary for future possibilities of social change and political transformations. Halberstam flags up the need to recognise 'other possible non-oedipal logics including a focus on the ephemeral, the momentary, the surprise, simultaneity, contradiction, intergenerational exchange. This might mean rejecting the model of feminism which posits generational relations in terms of mother-daughter bonds and conflicts; it might mean recognising alternative futures in alternative readings of the past' (2006, p. 104). Therefore, in brief, the definition of queer feminism used within this thesis involves (i) a que(e)rying of feminism in terms of established feminist histories, institutions, agendas, categories and subjects; (ii) an agenda that attempts to recognise intersections, multiplicities, and gender-queer positions, and highlights the limits of universal identity categories and associated political movements; (iii) indulges in tactics for social change outside official channels, that is in the creation of cultural political communities. Grassroots queer feminisms are involved in the production of critical spaces, communities and knowledges for future transformative shifts in genders, sexualities and feminisms.

To summarise, this section has outlined current feminist and queer theoretical understandings and debates that focus on the constitution of gender and sexuality within contemporary society. Genders and sexualities represent contested interlinked territories within which 'men', 'women' and gender-queer individuals struggle against patriarchal discourses and structures in their everyday practices. I now wish to focus on the negotiation of genders and sexualities within the study of girlhood, to trace the contributions of the growing area of girl studies in the consideration of girls' and young women's cultural practices.

#### ***1.4 Becoming a 'Real Girl'***

Escaping from the family and its pressures to act like a real girl remains the first political experience. For us the objective is to make this flight possible for all girls, and on a long-term basis (McRobbie 1990, p. 80)

The initial recognition that girls' and young women's experiences were obscured by subcultural theory spurred on the emergence of studies that focussed on the experiences, cultural practices and historical constructions of 'girlhood' and 'feminine adolescence', collectively known as 'girl studies'. The term 'girl' became visible in 1880 and the wider concepts of girlhood or feminine adolescence, as a separate transient stage between childhood and womanhood, have been traced to economic, social, scientific and cultural transformations in the late nineteenth century (Mitchell 1995; Driscoll 2002; Kearney 2006). In advanced capitalism the girl has gained special symbolic status, combining neo-liberal and feminist discourses to represent a new idealised subjectivity amidst dramatic social, cultural and political changes (Harris 2004; Gonick 2006). Within feminist discourse girls and young women represent the future and failure of feminism; girls are significantly advantaged by feminist gains but are also criticised for depoliticising their experiences. Established feminists are haunted by the lack of visible collective feminist activism within girls and young women's lives (Lister 2005; Epstein 2001; Staggenborg & Taylor 2005).

I often use the term 'girl' in reference to the queer feminist participants and riot grrrl participants who are the active subjects of the current study. The exact meaning of the terms girl, queer and feminist are notoriously ambiguous, polysemous and contradictory. In response to the term 'girl' some girl studies scholars have avoided fixing the identity of girl to any distinct age, stage of puberty, identity or set of behaviours; but have instead considered the function of social, historical and medical discourses that shape how and why girls become visible within popular culture and wider society (Driscoll 2002; Kearney 1998b). However, in conducting research on girl media producers, Mary Celeste Kearney has tentatively defined the 'female youth' she studied, to be between the ages of twelve and twenty-one, who existed in a financially and/or domestically 'semi-dependent' status in relation to their parents (2006, p. 5). Subsequently, as will be explored later in relation to Judith Halberstam's theoretical contributions to queer subcultural life, 'girl' and 'girlhood' can be thought of as an extended liminal adolescent location; a set of possibilities 'in-between' childhood and womanhood from which girls can invest in girl subjectivities, identities and practices that disrupt the heterocentric ordering of time and space. A girl, invested in DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural life, may resist the trappings of (albeit white middle-class) hetero-femininity and adulthood, and question the centrality of marriage, monogamy, motherhood, career and popular media entertainment in shaping her life trajectory.

In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Judith Butler (1993) introduced the idea of 'girling' to refer to a social process that regulates the formation of idealised girls, but crucially Butler also used 'girling' to refer to individual performances of girlhood wielded to resist as well as naturalise the dominant feminine subject.

The girl is 'girded', brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender. But that 'girling' of the girl does not end there; on the contrary, that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reinforce or contest this naturalised effect. The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm (Butler 1993, p. 7-8)

Therefore, although entrenched in power relations, the performance of 'girling' can be a transformative gender practice. Girls can be aware of and ambivalent towards social demands on their feminine performances and express resistance or co-opt girl endeavours for their own ends. For instance, notions of the girl and girlhood were radically reclaimed in the 1990s riot grrrl movement, to fuse the rebellion of a masculine punk adolescence, and the celebration of the innocence and communality of girlhood, with the political energy of feminism. Riot grrrl provided a space to resist the demands of hetero-femininity, to privilege the connection, friendship and encouragement between girls, thereby demoting the importance of male approval. Many theorists consider the transformative spellings of grrrl, grrl and gURL to be emblematic manifestations of this resistant girl in the production of feminist girl gangs, cyberspaces and popular cultures (Kearney 2006; Leonard 2007; Driscoll 1999, 2002; Gottlieb & Wald 1994). Nonetheless it is important to highlight that an identity as a 'girl' represents a claim possible within particular white and middle-class structural positions that characterises the urban subjectivity of contemporary society (Kearney 1998b, p. 5; Wald 1998; Harris 2004).

#### *1.4.1 The Hetero-feminine Project*

Feminist girl studies have explored the experiences of growing up as a girl within wider social, economic and political transformations intersecting across boundaries of race, ethnicity, nation and class. However, in general, girl studies has been concerned with interrogating girls' discursive negotiation of western, middle-class, white, heterosexual feminine ideals (Walkerdine et al 2001; Griffiths 1995). This perspective focuses critically on how girls are encouraged by social institutions and individuals to privilege and embody practices of hegemonic femininity and heterosexuality. The process of embodying acceptable femininity is thought to involve a constriction of space, body and voice from the onset of puberty (Young 1990; Pipher 1994; Brown & Gilligan 1993; Brown 1998). Girls are encouraged to develop an appropriate feminine gender through the restriction of behaviours and activities conventionally coded as masculine in favour of traditionally feminine aptitudes. Constructing, and being constructed through, discourses of heterosexual femininity allows a girl to negotiate her access to social power, privilege, and advantage. For instance, R. W. Connell (1987) describes a construction of emphasised femininity, which is centred on the satisfaction of male needs and desires, as the most powerful form of femininity in western societies.

Feminist scholars have critiqued the paradoxical cultural and social demands made on girls' embodiments of heterosexual femininity within popular culture. Studies have interrogated how

girls invest in popular cultural representations that position girls as hypersexual bodies for male desire, but simultaneously engage in cultural narratives of feminine morality, innocence and purity (Walkerdine 1997; Frost 2001). In constructing a respectable hetero-feminine body, girls derive pleasure in appearing sexually competent and attractive towards men, but, in doing so, often fail to articulate their own sense of desire. This 'missing discourse of desire' diminishes girls' claims to sexual agency and situates girls' sexuality as a problem that requires adult protection and surveillance (see Walkerdine 1997; Fine 1988). Crucially, girls are differently positioned and fragmented across axes of race, class and sexuality. Working-class and non-white girls face additional obstacles to embodying hetero-femininities. Achieving a convincing performance of respectable femininity is a fragile, some say impossible, process for working-class, poor and non-white girls (Hudson 1984; Skeggs 1997).

In focussing on popular culture, feminist cultural theorists have sought to revalue previously ignored feminine media – like soap operas, women's magazines and romance literature – to produce sophisticated understandings of girls' active participation with popular culture (Mazzarella & Pecora 1999). Girls are considered to enact hetero-feminine identities through complex negotiations with popular media. Angela McRobbie has elucidated how discourses of femininity within magazines hold the potential to regulate and prescribe girls' subjectivities, experiences and interests. For instance, McRobbie (1981) critiqued the discourses of romance and neurotic femininity that pervaded mid-1970s teen magazine *Jackie*. These discourses promoted the construction of a submissive heterosexual femininity eager to secure and defend male attention from the threat of other women. In contrast, contemporary teen magazines like *Just Seventeen* and *More* have experienced a displacement of the romance narrative, to privilege overt sexual material, opening up possibilities of new active (hetero)sexualities for girls; however, the competition for male approval and desire is maintained through the positioning of beauty, romance and fashion as the primary popular cultural interests for girls and young women (McRobbie 1991, 1999).

These theoretical interventions led to the construction of 'girl culture' as a field in which girls share common spaces, activities, desires, tastes, habits and identities. Homogenising girls' and young women's cultural activities, however, tended to restrict girl culture to the *consumption* of *popular media* within the *domestic* sphere. Social researchers have continued to focus on this 'bedroom culture' to elucidate the discerning practices of pre-teen and adolescent consumption (Baker 2004; Lincoln 2004; Steele & Brown 1995). Nonetheless, the dichotomy of young female consumers and adult producers embedded within studies of girl culture erroneously positions girls as culturally un-productive (Kearney 2006). Girls are arranged as key consumers of a post-feminist market of commodified pleasures in which they can lay claim to power and space within the narrow, yet slowly shifting, 'choices' that hetero-femininities offer (see Levy 2005; McRobbie 2004).

### *1.4.2 Neo-liberalism, girl power and post-feminist consumer culture*

Contemporary work in girl studies has been concerned with the experiences and constitution of the feminine subject within a neo-liberal context (Walkerdine 2003; Harris 2004; Ringrose 2007; Ringrose & Walkerdine 2008; McRobbie 2009). In general, neo-liberalism refers to an attitude that emphasises individual freedom and rights over state interventions and dependence. In brief, the new economy of a post-industrial society requires a new flexible worker who is able to cope with uncertainties in employment opportunities, financial instability and a fragmented community and family life. Successful individuals have to become 'productive economic entrepreneurs of their own lives' (Davies & Bansel 2007, p. 248), thereby able to govern the self to become productive and healthy members of society (Richardson 2000; Duggan 2002). In relation to girls and young women; neo-liberal mythologies of success are argued to centre on the reinvention of the self through education and work-based identities (Walkerdine & Ringrose 2006). Once again the 'modern girl' has been heralded as an agent of social change in the global economy (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001; Driscoll 2002; McRobbie 2009; Harris 2004; Barlow et al 2005). This 'modern girl' has been granted a privileged position: 'second-wave' feminist transformations established within western society have enabled women – albeit predominantly young, white and middle-class women – to access the public spheres of education and employment. Female biographies have experienced an 'individualization boost': a young woman can now lead 'a life of one's own' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001, p. 54). Additionally, the discourse of 'girl power' offers an apolitical fantasy in which a new generation of 'can-do' girls are now free to become high achievers (Munford 2004). These mythologies work within a post-feminist discourse in which the power structures of 'race', class and gender are no longer viable explanations for the presence of social inequalities in contemporary life; instead the onus lies within the individual, as Jessica Ringrose and Valerie Walkerdine illustrate:

In this economic, political and social context, it is the flexible and autonomous subject who is demanded to be able to cope with constant change in work, income, and lifestyle, and with constant insecurity. It is the flexible and autonomous subject who negotiates, chooses, and adapts in order to succeed in the array of education and retraining forms that form the new "lifelong learning" and "multiple career trajectories" that have replaced the linear hierarchies of the education system of the past and the jobs for life of the old economy. It is argued that these times demand a subject who is capable of constant self-invention (2008, p. 229)

The government's role is 'to provide advice and assistance to enable self-governing subjects to become normal/responsible citizens, who voluntarily comply with the interests and needs of the state' (Richardson 2005, p. 516). Therefore, the new neo-liberal global economy is no longer willing to provide long-term forms of support or external regulation of its citizens but has

shifted towards technologies of self-regulation. Failure is no longer the fault of state, inequality or structure but has become the fault of the individual.

Various researchers have argued that the feminine is entangled in these new practices of neo-liberal subjectivity in ways that position girls and young women as critical sites of crisis, anxiety and success (Harris 2004; Ringrose & Walkerdine 2008; Gonick 2006). A neo-liberal context has mobilised new demands to 'do' femininity in a way that balances traditionally feminine qualities with traditionally masculine subject positions: 'women are to unproblematically inhabit both a masculine, rational, productive worker self, and a (hetero)sexualised feminine, (appropriately) reproductive identity that both consumes itself into being and is the object of consumption' (Ringrose & Walkerdine 2008, p. 231). These practices are not externally imposed but encompass 'post-feminist gender-aware bio-political practices of new governmentality' (McRobbie 2009, p. 60). For Ros Gill (2007) successful post-feminist positions are gained by women who manage to combine success in the workplace with consumptive practices to construct a body amenable to male heterosexual desire: a powerful hetero-femininity. Furthermore McRobbie (2009) pinpoints the role of self-improvement consumer culture, epitomised by television programmes *What Not To Wear*, *10 Years Younger* and *Would Like To Meet*, in the subtle enforcement of a new gender regime; consumer culture supervises a 'freely-chosen' (re)production of respectable hetero-feminine identified bodies. Therefore, the growing threat of young women's autonomy to white, western masculine privilege and heterosexual order is contained and defused within the production of mitigated hetero-feminine subject positions. These shifts have been accompanied with an increase in surveillance, discipline and denigration of young women who fail to fully embody these new archetypes of femininity (Gill 2007).

In theorising British post-feminist popular culture, feminist cultural theorists have stressed the 'disarticulation of feminism', in which promises and gains in power for young women are accompanied by a compulsory abandonment of political subjectivity, that is a rejection of feminism. In *The Aftermath of Feminism* McRobbie articulates the situation faced by young women in contemporary Britain:

A kind of hideous spectre of what feminism once was is conjured up, a monstrous ugliness which would send shudders of horror down the spines of young women today, as a kind of deterrent [... T]he abandonment of feminism, for the sake of what Judith Butler would call intelligibility as a woman, is amply rewarded with the promise of freedom and independence [...] There is a kind of exchange, and also a process of displacement and substitution going on here. The young woman is offered a notional form of equality, concretised in education and employment, and through participation in consumer culture and civil society, in place of what a reinvented feminist politics might have to offer (2009, p. 1-2)

The risks of associating with feminist debates, campaigns and communities become too threatening for young women's self-construction of a privileged hetero-feminine self, identity and body. An effect of this can be seen in research with young white middle-class women who reject a feminist identity despite an overwhelming acceptance of feminist-won ideals, equality and entitlements (Aronson 2003; Budgeon 2001). Within the logic of post-feminism, visible excesses of lesbianism and feminism mark out hetero-feminine bodily failure. Various queer girl subjects are incomprehensible within this gender regime: 'rigorous requirements of the commercial domain addressed to young women are radically uninhabitable by young lesbian women' (McRobbie 2009, p. 86). Subsequently McRobbie fails to interrogate young queer women and girls' (sub)cultural resistance of hetero-feminine norms of popular culture. Radical feminist and lesbian subjects are detested by generations of girls and young women who are required to embody the repackaged hegemonic hetero-femininities on offer within an 'equal' society. The identificatory sites on offer within post-feminist commercial culture can be considered *phobic*. By using the term *phobic*, I concur with Jose Muñoz (1999) in his assessment of commercial culture as key in the (re)production of fear of gender and sexual diversities in its persistent marginalisation of trans, feminist and queer subject positions.

The dominant strategy of contemporary LGBT political activism within this neo-liberal milieu has been that of normalisation: seeking access and acceptance in mainstream culture and attaining equal rights of citizenship (Richardson 2005). Therefore, it could be argued that challenges to gender and sexual hegemony represented by feminism and LGBT activism have been neutralised within a redeployment of conventional hetero-gendered ideals: the centrality of monogamy, family and marriage – alongside the binaries of heterosexual/homosexual, male/female, and masculine/feminine – have been reinforced in contemporary social life.

In line with the observations of other queer writers in girl studies, cultural studies and popular culture, despite well-meaning feminist intentions, girl studies can easily fall into the trap of reaffirming the conventional ordering of female sex, feminine gender and heterosexuality (Halberstam 2003; Driver 2007). Girl studies often perpetuate a world of neatly arranged feminine girls and masculine boys secured within a heterosexual foundation that efficiently acts to motivate and shape negotiations of popular culture and wider society. This framework obscures the complexities of girls' practices and identities that resist binary logics of gender and sexuality. Girl studies is troubled by an 'ambivalence about the status of girls who are sexually desiring subjects, especially desiring of other girls and those girls whose identifications may or may not be feminine' (Driver 2007, p. 37). Privileging girls' private consumption of adult-produced popular media also leaves little room for attending to girls' and young women's critical (sub)cultural productive practices (see Schilt 2003b; Kearney 2006). A homogenous focus on hetero-feminine girlhood ignores and obscures multiple positions; girls who desire

girls, queer girls, bisexual girls, culturally productive girls, rebellious girls, subcultural DIY girls, girls who identify as boys and girls who identify as queer femme girls.

Girl studies seems unable to break the cycle of neo-liberal hetero-feminine girlhood to consider how girls and young women resist and rework their worlds within grassroots spaces of resistance that form part of a globalised network of protest and activism (see Marchart 2004; Harris 2008). McRobbie dismisses the viability of contemporary young women and girls' subcultural resistance in Britain: 'in a sense subcultures, with the promise for young people of escape and possibilities of dissolving a self in favour of collectivity and communality, have also become things of the past' (2009, p. 121). Counter-cultural queer girls are unintelligible within the good-girl/bad-girl dichotomy and post-feminist consumer-centric assumptions embedded within girl studies. Just like the invisible girls of traditional subcultural theory, contemporary girls' subcultural practices risk being misrecognised by feminist discourses. Recently, feminist scholars have argued that contemporary feminist activism may defy traditional models of feminist protest, to move towards something more diffuse, less visible or recognisable to current paradigms of activism and protest (Bulbeck 2006; Martin et al 2007; Downes 2008). Occasional glimpses can be seen in multi-disciplinary work that attends to visible aspects of riot grrrl, fanzine networks and Ladyfest (Gottlieb & Wald 1994; Riordan 2001; Feigenbaum 2006; Driscoll 1999; Rosenberg & Garofalo 1998; Leonard 1998, 2007; Wald 1998; Fuchs 1998; Kearney 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2006; Turner 2001; Zobl 2004; Triggs 1998; Schilt 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Schilt & Zobl 2008; Duncombe 1997; Piano 2002, 2003). At present, Anita Harris (2004, 2008) seems to be the only girl-studies scholar to consider the political potential of these 'border spaces' as crucial sites for the expansion of other ways of being and doing girlhood. The construction of girl (sub)culture offer crucial spaces, networks and resources for the articulation of genders and sexualities that defy heterocentric order throughout the history of girlhood. The political ramifications and diverse experiences of 'DIY feminism' (see Bail 1996, p. 4) have just begun to be discussed in girl studies, most evidently in the edited collection *Next Wave Cultures: Feminism, Subcultures, Activism* (Harris 2008). Tracing the historical development of girl culture, I aim to outline the need to pay attention to girl-produced (sub)cultural practices, not because of any misguided search for an authentic girlhood or to argue for the superiority of underground practices over mainstream media consumption. Instead I will argue that this practice of reclaiming counter-cultural public space is a crucial legacy for the contemporary feminist movement, queer feminist politics and the everyday lived experiences of girls and young women.

### 1.4.3 Girl Cultures: Claiming counter-hegemonic space

In *The New Girl*, Sally Mitchell (1995) argues that late nineteenth-century Britain underwent vast changes that allowed for the construction of a space of transition for girls. No longer considered a child, but still not quite an adult, girls experienced an increase in leisure time and decline of responsibilities as a 'child at home'. Advancements in compulsory education, changes in child-labour laws, increases in the cultural autonomy of the middle class, new female occupations and opportunities for extended spells of intellectual development expanded girls' opportunities to engage in the public sphere. It is important to recognise that working-class and poor girls' leisure time was curtailed by demanding domestic, childcare and labour responsibilities, and limited finances that did not hinder middle-class girls. Nonetheless, Mitchell argues that a growing faction of middle-class and working-class girls constructed their own girl culture - a space distinct from adult expectations in which to dream of new ways of being in the world that differed from their mothers' paths. Girls found space to re-examine the centrality of domesticity, marriage and childrearing in their lives and explore opportunities for public autonomy.

Commercial adult-made artefacts of girl culture, including magazines and books, provided girls with another set of possibilities that waited outside the boundaries of their family and home. Sally Mitchell (1995) explored the prolific girls' author L. T. Meade, whose books and journal *Atlanta* encouraged girls to become intelligent and strong career women. In her formula-fictions, girls were active protagonists, portrayed in various careers and scenarios as nurses, teachers, art students and journalists. Meade's stories also pay homage to the complexities of female friendship and valued special bonds between girls. Despite her fictional works being banned from libraries in 1929, deemed to offer 'no literary value' to culture, Meade's books and journal were extremely popular amongst girls, attracting letters from girls such as Evelyn Sharp, who would later become a prominent militant suffragette. Despite the promises of cultural production within this early girl culture, the traditional pressures and expectations of marriage, maternity and appropriate feminine appearance, skills and behaviour still pervaded girls' lives, eventually disciplining girls back to roles within the family and domestic structure (Dyhouse 1981).

Writing letters and diaries became a crucial element of this early girl culture. Writing was characterised as an essential educational skill for middle-class women and American girls were encouraged to write informative letters that documented major social events, as well as diaries that listed daily events chronologically, both of which were frequently checked over by parents (Kearney 2006). Within the late nineteenth and early twentieth century girls began to use their diaries as private spaces for self-expression, reflection and to document their intimate emotional and increasingly sexually desiring lives. It became a common practice for girls to share their

diary excerpts with their close female friends. The new circumstances of girls entering boarding schools and the outbreak of war provided girls with letter-writing opportunities to maintain long-distance friendships and to boost the morale of soldiers, expanding their horizons, knowledge and sense of possibility.

In the nineteenth century domestic music-making was synonymous with bourgeois girls and women (Scott 1989; Gillett 2000; Solie 2004; Fuller 2004). In “Girling” at the Parlor Piano’, Ruth Solie (2004) analyses diaries, sheet music and etiquette guides to discuss the role of piano playing in nineteenth-century bourgeois life. To be good and dutiful daughters, girls were expected to share their mother’s domestic responsibilities and perform moral and emotional work through playing the piano. Girls’ piano playing was centred on pleasing family and friends; for instance, in offsetting the alienation experienced by the father after a day at work or in entertaining guests at special occasions. Romantic discourses constructed idealised womanhood as intuitive, artistic, nurturing, delicate and shy, and piano playing offered girls an appropriate avenue to improve and perfect a convincing performance of femininity in posture, appearance and manner. The piano was also a charged site for enactments of (hetero)sexuality; musicality was widely believed to be a highly desirable quality in a potential wife and music proved to be highly effective as bait in securing male desire (Solie 2004, p. 114). Alongside diaries, the piano often held special significance for girls and women as a ‘source of emotional rescue’ (Solie 2004, p. 110) to articulate desire, frustration and anger at the world around them.

On both sides of the Atlantic the twentieth century’s abundance of consumer culture and entertainment in the form of films and recorded music allowed for the proliferation of girl fan cultures. Girls frequently engaged in cultural productive practices together, in the creation of fan letters, scrapbooks, newsletters and fan clubs that ‘allowed girls a specific form of cultural expression that offered them a public forum for what normally has been private discourse’ (Scheiner 2000, p. 133). However, girl fan cultures transformed dramatically after World War II (see Kearney 2006, p. 38). Girls’ fan cultural production became displaced by the manufacture of mass-produced fan commodities, such as posters and magazines, which were positioned as superior in the battle for post-war economic recovery (Cohen 2003). Within advanced capitalist society, consumerist forms of fanhood are believed to have proliferated as an increasingly commercialised teen culture elevated male stars and celebrities, subsequently redefining girl culture as a heterosexual enterprise (Kearney 2006). Girl cultures thrived in the public eye with the Flappers in the 1920s, the Bobbysoxers and Teenyboppers taking hold in the 1950s, and the girl fans of 1960s Beatlemania and 1990s Spiceman. Girls and young women have become categorised as a lucrative demographic for popular cultural commodities and teen merchandise.

However, research into girls’ fan practices has troubled the simple relationship between girl fan practices and the passive consumption of commodities. One study of Spice Girl fans found that

whilst many were bought band merchandise by adults, the importance of merchandise to girl fan identity was challenged. The crux of Spice Girl fanhood practices was located in reproduced tapes and cheap posters. Serious play was central to Spice girl fan identity, in which favourite Spice Girl songs, personas and dance routines were acted out in a variety of public and private spaces (Cowman & Kaloski 1998). This demonstrates that girls are creative cultural scavengers who can manipulate popular culture in order to create unpredictable practices and meanings beyond those that adult-producers can foresee. However, the spectacle of girl culture is constantly troubled by hegemonic pressures to realign girl culture within discourses of hetero-femininity and post-feminism. (Sub)cultural resistance can offer girls and young women productive opportunities to enter the cultural conversation, to resist and rework prevalent discourses of feminism, gender and sexuality.

### 1.5 '*Your World, Not Ours*':<sup>3</sup> Girls' (sub)cultural resistance

Characteristics of male power include: *the power of men [...] to cramp [women's] creativeness* [witch persecutions as campaigns against midwives and female healers and as pogrom against independent, 'unassimilated' women; definition of male pursuits as more valuable than female within any culture, so that cultural values become the embodiment of male subjectivity; restriction of female self-fulfillment to marriage and motherhood; sexual exploitation of women by male artists and teachers; the social and economic disruption of women's creative aspirations; erasure of female tradition] (Rich 1980a, p. 233)

Following the sentiments of Adrienne Rich, many scholars have argued that modern cultural industries are socially produced as 'male-dominated' heteronormative structures that limit the culturally productive options for creative girls and women (Bayton 1998; Davies 2004; Richards & Milestone 2000; Gill 1993). Ethnographic studies have illuminated the complex processes at work within cultural industries that shape popular culture. For instance, the interplay of the often conflicting factors of dominant political systems, institutional constraints, time scales, power relations, economic interests, audience feedback, distribution networks, marketing, sales and aesthetic considerations impact upon the style and content of cultural production (see Mahon 2000; Forde 2001). Over time, taken-for-granted conventions, discourses and codes of cultural production within profit-centred cultural industries become embedded, limiting the cultural symbolic imagination. The convolution of capitalism and patriarchy constructs the economically viable audience as males aged between 18 and 34 (Kearney 2006). Popular culture becomes produced as masculine, privileging stereotypical male interests and creators. Subsequently popular culture becomes saturated with celebrated white male icons, film directors, cultural critics, musicians, artists, actors and authors.

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<sup>3</sup> Bikini Kill 'Resist Psychic Death' *The C.D. Version of the First Two Records* (Kill Rock Stars, 1994)

Marginalised identities and cultures become distorted and unrepresentable within processes of normalisation that privilege conventional white and hetero-gendered youthful bodies. However this cultural dominance is never guaranteed; it must be struggled for. The normalising intentions of popular culture are never complete; resistance is always possible. Alongside representations of empowered post-feminist hetero-femininities, the resistant allure of LGBT identities has also entered the popular consciousness via cultural industries. Kimberley Peirce's 1999 feature film *Boys Don't Cry* brought consciousness of the violent death of rural transgendered American Brandon Teena to an international level. In the 1990s various American popular performers – k. d. lang, Melissa Etheridge and the Indigo Girls – came out publically. Since the 1990s, lesbian chic has culminated in the visibly lesbian character Willow in US television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Fox's longest running US television series *The L-Word*, a drama dominated by lesbian characters, issues and culture. In the UK, lesbian culture has also become visible in the national consciousness, in the successful publication of lesbian magazine *Diva*, the storylines of lesbian characters featuring in nationally revered soaps *Eastenders*, *Emmerdale*, *Brookside* and *Coronation Street*, the television series *Sugar Rush*, and national music talent-show winner Alex Parks. Nonetheless critics have argued that the heterosexual norm has been left unchallenged by the inclusion of lesbianism within popular culture (Stein 1995).

This popular visibility of non-normative sexualities can provide queer girls with shared narratives; however, these popular cultural representations are also 'controlled pleasures' (Fiske 1989), as the redeployment of hegemonic discourses of gender, 'race', ethnicity and age can minimise the threat of queer life to existing social order. In Susan Driver's (2007) study of queer girls, everyday cultural consumption of lesbian popular culture was characterised as complicit as well as resistant. Queer girls yearned for shared mainstream cultural narratives of queer desire to produce queer identities, establish belonging, public acceptance and claim pleasure. However, as globalised media institutions fulfilled the wishes of this lucrative demographic, girls' cultural negotiations were also laced with a critical awareness of the closures and omissions at work within media formulations of sexual difference. Queer girls were critical of 'mainstream' lesbian magazines that represented lesbian identities and interests through a normalised racialised, classed and gendered lens of feminine beauty. The inability for popular culture to provide complex representations sensitive to the particularities of queer girl experience spilt over into a search for other cultural representations. Queer girls used a wide repertoire of 'mainstream' and 'underground' cultures, frequently interrupting the boundary between DIY and consumer cultural spheres. For instance, online communities and girl fan cultures opened up knowledge about girls' subcultural productions as valuable resources for the everyday enactments of non-normative genders and sexualities. Therefore, Susan Driver's (2007) work demonstrates how girls are active participants in their articulations of queer identities within both 'commercial' and 'underground' cultural sites. In order to configure

identity, queer girls engaged in 'textual poaching' (Jenkins 1992) to rework the meaning of cultural representations and resist commercial producers norms and values. In queer girl negotiations with culture, the mainstream was displaced as the central resource for constituting girls' identities. Power and pleasure were relocated in the unintelligible and ambiguous - texts that stayed open to the intangible, unexpected and unpredictable (Driver 2007; Stein 1995). In *Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds*, Judy Grahn emphasised the continuity of lesbian and gay culture as 'sometimes underground, sometimes above ground, and often both' (1984, p. xiv). Queer culture increasingly disrupts the boundaries between popular and underground, the visible and the incomprehensible, the inside and the outside. The spaces and identities of queer culture need to be reconsidered:

Homosexuality is no longer to be seen simply as marginal with regard to a dominant, stable form of sexuality (heterosexuality) against which it would be defined either by opposition or homology [...] Thus, rather than marking the limits of social space by designating a place at the edge of culture, gay sexuality in its specific female and male cultural (or subcultural) forms acts as an agency of social process whose mode of functioning is both interactive and yet resistant, both participatory and yet distinct, claiming at once equality and difference (de Lauretis 1991, p. iii – xviii)

Therefore, to position queer subcultural life as the oppositional counterpart to the dominance of commercial culture is unworkable and it is not my intention to privilege and romanticise spectacles of 'resistance' over everyday 'compliance' with commercial culture. The boundaries between what is perceived as 'underground' and 'mainstream' are considerably leaky and open to question in queer feminist worlds. This is another reason for the use of the term *(sub)culture* rather than subculture; to acknowledge the permeable boundary between culture and subculture. Queer feminist (sub)cultural participation is not a simple rejection of dominant mainstream representations and valorisation of authentic underground texts, but encompasses a critical questioning of the social (re)production of gender and sexual norms in (sub)culture.

In contemporary culture, advances in media and communication technologies have enabled marginalised groups to secure the means to self-consciously create cultural forms – music, film, video, literature and visual art – to construct, reconfigure and communicate meanings associated with their racial, ethnic, gender, sexual and national identities (Ginsburg 1991, 1997; Mahon 2000; Garrison 2000). This 'cultural resistance' focuses on the practices of ordinary people and amateurs in reworking, resisting and redeploying cultural narratives in the constitution of counter-cultural subjectivities, spaces and practices (see Duncombe 2002). Howard Becker (2005) argues that the sociological bias towards the study of commodified end products of popular culture ignores huge areas of important cultural activity carried out by ordinary people. Furthermore, studies of girls' and young women's (sub)cultural resistance have been marginalised, as stories of men's cultural resistance in the public sphere are privileged and

women's stories of cultural resistance are restricted to the domestic sphere.<sup>4</sup> Local feminist and queer communities and art worlds can develop around marginalised amateur cultural productions, establishing idiosyncratic logics of style, aesthetics, value and purpose. These DIY queer and feminist practices can add critical counter-narratives, spaces and communities to the wider cultural representation of genders and sexualities. I will now summarise the main contemporary (sub)cultural resistant practices of girls and young women that have been theorised across a range of disciplines.

### 1.5.1 'We are turning cursive letters into knives':<sup>5</sup> Self-publishing girls

Drawing on a shared history of women's writing, girls and young women have continued to self-produce literature free from institutional and corporate interests as a response to the omission of girls' and women's diverse voices, interests and talents from popular culture. The development of cheap and accessible photocopying and word-processing technologies has allowed girls to develop a shared space in which to contest normative discourses of hetero-feminine girlhood. Since the 1970s, British women frustrated with the representation of women and feminism in the popular press responded by starting up their own publications, such as *Spare Rib*, *Bad Attitude* and *Shocking Pink*. Girls' self-publication practices in print mediums, for example in fanzines, more commonly known as zines, have been widely acknowledged as a crucial part of girls' resistance to the cultural and social devaluation of women and girls (Schilt 2003b; Bell 2002; Harris 2003; Piano 2003; Comstock 2001; Leonard 1998; Duncombe 1997). The contemporary networks and friendships made through the exchange of zines between girls and women become crucial in creating counter-public spaces for the everyday questioning of normative discourses of genders and sexualities.

In the US lesbians fought against their public erasure and sought control over the representations of lesbian sex practices through self-publishing lesbian sex zines like *On Our Backs*, *Venus Infers* and *Brat Attack* (Collins 1999). Women and girls of colour have critiqued everyday incidences and institutional structures of racism in US zines like *Bamboo Girl*, *Evolution of a Race Riot* and UK-based *Race Revolt* (see Alcantara-Tan 2000). Zines also provide outlets to share uncensored experiences, skills and information on reproductive health (*Viva Voce*), mental distress (*Alien, Toast and Jam*) and parenthood (*Hip Mama*). In the 1980s a frustrated Cheryl Cline (1992) began publishing the US-based *Bitch: The Women's Rock Newsletter with Bite* to circulate information about women rock musicians whom profit-centred rock magazines were failing to cover adequately. Contemporary incarnations, that focus on circulating information about women's cultural production, include the US magazines *Bitch*

<sup>4</sup> An example of this tendency can be seen in Stephen Duncombe's *Cultural Resistance Reader* in which Duncombe includes a section on women's cultural resistance titled 'A Woman's Place' (2002, p. 240-274) and confines women's cultural resistance to domestic spaces.

<sup>5</sup> Bikini Kill, 'Bloody Ice cream', *Reject All American* (Kill Rock Stars, 1996)

(1996 - present), *Bust* (1993 - present) and *Venus* (2000 - present). In the UK less-glossy and often less stable feminist cultural magazines include *Subtext* (2006 - present), *Uplift* (2007 - present) and *Revolution* (published one issue in 2005).

### 1.5.2 *Cybergurls: politicising digital space*

The rise of the Internet has also impacted on the cultural productivity of girls and young women, and led to the rise of the 'cybergurl' as 'an emblem of women in the future – the newly born technological woman' (Driscoll 1999, p. 183). Despite the gendered discourse of computer culture that positions men and boys as the principal creators and consumers of cyberspace, the increased technical confidence of girls and young women has seen girls engage with digital technologies to produce their own online virtual worlds (Youngs 1999). Catherine Driscoll locates the cybergurl 'across a broad but allied range of websites, mailing lists, and other computerised artistic and political practices interested in women, technology and the image of the future' (1999, p. 183). Many studies have suggested that girls and young women tend to use the Internet, in the home and at school, to communicate with others in chat rooms, emails and message-boards (see Kearney 2006, p. 239 - 252). The girl fan sites scattered around cyberspace demonstrate girls' active cultural consumption and production of popular culture, and studies have affirmed the significance of fan sites in girls' constitution of identity and community (see Mazzarella 2005). Young women and girls have carved out their own space, constructing blogs, message-boards and online e-zines, to express and explore their relationship to feminism. For instance, in 2001 Catherine Redfern started *The F-word* an online magazine to bring together young women eager to debate contemporary British feminist issues. Elsewhere, in 2004 American feminist Jessica Valenti set up *feministing.com* to bring together young women bloggers to critique and comment on the world around them (see Valenti 2007). In the 1990s many critical girl-centred friendships, communities and projects emerged from interactions within online message-boards on record-label websites and AOL discussion folders (Starr 1999). One recent article positioned ICTs as a critical component of girls' feminist activism and networking within the organisation of a Ladyfest - a grassroots DIY festival that centres on celebrating women's creativity (Aragon 2008).

This explosion of online media might have spelt disaster for the print zine. In contrast, however, the Internet actually provided an opportunity to expand the distribution of girl zines globally, as distros (small independent distribution companies that sell various products like zines, records, tapes, patches, badges and crafts) moved online. Distros were previously limited to attracting orders through mail-order catalogues, adverts in zines, or specialist zines that listed information about currently available zines like *Factsheet 5*. Girl distro sites are driven by a political commitment to circulate subversive voices, information and ideas to counteract the power of commercial cultural industries (Kearney 2006). Distros act to 'intervene in corporate

consumerism by promoting subcultural production that distinguishes itself from mainstream marketing through stylistic, political and economic deviations' (Piano 2002, Para. 25). Distros actively reengage the radical template of feminist bookstores that emerged in the 1970s women's liberation movement with online commerce, to produce spaces for not-for-profit circulation of radical media and construction of politicised communities and identities.

### 1.5.3 *Girl visions: Girl-made films*

In comparison to women's literary traditions, film-making is a relatively recent cultural avenue for girls. Barriers to girls' film-making practices have included a lack of access to expensive filmmaking equipment, the privileging of male directors, spectators and content in the commercial film industry, art-funding cuts, and low confidence with media technologies and technical discourse (Kearney 2006). Nonetheless, there have been active periods of girls' and women's film production, which have been obscured by conventional narratives of film history. At the turn of the twentieth century the introduction of the \$1 brownie camera by Kodak encouraged girls to take up photography as a hobby and explore nondomestic spaces (Kearney 2006). Furthermore, Patricia Zimmerman (1995) found that within this period women were active home-movie makers, typically documenting their homes and children. However, by the 1950s men had secured their role as the key movie-makers, and the rise of Hollywood and 'classic' cinema reinforced marriage, child-rearing and male attention as the main concerns for hetero-femininity. The rise of second-wave feminism initiated a desire to create films to depict more positive representations of women's lives and identities. In the 1970s feminists created a film movement, and produced hundreds of documentaries and experimental films that centred on women's social and economic positions, issues of marriage, divorce and abortion, and articulations of feminist ideologies (see Rosenberg 1983).

The rise of girl film-makers was stimulated by the invention of the video camcorder in the 1980s. Subsequent advances in digital technology have allowed for a lighter, cheaper and less complicated way of creating films, thus situating film-making as a viable activity for girls. These technological transformations were accompanied by a rise of films about non-conformist teenage girls, as feminist and women screenwriters, directors and producers found support for their feature films. For instance, the films *All Over Me* (1997), *Ladies and Gentlemen: The Fabulous Stains* (1981) and *Go Fish* (1994) foreground lesbian desire, close female friendships and girls' punk-rock rebellions. The 1980 film *Times Square* was inspired by a runaway girl's diary found in a second-hand sofa bought by the director Lou Adler. Controversy has raged over the heavy cuts made to the film's openly lesbian content; however, subtle lesbian overtones in the friendship between punk runaway's Nicky Marotta and Pamela Pearl do remain in the final version.

Film became a valuable medium for the expression of counter-cultural narratives of girls in the 1990s. In the early 1990s Sadie Benning became an art-world darling for her amateur films recorded on a Fisher-Price pixel-vision camera in her bedroom (see Carter 1998). Her films focussed on her experiences of growing up as a lesbian in a conservative hub of mid-west America. Benning tells her stories through uncomfortable close-up shots, intimate confessions, and torn-up and rearranged fragments of commercial media. In the UK Lucy Thane made two documentaries of the subversive girl-punk movements she encountered and was inspired by. The first, *It Changed My Life* (1993), documented the UK tour of riot grrrl bands Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill, and the second *She's Real (Worse Than Queer)* (1997) focused on the queercore scene in the US. Mary Celeste Kearney (2006) explored the relatively new field of girl-produced movies and found a continuation of a tradition in girls' movies of critiquing discourses of media texts created by commercial cultural industries. Often poking fun at the dominant representations of girls in teen movies and magazines, girls redefined their ideas of girlhood. Girls attacked unrealistic beauty standards, celebrated women, explored race, and critiqued the narrow roles that women occupy in society.

Various distribution networks and film festivals have allowed for girls' and women's films to reach wider audiences. For instance, the now acclaimed film director Miranda July set up the video-letter project Miss Moviola in 1995; women would send July their films, which she would add to a compilation tape of women-made films and send back to the film-maker. Compilations were also available to purchase and shown at film screenings, and information about the film-makers was distributed and made available online. The project continues today under the name Joanie 4 Jackie and Miranda July went on to make the critically acclaimed independent feature film *Me and You and Everyone We Know* in 2005. In the UK, the Bird's Eye View film festival annually screens the work of emerging women filmmakers. The Leeds-based feminist film production company Vera Media has created documentaries focussing on the experiences of women in West Yorkshire for over twenty years. Film is a critical medium through which girls and women can open up dialogue and space, to explore other ways of being beyond the hetero-feminine gaze canonised in popular culture.

To summarise, research into girls' and young women's subversive cultural participation has focussed on the tangible cultural productions of zines, websites and visual media. Studies have elucidated the critical functions that cultural practices play in the constitution of resistant communities, identities and politics. I want to shift the focus now, onto the liminal and ephemeral cultural practices and legacies of queer women, in space and sound, which constitute critical parts of queer feminist histories.

### 1.6 'Some Girl's Stare':<sup>6</sup> Lesbian bar legacies and Queertopic futures

I just want a public place  
 where girls can meet each other's stare  
 sometimes that's what it takes  
 to know you're alive  
 to feel yourself burning just for some girl's stare  
 (Team Dresch 'Remember Who You Are', 1996)

Dykes especially cannot be expected to live in worlds made by others. A commitment to being a dyke is partly a commitment to invention – a commitment to making up one's own world, or parts of it, anyway (Trebilcot 1994, p. 138)

Claiming the right to occupy public space dominated by masculine and heterosexual privilege, has been vital to the emergence of lesbian and gay culture and political activism. In the 1920s bars were the first collective public spaces for women's enactments of non-normative sexualities and genders (Wolfe 1992). The inter-war years were critical for the (re)mobilisation of hegemonic discourses and discipline of lesbianism and feminism. The development of sexology and the obscenity trials of Radclyffe Hall and Oscar Wilde, proposed legal amendments and parliamentary debates all constructed lesbianism and feminism as dangerous threats to civilisation. This culminated in a fear of politically active and economically independent women (Oram 1989). However, these new understandings of gender and sexual deviance – for instance, the boyette, flapper, modern girl, and mannish woman – also offered resources for constructing lesbian identities, community and culture (Doan 2001; Jennings 2007b, 2007c). From the 1930s, lesbians became part of the underground clientele of London's bohemian nightlife, and gradually claimed identifiable public space as an exclusive crowd at particular bars, for instance at The Gateways club (Gardiner 2003). Oral history studies have highlighted how such public sites provided unique spaces for the validation of women's social and sexual lives, becoming essential to the formation of lesbian community (Faderman 1991a; Gardiner 2003; Bullough & Bullough 1977; Kennedy & Davis 1993). In the US, women's interventions in the urban landscape to secure meeting places, access to athletic fields, and to open women's bookstores, cafes, clubs, shelters and health clinics produced vital spaces and outlets for second-wave feminist activism (Enke 2007).

These spaces of subversion were constantly attacked by the conservative status quo. In America lesbian bars were considered public meeting-spaces for deviant women and historically were subjected to raids, closures, arsons and violent arrests. Until the 1960s, it was illegal for lesbians and gay men to gather in public spaces where alcohol was served. Legal interventions sought to discipline lesbian public spaces through the enforcement of secular laws that prohibited women's use of men's clothing, and public displays of same-sex affection (Wolfe 1992).

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<sup>6</sup> Team Dresch, 'Remember Who You Are', *Captain My Captain* (Chainsaw, 1996)

Officers often recorded names of club attendees to pass onto press contacts who would use the information to publically shame lesbians and gay men. The infamous 1969 raid on Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York's Greenwich Village, saw gay men, lesbians and transgendered individuals collectively and violently resist arrest in a police raid. This sparked the development of gay and lesbian activism in the formation of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and annual Gay Pride marches (see Duberman 1993). Therefore the process of securing spaces for non-normative sexualities and genders is entwined with the history of lesbianism and feminism, and has subsequently led to the political struggle for women's liberation and LGBT rights.

Tensions have emerged within lesbian and feminist communities, as factions struggled over the character of counter-hegemonic gender and sexual identities. Within 1960s and 1970s lesbian feminism, working-class butch/femme relations common to lesbian-bar subcultures were considered harmful replications of anti-feminist patriarchal gender relations; for lesbian sex to become successfully accommodated as a feminist political praxis, it was thought to require complete egalitarianism (Inness 1997; Jeffreys 1989). Feminist ideals of lesbian sex spiralled into the sex-wars debates of the 1980s and 1990s, which sought to rework conceptions of what is considered normal and healthy in lesbian sex. Second-wave feminism struggled to consolidate demands under a universal identity of 'woman' without undermining particularities of women's experiences across race, class, sexuality and ability. Lesbian feminist circles rejected feminine signifiers in favour of an (ironically rather masculine) androgynous ideal, promoting natural bodies, free of make-up (Inness 1997). This historical authentication and political legitimisation of masculinised identities within lesbian subcultures has been problematised within femme-centred queer theory (Nestle 1992; Austin 1992; Walker 1993; Maltry & Tucker 2002; Brushwood Rose & Camilleri 2003).

Despite emphasising significant gains in women's rights to public space, reproductive justice, education, and the workplace, and the development of women's studies and feminist theory, conventional debates and histories of second-wave feminism have overlooked the interrelationships, irreverence and fluidity in categories of feminism, lesbianism, femininity and masculinity circulating in women's subcultural spatial practices. Lesbian subcultures can be associated with the development of queer transgressive practices. The normative ordering of sex, gender, and sexuality can be contested in the contemporary production of female masculinities, queer fem(me)ninities, transsexualism, transgenderism, drag kings, bio-queens, and xxboys (Halberstam 1998, 2005a; Maltry & Tucker 2002; Troka et al 2002; Devitt 2006; Brittan 2006; Bailey 2008).

Increasing attention to the significance of space and place in queer history and contemporary life has led to the development of queer geographies, which seek to shift understandings of space as 'a relatively passive backdrop against which "real" social and cultural processes are enacted' towards understanding space as constitutive of sexuality and gender (Mort & Nead 1999, p. 6). A person's location within space can shape the constitution of queer subjectivity (see Inness 1997). Contemporary changes in social, economic and political contexts accompanied by sexual migration have led to the development of thriving gay and lesbian districts within urban landscapes (Bell & Valentine 1995; Ingram et al 1997). Gains in queer visibility circulate within an increasing array of consumer products, lifestyle options and leisure pursuits. However this new gay and lesbian demographic suits an individualistic consumer culture, geared up to line their pockets with 'the pink pound' (Chasin 2000).

Studies of contemporary gay and lesbian culture have been criticised for privileging particular geographical locations and subject positions. For instance, studies have tended to concentrate on the well-established commercial queer centres of San Francisco and New York at the expense of rural locations (see for example Boyd 2003; Chauncey 1994). Gay liberation has been conflated with consumer participation within capitalist social relations, privileging the white gay-male professional middle-class (Bell & Binnie 2000; Halberstam 2005b). In comparison, lesbians are less likely to participate in commercial libertarian spaces. Lesbians have less access to capital, are often the primary caregivers of children and are less mobile in public space, due to an increased threat of sexual and physical assault (Adler & Brenner 2005). In contrast, less academic attention has focused on the construction of DIY queer feminist communities in the margins of urban locations. DIY queer feminist (sub)cultures often seek to interrupt and critique 'homonormative' (Duggan 2002) pressures on non-heterosexual subjectivities and practices perpetuated in gay and lesbian consumer cultures.

Those interested in the relations between queer identities and space have found inspiration in Michel Foucault's essay *Of Other Spaces* (1986). This essay, exhibited publically just before Foucault's death and later translated and published in *Diacritics*, introduced the concept of heterotopia and asserted that 'the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space' (1986, p. 22). Foucault viewed modern life as organised through hierarchical and oppositional notions of space and time; examples include the private and public, family and social, and leisure and work. His interest turned to spaces that interrupt this normative ordering of space and time, termed heterotopias: constructions of place that revel in the contradiction and juxtaposition of multiple incompatible spaces and break with the traditional order of time. This concept of heterotopias has been employed within analyses of queer subcultural practices.

In an analysis of queer subcultures Judith Halberstam (2005a) draws on Foucault to theorise queer ways of living that interrupt the normative ordering of time and space. In part of her book-long study *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Halberstam focuses on the queer subcultures of 'riot dykes', homohop and slam poetry as instances of 'queer temporality'. Halberstam uses these examples to argue for a departure from traditional understandings of subcultures that position youth subcultures as ephemeral sites of adolescent transition that become redundant once the responsibilities of reproductive adulthood are achieved. For Halberstam, queer life is reconceived as a prolonged adolescence that can see extended participation in queer subculture uninterrupted by the logic of family and reproductive time.<sup>7</sup> A queer cultural theory of subcultures, she argues, 'demands that we look at the silences, the gaps, and the ruptures in the spaces of performance, and that we use them to tell disorderly narratives' (Halberstam 2005a, p. 187). It demands recognition of the alternative lives that exist in the margins and shadows of commercial capital and visibility. Alongside queer subcultures, queer autonomous spaces have emerged as key sites for anti-capitalist resistance to the homonormativity of gay and lesbian consumer culture (Brown 2007). Organised as DIY grassroots anarchist events in squatted venues around the world these 'queertopias', known as Queeruption or Queer Mutiny, fuse sex parties, workshops, communal meals, and live music to reclaim control over the production of queer culture. In many ways these gatherings echo the grassroots networks and separatist festivals produced by lesbian feminists who sought to reclaim control over the production of women's culture from patriarchy and capitalism (Lont 1992; Kimball 1981, 2005; Sandstrom 2005). Queeruptions attempt to construct heterotopias in which the normative order of gender and sexuality is open to disruption, contestation and ridicule. Other DIY quasi-autonomous club-nights and feminist festivals, such as Ladyfest, complicate the boundaries of capital and DIY production, and secure fleeting spatial moments in which queer practices, performances and identities are articulated (Keenan 2007a, 2007b; Schilt & Zobl 2008).

The act of claiming and defending public space has been a central concern within lesbian, gay, queer and feminist histories and activism. The development of queer geographies has allowed for a reconsideration of space in the constitution of genders and sexualities, and subsequent critique has opened up the analysis of spaces that lie in the shadows of commercial gay and lesbian culture. Foucault's notion of heterotopias has been crucial in the development of queer subcultural theory; this disruption of heterocentric order of time and space can produce subcultural fissures in which queers can reorder their worlds, communities and practices.

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<sup>7</sup> Halberstam (2006, p. 104) is careful to emphasise that not all gay and lesbian-identified individuals avoid settling down within a hetero-reproductive logic; likewise, not all heterosexuals conform to the demands of reproductive time.

### *1.7 Sonic resistance: Music, gender, sexuality and feminism*

Alongside space, music is a critical cultural component implicated in the constitution of gendered and sexual subjectivities. Music can be perceived as a medium through which dominant gendered and sexual categories and identities are socially constructed, (re)produced and circulated throughout society (Dibben 2002). However, crucially, music can also be used to construct sonic space for resisting, reordering and reworking these dominant codes of gender and sexuality, offering a resource for critical transgression and queer feminist praxis. In this section I highlight how queer girls and women have utilised music and music culture as (sub)cultural resistance. From the lesbian feminist music cultural legacy of Olivia and Michigan, to queer and feminist subcultures of queercore and riot grrrl, music (sub)culture has produced spaces for queer acts that continually resist and redefine available genders, sexualities and feminisms. However, in order to lay the foundation for a study of queer feminist music (sub)cultural resistance, a review of current research of gender in the music industry and music culture is necessary.

#### *1.7.1 Boy's Club: Gender, the music industry and music cultures*

Research has argued that the music industry and music culture are both socially produced as masculine within a set of contested gendered spaces, discourses and practices (Bayton 1997, 1998; Clawson 1999a, 1999b; Cohen 1991; Groce and Cooper 1990; Krenske & McKay 2000; Walser 1993; Whiteley 1997, 2000; Schippers 2002; Leonard 2007; Bannister 2006). Girls and young women have been characterised as key consumers of 'mainstream' pop music in the form of vocal boy bands, teen icons and all-girl pop groups (Wald 2002). Status and power is established within alternative music through the 'displaced abjection' of this symbolic mainstream realm of girls and young women (Railton 2001; Coates 2003). The sexual objectification and emotional labour of women and girls secures the heterosexual arrangement of an otherwise homosocial sphere; '[girls] appear as nothing more than mindless, hysterical, out-of-control bimbos who shrieked and fainted while watching the Beatles or jiggled our bare breasts at Woodstock' (Douglas 1994, p. 5). The arrangement of hetero-feminine female fans and hetero-masculine male cultural producers perpetuates the hetero-gendered dominance of popular culture. This situation undermines the cultural contributions of women and girls, and obscures queer arrangements of gender and desire within music culture.

Girls' and young women's access to culturally productive opportunities within the music industry and local-level music culture has been troubled at multiple levels. The music industry is thought to experience horizontal and vertical gender differentiation, as women are located in different areas of work further down the career ladder compared with their male counterparts.

Men occupy the majority of the culturally productive roles within the music industry, as record-label owners, tour promoters, radio DJs, music journalists, A&R workers and agents. Women are over-represented in unskilled or semi-skilled manual labour, or office jobs that are significantly lower in terms of pay, status and power (Negus 1992; Bayton 1998; Leonard 2007). Male 'cultural intermediaries', the decision-makers crucial for a musician's success, have been criticised for (re)producing gender inequalities at various levels in the music industry. For instance, radio DJs have been seen to deflect accusations of sexism and defend their dominance of the airwaves by drawing on discourses of gender difference (Gill 1993). Similarly music journalists and readers (re)produce a homosocial community, that prevent young women and girls from achieving the gender-specific constructions of authenticity and credibility required for admittance (Coates 1998; Kruse 2002; Davies 2004; McLeod 2001, 2002; Regev 1994; Toynbee 1993). Local level music-making practices are also gendered, as research has located women in 'subordinate' roles as the singer, keyboardist, or bass player, whilst men take up the socially powerful roles in rock bands as the lead guitar-player or drummer (Clawson 1999a; Groce & Cooper 1990; Bayton 1998). The sonic, lyrical and performative aspects of rock aesthetics have culminated in a complex set of performances of hegemonic masculine heterosexuality some have labelled as 'cock rock' (Frith & McRobbie 1978; Walser 1993).<sup>8</sup> This cock rock milieu extends to the gendering of spaces and language associated with rock practices in practice spaces, instrument shops, record stores and live music gigs (Cohen 1991; Bayton 1998; Leonard 2007).

Nonetheless, women and girls have attained some success and visibility within the music industry. A plethora of feminist historical excavations has revealed the continuous productivity of women throughout popular music (see O'Brien 2002; Hirshey 2001; Gaar 1993; Dickerson 2005; Carson et al 2004; O'Dair 1997; Tucker 2000; Warwick 2007; Grieg 1989). Women have been critical in shaping the horizons of popular music. The vital contributions of vaudeville and blues women Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey, blues guitarist and singer Memphis Minnie, and jazz singers Billie Holiday, Anita O'Day and Ella Fitzgerald have been recognised. In Britain, Ivy Benson's all-girl orchestras and America's all-girl swing bands exuded instrumental professionalism (Tucker 2000). The 1950s saw the success of pop, rhythm and blues and soul singers Lita Roza, Peggy Lee, Dusty Springfield, Connie Francis, Big Mama Thornton, Lena Horne, Nina Simone and Eartha Kitt. Rockabilly women Wanda Jackson, Cordell Jackson and Janis Martin pioneered paths for the evolution of rock 'n' roll. The 1960s signalled the development of Motown and an era which saw girl groups dominate the mainstream charts with the voices and concerns of female adolescence. Stax introduced the gospel-inspired soul of Aretha Franklin. Rock band Goldie and the Gingerbreads became the first all-woman band to be

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<sup>8</sup> See Matthew Bannister (2006) for discussion of heterogeneous masculinities operating in indie rock spheres.

signed to a major label, followed by The Runaways, Isis, Birtha and Fanny. Pioneering performers Janis Joplin, Patti Smith, Grace Slick, Mama Cass, Joan Jett, Suzi Quatro and Tina Turner have all left their unique mark on rock 'n' roll music culture.

### 1.7.2 'Singing for Our Lives':<sup>9</sup> Women's music culture

Despite their commercial success, women have faced a systemic refusal to take women-made music on its own terms, especially if it explored themes of feminism, lesbianism, bisexuality and queer desire. Subsequently some women critiqued the music industry through collectively producing independent feminist music cultures. The most well-researched feminist music culture is the 1970s 'women's music' movement in the United States (see Lont 1984, 1992; Peterson 1989; Scovill 1981; Sandstrom 2002, 2005; Cvetkovich & Wahng 2001; Casselberry 1999; Staggenborg et al 1995; Morris 1999, 2005, Love 2002). Within the second-wave feminist movement, the idea of 'cultural feminism' emerged alongside political activism (Taylor & Rupp 1993). Cultural feminist ideology, referred to as 'third-wave' feminism (Kimball 1981), encouraged women to seize control over the representation of women in wider society and provoke social change through the production of counter-culture. This practice could include resistance of dominant representations of feminism; for instance, enraged by Betty Friedan's homophobic characterisation of lesbians as the lavender menace of the feminist movement, the Radicalesbians developed their idea of 'the woman-identified-woman' that argued for women's complete separation from male definitions of women for a more authentic women's liberation (1970). These strands of lesbian separatism, cultural feminism and radical feminism collided in the construction of an autonomous women's music movement.

US-based 'women's music' culture intended to create 'music by women, for women, about women and financially controlled by women' (Lont 1992, p. 242). Collectively women constructed an intricate widespread grassroots network and infrastructure which saw women control every stage of music production, including record production, live performance, and distribution. The Olivia Record collective is a pioneering example. Set up in 1975 in Washington DC by a collective of college-educated lesbian women who published the lesbian feminist monthly newsletter *The Furies*, Olivia Records quickly became a successful independent label; their debut release, Cris Williamson's *The Changer and the Changed* sold over 60,000 copies in its first year. Women shaped every aspect of the performance in the choice of woman artist, venue, grassroots promotion, tour management, sound engineering, roadying and lighting. 'Women's music' culture aimed to produce supportive spaces that enabled a reciprocal relationship between the performer and audience, and reached women (inter)nationally through grassroots distribution networks that covered women-owned

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in Love (2002), p. 71

businesses, bookstores and coffeehouses, as well as through mail-order and at live performances. Ruth Scovill described the spirit of 'women's music' culture:

Woman-identified because it speaks of self-affirmation and independence, of women working together in new ways; of women caring for, sharing with, and loving each other; and of women getting in touch with their power by getting in touch with themselves (1981, p. 154)

In order to reject the patriarchal masculinity believed to be inherent in popular music, 'women's music' encouraged the evolution of a distinct feminine sound. An acoustic, folk, singer-songwriter style tended to dominate the aesthetic repertoire of 'women's music', evident in the approach of popular 'women's music' artists Holly Near, Cris Williamson and Meg Christian. Women-identified lyrics constructed women as independent and celebrated the erotic potential of women's relationships (Scovill 1981). Supporters also mused about the possibility of establishing a unique female musical form in women's music. For instance, the women's music composer Kay Gardner has speculated about a 'golden section' that is unique to women's music (Kimball & Gardner 1981). Gardner linked these musical details to women's biological difference; 'women are naturally cyclical beings, operating on a lunar cycle regarding both menses and parturition. It is not unusual that we think and create in an organic form' (cited in Scovill 1981, p. 158). However 'women's music' became heavily criticised for the perpetuation of white middle-class norms within lesbian feminism. Important decisions, including the selection of artists, were made by the more affluent members of the Olivia collective and subsequent releases tended to be dominated by white women (Sandstrom 2005). Women of colour experienced unequal access to recording contracts and tour opportunities and women who already played louder rock, jazz and dance styles were denied support (Casselberry 1999). However other sources defend the multicultural nature of women's music that extended beyond folk to embrace pop, rock, blues, latin and gospel sounds (Pollock 1988). Some direct attempts were made to address racism within 'women's music' culture; for instance, in 1978 Holly Near and Amy Horowitz created Roadwork, a booking and production company, to support diverse multi-cultural productions.

The creation of women-centred music festivals has been crucial in maintaining 'women's music' culture to the present day. These creative spaces provide important functions for the validation of lesbian culture, individual empowerment and future feminist activism (Staggenborg et al 1995). Bonnie J. Morris has uncovered 27 diverse 'women's music' festivals throughout history (1999, 2005). The first festival, the National Women's Music Festival (NWMF), was set up in 1974 at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. Frustrated with a local 'male-dominated' folk festival, Kristen Lems created NWMF as a folk festival to celebrate women folk-musicians. Despite the University's refusal to operate a women-only policy, the audience, performers and workers continue to produce the NWMF as a lesbian cultural space (Meyer & O'Hara 2004). The more well-known Michigan Womyn's Music

Festival was started in 1976 by sisters Lisa and Kristie Vogel alongside Mary Kindig. Michigan was organised as a women-only 'safe space' to highlight 'women's music' and culture, and has expanded to become the largest 'women's music' festival in the US, attracting 4,000 - 6,000 attendees annually. Calls for cultural diversity have led to the conscious expansion of diverse music, comedy, performance art, theatre, dance, film, stalls, 'open mic' opportunities and workshops. Michigan is unique, in that all women who attend, work and volunteer are involved in the process of collectively building, maintaining and physically dismantling the entire site of the festival each year (Cvetkovich & Wahng 2001). Over the years, Michigan has become a battleground for debate over the character of lesbianism and feminism (see Morris 1999). Controversies have raged over lesbian sexual practices, whether BDSM (bondage, domination and sadomasochism) practices replicate exploitative social inequalities embedded in patriarchy. In recent years the 'womyn-born-womyn' admittance policy and exclusion of trans-women has become a point of generational friction, leading the protest-festival Camp Trans to organise in the vicinity of Michigan.

### *1.7.3 Queering Women's Music Culture: Female masculinities and queer fem(me)ninities*

There is no doubt that 'women's music' culture has been a source of strength for lesbians and women. However, like all music cultures women's music is the product of a particular historical, political and cultural context. The generation-specific ideologies of 'women's music' limit the participation of younger women and queer girls. The heterosexual/homosexual binary remains uninterrupted as the emphasis lies on constructing a marginal lesbian culture that is distinct and separate from the heteronormative world. Furthermore, the lesbian and feminist ideals which circulate within 'women's music' culture stress women's shared experiences of biological difference. Performers and audiences who complicate the homonormative ordering of sex, gender and sexuality – BDSM, queer, bisexual, heterosexual, feminine and trans women – repeatedly become the subjects of controversy. 'Women's music' culture becomes a comfort zone for homogenous concepts of lesbianism and feminism based on a politics of visibility (see Phelan 1994). The stances of Michigan festival organisers have led some heterosexual women to withdraw their support and involvement from organising committees (Sandstrom 2005).

'Women's music' culture perpetuates a mutually exclusive binary of feminine folk/pop and masculine rock/punk sounds. This fails to account for the experiences of women and girls who are drawn to rock, hip hop and punk subcultures. Instead of considering the masculinity of rock, hip hop and punk as offensive and inaccessible to young women and girls, attention needs to be paid to how and why this masculinity may attract and compel young women and girls to participate in the first place (Halberstam 2005a). Women have inhabited crucial creative roles in the history of music subculture, as creative (sub)cultural producers in punk (Reddington 2007; Leblanc 1999), rock (McDonnell & Powers 1995; Schippers 2002), hip hop (Pough 2004; Rose

1994), riot grrrl (Rosenberg & Garofalo 1998; Leonard 1997, 2007; Kearney 1997, 1998a, 2006; Schilt 2004; Downes 2007) and queercore (du Plessis & Chapman 1997; Ciminelli & Knox 2005). The androgynous ideal circulating within lesbian feminist 'women's music' culture has been criticised for perpetuating links between masculinity, the male body and patriarchal oppression (Maltry & Tucker 2002). As a contested space for gender and sexuality, rock music cannot be considered a monolithic masculine structure void of resistant and subversive possibilities. The 'female machismo' of women punk and rock musicians cannot be simplified as a deluded replication of oppressive masculinity; it can also represent a valid challenge to white middle-class sex/gender systems. For instance, the female masculinity of rock musicians Suzi Quatro and Joan Jett can constitute complex challenges to conventional understandings of gender and sexuality (Kennedy 2002; Auslander 2004). As mentioned above, contemporary queer cultural theory has flourished in attending to such queer performative practices.

In contrast, less attention has been paid to the subversive potential of femininity in gender and sexual (sub)cultural resistance. The historical representation of lesbianism has tended to position cross-gender, butch identifications as authentic resistance, leaving the femme to be considered a passive dupe, a failed heterosexual woman unable to attract male desire who accidentally stumbled into lesbianism (Maltry & Tucker 2002). In butch identifications it was the 'usurpation of male prerogative by women who behaved like men that many societies appeared to find most disturbing' (Faderman 1991b, p. 17), whereas lesbian feminist culture regarded femmes to be suffering from false consciousness, foolishly adorning their bodies with the make-up, tight dresses and high heels considered 'tools of the patriarchy' that undermined the liberation of women. Feminine signifiers were stripped of all radical potential, to be considered weak, passive and stupid. Femmes have voiced their frustrations in living with this 'stigma' of femininity within lesbian feminist circles. In her essay *Femme-inism*, Paula Austin's personal experiences of hetero-feminine misidentification leads her to ask a critical question - 'what should I look like to be a politically correct lesbian-feminist of color?' (1992, p. 365).

'Third-wave' feminism and femme-centred queer theory have both argued for a greater recognition of the transgressive potential of feminine signifiers and identities (Baumgardner & Richards 2000; Nestle 1992; Austin 1992; Maltry & Tucker 2002). I want to explore how the term 'queer fem(me)inism' is productive in the exploration of politicised and strategic embodiments, celebrations and performances of femininities. The term queer fem(me)inism combines Paula Austin's 'Femme-inism' with Melanie Maltry and Kristin Tucker's 'fem-meminities' to articulate a space for thinking about collective queer feminist activist possibilities of the feminine. Melanie Maltry and Kristin Tucker's idea of queer fem(me)inism acts include the role of loudness as a tactic to resist the silencing of women and femmes in the wider social order; 'femmes intentional creation of noise stands contrary to women's position in society [...]

it also means being vocal in the expression of one's politics, articulating oneself powerfully' (2002, p. 100). Austin's account of femme-inism recognises the impossibility of constructing an autonomous gender category free from inflections of white patriarchal society; instead, she chooses to reclaim her femme identity, actions, and desires as a subject-position of agency from which she positions her everyday life as activism - 'our roles can oppress us, they have in the past; they reflect the dominant culture as it now exists. But they do not have to. I take my life, my decisions and actions, into my hands, as they were meant to be. I constantly deconstruct my education, my language, my culture, my desires' (1992, p. 365).

To speak from a subject-position of queer fem(me)inism is to evoke a critical awareness of the restraints of hetero-femininities for girls and young women; however, it does not simply reject femininity, but revels in critique, agency and pleasure through a reworked, reordered and resistant femininity. It exposes the dominant social and cultural constructions of femininity through an emphasis on denaturalisation, irony and play. For instance, Karina Eileraas (1997) suggests that 1990s contemporary girl rock-bands challenged cultural representations of 'pretty' hetero-femininity through an active deployment of ugliness in their active performance of lyrics, artwork, image, voice, sound, language, live concert practices, sexuality and the body. These strategies enabled artists to 'claim their bodies as their own battlegrounds, waging war on the oppressive limits of conventional femininity' (p. 137). Queer femmes of all sexualities have collectively laid claim to their femininities as critical practices and performances that disrupt conventional cultural performances of hetero-femininity (Hardy 2000; Austin 1992; Nestle 1992). The subversive potential of queer fem(me)inism lies in its explicitly political impetus, to situate the individual, ephemeral and everyday negotiations of genders and sexualities within wider networks of power; to collectively construct queer fem(me)inist countercultural spaces, sounds and visions that provoke and disrupt images of hetero-feminine girls and girlhood. Contemporary DIY queer girl music (sub)cultures like riot grrrl have engaged in queer fem(me)inism through the active redeployment of conventional feminine images, aesthetics and sounds within a DIY feminist discourse and punk music milieu. The production of queer girl music (sub)culture offers a way to (re)imagine the world, a means to create space for (re)articulating genders, sexualities and feminisms, as well as a medium to provoke, ridicule and disrupt hetero-gendered popular culture. Therefore music (sub)culture can act as a rich resource for social transgression, as Thomas Swiss, John Sloop and Andrew Herman argued; 'Music is a *tamed* noise, a structural code that defines and maps positions of power and difference that are located in the aural landscape of sound. Noise, or sound that falls outside a dominant musical code, transgresses the dominant ordering of difference' (1998, p. 18-19).

#### 1.7.4 'Resist Psychic Death':<sup>10</sup> Riot grrrl, Queercore and Ladyfest

Many studies have situated the riot grrrl movement as a brief era in the 1990s in which a collective of young white women involved in the DIY indie-punk subcultures of Olympia, Washington and Washington DC constructed a pro-feminist underground subculture comprised of a handful of amateur all-girl punk bands, zines and discussion groups (see Gottlieb & Wald 1994; Home 1995; Rosenberg & Garofalo 1998; Leonard 2007; Turner 2001; Andersen & Jenkins 2001; Kearney 1997, 1998, 2006; Schilt 2004, 2005; Wilson 2004; Belzer 2004; Gamboa 2000; Kaltefleiter 1995; Cateforis & Humphreys 1997). Riot grrrl garnered significant international UK and US media attention in the early 1990s; in contrast, queercore as an underground movement that focused on queer visibility in punk has not attracted as much attention (see du Plessis & Chapman 1997; Fuchs 1998; Ciminelli & Knox 2005). Mainstream accounts have ignored crucial links between riot grrrl, lesbian feminism and queercore, to offer mere glimpses that undermined the politicised potential of gender and sexual (sub)cultural life (Kearney 1997; Schilt & Zobl 2008).

Reminiscent of second-wave feminism and lesbian feminist 'women's music' culture, riot grrrl was realised within specific cultural, political, technological, economic and social contexts. The available cultural resources and experiences of young women, girls and queers in underground indie-punk culture, accompanied with wider political threats to human rights, spurred on the development of a fanzine network (Downes 2007; Schilt & Zobl 2008). Dubbed 'angry grrrl zines', these zines expanded on the prevailing conventions of punk fanzine writing, connecting personal narratives to damning cultural and political critiques. In pre-Internet America these zines were exchanged and traded nationally through the post, often with handwritten letters. This network afforded a space in which young women could rework their ideas about feminism, gender and sexuality, connect and share their experiences with other similar others. Zines often had provocative queer and girl-centred titles; *Girl Germs*, *Revolution Girl Style Now*, *Sister Nobody*, *Outpunk*, *Homocore* and *Bikini Kill*, and key friendships were formed through these fanzine networks. These relationships spurred on the development of pro-feminist punk bands Bikini Kill and Bratmobile, who sought to extend their web of mutual support and encourage the (sub)cultural productivity of more young women.

In Washington DC, members of Bratmobile, Allison Wolfe and Molly Neuman started a fanzine appropriating the phrase 'girl riot' from a letter written by Jen Smith, along with the term 'grrrl' from the expression 'angry grrrl zines' coined by Tobi Vail, to create riot grrrl (Downes 2007). Other friends and members of Bikini Kill joined in the weekly riot grrrl zine-production sessions and eventually the idea of weekly women-only meetings developed. These meetings became crucial in facilitating young women's experiences, disclosures and discussions of sexual

<sup>10</sup> Bikini Kill, 'Resist Psychic Death', *The C.D. Version of the First Two Records* (Kill Rock Stars, 1994)

and physical abuse, sexualities, homophobia, racism, classism, capitalism and sexism. These discussions critiqued the dominance of male approval, within popular and underground cultures that perpetuated unattainable beauty standards, provoked competition between girls and undervalued young women's (sub)cultural productivity. The riot grrrl network was a catalyst, encouraging young women and girls to produce pro-feminist zines, music, meetings and events. Riot grrrl radically critiqued and reworked the conventional ordering of difference in public (sub)cultural space and sound. Riot grrrl represented a queer fem(me)inist form of resistance. Many associated with riot grrrl sought to reclaim the word 'girl' and politicise feminine signifiers from denigration in second-wave lesbian feminism that permeated their experiences with college women's studies classes. Utilising queer fem(me)inist musical, performative and spatial acts, riot grrrl provoked, politicised and criticised hetero-feminine girlhood. Media attention, however questionable, saw riot grrrl spread across America, eventually migrating to the United Kingdom and Europe.

Queercore was a subculture that radically questioned heterocentric dominant culture and challenged homonormative models of lesbian and gay identity. Queercore was interconnected within riot grrrl, as Jody Bleyle commented: 'in the early 90s the queercore and riot grrrl scenes were so intertwined [...] that was a very strong part of where queercore came from' (cited in Ciminelli & Knox 2005, p. 142). The dissipation of riot grrrl, amidst a media blackout and internal struggle over inadequately voiced issues of race and class privilege, saw a resurgence of bands made up of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer-identified members collectively build a grassroots queer music (sub)culture around America. Bands like Fifth Column, the Ce Be Barnes band, Team Dresch, The Third Sex and Tribe 8, assisted by queer-orientated independent labels Chainsaw, Candy Ass and Outpunk, and event collectives like Homocore Chicago and Homocorps in New York, created the spaces and sounds of queer (sub)cultural resistance. Investing in punk sounds traditionally associated with masculinity, queer women challenged the aesthetic boundaries of women's music and complicated the performance of gender and sexuality in music subculture. The queercore spirit has continued within bands like the Haggard, the Need, the Butchies, Triple Creme and Sleater-Kinney, the independent labels Mr Lady Records and Retard Disco, and festivals like Dirty Bird, Homo-a-go-go and Queeruption. Contemporary queer acts frequently blur genre boundaries and often consist of members from diverse gender and sexual identifications. Queer hip hop, or homo-hop, has opened up new positions of cultural production, visible in acts like Scream Club, Stinkmitt, Diamonique and God-des and She. Electronic music has also offered new opportunities for queer (sub)cultural subversion, evident in acts like Gravy Train!!!!, Le Tigre, Peaches, Rhythm King and her Friends and Lesbians on Ecstasy (see Halberstam 2007; Bridges 2005; Böttner 2005). Alarmingly, there is a scarcity of histories of queercore that focus adequately on the

complexities and subtleties of young women's and girls' queer resistance; accounts often foreground gay male musicians (e.g. Ciminelli & Knox 2005).

Riot grrrl has retrospectively been positioned as an important precursor to 'third-wave' feminism (see Mack-Canty 2004; Dicker & Piepmeier 2003; Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004; Gillis et al 2004; Gillis & Munford 2004). The phrase 'third wave' was coined by Rebecca Walker, daughter of the African-American feminist icon and author Alice Walker, who proudly asserted 'I am not a post-feminism feminist. I am the Third Wave' (1992, p. 87). 'Third-wave' feminism resists and critiques the discursive deployment of hetero-femininity and post-feminism within popular culture. Responding to critiques of 'second-wave' feminisms that invested in a universalised category of 'woman', 'third-wave' feminism revels in the exploration of contradiction marked out in the individual experiences, identities and voices of young women across intersections of race, ethnicity, ability, size, gender-identification, sexuality, class, nation, education and occupation (see Walker 1995; Findlen 1995; Heywood & Drake 1997; Hernandez & Rehman 2002; Tea 2003; Berger 2006). In a key 'third-wave' text *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future*, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards argue for the reclamation of 'girlie' ideologies within feminism:

Girlie says we're not broken, and our desires aren't simply booby traps set by patriarchy. Girlie encompasses the tabooed symbols of women's feminine enculturation – Barbie dolls, makeup, fashion magazines, high heels – and says using them isn't shorthand for 'we've been duped' (2000, p. 136).

For 'third-wavers', femininity no longer automatically signals weakness, conformity or delusion, but is reworked as a potentially empowering and politically subversive subject position. The 'third wave' also expands on the traditional remit of women's issues to organise as a multi-cultural social-justice movement, to include diverse global political struggles over climate change, environmental issues, racism, reproductive justice, AIDS awareness, trans-politics, war and conflict, men and masculinity, poverty and globalisation. Unfortunately, the majority of 'third-wave' theory is US-centred and even the scant British theorisations tend to focus on academic analyses of popular culture obscuring contributions from British grassroots (sub)cultural and activist spaces (Gillis et al 2004).

The existing literature on riot grrrl is limited by its focus on the visible artefacts and voices of the US movement. It is the zines, media articles, lyrics, style and interviews associated with Kathleen Hanna, Allison Wolfe, Kathi Wilcox, Tobi Vail, Molly Neuman, Sharon Cheslow and Erika Reinstein that shape the prevailing definitions of riot grrrl (Gottlieb & Wald 1994; Reynolds & Press 1995; Kearney 2006; Andersen & Jenkins 2001; Turner 2001; Schilt 2000, 2004, 2005; Gamboa 2000; Starr 1999; Wilson 2004). However, my historical review of girls' and queer women's (sub)cultural resistance has uncovered a multitude of moments and opportunities for the emergence of politicised girl subcultures. The absence of research sensitive

to expression of girl (sub)cultures across diverse locations and times needs to be addressed. Although stories of the origins of critical popular cultural moments are crucial, ‘revolutionary moments in pop culture have their widest impact after the “moment” has allegedly passed, when ideas spread from the metropolitan bohemian elites and hipster cliques that originally “own” them, and reach the suburbs and the regions’ (Reynolds 2005, p. xvi). Nostalgic and romanticised interpretations of US riot grrrl undervalue the (sub)cultural resistance of girls and young women that span different locations and eras.

Currently, little research has delved into non-American and contemporary manifestations of girl music (sub)cultures. British indie-punk music culture was transformed by riot grrrl and developed girl-centred independent labels, riot grrrl chapters, bands, events and zines.<sup>11</sup> The work that does attend to British riot grrrl tends to focus its analysis on zines, media articles and written interviews (see Leonard 1998, 2007; Home 1995; Triggs 1998, 2004; White 2000; Blase 2004). The recent incarnation of Ladyfest has revitalised DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance across the world (see Downes 2007; Zobl 2004; Schilt & Zobl 2008; Keenan 2007a, 2007b). However, there is a lack of comprehensive interest in exploring the political potential of these contemporary DIY spaces, music practices and participatory tactics for new considerations of British queer feminist theory.

My research aims to address these omissions, to locate and understand participatory practices of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance in Britain. This research consists of three interrelated empirical studies: (i) the construction of a history of riot grrrl culture in the UK that includes an exploration of power, conflict and contradiction within oral histories, media sources, zines and interviews; (ii) an ethnography of contemporary queer feminist music (sub)cultural participation across the UK, to consider the importance of music participation within (sub)cultural life; and finally, (iii) an analysis of DIY queer feminist music-making drawing on case studies of queer and/or feminist identified bands; Jean Genet, Party Weirdo and Drunk Granny.

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<sup>11</sup> Between the inception of Ladyfest in 2000 and 2007 approximately 123 Ladyfests occurred in 27 countries; therefore the impact of riot grrrl and Ladyfest is not restricted to a British and/or US context, but has influenced queer feminist cultural resistance across Europe, South America, Africa, Australia and Asia (Schilt & Zobl 2008, p. 176-77)

## Chapter Two

### Methodology

#### Sett(l)ing the Agenda: Interdisciplinary Queer and Feminist Tactics

a *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus [...] the space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organised by the law of foreign power [...] It must vigilantly make use of cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse (Certeau 1988, p. 36-37).

A queer methodology, in a way, is a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour. The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion towards disciplinary coherence (Halberstam 1998, p. 13)

The study of queer feminist music and music culture confronts and questions conventional research practice. It disturbs the guarded boundaries between science and art; the researcher and the researched; text, vision and sound; centre and margin; the spectacular pop cultural moment and hidden everyday (sub)cultural production. Refusing to settle on exploring inner logics and essences as adequate sources of (sub)cultural meanings, it foregrounds the political, cultural and social mechanisms embedded in the everyday performative (re)constitution of identities. It attempts to remain critically aware of the tricks of linearity, identity and language, to understand how reliance on categories of girl, music, riot grrrl, woman, feminism, queer, lesbian, bisexual and gay can be implicated in the reification of discourse invested in the maintenance of systems of power. But it also holds on to the ability to rewrite, resist and reorder discourse, remaining astute to hegemonic residue in the processes of social change. It invests in reflexivity, recognising how research experiences impact on authorial identities, and it drives the desire to locate, archive and represent the identities and practices of ephemeral queer subcultural life (see Warren & Fassett 2002; Finlay 2002). It violates the traditional quest for 'truth' to forage across multiple disciplines in its search for new interdisciplinary theories of cultural signification that can address new questions of genders and sexualities which conventional methodology can avoid and/or neutralise. I wish to outline and justify the methodological peculiarities necessary for an interdisciplinary research project such as this, which draws on queer feminist subjects, spaces and sounds.

## 2.1 (Sub)cultural Producers as Cultural Theorists

Feminist and postmodern critics of scientific methodologies have critiqued the impossibility of social science to be objective, detached and value-neutral. The ability to claim knowledge of a real social world by discovering grand narratives and universal truths has been deeply disputed (Kuhn 1970; Feyerabend 1975; Haraway 1989; Harding 1987). Those involved in the production of queer and feminist cultural theory often disrespect the requirements of objectivity and detachment dictated by conventional social research. Nonetheless several studies of riot grrrl have tended to find the social researcher engaged in the analysis of girl culture without any previous involvement (see Leonard 1997, 1998, 2007; Kearney 2006; Nehring 1997; Eichhorn 2001; Gottlieb & Wald 1994; Kaltefleiter 1995). Instead, as Judith Halberstam (2005a) has observed, the *queer* cultural theorist is more often a queer subcultural *participant*; commonly sharing the same friendship circles and engaging in queer subcultural spaces as a fan, consumer or long-standing subcultural producer. Subcultural participation permeates the study of DIY subculture in other disciplines. Cultural studies and histories of DIY culture are commonly undertaken by subcultural participants (Leblanc 1999; Moore 2007; Duncombe 1997; Andersen & Jenkins 2001; Spencer 2005). In addition examples of musicians studying the music culture within which they already create and perform exist within ethnomusicology, and have, more recently, become present in musicology itself (Cottrell 2004; Titon 1997).

My position within queer feminist music subculture operates on a number of interrelated levels. My desire for women's punk music began when I was twelve years old; at thirteen I had rejected violin playing and participation in choir and string orchestra, for an electric guitar and alternative rock music making in my friend's cellar. It was not until I left school, bound for sixth-form college, that I came across riot grrrl. I was then a fan of the more accessible women's rock bands like Hole, Babes in Toyland and L7, and played guitar and sang in a local punk rock band. A college friend called me a riot grrrl and made me two compilation tapes consisting of a multitude of bands such as Sleater-Kinney, The Third Sex, Bratmobile and Bikini Kill. This was 1999; the year after Bikini Kill had broken up. By the time this culture was opened up to me, it was already history. I had a 'click' experience in another friend's house when we were discussing riot grrrl: it seemed like this combination of punk rock and feminism had the potential to describe my own location in culture. Although, riot grrrl seemed too far in both time and distance from my everyday experiences for me to *really* identify as a riot grrrl, it did serve as a useful term with which I discovered a network of young feminist music, writing and culture.

I did not experience a DIY queer feminist space directly until 2001, when I attended Ladyfest Glasgow, and my second Le Tigre gig at Joseph's Well in Leeds in 2002. The energy and inspiration I drew from these experiences led to the development of the Manifesta collective in

Leeds. This in turn culminated in experiences of collectively constructing DIY queer feminist spaces and sounds. I have been involved in promoting, DJ-ing, and organising the club nights *Pussy Whipped* and *Suck My Left One*; arranged gigs for queer and feminist bands like *The Gossip*, *Drunk Granny*, *Jean Genet*, *Vile Vile Creatures*, the *Corey O's*, *Lesbians on Ecstasy*, *Gravy Train!!!!*, *Party Weirdo*, *New Bloods* and *Finally Punk*; delivered practical skill-sharing workshops covering DJ-ing and DIY feminist cultural activism; was a drum tutor at *Ladies Rock Camp UK* in August 2007; co-organised the music events for the feminist cultural arts festival *Ladyfest Leeds 2007*; and continued my music-making as a vocalist and bass player in *Black Bats*, and drummer in all-girl post-punk bands *The Holy Terror*,<sup>12</sup> *Fake Tan*,<sup>13</sup> at present I play drums in *Vile Vile Creatures*.<sup>14</sup>

With this background, I can position myself as a fan, (sub)cultural producer and music-maker within British queer feminist (sub)culture. Queer feminist (sub)culture has influenced my friendships, relationships and politics, which later determined my academic interests. In 2003 I carried out my undergraduate dissertation; a critical feminist discourse analysis of focus-group talk about riot grrrl. I did not anticipate continuing with this work until I chanced upon some research-assistant employment from which I received encouragement to consider postgraduate research. I was awarded a ESRC 1+3 scholarship in 2004. The opportunity to carry out research into the historical legacy and contemporary landscape of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural production has enabled me to document and produce 'an archive of the ephemeral' (Muñoz 1996). This is a politically driven project, fusing academia and activism, to produce knowledge to challenge and confront conventional understandings of British queer life, queer feminisms and DIY music (sub)cultures. It takes as its starting point 'communities that never seem to surface in the commentaries on subcultures in general' (Halberstam 2005a, p. 165), situated in the British legacies of DIY (sub)cultural resistance in queer feminist counter-publics. Therefore, my position complicates neat divisions, for example academia/activism, inside/outside and

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<sup>12</sup> *The Holy Terror* (Emma Rowe – guitar; Cathy Russell – bass; Julia Downes – drums; Helena Gee – vocals) evolved from early *Manifesta* girl-friendly jamming sessions, and a period with Amy Brachi as the vocalist under the name *No Problems Disko*. After my departure *The Holy Terror* manifested into *The Ivories* (with Anna Prior – Drums) who were signed to Leeds indie label *48 Crash records*, released two singles 'Reduce the Temperature' in 2005 and 'Heartstrings' in 2006 and disbanded in 2006. *The Ivories* were the only all-girl band to be featured in *NME's* New Yorkshire feature in 2005.

<sup>13</sup> *Fake Tan* (Claire Adams – bass; Rosemary Lucy Hill – vocals & guitar; Julia Downes – drums) formed in January 2006 and went on hiatus in December 2007. *Fake Tan* self-released one CD EP 'Red Riding Hood' recorded at the University of Leeds School Of Music by Kate Whitaker and featuring artwork by Ellen Burroughs. For more information see <<http://www.myspace.com/faketanrock>> [accessed on 1 August 2008]

<sup>14</sup> *Vile Vile Creatures* (Jenny Howe – guitar & vocals; Sian Williams – bass & vocals; David – drums) are based in Manchester, have self-released one CD EP 'The Cabin Fever Tapes', and the 'Wilderness/Faux Feminism' EP was released by AARBR Records in 2007. *VVC* have been played and recorded a session on BBC Radio including Marc Riley, Steve Lamacq and Huw Stephens. I joined *Vile Vile Creatures* on drums in April 2008 after David's departure creating an all-girl line-up. For more information see <<http://www.myspace.com/vilevilecreatures>> [accessed on 1 August 2008]

emic/etic. These contradictions bring a multitude of ethical, political and practical issues to the fore, provoking the need for further discussion.

### *2.1.1 Access*

Many researchers interested in riot grrrl cultures in the form of collective activism or fanzine communities have had to negotiate access and acceptance as a temporary participant. Caroline Kaltefleiter described her experiences of locating and accessing a riot grrrl collective in Washington DC to be 'the most difficult stage of the project' (1995 p. 108). Kaltefleiter spent three anxiety-ridden weeks scouring DC for someone who looked like a 'riot grrrl type', encountering dead-ends and disconnected phone numbers. Similarly, Kate Eichhorn's (2001) study of a girl fanzine community was troubled as her requests for zines defied community norms and tacit rules. Her laser-printed requests clearly marked her out as a researcher in a world where personalised, hand-written letters and reused envelopes were commonplace. Eichhorn received only a fraction of the zines she sent requests for, learning that access to the girl fanzine world was restricted and controlled by subcultural participants. 'Informal access' requires a researcher to understand the codes and conventions that distinguish and locate a subculture (Glesne & Peshkin 1992). Similarly, in selecting punk girls to interview, Lauraine Leblanc resorted to 'ambush sampling' wherein she would frequent punk sites and pick out girls using her own judgments of subcultural commitment based on dress and demeanour (1999, p. 25-26). A researcher needs a sense of subcultural-specific knowledge concerning where to look and how to approach and present their identity and research appropriately.

Queer girl subcultures, like riot grrrl, are embedded in a legacy of restricting and controlling public access in order to preserve subculture as a 'safe space' free from external interference. In late 1992 US riot grrrl culture, aware of its status as a popular cultural curiosity amidst negative media representation, initiated a media blackout encouraging those identified with riot grrrl to decline all media and expert contact. An anti-academic stance became a common feature of riot grrrl discourse, as Karren Ablaze detailed in her zine: 'Academia is a shitty place for me, it's like a long tall twisting staircase in a building with no doors, and little light, just enough to realise that every few steps those ugly grunting noises are made by little pug-dog type monsters with running noses and bad breath and they keep trying to sniff up to me – NO!!' (1992 p. 15). Similarly, Caroline Kaltefleiter (1995) experienced a critical interrogation of her academic identity, as many riot grrrl participants flatly rejected academia as patriarchal. My involvement in a Riot Grrrl Retrospective panel at Ladyfest Brighton in October 2005 alongside personal correspondence and interviews has enabled me to understand how and why key figures of riot grrrl are critical of the academic theorisation and popular historicisation of riot grrrl.

In contrast, my experiences of conducting research on queer feminist (sub)culture within a contemporary British context has not been characterised by such intensity or resistance. The

majority of people I approached were happy to be interviewed and involved. The only refusals I experienced within the oral history project were from two members of Huggy Bear who did not respond to my request to interview them. This was not unusual, as Gary Walker, their ex-record label owner, explained to me in an email; 'from past experience, [they] are unlikely to respond to any request for an interview! They just don't want to talk about this era, and have turned down every interview that I've passed onto them over the years' (personal correspondence 26 July 2007). Nonetheless, the relative enthusiasm and openness I experienced may also be linked to the current social and cultural context in which riot grrrl has retrospectively become celebrated<sup>15</sup> and repositioned as an influential moment within popular culture (Gibb 2006; Monem 2007; Amp 2007). When conducting oral histories and interviews, many interviewees enjoyed the opportunity to reflect and were excited about the possible positive influence my research could have. In terms of accessing contemporary sites of queer feminist (sub)culture, my position as a subcultural participant equipped me with plenty of tacit knowledge and contacts in order to successfully locate and approach queer feminist (sub)cultural participants. In many queer feminist (sub)cultural sites I was already established and recognised primarily for my (sub)cultural participation. Therefore, the issue shifted to consider how, why and when it was appropriate to emphasise my researcher role and to reflexively evaluate the ethical implications and representational issues of my research.

### *2.1.2 Data production*

I turn now to reflect on how my subcultural participatory position impacted upon the data collected. It would be too simplistic to claim that my 'insider' position enabled more 'accurate' or 'realistic' data to be uncovered. However, my position has impacted on the issues I have considered as well as how I have chosen to consider them, and have heavily informed my methodological approach. For instance, from my perspective it seemed obvious that in order to represent queer feminist (sub)cultural life, an auto/ethnographic approach would be best equipped to allow me to address the everyday practices, processes and investments involved in constructing queer feminist (sub)cultural spaces and sounds. An auto/ethnographic approach challenges the distinction made between researchers and the researched in fieldwork. It enables the inclusion of myself as a participant in research, to add my experiences as data, producing a multidirectional gaze and dialogue between myself amongst fellow (sub)cultural participants (see Denzin 1997). Recent studies of contemporary girl subculture, focussing on Ladyfest, fanzine communities and girls use of cyberspace, have tended to rely upon the analysis of text generated from indirect sources - Ladyfest websites, programmes, flyers, posters, email lists,

<sup>15</sup> The riot grrrl retrospective panel featuring Allison Wolfe and Tobi Vail I helped to chair at Ladyfest Brighton 2005 represented one of the first times US protagonists publically reflected on their riot grrrl experiences within Britain. The panel has been archived online: <<http://www.archive.org/details/RiotGrrrlpaneldiscussionLadyfestBrightonOctober2005>> [accessed on 10 September 2009]

written interviews and email correspondence (Leonard 2007; Aragon 2008). This inclination to avoid face-to-face interactions and participation within (sub)cultural sites restricts the exploration of the meaning-making processes embedded within the everyday (sub)cultural practices of girls and young women.

In a study of girl fanzine culture, rooted in the textual analysis of zines, Kate Eichhorn (2001) found that a face-to-face interaction with a fanzine writer in her home gave her critical insight into how girls used technologies in their everyday production of zines. This led her to concentrate on a previously peripheral aspect of her research, the resistant act of salvaging neglected technologies in zine production. Therefore, participation in (sub)cultural life can produce opportunities for interactive in depth analysis of the meanings subcultural participants construct in their everyday practices. Reflecting on the fruitful data gained from her interaction with a fanzine writer, Eichhorn notes how the experience 'made [her] increasingly aware of the extent to which knowing people only at the level of texts was both closing off and opening up research routes' (2001, p. 571). Auto/ethnography offers multiple routes to explore how the textual, sonic and visual aspects of subcultures are produced, used and articulated in everyday life. One exceptional study of riot grrrl subculture in New York City was conducted by Theo Cateforis, a doctoral student of Musicology, alongside Elena Humphreys, a subcultural participant of riot grrrl NYC and postgraduate art student (Cateforis & Humphreys 1997). The combination of insider and outsider ethnographer perspectives enabled the production of a sensitive and comprehensive account of how riot grrrl NYC collectively constructed and understood their everyday subcultural practices, spaces and music performances. Another successful example is Stacy Holman Jones' elegant ethnography of women's music organisation at a folk-music venue, *The Club* (1998). Currently there are a handful of retrospective essays on feminist cultural experiences written by those directly involved in riot grrrl (Klein 1997; Smith 1997; Lamm 2001 [1995]; Hanna 1999, 2003), *Ladyfest* (Hoffman 2006) and publications containing interviews with riot grrrl performers (Juno 1996; Sinker 2001; Raphael 1995). In the US Elizabeth Keenan has completed her ethnomusicological doctoral research on US *Ladyfests* (see Keenan 2007a, 2007b, 2008). However, there is a lack of auto/ethnographic attention to contemporary British queer feminist (sub)culture that interrogates how spaces, sounds and visual aspects are produced and understood by its (sub)cultural participants.

### *2.1.3 Ethical dilemmas*

Every stage of this research project has been met with personal and political concerns over the potential impact of academic knowledge production within queer feminist (sub)cultural life. My position is fraught, caught between contradictory demands and personal investments in both academia and (sub)cultural resistance. I have struggled with one critical question: what does this/our community gain from becoming visible in an academic context? Some feminists have

argued that the utilisation of academic research processes within personal feminist activist communities carries an inherent danger of exploitation (Neal & Gordon 2001). Inevitably my research will produce unequal rewards for my academic identity in relation to (sub)cultural participants. I have benefitted from greater access to the economic resources, time, training and expertise than my fellow (sub)cultural participants. I have frequently reflected on the comparative privilege embedded in my racial and class positions (white and middle-class) that have shaped my acceptance and behaviour in academic feminist spaces. To deny the existence of privilege would obscure the interpretative and representational power invested in my position. Many participants were aware of the dilemmas involved in carrying out research on radical subcultures within an institutional academic context and were happy to engage in dialogue concerning how I was managing these conflicting interests. I frequently made recourse to the practices of existing queer cultural theorists. It is increasingly common for academics to be involved in the construction of (sub)cultural knowledge, archives and histories; 'queer academics can – and some should – participate in the ongoing project of recoding queer culture as well as interpreting it and circulating a sense of its multiplicity and sophistication' (Halberstam 2005a, p. 159).

Furthermore, my research has confronted unexpected opportunities to intervene in the popular cultural narratives of riot grrrl. In 2007 I was involved in the publication of a book solely devoted to documenting riot grrrl culture by the London-based publisher Black Dog publishing. Although initially reluctant to engage with the publication I found an un-used rail ticket to London and agreed to meet with them. The meeting with the editor, Nadine Monem, was validating but also perturbing. I was considered an expert on riot grrrl and my suggestions were keenly scribbled into a notebook along with my ideas for contributing writers and book structure. Up until this point my experience with media industries had been mixed and I was chronically aware of the position riot grrrl has previously taken towards the media. Nonetheless, Nadine made a good impression on me and insisted that the book would avoid the common pitfalls of media representation I had described and would actively seek the involvement of multiple perspectives and voices. I felt that contributing an accessible account of my research could be a valuable way for my work to reach a wider audience and contest existing negative narratives. I ended up as a contributing author, producing the chapter 'Riot Grrrl: The legacy and contemporary landscape of feminist cultural activism' (Downes 2007). This experience was also a rather uncomfortable crash-course into the world of commercial publishing, a radically different world to academic publishing. The emphasis was on producing the book quickly, gaining media approval and ensuring profit margins. This led to short-cuts, including the unauthorised publication of an incomplete riot grrrl timeline, inattentive editing and haphazard image permissions. Additionally, contracts were breached as final payments were withheld from

the lesser known writers (including Cazz Blase, Red Chidgey and I) until significant pressure was imposed on the publisher.

The uneven exchange between dominant-cultural scavengers and subcultural participants has been discussed by Judith Halberstam (2005a, p. 156-159). Instead of fair payment, the payback for subcultural participants' cooperation with cultural industries is the opportunity to 'use the encounter to force some kind of recognition on audiences that what is appealing about mainstream culture may well come from subcultures that they do not even know exist or that they have repudiated' (Halberstam 2005a, p. 158). This concern with the currently mainstream 'hip' and 'cool' was very evident in the editor's choice of Beth Ditto to author the foreword of the riot grrrl book. During 2007 Ditto's band, The Gossip, became critically acclaimed in Britain after their song 'Standing in the Way of Control' was featured on the youth-orientated television series *Skins*. Beth Ditto and The Gossip appeared prominently in the indie-rock music press, embarked on large successful UK tours, garnered tabloid press attention, made numerous television appearances and Beth became a valued guest columnist and agony aunt at the *Guardian*. The impact of The Gossip on the wider cultural consciousness had inevitably brought riot grrrl back into the popular British imagination. During the production of the book it became clear that at least one other book was in the planning stages at Passenger Books, to be authored by the music journalist Miss Amp. Unfortunately Black Dog's original goals became infused with a new-found urgency of production; the priority was to publish, circulate and sell their riot grrrl book before this 'rival' publication came to press. Despite the positive feedback I have received since the publication of the riot grrrl book (see True 2007; Cihak 2008; McCabe 2007; Ledger 2008) my academic work seeks to resist the grip the cultural industries can exert over the British popular imagination and reclaim marginal and radical (sub)cultural practices; 'the more intellectual records we have of queer culture, the more we contribute to the project of claiming for the subculture the radical cultural work that either gets absorbed into or claimed by mainstream media' (Halberstam 2005a, p. 159).

Throughout my research and commercial publication experiences I have been forced to reflect on my ethical responsibilities towards the subcultural participants involved in my study. I had formally gained their informed consent within our oral history and interview sessions, the pronounced moments of data production. Participants were clearly told the aims and topic areas of the research in an introductory email, volunteer information sheet and consent form (see appendix 1), and any questions participants had regarding the research were answered. The face-to-face interviews were audio-taped and typed up into a transcript which I emailed back to participants to read and clarify, and I often asked further questions at this stage. Some participants opted to contribute via email correspondence due to distance, time and communicative preference, a decision I respected. I encouraged a reciprocal dialogue and asked participants to co-construct their biographies retaining control over how they would be

introduced within the text. The assurance of confidentiality was complicated in the project as many participants were used to the conventions of music histories in which personal names, band names and locations are central to the archival order. All participants wished to maintain their real identities and associations with bands, collectives and locations. It also seemed critical to retain this information in order to produce a history sensitive to the identities and situations of marginal voices. Participants were informed of the potential viewers of the transcript material, including supervisors and academic audiences in presentations, reports and lectures. The commercial riot grrrl book venture introduced a new unanticipated audience. I found it increasingly important to revisit each participant as their voice featured in the chapter narrative. I emailed all participants with a draft of the chapter for comments, feedback and to negotiate permission for quotations to appear in a commercial text. Therefore, informal consent and knowledge production became a collaborative process, allowing participants to exert control over their contributions at various levels of visibility. All participants remained content with the inclusion of their voices in an academic text; one individual refused to be included in the commercial text and a few made minor alterations to their quotations.

#### *2.1.4 Researching with friends*

Subcultural and academic spheres were increasingly blurred with the inclusion of existing friends and personal activist communities and collectives within my research. The majority of oral history participants were previously unknown to me; however, contemporary (sub)cultural participants were frequently existing friends and acquaintances. Friendships have an important place in feminism and queer life. Historically female friendships have been considered as preparatory or secondary to other more privileged relationships with men (Faderman 1991). Therefore the active fostering of friendships between girls and young women creates an important space for rebellion, power and pleasure in the collective resistance of hetero-feminine socialisation (see Hey 1997). Despite attempts by hetero-gendered institutions to dismember the potential of female friendships, through the circulation of hegemonic discourses that encourage competition between women and girls for male desire, friendships between young women and girls remain crucial to queer feminist (sub)cultural life.

Close friendships are becoming ever more critical in contemporary patterns of living; people are experiencing extended periods of time and space outside the conventional family and heterosexual coupling archetypes (see Roseneil 2005). Communities and friendship networks have been historically important to those who exist outside of hetero-norms; LGBT communities have been crucial to everyday queer life and emergence of political activism (Harris & Crocker 1997). Queer communities and friendships are also crucial to cultural production practices and creative worlds. Nadine Hubbs (2004), in her analysis of twentieth-century American concert music, criticised homophobic cultural myths that reinforced

heterosexuality's exclusive position in cultural and social production and reproduction. Instead she points to the importance of queer life and subculture within which inter-gender and inter-art alliances and friendships were crucial to the production of American art and culture. Twentieth-century queer life was multi-dimensional; social, sexual, artistic and professional dimensions overlapped in the shared experience of negotiating creative legitimacy whilst inhabiting an unspeakable minority status. Friendships, networks and communities are an important feature in the production of spaces and sounds of queer feminist life.

In queer subcultural theory, it is common for researchers to learn about queer subcultural acts from critical friendships and alliances that are embedded in their personal relationships. For instance, José Esteban Muñoz's friendship with Carmelita Tropicana enabled him to learn more about the queer performance art practices of Jack Smith. Furthermore friendships also developed between Muñoz and the artists he studied for his book *Disidentifications* (1999), including Marga Gomez, Vaginal Davis and Richard Fung. My friendship with some queer feminist musicians allowed for the construction of documentation that referred directly to me as the viewer and even led to me becoming the topic of songs.<sup>16</sup> Friendships are a useful link in understanding queer feminist worlds, but are also a closely guarded resource. Research within queer communities which the author is also dependent on for their own creative, political and social survival introduces many complexities. Research with friends can slip into wrongful assumptions of sameness that obscure differences in the textures of subcultural life woven through class, racial, ethnic, gender, religious, political and sexual identifications. Personal creativity and friendships become scrutinised in new ways which inevitably impact on personal dynamics and interactions. The outcome has personal effects on the political, creative and social life of both the researcher and participants. I have attempted to monitor and reflexively evaluate how academic sub-desires have informed and been informed by my friendships and (sub)cultural practices in queer feminist (sub)cultural life.

Research can threaten and challenge friendships in unexpected ways, introduce ulterior motives for maintaining friendships and projects, allow for assumptions of consent without proper procedure, and subsequently leave research open to accusations of exploitation, whilst the imposition of academic processes and languages threatens to misrepresent queer feminist life. I felt the weight of these research pressures in choosing to use my own band Fake Tan as a case study. When Fake Tan went on indefinite hiatus in December 2007, it allowed me to re-evaluate the troubling dynamics that had impeded the band's creativity and reflect on the ephemeral and transitory aspects of DIY queer feminist music-making in people's lives. Did I resist voicing my concerns for the sake of sustaining Fake Tan as a case study? Did the introduction of data collection within the band space allow for additional scrutiny and reflection? Transformations are a common feature of DIY queer feminist creative cultures, and other bands also experienced

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<sup>16</sup> See Drunk Granny, 'Auntie Julie', on *Postcards for Auntie Julie* (self-released CDR album, 2007).

change during the project: Jean Genet played their final gig in Brighton on 29 December 2007 but began performing again in late 2008; and Party Weirdo sustained their creativity with members based in Berlin and Dublin and went on indefinite hiatus in May 2008.

### *2.1.5 The home and the field*

In traditional anthropology, ethnographic research has symbolically privileged 'the legacy of the field' (Clifford 1997, p. 88) in the construction of methodology and researcher identity. In other words, the temporary relocation of the researcher in a geographically bound field distinct from the home environment in order to undertake fieldwork that relies on face-to-face interaction, participation and observation is seen as necessary to successfully decipher another culture. In comparison the home becomes the site to which the researcher returns to make sense of field notes, interviews and artefacts collected from the field. This traditional separation of home and field continues to structure the study of music culture. In ethnomusicological circles researchers commonly enter a non-western field in order to decipher the cultural uses of 'other' musics (Blacking 1974; Byron 1995; Nettl 1956; Dawe 2007). However, some areas of ethnomusicology have found researchers increasingly applying their field methods to western music cultures closer to home (Born 1995; Slobin 1993), and even interrogating their own institutions of music academe (Nettl 1995; Kingsbury 1988). The traditional home/field divisions have become unworkable in my research; there have been numerous occasions where the home and field have merged as (sub)cultural production, documentation and comprehension occurred across these so-called sites. Often my adherence to academic demands, in terms of writing and meeting deadlines, has (re)constructed the home as a traditional enclave of academic work overriding established (sub)cultural productive practices. Once a haven of flyer and poster production and gig promotion, my scissors and glue often laid dormant as I planned lectures, handouts, papers and chapters to conform to deadlines. Academic demands frequently interrupted and detracted from my participation in (sub)cultural spheres, which ironically also removed me from the so-called field of my academic endeavours; therefore, the home and field have both been transformed through my participation in academic research.

To summarise, this section has outlined how my position as an academic researcher with personal, political, creative and social investments in DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural life has informed this research at various levels. It has shaped how I have negotiated access to fellow subcultural participants' lives, guided my choice of auto/ethnographic data production, intersected in various ethical dilemmas, included my personal friendships and activist networks, and finally, challenged the traditional divide between the research field and home. In the next section I encounter the disciplinary boundaries that compartmentalise the study of text, image and sound.

## 2.2 *Disciplinary Restraint: Text, image and sound*

DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural life encompasses a variety of visual, sonic and textual everyday cultural practices, from textual fanzine communities and the visual practices of performers and artists, to embodied music participations. However, the academic study of these forms tends to be constrained by a researcher's disciplinary location, as different disciplines privilege the analysis of a particular cultural object. Sociology, women's studies and cultural studies tend to foreground textual sources within readings of queer girl subcultural life, focussing analysis on lyrics, interview transcripts, email lists, media reports, website and fanzine sources (Schilt 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2005; Aragon 2008; Bell 2002; Belzer 2004; Collins 1999; Comstock 2001; Driscoll 1999; Starr 1999; Gamboa 2000; Home 1995; Kearney 2006; Leonard 1998, 2007; Piano 2003, 2004; Triggs 1998, 2004; White 2000). Analyses of the sounds, visions and spaces of queer feminist (sub)culture remain curiously absent. Tia DeNora acknowledges this absence of sound in the sociology of music, observing that sociologists 'have mostly avoided analysis of musical works (whether as scores or performances)' (2004, p. 213). Additionally feminist cultural theorist Ruth Holliday (2000) has interrogated the reluctance of sociology to use visual sources as evidence, criticising the traditional reliance on statistics and texts. Holliday argued that the cultural studies text-centric semiotic approach to critiquing visual and textual sources abandons the visual as an empirical tool to help explain the everyday practices of queer life. Musicology,<sup>17</sup> the discipline that prioritises the perception of musical sounds, has been remarkably silent on the music practices of contemporary queer and feminist subcultures. Musicology has dismissed the significance of riot grrrl sounds; 'the mass of poor oppressed people would surely not want to buy any Riot Grrrl singles, and for one very blunt reason. They sound *awful*' (Griffiths 1999, p. 411). Even popular musicology,<sup>18</sup> which defines itself as more open to the serious consideration of subcultural musics and social issues, has dismissed riot grrrl sounds:

What about the music?, you might well ask. Despite their 'pro-girl' ethos, Riot Grrrl hasn't questioned the gender-orientation of music qua music, and there's been only lipservice acknowledgement of bands like the Raincoats or Throwing Muses who've attempted to interrogate the phallogocentric forms of rock itself [...] most Riot Grrrl bands seem to be engaged in a reinvention of

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<sup>17</sup> I use the term Musicology to refer to a set of, albeit fragmented, academic approaches to the study of music and sound. In North America two official schools of multi-disciplinary thought predominate, the American Musicological Society (AMS) which focuses on musicology (music analysis, history and theory) and the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) which focuses on ethnomusicology. In the UK these branches are not as distinct. Postmodern turns occurred on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1980s and 1990s, with the US tending to use the term New Musicology and the UK preferring Critical Musicology.

<sup>18</sup> Popular Musicology refers to the musicological study of popular music, a sub-branch that has increasingly sought its own analytical frameworks, canons and theory (see Moore 2003; Frith 2003). Diverse groups of scholars in sociology and literary disciplines interested in the academic study of popular music founded an official body, the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) in 1981.

the wheel: they sound like very traditional hardcore or late 70's punk bands. They may criticise tomboy rockers, but musically they sound like tomboys, throwing straightforward punky tantrums [...] this music sounds simplistic and retrograde [...] It's a kind of musical anorexia, a deliberate arresting of development in order to preserve innocence and stave off the professionalism that's associated with the corrupt music biz [...] the spirit is wild but the musical flesh is puny (Reynolds & Press 1995, p. 327-9)

Simon Reynolds and Joy Press are obviously unaware of the feminist archival activities and comprehensive music knowledge of women involved in 1990s riot grrrl culture. Sharon Cheslow is dedicated to archiving the history of women's punk and post-punk music-making; Layla Gibbon, past member of Skinned Teen and current editor of the long-running fanzine *Maximum Rock n Roll*, documents and archives women's punk music practices in print, radio and online mediums; Bikini Kill's Tobi Vail has contributed to the knowledge production of women's post-punk music. Zines and documentaries clearly indicate riot grrrl awareness, commitment and knowledge of post-punk women bands, significantly exceeding meagre 'lip-service'.<sup>19</sup> To simplify riot grrrl music as derivative of (male) punk alongside moves that characterise resistance as mere tomboy emulation undermines the threat of queer fem(me)inist and female masculine acts and preserves the normative order of (male) sex, (masculine) gender and (hetero) sexuality in punk and rock music culture. Furthermore, the associations with 'anorexia' and 'puny flesh' highlights how feminist dissent is commonly met with the remobilisation of gendered discourses of pathology which taint dominant readings of women's cultural expressions as excessive, disordered and one-dimensional. The DIY discourse common to subcultural music production is marked out in riot grrrl as childish and irrational, as actively preventing itself from growing and developing, whereas DIY tactics in comparable men's indie-rock bands are celebrated (see Azerrad 2001). The diversity of DIY queer feminist music (sub)cultural resistance is limited to the disdainful consideration of the recordings of Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear as 'a lineage that has delivered less and less musically with each turnover' (Reynolds & Press 1995, p. 331).

The study of British queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance, from 1990s riot grrrl to the localised DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural practices of the 2000s, is hindered by an absence of cultural

<sup>19</sup> See <<http://www.mindspring.com/~acheslow/AuntMary/bang/wip.html>> [accessed on 11 August 2007] for an online resource derived from Sharon Cheslow's women in punk 1975-1980 project that originally appeared in her fanzine *Interrobang!?* Sharon was also heavily involved in documenting the 1980s punk hardcore scene in Washington DC; see Connolly et al (1988). Layla Gibbon co-hosted a 'women in punk' special radio show for *Maximum Rock n Roll* available online at <<http://www.maximumrocknroll.com/radio/specials/LadyPunkPlaylist.html>> [accessed on 2 March 2008]. Tobi Vail has written extensively on women's post-punk bands in her fanzine *Jigsaw* <<http://jigsawunderground.blogspot.com>> [accessed on 23 September 2009], has run the cassette tape label known as bumpidee <<http://www.bumpidee.com>> [accessed on 1 August 2007], which has since transformed into an online reading group <<http://thebumpideereader.blogspot.com>> [accessed on 23 September 2009], and regularly contributes to discussions on the post-punk women's email list Typical Girls, see <<http://lists.ibiblio.org/mailman/listinfo/typicalgirls>> [date accessed 19 March 2008], and along with other members of Bikini Kill is featured in Lucy Thane's (1993) documentary *It Changed my Life*, meeting Ana da Silva and Gina Birch, members of the critically acclaimed post punk band the Raincoats.

objects to study. The most widespread source of information comes from tabloid and broadsheet press articles produced within the constraints of dominant cultural industries. The objects of DIY subcultural life tend to be ephemeral: there is scant documentation of live performances of bands, relatively few bands manage to produce accessible recordings and fanzines are produced on a small scale in limited runs and copies. This lack of cultural objects presents unique challenges for researchers but also leads to a reassessment of the place of cultural objects within a range of academic disciplines. Within some disciplines particular cultural objects – works of literature, art, film and music – tend to represent a starting point for assessment in terms of historical period, biographical information, theoretical perspective, socio-political contribution and wider discursive significance. In relation to music, some areas of musicology construct the musical work as a valued site for signification transcendent of its cultural context. This has led some critics in the field to accuse music analysis of being fetishistic (Bohlman 1993). Within ethnomusicology, questions concerning how and why music is used within communities have become more possible (Blacking 1974; Stock 1998). However to understand music and music culture as a dynamic community, involving individuals, relationships and networks of embodied acts embedded in a particular social, cultural and political climate, the object itself becomes less of a primary focus. Music can be understood as a manifestation of an active process to produce spaces, imaginaries and ways of being that challenge hetero-gendered norms. The production of a nuanced account of queer girl (sub)cultural life requires the violation of disciplinary boundaries and a displacement of the authority of the cultural object. In order to comprehend the textual, visual and sonic elements embedded in the everyday practices of DIY queer feminist music (sub)cultural participants, an interdisciplinary scavenging, questioning and arrangement of ideas, methods and epistemologies becomes necessary.

### *2.3 (An)Other Musicology: Charting feminist musicologies*

When music becomes the object of academic disciplines as it is today, discourse can become a site of struggle among the factions and interest groups that compete for the cultural authority to speak about music. The expert critical and technical languages that these groups invent can foster a social bond among those who share them but they can also alienate and exclude outsiders [...] When groups stake their identities on a particular mode of discourse, they often cannot recognize the exclusions that frame their own knowledge. (Korsyn 2003, p. 6)

In struggling to find a way to speak about queer feminist (sub)cultural sounds in different ways I sought solace in feminist musicologies. Unlike other humanities disciplines specialising in literature, film, performance and art, the study of music has faced additional resistance to feminist thought. Music lacks a physical trace, presenting unique challenges, and ‘has its own constraints and capabilities that have to be identified and queried’ (McClary 1991, p. 7). In

musicological circles music has traditionally been thought of as abstract, pure and absolute, thereby able to transcend the taint of the social world. It exceeds the capacity of language to describe its effects and calls for different methodologies to understand and interrogate its unique character. Since its inception as a professional academic discipline in the 1880s, musicology has radically influenced the aesthetic and analytical discourses available to produce knowledge about music. Unfortunately, the construction of academic musicological discourse inevitably produces multiple exclusions. These exclusions, as described by Kevin Korsyn above, limit who has the cultural authority to speak about music, how music is conceptualised and determines whose musics are worthy of academic attention. Traditionally, musicology has conspicuously silenced issues of gender, race, class and sexuality in its scientific pursuit of universal rules, formal properties and inner structures to explicate music phenomena (see similar critiques made by McClary 1991, 1993; Bohlman 1993; Citron 1993; Shepherd 1987, 1993; Maus 1993; Cusick 1994a, 1999a; Korsyn 2003). In the late 1960s feminism had begun to make critical inroads in humanities disciplines critiquing how gender had informed the production of knowledge and histories that have privileged masculine creators and interests. It was not until the late 1980s that feminism successfully agitated musicological boundaries to seek understandings of the socially, politically and culturally contingent aspects of musical experience, ask new questions, and demand new analytical frameworks. Dissatisfied with the prevailing formalism in music analysis and music theory, many began to question what lay behind the erasure of women composers, affect and emotion, bodily practices, social contexts, sexuality and desire from discussions of musical meaning.

### *2.3.1 First-Wave Feminist Music Studies: Recuperating lost women*

Corresponding with Linda Nochlin's (2003 [1971]) famous essay that questioned the absence of great women artists, individuals interested in music history demanded to know why women have not become great composers (Rubin-Rabson & Rosen 1973; Tick 1975). Derived from a similar approach to that taken by historians interested in women's history, this emerging 'first-wave' strategy of feminist music studies takes a woman-centric approach to recuperate previously obscured and invisible women composers to their rightful place within established music histories and musicological canons (Drinker 1995 [1948]; Hixon & Hennesse 1975; Block & Neuls-Bates 1979; Handy 1981; Denby Green 1983; Ammer 1980; Placksin 1982; Briscoe 1987; Jezic 1988; Neuls-Bates 1996 [1982]; Tick 1995; Bowers & Tick 1985; Pendle 1991, 2000). Groundbreaking women have been excavated in detailed studies of individual women composers including Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (Citron 1987), Mary Carr Moore (Parsons Smith & Richardson 1987), Cecile Chaminade (Citron 1988), Hildegard of Bingen (Peraino 2006) and Clara Wieck Schumann (Reich 2001).

These works, which epitomise what has become known as 'women and music' studies, aim to confirm and validate women's musical legacy. Scholars orientate the reader to consider the enduring barriers, limitations and prescriptions that have inhibited women's careers and acceptance in music spheres and public places. For instance, the Pauline injunction excluded women from singing in the church since the fourth century and relegated to women's music-making to separatist women-only convent spaces (Neuls-Bates 1996). The demand for women as professional singers in the sixteenth century Italian operatic milieu was met with the Catholic Church's promotion of the castrato. Castrati took over women's operatic roles in places where women were banned from the public stage due to social anxieties over feminine sexuality (Rosselli 1988). It took until the eighteenth century for women to achieve their rightful place in leading operatic roles and up until the nineteenth century for women's voices to be heard in some churches. Women composers struggled against essentialist discourses in nineteenth-century philosophy that considered women to be essentially inferior to men and lacking in the capacities of reason, strength, intelligence and aesthetic appreciation (see Schopenhauer 1978 [1851]). Women risked shame and disgrace in public performance of music, and women's music practices were relegated to the domestic sphere. Women's compositional activities were related to the professional situations available to women that were much more limited than opportunities available to their male counterparts (Neuls-Bates 1996). Women did not have the resources and opportunities to produce large-scale works and gain authoritative roles. The construction of musical conservatories in the nineteenth century enabled women to train professionally in music and the energy generated at the turn of the century within 'first wave' feminism saw women's musical activities increase. Music has been conceptualised as a critical component of the militant women's suffrage movement in Britain (see Wood 1995).

The woman-centric approach highlights the historical struggle of women musicians to be accepted in mainstream music histories and canons, through focussing on the discriminatory practices, barriers and restraints that prohibit women's full participation. This approach is also present in popular music studies and sociological research that seeks to understand women's alternative music-making practices. For instance, Mavis Bayton's (1998) *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* and Helen Reddington's (2007) *The Lost Women of Rock: Female Musicians of the Punk Era*, echoed by narratives in women-centred music histories that foreground the struggles of women in rock, pop, punk and soul genres (see O'Brien 2002; Gaar 1993; Hirshey 2001; Carson et al 2004). Beyond the excitement of reconstructing the legacy of women's creative forces and countering 'male-dominated' histories and canons with examples of innovative women, important stones remain unturned. According to this perspective women can be added-in to existing canons or written about in separate histories, leaving the exclusionary processes embedded within canon construction and musicology uncontested. Women retain their 'other' status as their gender is clearly marked out in 'women and music'

studies, leaving male culture to remain the universal norm. The masculine dominance of the traditional musicological canon is normalised and gender binaries are stabilised. Subsequently, the teaching of women's music histories in the academy has been contained within tokenistic optional modules, books and lectures, as attention returns to the history of (male) music as normal.

The majority of woman-centric work reproduces the interests of conventional musicology, retaining a focus on western art music traditions, albeit with the twist of attending to the musical pursuits of privileged white women (exceptions that focus on black women's music-making include Handy 1981 and Denby Green 1983). Furthermore, the power dynamics represented within this women-centric model assumes a 'male-dominated' model that positions women outside musical enclaves through male intimidation and discrimination. Power is not solely possessed by men. Power is more diffused and productive, complicated through intersections of race, class, sexuality, education and ability. Music and musicology are not simply 'male-dominated' but are (re)produced as masculine within a set of contested gendered spaces, discourses and practices. In the late-1980s an explicitly feminist gender-centric approach emerged in musicology that asked new questions of music and musicology. New interrogations analysed the role of music and musicology in reproducing, challenging and resisting the established gender order.

### *2.3.2 Challenging 'the Music itself': Gendering the absolute*

Feminist music studies needed to extend its critical visions beyond the inclusion of women composers and women-made compositions as viable subjects of study. Feminists working in musicology began to wonder how and why the feminine must be persistently expelled from musicology. Whose interests did these omissions serve? What would the inclusion of the feminine mean to musicology? The influence of postmodernist thought encouraged the deconstruction of taken-for-granted concepts and application of critical theoretical perspectives. Previous assumptions were challenged as key notions of originality, authorship and autonomy were critiqued. Musicologies could no longer afford to ignore 'other' musics and begun to critically interrogate ideas of genius, the canon, universality, aesthetic autonomy and textual immanence (Kerman 1980, 1985). This gradually opened up the critical examination of the social, political and cultural ideologies embedded within music practices and musicological discourses. Critical feminist attention turned to the sacred cornerstone of musicology, absolute music, or what is commonly referred to as 'the music itself'. As previously mentioned, additional aesthetic challenges face the study of sound when compared to visual and textual art forms like literature, film and art. Marcia Citron reflects on these challenges; 'music creates the most obvious barrier in its seeming lack of tangible content, reality, and hence meaning [...]' How do we locate content, especially narrative content, in sounds – mere acoustical

phenomena?’ (1994, p. 16). Citron concluded that the long-established musicological ideal of absolute music needs to be dismantled for the advancement of transformational feminist musicologies.

The Romantic notion of absolute music elevates an understanding of music as pure, transcendent and ethereal. Music just is. Absolute music is believed to follow a purely musical logic in its construction to occupy a self-referential world. It does not require any explanation, external validation or connection to contextual factors; it stifles critique (paraphrased from Chua 1999). This belief in ‘the music itself’ constructs music as an object that exists independently from any particular performance or social context, whose meanings can be accessed only by trained ears. So-called ‘extra-musical’ bodily acts, emotional reactions or social uses are expelled from the dominant definition of absolute music. Musical meaning is controlled by ‘those who call upon the “the music itself” as the ultimate arbiter of critical interpretations, then, confirm and reinscribe a definition of ‘music’ that limits ‘music’ to communication in sound between an entity (“the music itself”) with a fixed identity that has been detached from its socially grounded creator and that music’s ideal listener’ (Cusick 1999a, p. 492). Music became understood as ‘a collectable, comparable and ultimately explainable object within an observable cosmos’ (Cooley 1997, p. 9). Often ‘the music itself’ became erroneously connected to the visual representations of sound in notation and scores. For critics, the practice of notating music was a means of disciplining music, to construct music as cerebral and rational, and isolate music from its social use or wider cultural context (Shepherd 1993; Bohlman 1993; Martin 1996, chapter 2). Philip V. Bohlman expands; ‘Notation insists on the music’s right to be just what it is, black on white, notes on the page, music as object. Notation removes music from the time and space that it occupies through performance, thereby decontextualising it’ (1993, p. 240).

Furthermore feminist music historians have argued that the idea of ‘the music itself’ neglects attending to practical music-making or the ‘art of music’ found to be a common expression of women’s music experience (Cusick 1999a; Citron 1994). The privileged ‘mind-mind’ musicological relationship denigrates other possible relationships that amateur and non-professional audiences can have with music (Cusick 1994, p. 16), and constructs a music that is impervious to feminist critique. Absolute music is believed to exist independently from social, cultural, historical or political issues including ideological representations of gender and sexuality. In contrast, feminist musicological critique has argued that the construction of absolute music operates as a highly gendered concept. Concepts of disembodiment, transcendence and autonomy embedded in ‘the music itself’ closely resemble a middle-class masculine ideal self (Citron 1993, 1994; Cusick 1999a). Within absolute music, the masculine composer is elevated to a genius status, as a supreme creator capable of channelling god-like creativity (Goehr 1994; Battersby 1989; DeNora 1995). Suzanne Cusick concludes that a

musicology that invests in the idea of “the music itself” [...] has always been both a gendered and a political entity’ (1999a, p. 493).

### 2.3.3 *‘Second-Wave’ Feminist Music Studies: Towards a gender-centric approach*

The gender-centric approach paralleled these theoretical developments to focus on (i) how gender ideologies shape music scholarship, practices and activities, and (ii) how music reinforces, resists and reworks wider gender relations (see Cook & Tsou 1994; Citron 1993; Koskoff 1989). Music could no longer escape social muddying; turbulent textures of masculinity and femininity could be traced throughout the history of music. Gendered musical codes have circulated since Ancient Greek times: the Dorian mode was associated with reason, restraint and order and considered the basis of appropriate ‘manly’ musics; whereas, Mixolydian, intense Lydian and Phrygian modes were associated with sensuality, passion and madness, and considered to be ‘womanly’ or effeminate musics, harbouring the potential to corrupt the dominant social order (Lorraine 2000; Peraino 2006). Similarly, in medieval times, Old Roman chants were believed to be ‘highly decorated’, ‘melismatic’ and ‘recursive’ when compared to the more orderly masculine Gregorian chants that oozed strength, vigour and reason (Treitler 1993, p. 26). Historically, music-making has been cast as unmanly, designated as women’s work, leaving men to risk accusations of effeminacy if seeking any engagement in ‘irrational’ music practices.

Ethnomusicological research explored how non-western cultures expressed different gender arrangements that informed musical practices. For instance, Carol Robinson’s (1993) work with the Mapuche in Chile and Argentina located the machi, a group of men and women who lived as women. The machi undertook female initiation rites, symbolic menstrual cycle celebrations and perfected lineage-based vocal repertoires in order to become ‘life givers’: an idealised embodiment of feminine spirit and energy. The machi were powerful spiritual guides and healers, their psychic abilities could incite political action and their chants were believed to heal defeated soldiers. In Hawai’i, the mahu, a group of differently gendered individuals, were linked to the cultural privileging of femininity. The mahu were respected participants in all performance traditions including hula. Gender was fluid and femininity was highly valued in these cultures, an arrangement that was reflected and constructed in its musical activities. In gender-centric approaches, the authority of absolute music and stability of western gender roles were radically questioned as variance was demonstrated across historical and cultural boundaries. This indicated that dominant gender and sexual formations are changeable and that music is implicated in the social construction of genders and sexualities. Marginal musics that articulate different versions of social reality become paramount for feminist musicologies. The next ‘wave’ of music studies witnessed an increased influx of postmodern ideas as feminist

musicologies became increasingly interdisciplinary, incorporating gay and lesbian studies, cultural studies, performance studies, semiotics and psychoanalysis within its analyses.

#### 2.3.4 'Third-Wave' Feminist Music Studies: *Queering sonic genders and sexualities*

The 'third wave' of feminist musicologies invested in a dethroning of so-called 'great' musical works and musicological traditions, to investigate how social, historical, political and cultural contexts have constructed dominant understandings of musical experiences. Arguing for the socially constructed nature of gendered musical codes, feminists examined how western art composers had mobilised these gendered discourses to musically depict the interplay of female and male characters within instrumental and operatic musics. For instance, in early baroque music female characters were constructed through ornamental, unstable and chromatic idioms and male characters were represented through the use of straightforward, diatonic and orderly sounds (Cusick 1993; McClary 1991). Furthermore, many operatic narratives required the eventual domination of the unruly sensual feminine musical theme. Musical resolution is typically accompanied by the death of the unacceptable woman, or her domestication as she is successfully assimilated within dominant social norms (Clément 1989; McClary 1991). This narrative is argued to participate in reinforcing wider hetero-gendered relations as listeners learn to anticipate the resolution of the musical tension and subsequent defeat of the heroine (Lorraine 2000). Other scholars have argued that female singers are able to rework feminine conventions to claim power and authorial voice in operatic contexts (Cusick 1993; Abbate 1993). In instrumental music, Marcia Citron critiqued the underlying rhetoric of the sonata aesthetic as conveying 'masculine metaphors, notably power, hegemony, opposition and competition' (1994 p. 19). Susan McClary (1991) has argued that (hetero)sexual narratives of arousal and climax permeate canonic music, woven within the unequal interaction between principal masculine and subsidiary feminine musical themes in sonata form structures.

The idea of a uniquely feminine music or women's way of composing became a topic for feminist musicologies, developing the feminist concept of 'écriture féminine' - a style of feminine writing characterised as heterogeneous, fluid and disruptive (Cixous & Clément 1986). A feminine form of expression, available to all genders but argued to be more prevalent in women's art, was linked to women's enhanced access to the *jouissance* of pre-oedipal rhythmic and lyrical noise-play and a feminine sexuality that defies singularity of phallogentric order to embrace multiple, diffuse and cyclical qualities (Kristeva 1980; Irigaray 1985). Theoretically, this feminine music would be highly disruptive to the dominant masculine order, requiring intense discipline, containment and objectification. Various feminist music theorists have attempted to outline the sonic possibilities of this unruly feminine musical *écriture féminine*:

A music similar to *écriture féminine* [...] would engage the listener in the musical moment rather than the overall structure, would have a flexible form,

and might involved continuous repetition with variation, the cumulative growth and development of an idea. Such music would serve to deconstruct musical hierarchies, and the dialectical juxtaposition and resolution of opposites would disrupt linearity and avoid definite closure. In sung music, vocalisation would be relaxed and would make use of nonverbal or presymbolic sounds (Lorraine 2000, p. 11)

Various feminist musicologists turned their critical attention to the peculiarities of women musicians' compositions and popular-music performers. The potential of these women's musical practices to break down constraints of patriarchal thought were isolated in their use of subversive rhythms, unusual uses of time and vocal techniques (Citron 1993; McClary 1991). Women's music composers like Linda Tillery, Mary Watkins and Kay Gardner have grounded their compositional intentions within cyclic structures, fluidity and rhythmic dissonance (Scovill 1981; Pollock 1988). Feminist musicologies can face a crucial danger; the conflation of gender and sexual order within male canonic compositions, and gender and sexual disorder in non-canonical works by women. The patriarchal binary that associates men with order and women with chaos is reinforced (Cusick 1999a, p. 489). Furthermore, the grounding of musical creativity within a pre-symbolic phase of womanhood also borders on the dangers of essentialism and normalises a reproductive heterosexual order. In sociological research on bass players, women were found to utilise essentialist ideas of rhythm, nature and the body to justify their rock musicianship (Clawson 1999a). Women's use of essentialist metaphors may illustrate the scant discursive resources available to women as a marginalised group. Women's experiences can be indistinguishable from patriarchal constructions of the feminine, making the pursuit of a pure or pre-symbolic feminine music unreachable. The strength of feminist musicologies lies in exploring the contestation of gender and sexual difference within music practices, experiences and scholarship.

The study of sexuality in music was elevated in feminist musicologies with the influence of gay and lesbian studies in musicology that culminated in Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary Thomas's (1994) landmark collection *Queering the Pitch: The New Lesbian and Gay Musicology*. The rise of gay and lesbian musicology is heavily associated with the efforts of Philip Brett who hosted cocktail parties at disciplinary meetings in the mid-1980s, organised the first panel on gay musicology in 1990, and initiated the development of the Gay and Lesbian Study Group of the American Musicological Society, acting as a valued newsletter contributor (McClary 1993; Brett 1994b). In *Queering the Pitch's* opening essay, 'Musicality, Essentialism and the Closet', Philip Brett elaborates on the powerful historical depiction of musicality as a queer space; 'all musicians, we must remember, are faggots in the parlance of the male locker room' (1994a, p. 18). Castration anxiety is posited as the catalyst for musicological investment in rationalisation, rigour and disembodiment. Gay and lesbian musicology critiqued the constructions of rational masculinity and heterocentrism in music and musicology, and asked explicitly how non-normative genders and sexualities can be expressed in musical works.

The sexuality of various western art composers was scrutinised through this queer lens, including Benjamin Britten (Brett 1983, 1993), Ethel Smyth (Wood 1993, 1995) and Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (McClary 1991). Discussions of Franz Schubert's sexuality even dominated a whole special issue of *19<sup>th</sup> Century Music* (1993). Scholarship also extended to consider the sexual politics of popular musicians like k. d. lang (Mockus 1994). Lesbian and gay musicology fought for a musicology that problematised the relations between self and other, connected the body and mind and made the author's experiences and subject position visible; 'musicology becomes a political act for lesbian and gay scholars who will no longer suppress those sides of themselves they have been taught by musicology (and in other arenas) to despise and conceal' (Brett 1994b, p. 374). Therefore, gay and lesbian musicologies produced space for the articulation of rich analytical narratives that explore what it means to listen to, experience and perform music within a queer body (Cusick 1994b; Gould 2007). They also allowed for theorisations of border-crossing sapphonic voices - 'a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of lesbian possibility, for a range of erotic and emotional relationships among women who sing and women who listen' (Wood 1994, p. 27). Queer musicology has continued to expand into the interrogation of popular musics with the recent publication of *Queering the Popular Pitch* (Whiteley & Rycenga 2006). These innovations produce useful resources for understanding the role of music in DIY queer feminist (sub)cultures.

The emergence of queer and poststructuralist theory in the work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993), Michel Foucault (1978) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) has facilitated the theorisation of music within a wider contested system of repetitive embodied performances of gender and sexuality (Cusick 1994a, 1999b). Feminist musicologists have recuperated the previously hidden role of bodily practices in musical experiences. For example, Susan C. Cook (1999, 2002) has produced scholarship that combines her own experiences with dance with the social history of the dancer Irene Castle to produce a sophisticated challenge to the traditional dismissal of the dancing body in music. In relation to queer music subcultures, various scholars have attended to the significance of dance in the construction of queer lifeworlds, community and political imagination (Buckland 2002; Currid 1995; Case et al 1995). Therefore embodied musical experiences can act as critical resources for the resistance to the dominant order of genders and sexualities.

## 2.4 'No-Wave' Feminist Music Studies: Music culture as collective social action

There are glimpses of possibility in feminist and queer musicologies for interdisciplinary research that aims to explore the sounds, sights and spaces of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural life. Interdisciplinary studies of queer sounds and women's musics have flourished in this milieu (Moisala & Diamond 2000; Whiteley 2000; Mazullo 2001; Fuller & Whitesell 2002; Burns & LaFrance 2002; Kennedy 2002; Lemish 2003; O'Meara 2003; Rodger 2004; Böttner 2005; Gordon 2005; Auslander 2006; Whiteley & Rycenga 2006; Peraino 2006; Hubbs 2004, 2007; Halberstam 2007). However, the majority of interdisciplinary feminist scholarship has retained its focus on the analysis of musical works or idealised performance, prioritising an authoritative interpretation of a recorded end-product, leaving questions concerning other musical events and interpretations unanswered. It is important to remember that 'the western music tradition unfolds not only as a series of works but also as a series of music events: performances, rehearsals, auditions, lessons, discussions, readings etc.' (Stock 1998, p. 60). The construction of meaning within music is articulate in a variety of moments and spaces beyond a music recording. A situated and process-orientated approach to the study of music as a series of events is currently absent from feminist music scholarship. The potential of feminist and queer musicology remains limited. Despite the progressive influences of postmodern theory the tenets of originality, authorship and autonomy tend to remain intact.

### 2.4.1 Participatory Culture: Involving audiences, fans and listeners

Feminist music scholarship has upheld the standard of originality, preferring to attend to exceptional, spectacular and professional musics, rather than local-level and everyday amateur musics. To some extent authorship and autonomy have also been preserved, where authorship refers to the belief in the author as the sole producer of musical meaning. In this formulation the musicologist is constructed as a privileged listener, capable of accessing these authentic meanings and authorial intentions of a musical work. Autonomy situates the creator as separate from the mundane nature of everyday life, therefore justifying analytical avoidance of everyday social and cultural contextual factors. However, since Roland Barthes' influential essay 'Death of the Author' (1977 [1967]) these ideas have become increasingly unworkable in contemporary cultural life. Various researchers have opened up the idea of a participatory culture in which the 'reader', 'fan' or 'consumer' is an active co-producer of meanings that can disrupt producers' intentions (Jenkins 2006). Meaning-making in music culture can thus be a collaborative process. For instance, in *Art Worlds*, Howard Becker (1982) argued that an innovative music genre can be thought to emerge from the repetitive interactions, performances and enactments found in the cultural experiences of artists, co-workers and audiences. It could be thought that 'art worlds rather than artists make art' (Becker 1982, p. 198-9). Currently, feminist musical scholarship conveys a perpetual lack of engagement with the cultural experiences of performers, audiences,

fans and wider musical communities. I would not claim that these scholars dismiss the importance of audiences and communities in the investigation of how sound structures articulate sexualities and genders, but the absence of dialogue with these communities and listeners is troubling. There may be excellent reasons why collaborative dialogue is not possible. Perhaps the historical nature of most music within the canon impedes the study of creation and reception. However within popular music studies the reluctance to take the experiences of consumers and fans seriously and prioritise the analysis of a musical text risks reinforcing a hetero-gendered social order.

Traditionally the category of fanhood has been hetero-feminised and characterised as 'excessive, bordering on deranged behaviour' (Jenson 1992, p. 9). Female fanhood has been stereotyped as passive and hysterical, as an incongruent response to the sexual allure of a male pop star (Coates 2003). Women have been historically linked with mass culture, therefore representing the 'other' from which avant garde and underground music cultures claim authenticity (Huysen 1986; Railton 2001). Researchers have explored how constructions of ideal fanhood in music culture are embedded in masculinity, with boys and men constructed as the serious, rational and active connoisseurs (Straw 1997). In her doctoral research on the British indie rock press, Rachel White (2006) explored how the natural indie audience is constructed as serious, mature and masculine. Girls and young women's fanhood was seen to be motivated by the wrong reasons; 'boys are fans of music, girls are fans of boys' (p.170). Men who exceeded serious fanhood were emasculated, becoming associated with the supposed inauthenticity, irrationality and passivity of mass culture. This creates a situation in which girls and young women are constructed as subservient fans and recipients of the important music and knowledge generated by adult men (see Kearney 2006).

The exclusion of women's fan narratives from feminist music scholarship risks perpetuating this patriarchal stereotype, presenting another route for rationalisation that eschews attending to other 'non-professional' uses of music. To date only a handful of scholars have attempted to rehabilitate the female fan as a discerning cultural participant, to account for music's role in producing pleasure, empowerment and resistance in women's lives (Wise 1986; Cowman & Kaloski 1998; DeNora 1999, 2000; Savage 2003). Despite calls for musicologists to 'learn – perhaps through participation, observation, and dialogue – how the individuals and groups involved make sense in and of these songs' (Stock 1998, p. 57), everyday interpretations and socially grounded uses of musics have not yet entered the realm of feminist musicologies. This means that feminist music studies can risk making a musical interpretation that conveys little or no meaning to a musical community. Feminist music studies needs to continue expanding its concept of music and infuse critical interpretations with the views of music-makers and their audiences; 'the musicologist who analyses what musicians and others actually do in particular musical instances, and how these individuals explain what they do, is likely to gain enlightening

perspectives on the sounds that emerge on these occasions' (Stock 1998, p. 62). These insights have been invaluable for the construction of an interdisciplinary project, such as this, which is able to comprehend the everyday music practices of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural life and community, to incorporate subcultural participants' multiple musical interpretations, justifications and explanations produced within a diversity of everyday spaces and moments.

#### *2.4.2 'Musical-Being-In-The-World': Lessons from contemporary ethnomusicology*

Other valuable clues can be found in contemporary ethnomusicology; new paradigms have emerged that have focused on the personal interactive processes of fieldwork within music cultures (Barz & Cooley 1997). The emphasis here shifts away from explaining the effects of a musical work, towards understanding how people make and experience music in their everyday lived contexts (Titon 1997). This includes the critical immersion of the researcher within personal music cultural experiences. The ethnomusicologist Jeff Todd Titon formulates his approach to producing musical knowledge from his own embodied experiences of social musicality, or what he refers to as his 'musical being-in-the-world';

For me music is incomplete when I do it myself; it is completed in a social group when I make music with others [...] Desire compels me to make music. I feel this desire as an affective presence, a residue of pleasure built up from my previous experiences with music and dance that makes me seek it out in order to know it better. It is a curiosity of all my bodily senses and I feel it embodied in them: an embodied curiosity. Knowing people making music begins with my experience of making music [...] When my consciousness is filled with music I am in the world musically. My experiencing mind tells me that I have a musical way of "being-in-the-world" when I make music and when I listen and move to music so that it fills my body [...] I would like to ground musical knowing – that is, knowledge of or about music – in musical being [...] I experience fieldwork not primarily as a means to transcription, analysis, interpretation and representation, although it surely is that, but as a reflexive opportunity and an ongoing dialogue with my friends which, among other things, continually reworks my "work" as "our" work (1997, p. 93-4)

Titon emphasises the collaborative, embodied and social aspects of his musical knowledge production. Music becomes something that he does, that is a shared common ground for him and others, driving his desire for understanding. From my perspective this opens up the opportunities for engaging with music culture from an involved perspective, as a musician, subcultural participant, fan and scholar of riot grrrl and queer feminist (sub)culture. The present research project represents a possible answer to a call from John Potter:

I would suggest that ideally we need to summon up a scholar-performer-fan, and that it is a basic weakness of current musicology that very few such people seem to exist. It may be (and this is a terrible admission) that certain aspects of musicology are now so far from the 'real life' of performance that the two disciplines are irreconcilable. I can say what I like about riot grrrl, but surely it would be preferable to have the thoughts of someone who does it' (1994, p. 196)

Other useful ethnomusicological ideas that express the diverse social action of music include Christopher Small's concept of musicking; 'To music is to take part, in any capacity in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.' (1998, p. 9). Small thus effectively moves music away from analysis as an object or work, towards an idea of music as a verb, an action and a collaborative social experience. The dichotomy between the creative performer and audience is troubled, since musicking is open to a range of different roles and actions that collectively construct a meaningful musical experience.

#### *2.4.3 The Sociology of Music: Everyday musics*

In comparison to musicology, sociological studies of music have extended the concept of music. In contrast to the musics valued by popular musicology, which as Richard Leppert has argued 'represent something of a mass-culture avant-garde' (2002, p. 345), sociologists have paid attention to the mundane and routine use of music in everyday life, moving away from the idea of music as a cultural object, towards music's 'affordances' - what music actually enables people to do in everyday situations (DeNora 2003, p. 48; Martin 2006). Music has a substantial role in everyday experiences; 'music can play a part in the constitution of everyday settings - that is, neither "imposing a meaning" on its listeners, nor reflecting an existing emotional state, nor representing an already formed taste pattern, but as an element in the process through which people actively engage in the ongoing flux of events' (Martin 2006, p. 209).

Extending Foucault, Tia DeNora (1999, 2000, 2002) has explored how music is used as a 'technology of the self'. DeNora combined ethnographic and interview approaches to explore how individual women used music to configure the textures of their everyday lives. Women exuded high levels of musical knowledge and utilised music to alter or enhance their moods, energy levels, immediate surroundings and cognitive capacities, to correspond to the demands of a specific situation. Music was also implicated in women's identities and subjectivities, providing resources for the articulation of a 'biography of the self', a kind of personal soundtrack that allowed for reflection on key life events, past friends, relatives and lovers; 'music is, in short, a material that actors use to elaborate, to fill out and fill in, to themselves and to others, modes of aesthetic agency and with it subjective stances and identities' (DeNora 1999, p. 54). DeNora (2000, 2002) also explored how music can construct suitable atmospheres and sustain social practices over a range of public and private spaces, including intimate encounters, shopping malls and aerobics classes. Similarly, in an interview study on the fans of mainstream feminist musicians,<sup>20</sup> Ann Savage (2003) identified 'moments of articulation' in

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<sup>20</sup> Savage focuses on the fans of female artists that were part of a 'new-found mainstream acceptance' in the 1990s who 'embodied a feminist and/or political sensibility' (2003, p. 2). Cited examples include; Tracy Chapman, Tori Amos, Melissa Etheridge, Hole, P. J. Harvey, Liz Phair, Indigo Girls, Ani DiFranco and Sarah McLachlan.

which women used feminist music to cope with everyday situations and identities; for instance, to negotiate personal intimate relationships, cope with depression, survive past abuse and affirm their sexual orientation and feminist identity. Music is a critical resource for the negotiation of everyday life, as Tia DeNora argued - music 'turned out to be one of the most important features of the constitution and regulation of self' (2000, p. 49). This body of work alerts us to how music cannot be simply regarded as a stimulus that produces predictable and knowable effects; musical meaning is situated within the everyday activities of active participants who appropriate music and invest it with emotions, ideas, politics, memories and intentions that shape subsequent experiences, spatial practices and uses of music (Martin 2006).

Antoine Hennion's (2001) work on 'music lovers' emphasises how musical tastes are performatively produced within collaborative social processes. Music cultures are socially produced, remaining open to change and transformation. This 'entails seeing music not as a static product, on a score, on disc or in a concert programme, but as an unpredictable event, a real-time performance, an actual phenomenon generated by instruments, machines, hands and actions' (Hennion 2001, p. 2). Other ethnographic studies of music have also emphasised the critical social and collaborative elements involved in the production of music culture (Finnegan 1989; Cohen 1991; Drew 2001; Holman Jones 1998). Collective amateur music practices can defy established criteria of what music should be (that is produced by professional and talented stars, incorporated in the music industry, who possess a level of (inter)national success and critical acclaim) to collectively produce dissident musical meanings. For instance, in an ethnographic study of karaoke bars Rob Drew noted that 'what draws people to local music scenes is the promise of a music that touches their daily lives and relationships' (2001, p. 16). While professional stars retain a sense of distance, local-level music performances can be more immediate and encourage participation as 'imperfections, and the imitative, repetitive aspects of performance - which from the point of view of "professional" music may render them wholly uninteresting - are [...] opportunities to reassert personal and collective identities' (Drew 2001, p. 52). Considerable music-making activities occur at an amateur everyday local level - for instance, Ruth Finnegan's (1989) ethnography uncovered a staggering array of diverse amateur music-making practices in Milton Keynes. The ethnomusicologist Christopher Small offers a strong justification for attending to these kinds of amateur musical activities;

Our present day concert life, whether 'classical' or 'popular', in which the 'talented' few are empowered to produce music for the 'untalented' majority, is based on a falsehood. It means that our powers of making music for ourselves have been hijacked [...] while a few stars, and their handlers, grow rich and famous through selling us what we have been led to believe we lack. (1998, p. 8)

The uncontrollable and unknown aspects of grassroots music-making add a subversive element; music becomes 'something pleasurable that everyone can participate in and create their own bit

of magic outside the loop of production and consumption' (Balliger 1995, p. 25). These marginal amateur music cultures are where the heart of this thesis beats, not through a desire to perpetuate the idea of a romanticised underground or authentic form of 'pure art' that exists autonomously from capitalism, but, because personal participation in local amateur music cultures has enabled me to become a creative individual, able to co-construct counter-hegemonic pleasures, community, politics, stories, bodies, sounds and spaces. The questions that fuel this thesis concern the musical practices of local level amateur queer feminist (sub)cultures. How and why is music being used, created, played, performed and experienced within these spaces and moments? What do these amateur musics mean to those involved in the contemporary British queer feminist community? How are these music practices related to wider struggles for transformation in dominant understandings of genders, sexualities and feminisms?

## *2.5 Studying local amateur music-making*

In comparison to studies that focus on gender interactions within the music industry and the meanings of women's popular music texts, studies of queer feminist resistance in music culture are absent. As I will outline below, the existing body of work on local-level amateur music-making is skewed, typically accounting for the occupational structures of predominantly male groups who seek professional employment, external validation and/or national recognition. The lack of a dominant institution to prescribe rules and roles to guide music-making is a common curiosity for these researchers. Accordingly, studies have (re)constructed a career trajectory that traces the common steps and dilemmas involved in becoming a successful musician. Crucially, this perspective facilitates the recognition of music practices as social interactional events between musicians and audiences, centralising the band as a collective social drama of creative negotiation. In accordance with the central place of rock music in the emergence of popular music studies and the grip of classical music on the musicological consciousness, studies of music-making have tended to analyse the practices of professional rock bands (Coffman 1971; Denisoff & Bridges 1982; Weinstein 1993) or classical ensembles (Schütz 1964; Stebbins 1976).

### *2.5.1 Commercial Music-makers*

The earliest theoretical investigation of music-making is commonly attributed to Howard S. Becker's (1951) study of jazz musicians in Chicago. Becker participated within professional jazz circles as a pianist and, under the supervision of Everett C. Hughes, studied jazz culture as an occupational group. Becker became interested in the occupational dilemmas that faced his fellow commercial musicians. One common dilemma involved balancing the tensions between art and commerce: audience and employer demands produced pressure for the performance of commercial music, whereas the jazz musician craved space to perform their creative and artistic

desires. Musicians were forced to choose between achieving commercial success by conforming to audience and employer expectations, or resisting these external demands to uphold their artistic integrity, confirmed through the performance of jazz.

Becker argued that musicians collectively responded to this dilemma by constructing counter-hegemonic cliques that sought to defend artistic boundaries by expelling their 'other', known as 'the squares'. The category of the 'square' encompassed all that was conventional, ignorant and ludicrous about non-music making society; however, squares were also feared for producing powerful pressures that forced musicians to play inartistically. Within this context the jazz musician needed to collectively construct and protect a sense of difference, as rightful owners of special, mysterious and un-teachable musical talent. Cliques formed to flaunt jazz difference in the face of convention - countercultural slang, attitudes, style and tastes carved out distinct alternative jazz identities, spaces and practices. Nonetheless, despite the counter-hegemonic ethos of jazz musicians who opposed racial discrimination and questioned the centrality of religion, sexist values were perpetuated and women were associated with mass culture, nature and sexuality. For the jazz musicians studied by Becker, women were not considered to be valuable jazz players, but could be used to guarantee employment; 'you could have a sexy little bitch to stand up in front and sing and shake her ass at the [squares]. Then you could get the job. And you could still play great when she wasn't singing' (Becker 2003 [1951], p. 221).

Later studies have developed from Becker's survey of jazz musicians to consider similar conflicting role expectations experienced by professional rock musicians (Coffman 1971; Weinstein 1993). These studies typically defined (male) rock stars as 'international celebrities [who] have successfully and repeatedly recorded for a world audience' (Coffman 1971, p. 21) and engage in lucrative worldwide concert tours. The countercultural audience is considered to be 'older, more critical of society, experimenting with new values and ideas, and more demanding of the performer and *his* product' (Coffman 1971, p. 21 my emphasis). The music industry, as a branch of the entertainment industry, is considered to be in complete control of the access to the means of producing music. According to this perspective the rock musician's key role conflict lies in the negotiation of the demands of countercultural audiences and music industry professionals, to construct music that is countercultural and authentic, but also commercially viable as a saleable product. The experiences of these conflicts are investigated in the lyrical content of songs and biographical accounts of predominantly male rock bands (Coffman 1971; Weinstein 1993). Increasingly, research has indicated that this struggle to maintain autonomy and control from the music industry is unworkable, as DIY discourse, creativity, and commerce are frequently within conflated the music industry's production of popular music (Negus 1995, 1998; Weinstein 1999; Strachan 2007).

### 2.5.2 Local-level amateur music-makers

The practices of less spectacular and local-level amateur musicians are considered to be at the bottom of a music-making hierarchy that privileges the musical creativity of stars and professionals. Amateurs are distinguished through their informal engagements with music-making culture, unhampered by career concerns and income needs. Subsequently, amateurs are considered to inhabit different attitudes and distinct social spheres. For instance, Robert Stebbins (1976) identified various similarities and differences between the professional, amateur and public spheres in his study of amateur classical music networks. These included the common live performance pressures experienced by the amateur and professional, broader music knowledge of the amateur compared to the public, and role of the amateur to provide professionals with insight and motivation to perform well for the audience. Other studies have explored rock music amateurs, most notably H. Stith Bennett's (1980a) *On Becoming a Rock Musician*, based on fieldwork in Colorado conducted between 1970 and 1972. Bennett defined the local rock band as a regional, self-producing group who performed live in their region, but were not considered to be widely successful. His analysis was driven by a desire to understand the construction of a cultural work identity; 'a study of how skills, ideas, and human identities manage to be created and transmitted in the context of industrialised culture' (1980a, p. ix). For Bennett, rock bands represented unique work situations; unregulated by external educational institutions, rock was learned through immersion in informal rock music-making culture. Rock music meanings were socially produced in everyday interactions - over time collective knowledge emerged from a negotiation with multiple ways of making and listening to music. Therefore, what is considered to be 'good' in a particular rock music culture is learned through engaging in the social process of making and performing music. Bennett tracked the social and economic barriers that amateurs negotiated in their bid to become rock musicians, from instrument acquisition and learning to play, to the formation and reformation of bands, practising and gigging.

Nonetheless from a contemporary perspective the rock milieu considered by Bennett seems very dated. Bennett's sample consisted of male rock bands that based music-making practices around live performances of cover songs in local bars. Subsequently his analysis of band rehearsals is preoccupied with the technicalities of 'song-getting', which privileged the close replication of studio recorded music within a practical live performance context (see Bennett 1980b). Employer and audience requirements also creep into Bennett's analysis of the process of constructing a live set for the 'bar market' (Bennett 1980a, p. 235). In contemporary local music-making (sub)culture, it is more commonplace for amateur bands to foreground the creation and performance of original material. The not-for-profit ethos of DIY amateur music communities challenges conventional financial pressures to please the gig organiser or give the audience their 'money's worth'. Compulsory cooperation with the music industry has

disintegrated as technological advances and Internet innovations have made the self-motivated recording, distribution and promotion of original amateur musics and music cultures possible.

Several researchers have critiqued the rise of a 'new creative knowledge economy' in which young music micro-entrepreneurs blend their creative leisure worlds with wider commercial interests to produce their own independent business enterprises (McRobbie 2002; Bloustien 2008; Luckman 2008). It is important to note that in contemporary 'post-industrial' British society DIY (sub)cultures can provide ample training opportunities, resources and networks to progress onto careers within the creative industries. Critics have pointed to the inequalities within such practices, as certain groups of youth, in structurally privileged positions of gender, race, class and ethnicity, tend to be more able to develop their dream enterprises than others (Bloustien 2003). Furthermore, micro-entrepreneurs tend to lack a secure workplace position leaving them open to exploitative practices (McRobbie 2002). Amateur queer feminist music (sub)cultures are embedded in a milieu of 'post-industrial' micro-entrepreneurship, commerce and creative industries. However little attention has been paid to how DIY (sub)cultural production can also impact on the character of contemporary British activism, politics and resistance.

Studies have suggested that the everyday experiences of amateur music-making are dramatically different in bands that create their own original music when compared to bands that perform more commercially viable 'copy music' (Groce & Dowell 1988; Groce 1989). In a comparative case study of two bands, the cover band 'The Copy Cats' and original band 'Curious Cargo', ideological differences influenced the roles, goals and creative practices of musicians. In The Copy Cats, goals were orientated around making money, meeting potential sexual partners and receiving external validation of their musical skills. This led to a band unit with low cohesiveness and high turnover of band members; a deficit in communality meant that band members frequently left, were fired and replaced. Subsequently, the Copy Cats lacked routine rehearsals, preferring to learn songs individually via tapes, only meeting up to rehearse once a specific job had been secured. Copy Cat members tended not to socialise with each other, often arriving to and leaving from gigs separately. The power to make band decisions resided with one member and money earned from gigs was distributed unequally between members. In contrast, the musical activities of Curious Cargo were orientated towards the realisation of a collective creative outlet through which members could showcase original material. Curious Cargo exhibited high cohesiveness, frequently rehearsing and socialising together. The everyday tasks of band life, including equipment transportation, set-list compilation and money distribution were shared concerns. Important band decisions were determined through a non-hierarchical, consensual decision-making process. Therefore, the diversities in the experiences of creating, playing and performing local level amateur musics are embedded within decisions to play 'copy' or 'original' musics.

Stephen Groce (1989) argues that these ideological differences map onto the range of musical identities available in response to the social organisation of the music industry. Local-level copy bands defined themselves as audience-orientated and financially motivated entertainers, whereas local-level original bands were more inclined to invest in ideas of artistry. Groce (1989) argues that these self-definitions are constructed to account for a desire to be successful in a musical world within which amateur musicians have little control. For local-level cover bands, the failure to measure up to industry standards of original hit songs leaves them with the next best option - the demonstration of technical abilities in the reproduction of existing industry hits. In relation to local-level original bands, the likelihood of creating a hit record is miniscule without some prolonged engagement in bar music culture shared with the more crowd-pleasing cover bands. As the two factions compete for scarce playing opportunities, original bands develop a resentment of cover bands as the latter tend to generate larger incomes and dominate playing opportunities. Ruth Finnegan (1989) analysed a variety of diverse rock and pop local-level bands to find that bands tended to consist of men who struggled to secure live performances for payment. From this research the presence of the music industry, mass audience and venue manager is still a central feature in the construction of amateur musical identities.

### *2.5.3 Re-assessing the study of local-level amateur music-makers*

There are several problematic themes running through this literature, and I will comment on just a couple relevant to the current study. The first concerns the definition of the amateur and their role in local music culture and the wider music industry. A tendency to frame local-level music-making in occupational discourse sets a series of underlying assumptions into play. The amateur is positioned at the beginning of a linear romantic ascendance to becoming a national, professional, industry-based music star. From this perspective amateur music-makers who operate within local-level music culture for an extended period of time could be considered as failures. This discounts bands who actively avoid seeking music-industry validation, regular employment or financial rewards from music-making. In Leeds DIY music culture alone, amateur bands like D'Astro and Bilge Pump have persevered in creating original music for over ten years, whereas bands like Ruby Tombs and Mz Sojourn have been more ephemeral and spontaneous. The frameworks offered by the above studies seem appropriate for a subsection of bands that are compatible with mainstream success and acceptance: Leeds-based bands that achieved this in the recent 2005 'New Yorkshire' era, included the Kaiser Chiefs, ¡Forward Russia!, The Sunshine Underground and The Pigeon Detectives, and all these bands, with the exception of ¡Forward Russia! drummer Katie Nicholls, are indie-rock outfits made up of predominantly white men. However, the current study addresses the activities of amateur music-makers that are critical of the whiteness, masculinity and heteronormativity that pervades the content of popular culture. In contemporary culture the rock band can offer a 'form of microresistance to the rationalised social imaginary [...] [to question] the hegemony of dominant

ideology and the effectiveness of its institutionalised practices' (Weinstein 1993, p. 220).

Therefore 'other' music-makers can exist for reasons beyond commercial logic. Ruth Finnegan's detailed empirical survey of local music-making activities in Milton Keynes has illuminated the critical social role music-making plays within contemporary life; 'playing in a band provided a medium where players could express their own personal aesthetic vision and through their music achieve a sense of controlling their own values, destiny and self-identity' (1989, p. 130). Music-making in local cultures offers its participants more than the chance of fame - a range of opportunities to construct and contest powerful narratives and identities.

The slippery conflation of the rock band with masculinity as male sexed/masculine gendered subjects dominate studies of rock music-making is the next point of contention (Bennett 1980a, 1980b; Finnegan 1989; Cohen 1991; Groce & Dowell 1988; Groce 1989; Coffman 1971; Weinstein 1993). The literature on local-level music-making has ignored the music-making strategies, spaces and practices of queer feminist music (sub)cultures that foreground the collective music-making practices of gender queer subjects. Theories solely based on (white) male collective music-making cannot be representative of all rock music-making, including the rock music practices of women, feminists, lesbians and queer subjects. Centralising masculine creativity limits the range of conflicts and questions asked about amateur rock-music practices. To what extent can the art/commerce conflict, audience/performer distinction and local amateur/national professional career structure map onto and inform the music-making practices of DIY queer feminist music (sub)cultures?

It would not be unreasonable to assume that existing studies of male rock music-making culture are infused with masculine ideologies. For instance, Bennett describes a special sense of commitment wherein 'nothing comes before music' that helps a rock band to form. When a member breaks band commitments by failing to show up to a practice or gig, 'their absence demonstrates that something means more than music - that, in short, they are not *musicians*' (Bennett 1980b, p. 222, original emphasis). This rather absolutist idea of music, as previously discussed, argues for the protection of music from the trappings of everyday life, serving a masculine ideology. The effect of this actively prevents women, associated with domesticity, commerce and (a distracting) sexuality, from claiming an identity as a rock musician. Controlling the threat of women became a paramount concern for the local-level male rock bands in Sara Cohen's (1991) detailed study of Liverpool rock culture. Cohen's participant observation centred on two unsigned bands - 'the Jactars' and 'Crikey it's the Cromptons!' These bands consisted of 4 or 5 white men aged between 20 and 30 who had been making music together in a typical guitar-and-drum-based outfit for 2 or 3 years. Cohen produced an innovative critique of the male rock band as a site for the performance of masculinity, finding that rock bands constructed themselves as gang-like social units which sought to secure their music-making rights through the active exclusion and denigration of women. Rock bands

offered men a valuable 'way of life' separate from the mundane nature of work and home that was passionately defended from the dual threats of women and commerce. Respectively, many scholars have also argued that the sphere of rock music-making is a contested gendered terrain producing narrow options for women as music-makers (Bayton 1997, 1998; Clawson 1999a, 1999b; Groce & Cooper 1990; Walser 1993; Krenske & McKay 2000; Schippers 2000, 2002; McDonnell & Powers 1995; Steward & Garratt 1985; Leblanc 1999; Whiteley 1997; Reddington 2007).

#### *2.5.4 Frock Rock: Women amateur music-makers*

To date, Mavis Bayton has been the only scholar to touch on the everyday amateur rock music-making practices of women and feminist-identified women. Bayton (1988, 1993, 1997, 1998) used a combination of in-depth interviews with women musicians and industry professionals alongside participant observation at women's music projects, gigs and workshops between 1978 and 1985, later updating her work in 1995-6. Bayton's scholarship has opened up the discussion of amateur music-making in several important ways - to consider the role of feminism in women's amateur music-making, the possible differences in women bands' collective creative processes, and the gendered conflicts women negotiate in making and performing rock music in the public eye. In the essays 'How Women Become Musicians' (1988), 'Feminist Musical Practice: Problems and Contradictions' (1993), 'Women and the Electric Guitar' (1997) and her book-length account *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (1998), Bayton suggests that women's routes into rock music-making differ from the male-trodden paths previously described by the likes of Bennett (1980a, 1980b) as opportunities and restraints are shaped by gendered discourses. The routes for men are enhanced by greater access to rock instruments and informal peer groups to share learning experiences and knowledge, prior to first band formation. Bayton confirmed the stereotype of the isolated male player engaged in 'song-getting' from his record player, paying his dues through the arduous task of mastering the rock canon on his chosen instrument. In contrast, Bayton suggested that women were less likely to have access to masculine-coded rock instruments or to experience similar peer-group opportunities to develop musical skills on rock instruments like the guitar or drums. In this section I will explore Bayton's comments on women's amateur bands and feminist music countercultures.

Gender differences are argued to impact on the form, style and structure of men's and women's collective rock music-making practices (Bayton 1988). While men's rock bands tend to start out with clear ideas of instrument roles, musical style and projected audience, it was common for women to form a band with a looser sense of instrumental role, style and band structure. Band line-ups were more open to revision, shaped by the relatively small pool of women players; therefore, it wasn't unusual for a woman guitar-player to end up as a drummer, or for instruments to be frequently swapped leaving the instrumental line-up in a permanent state of

flux. Women's desire to play often overshadowed dedication to any firm musical style. This enabled women's bands to explore and fuse different styles in extended collective spells of learning and experimenting with music. Women's bands were more likely to begin creating original music, whereas in men's bands it was commonplace for bands to extend their individual 'song-getting' experiences to a band context, initially playing covers of well-known rock songs before progressing onto writing original material. Bayton suggested that women's musical commitment was displaced by family and partners' needs - 'musicians schedule their lives around music; mothers schedule their lives around their children' (1993, p. 255).

In her analysis of successful male rock-band creativity and interaction, Deena Weinstein (1993) identified three models of collective creativity. The first form is termed 'the proprietorship', in which one member, 'the prince', is the dominant creator within a band thereby reaping the majority of financial income. The 'duopoly' describes a band in which two dominant creative members with different yet complementary strengths work together, for instance one in lyrics and the other in music. The final model, 'the cooperative', entails each band member having an equal say, input and financial stake in the creation, recording and performance of music. Weinstein argued that the latter model represents an ideological ideal which is rarely expressed in commercial rock-music culture. However, in Bayton's research a cooperative structure became the standard way of creating music within women's bands. When women initially learned how to play with each other, a carefully crafted democratic atmosphere free from male outsiders enabled them to quickly learn new musical skills together. In songwriting, a conscious effort was made to balance contributions and demonstrate sensitivity for all contributions and ideas. It was rare for one member to write all the material and more typical for members to bring partially formed song ideas that would become the basis of collective collaboration or for songs to emerge during jamming, the practice of 'playing loosely and spontaneously, with no particular direction' (Bayton 1988, p. 249). Priority was placed on women creating original material rather than covers. In feminist-orientated bands this preference was justified through beliefs in women's different ways of writing bolstered by the political necessity to highlight women's experiences. In the performance of cover songs there was a need to create a subversive version that presented a lesbian or pro-woman subtext; the Raincoats' 1979 version of 'Lola', originally written by Ray Davies about a man's encounter with a transvestite and performed by the Kinks, is a prime example. Instead of switching the protagonist to a woman and transvestite to a masculine-identification, the Raincoats retain the feminine gender-identification of Lola alongside a woman-identified protagonist to produce a radical revision that gleams with lesbian and queer possibility.

Women were more likely to develop close friendships with fellow band-members that extended far beyond band activities. The absolutist concept of music, already seen to be taken for granted in Bennett's (1980a, 1980b) study of men's rock cover bands, was challenged as the divide

between music-making and everyday life was violated. Extra-band issues were discussed and acknowledged in rehearsals, which allowed women's music-making and performances to hold special significance in women's lives as band relationships developed into close friendships; for women, 'the immediate experience of playing together is a source of strength and pleasure and purpose for more important than individual commercial success' (Bayton 1988, p. 257). Therefore, as opposed to the individualist structure and commercial interests that predominated studies of men's professional rock groups and amateur cover bands, in Bayton's research women's amateur bands were characterised as tight-knit cohesive friendship groups that preferred collective, original and democratic forms of artistic creation.

### *2.5.5 Feminisms and the production of music communities*

For Bayton 'feminism has been a long-lasting oppositional and enabling force within popular music (1993, p. 191); therefore, feminism represents a major route into music-making for women, providing the opportunity, motivation and material resources that enhance women's participation in amateur music worlds. Feminism is not a single ideology, easily identified movement or generational wave, but a multiple, fragmented, often conflicting yet enduring energy that challenges the wider social, political, economic, cultural and historical denigration of feminine experiences, identities and voices. In the late-1970s and 1980s British socio-political context for Bayton's work, multiple strands of feminism circulated, each with a different position on the uses and abuses of music for feminism. For instance, liberal feminism supported women in their struggle for equal status by invading traditional male enclaves and engaging in conventionally masculine occupations and roles; therefore, liberal feminism encouraged women to create rock music alongside men. However, the more radical branch of revolutionary feminism advocated a separatist strategy - the creation of a distinct feminist music that rejected the hallmarks of patriarchal 'cock rock' and emphasised sonic representations of femininity, lesbianism and womanhood. Revolutionary feminists discarded loud amplified sonic heavy metal or rock assaults in favour of a 'women's music' which tended to embrace light, soft and acoustic-folk sounds as well as pop, reggae, jazz, latin and improvisational genres to foreground politicised song lyrics. Although on a smaller scale to 'women's music' culture in the United States, the 1970s and 1980s saw the growth of a strong British lesbian feminist music counterculture under the radar of the mainstream press. Feminism offered women with existing musical inclinations the confidence to realise their creative desires, whereas for other women it was the contact with feminist ideas and networks that first inspired their musical endeavours as the increasing demand for women's bands to play at feminist socials provided a supportive and sympathetic platform.

Bands that identified their musical practices as feminist are seen as having subverted the conventions that guide music-making, to produce an 'alternative music discourse' that is argued

to have been more radical than punk and left-wing subcultural musics (Bayton 1993, p. 181). Many feminist bands sought to rewrite the rules and create an alternative feminist musical counterculture, to resist and rework conventional lyrical content, band structures, instrumental roles, spatial norms, performer/audience relations, songwriting processes, musical elements, live performances and visual presentations. Feminist ideology prioritised the spirit of collectivism and cooperation over individualism and competition, the latter of which were linked to the exploitative practices of white patriarchal capitalism. In lesbian feminist musical counterculture this was manifested in a critique of professionalism and an emphasis on grassroots, non-hierarchical and autonomous organisation. Separation between the audience and performer was minimised through the spatial reorganisation of the gig; bands often rejected the use of elaborate stage lighting for more sparse yet immediate and intimate performances. The hierarchical competitive gig roster that prioritised a 'headlining' band who played after the 'support' bands was subverted as joint-headlining gigs were introduced incorporating a revolving headliner.

Movements, postures and gestures in music performances rejected and ridiculed stereotypical masculine rock norms. Feminists challenged hegemonic discourses of feminine rock sexuality that pandered to male attention, epitomised through hetero-feminine dress including the mini-skirt, low cut top and make-up. In some circles these signifiers were rejected and a 'natural' image predominated: 'the norm for feminist bands tend[ed] to be no make-up, flat shoes/boots, and jeans/trousers. You could be any shape or size; you certainly did not have to look attractive in terms of conventional femininity' (Bayton 1998, p. 69). Other feminist music-makers questioned the possibility of achieving a 'natural' femininity and instead experimented with exaggerated forms of femininity. Overtly lesbian feminist themes and issues dominated the lyrical elements of songs, acting as catalysts for consciousness-raising and social change for performers and audiences, for instance previously taboo experiences of menstruation, housework, lesbianism, motherhood and menopause became viable topics for alternative music. Women-only gigs were important to feminist music-makers because they allowed for the construction of a 'safe space' free from male violence, intimidation and criticism; however, this also bred resentment as women's music tended to be unconditionally praised. Women-only gigs and lesbian feminist social events tended to displace the centrality of music to foreground the sexual and social elements of the event. Lesbian audiences were considered to prioritise dance music rather than more 'serious' musics and the interests of such audiences were radically questioned. The feeling that women's bands were 'playing to the converted' alongside the celebration of feminine amateurism and prohibition of rock sounds restrained the radicalism of feminist music practices.

### 2.5.6 *Frock Off: Contemporary queer feminist music makers*

Mavis Bayton undoubtedly broke new ground in her study of women's music-making practices; however, several problematic assumptions remain unchallenged within her work. The dominant tendency to frame music-making in occupational discourse and construct a linear career path is retained, particularly in *Frock Rock*, which as Bayton outlines in the preface, 'can be read as a guide for women considering a career in music-making, to show what the problems are likely to be and to demonstrate how others have successfully resisted and dealt with them' (1998, p. vii). Furthermore, Bayton cannot seem to avoid the uncritical perpetuation of gendered concepts that circulate in music culture. For instance, the first question that drives Bayton's thesis is why there are so few women instrumentalists in rock bands and priority is given to the voices and experiences of women instrumentalists. This tendency to privilege instrumental roles and overlook vocal and audience contributions to rock music culture can be clearly mapped onto a masculine/feminine binary. Vocality remains embedded in feminine associations with the body, nature and emotion that position singing as an unremarkable natural ability. The situation of being 'just the girl singer' seems to require considerable discursive work for women in order to claim artistic authority in rock music culture, whereas instrument playing is valorised as a highly developed skill with masculine connotations of rationality, culture and technology (Clawson 1993). The observation that women tend to cluster in apparently 'unpowerful' rock roles as the vocalist, keyboardist or bass-guitar player tends to be a common fixation for 'women in rock' theorists (Clawson 1999a, 1999b). Frequently both Bayton and Clawson tend to valorise guitar-playing and drumming as the most sonically powerful roles in rock music making, which suggests that playing instruments that cross gender norms presents the most satisfactory mode of feminist resistance (Bayton 1997, 1998; Clawson 1999a, 1999b). This narrow focus on experiences of women instrumentalists carries the ironic effect of reinforcing, rather than challenging, the constitution of patriarchal power in rock music culture.

Women-only audiences were often represented as a nuisance for instrumentalists in lesbian feminist countercultures. They were blamed for giving uncritical feedback, favouring social and sexual aspects of gigs over the music or demanding dance music rather than 'serious' music (Bayton 1993, p. 187-8). This confirms rather than resists the stereotypes of women's consumption as indiscriminate, previously discussed, and perpetuates the divide between apolitical feminine pop and serious masculine rock. Other 'women in rock' theorists have produced distinct histories to recuperate 'lost women of rock', detailing pioneering women instrumentalists and vocalists who have shaped rock music culture (for example, see Gaar 1993; O'Brien 2002); however, the concept of rock music culture as a constantly negotiated and contested site for gendered practices is not explored. For Bayton, rock music culture is assumed to consist of masculine norms, values and ideas that women must attempt to break into or reject

altogether, thereby she fails to take into account the historical contributions and continual presence of women in rock culture.

Bayton's uncritical use of the categories 'man' and 'woman' create a world of masculine men and feminine women complete with gender-bound normative routes and constraints. Not surprisingly Bayton finds that experiences of music-making map onto traditional gender expectations, with women considered to be more experimental, unskilled and communal, whereas men are understood to be more hierarchical, skilled and career driven in their music-making. It is difficult to see where gender-queer subjects, men who identify with feminism or women who identify with the masculine gender performances of heavy metal and rock can adequately fit into this framework. Even more perplexing for the current study is the nostalgic account of the 1970s and 1980s lesbian feminist music counterculture and dismissal of contemporary queer feminist music culture; 'feminism and lesbianism are no longer a major route into rock music-making in the apolitical 1990s [...] Lesbianism's public persona has been subject to considerable political dilution and today has no necessary connection with feminism, so that it is no longer the political route into women's music-making that it once was' (Bayton 1998, p. 74). Bayton bases her assumption on the responses of women instrumentalists interviewed in the mid-nineties, a post-riot grrrl era of considerable media backlash against women musicians who politicised their gender and sexuality. Subsequently, Bayton observes that these women musicians commonly discounted the importance of their sexuality in music-making or decided to remain closeted. Bayton proceeds to consider the impact of the riot grrrl movement on 1990s Britain, and acknowledging her lack of first-hand information, she presents a pessimistic account of a failed British riot grrrl scene that is littered with numerous mistakes and inaccuracies. Riot grrrls' handful of women-only gigs, zines, music and defiant spatial gig practices are heralded as media-savvy replicas of an earlier comprehensive feminist music counterculture, leading Bayton to conclude that;

It is arguable whether Riot Grrrl has had as much effect in the UK as it did in the States. Indeed, it never really took off nationally in the first place, and has remained highly localised in a few cities where the energising activity of one or two highly committed women inspires others (such as Newcastle, Glasgow and Leeds/Bradford). My research suggests that it has not had the same long-term impact in the UK as punk. Interviewing women in 1995-6, I discovered that many of them knew little about Riot Grrrl and some had never heard of it. Not one of the women who I interviewed would call herself a Riot Grrrl, while some believed that the whole Riot Grrrl scene was a media myth beyond the activities of one band: Huggy Bear. Many of the bands described as Riot Grrrl were playing long before the term existed and were annoyed at being so indiscriminately labelled by the press (Bayton 1998, p. 79)

Bayton does identify two important differences in riot grrrl. Riot grrrl bands often included men, for instance Linus, Coping Saw, Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear, and this concept would have been intolerable for the women-only bands and audiences of 1970s and 1980s lesbian feminist

music counterculture. Additionally, riot grrrl appeared to be more overtly sexual, flaunting bold visual statements of queer fem(me)inism that redeployed feminine style and girlhood aesthetics within a feminist praxis. However, instead of considering the radical possibilities of these practices pointed out in her earlier survey of women punks, Bayton is quick to point out how within a mixed audience such tactics are 'open to misinterpretation, employing a supposed irony which could be easily lost on some segments of the audience, most of whom would be only too delighted to give her an ironic fuck' (1998, p. 79). Bayton seems too misplaced to conceptualise the musical practices of an emerging queer feminism that had begun to build on a radical performative questioning of the very rigid gender and sexuality binaries that form the bedrock of her analyses. In the 1980s lesbian feminist culture was thrown into flux. Generational shifts, the sex wars and critiques levelled by women of colour questioned the viability of 'women's music' to adequately represent all women. This 'decentring' of lesbian feminism saw the mobilisation of 'rigid ideological prescriptions about who belonged in the lesbian community, and what lesbian culture should look and sound like' (Stein 1995, p. 419). Developing this critical legacy, queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance embraces ambiguity and constructs everyday spaces and practices that question the dominant frameworks that guide who is able to claim the identity of girl, woman, man, lesbian and feminist. Importantly, queer feminist (sub)cultures operate simultaneously within 'mainstream' and 'underground' levels to 'construct positions from which to speak that acknowledge both lesbian marginality and membership in the dominant culture' (Stein 1995, p. 425). One aim of the present study is to situate riot grrrl and DIY queer feminist (sub)culture within a rich continuation of British feminist (sub)cultural resistance that have made important contributions to the contemporary landscape, character and history of feminism in Britain.

Conventional feminist histories have relied on the documentation of prominent public marches, strikes, conferences, speeches and publications; however, women's social and political histories have also been articulated within music-making and music cultures. Susan McClary has argued that 'music can organise our perceptions of our own bodies and emotions, it can tell us things about history that are not accessible through any other medium' (cited in Wood 1995, p. 606). This possibility inspired Elizabeth Wood to develop a sonogram metaphor in her exploration of the militant British suffrage struggles in 1910-14 and musical works of Ethel Smyth. Wood proclaims her approach to be 'an alternative mode to the hegemonic invasiveness of "master" narratives [...] to investigate the body politic and its resonances to "tell us things about history" that are accessible through our sensory experience of musical sound' (1995, p. 607). Furthermore, in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* Attali (1985) has argued that music is prophetic, providing a 'rough sketch of society under construction' (p. 5) that can precede social transformations. Amateur music subcultures can provide space for the construction of alternative worlds, politics and identities that set forth collective desire for wider social, political

and cultural transformation. In a context in which there appears to be a lack of visible leaders and activism in contemporary feminism, unlike identifiable 'second-wave' icons like Germaine Greer and Gloria Steinem and the National Organisation of Women (NOW), a situation has developed in which contemporary feminists are more likely to identify their feminist leaders within their own local feminist communities, and, when pushed to move beyond their immediate contexts, identify (inter)nationally recognised music icons like Kathleen Hanna and Ani DiFranco (Reger 2007). It is possible that the character and future of British feminisms are being actively negotiated within local-level DIY queer feminist music (sub)cultures, for instance within the collective construction of musical moments like Ladyfest, DIY music-making and queer feminist club nights.

## *2.6 Methodological Outline*

The current study interrogates a combination of visual, textual and sonic elements to describe and analyse the everyday experiences, sounds and sights of British queer feminist music (sub)culture. Queer methodologies, as previously discussed, are scavenger methodologies that agitate conventional boundaries. In seeking a nuanced understanding of how music and music (sub)culture can be used to provoke and embody desire for social change, music needs to be unshackled from a disciplinary longing to view music as a fixed object, towards an understanding of music as embedded within a historically, socially, politically and culturally situated process of collaborative meaning-making. To ask how music is being used, created, played, performed and experienced within different countercultural spaces and moments, and to interrogate how music and music culture contest wider struggles for transformation in dominant understandings of genders, sexualities, and feminisms. I employed a combination of qualitative methodological approaches to explore the meanings that circulate in everyday lived experiences of creating, producing, performing and occupying various queer feminist sounds, visions and spaces.

### *2.6.1 Data Production*

In order to produce a 'thick description' of lived experiences of queer girl culture I prioritised an ethnographic approach (Geertz 1973). Within the social sciences, ethnographic methods refer to a process of 'doing' research in which the researcher engages with people, on their own terms and within their everyday worlds, in order to gain a nuanced understanding of their cultural beliefs and practices (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Denzin 1997). This may be through complete immersion in the everyday participation of cultural lifestyles; however, in contemporary ethnography researchers have been known to include other qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviewing, biographical narratives and the analysis of documents (Taylor 2002). Postmodern and feminist twists on ethnography have allowed for the development of critical,

situated and self-reflexive approaches conscious of the dangers of truth claims, unacknowledged power hierarchies and detached objective stances (Stacey 1991; Mascia-Lees et al 1989; Clifford & Marcus 1986; Denzin 1997). Ethnographies are not neutral descriptions of 'other' cultures, but active constructions of cultures, 'caught up in the invention, not the representation of cultures' (Clifford 1986, p. 2). Critical ethnographies have engaged in experimentation with dialogic forms of cultural writing, to include competing voices and perspectives, to embrace contradiction and multiplicity over linearity and order and to acknowledge the limits and particularities of ethnographic interpretations. Instead of viewing ethnographic visions as weak, incomplete and partial, 'a rigorous sense of partiality can be a source of representational tact' (Clifford 1986, p. 7). Critical ethnographies are argued to be more than descriptions of social life or celebrations of cultural difference, but are narratives that indicate the presence of multiple competing versions of 'reality' in the world and push for social transformation (Denzin 1997).

Feminist critics have debated the character of this reflexive postmodern moment that has enabled the development of a new or critical ethnography proposed by James Clifford, George Marcus, Michael Fischer and Norman Denzin. Highlighting the active exclusion of feminist anthropologists and disintegration of a means to speak about marginalised experiences in global systems of power and dominance, Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Cohen (1989) launch into a critique that radically questions the power exclusions embedded in postmodernism. The valorisation of a postmodernism that views truth, experience, and knowledge as multiple and posits the death of the ontological subject is argued as reflecting the experience of white western male thought, mobilised at a crucial moment in which non-western people and women have begun to speak for themselves (see also Hartstock 1987; Harding 1987). Therefore, postmodernist discourse, as a socially constructed knowledge, can also be understood as a redeployment of masculine dominance that marginalises the politicisation of 'other' experiences and secures male supremacy in the academy. For instance, postmodern anthropological reflexive accounts can produce a 'new ethnocentrism' in privileging the (male) author's voice, 'for in turning inward, making himself, his motives, and his experience the thing to be confronted, the postmodernist anthropologist locates "the other" in himself. It is as if, finding the "exotic" closed off to him, the anthropologist constructs himself as the exotic' (Mascia-Lees et al 1989, p. 26; see also Skeggs 2002, Probyn 1993). Experimental postmodernist writing techniques that aim to include multiple voices, dissonant perspectives and viewpoints in a non-hierarchical manner can mask agendas, narrative authority and power differences. Feminist theory can contribute to the practice of ethnography by restoring the critical relationship between research and politics in the production of situated knowledges (Mascia-Lees et al 1989; Haraway 1996 [1988]). This involves remaining critically aware of and accountable to readers, participants and audiences of research, acknowledging the political agenda that motivates research, and embracing the

contradictions in current feminist theorising and activism. These contradictions can be demonstrated as a dilemma between a need for feminism to recognise women's individual freedom and diverse biographies with a desire to organise as a group to mobilise claims for equality (Young 1995). Feminist cultural theory is also peculiar in that it requires the simultaneous construction and deconstruction of the terms 'woman', 'feminism' and 'oppression' that form part of its own discourse. A feminist and queer ethnography refuses to decentre the material and historical, and is committed to transforming power relationships that underlie the oppression of the feminine, non-white, working class and non-heterosexual.

Feminist researchers foreground professional, personal and political interests within their research and have laboured on ways to rework conventional research relationships, problems and methodologies (Reinharz 1992; Oakley 1981). Remaining astute to the traditional hierarchy between the powerful 'researcher' who obtains information from the powerless 'researched', participant and researcher interactions can also be viewed as active dynamic relationships embedded in complex negotiations of power and reciprocity that are linked to the immediate context, emotions and structural positions of both the researcher and participant. Interviews and ethnographies have been widely redefined as collaborative events for the co-construction of in-depth narrative possibilities. Feminist researchers have also encouraged researchers to utilise the everyday situations in which they are involved to develop feminist cultural theory (Stanley & Wise 1983); therefore, the possibility for auto/ethnography offers an opportunity for co-constructing narratives within existing activist, social and creative networks. Opposed to centralising a singular personal voice, I utilised an auto/ethnographic approach to sensitively situate and reflexively examine how my fluctuating experiential biography impacted upon the construction of a queer feminist counter-narrative and vice versa, for instance in an assessment of how my role as a subcultural participant had influenced the direction, ethical dilemmas, aims and methodological decisions in my research, as discussed above. I also wished to position my voice within a multiplicity of competing voices and viewpoints that circulate in queer feminist music culture, whilst acknowledging the authority I inevitably possess in shaping the debate.

This study consisted of three interrelated empirical studies. The first study draws on a political legacy of oral history methodologies to construct a situated history of riot grrrl. This project was driven by a desire to construct a counter-narrative to contest visible representations of riot grrrl, including media coverage, music histories and academic accounts that devalue girls' music (sub)cultural experiences. The complete absence and existence of distorted accounts of lesbianism and feminism is a problem frequently encountered in the production of lesbian and feminist histories (see Jennings 2004; Sangster 1994). Therefore oral history methodologies have enabled the (re)construction of queer, lesbian and feminist histories (Davis & Kennedy 1986; Boyd 2003; Faderman 1991; Gardiner 2003; Jennings 2007b). However, rather than viewing oral histories as objective recollections of 'real' experience, a critical oral history

approach involves 'asking why and how women explain, rationalise and make sense of their past, [to gain] insight into the social and material framework within which they operated, the perceived choices and cultural patterns they faced, and the complex relationship between individual consciousness and culture' (Sangster 1994, p. 6). Care needs to be taken to record the context of the oral history to clarify how the position of the speaker, in terms of personal, political and social agendas alongside gender, 'race', sexual and class positions, shapes the construction of historical memories, silences and subtexts of riot grrrl (see Sangster 1994). As discussed above, the prevailing historical, social and cultural context which enabled a reevaluation of riot grrrl, shaped the willingness for participants to share riot grrrl experiences and inevitably impacted on the evaluations and descriptions given.

I conducted 17 oral history interviews relating to UK riot grrrl between May 2006 and June 2008. Each oral history was semi-structured with a pre-determined interview schedule (see appendix 1) used to guide participants when needed, although care was taken to allow participants to construct idiosyncratic narratives and introduce alternative events, issues and ideas. Interviews typically lasted between 1 and 2 hours and were conducted in public places like cafes or in participants' homes. The interviews were fully transcribed in verbatim (see appendix 2) and the nuances of the speaker's linguistic expression including pauses, repetition and fillers were included (see Potter & Weatherell 1987). Quotations used from interview transcripts were adjusted to facilitate comprehension – this included small adjustments to punctuation and the removal of repetition, fillers and false starts – in academic and commercial texts. In some cases (for example, Suzy Corrigan) participants edited their own transcripts for clarity. The UK riot grrrl oral histories were complemented with the transcripts of 24 interviews and 3 roundtables of the US riot grrrl movement conducted in 1999 by Gillian Gaar and Jacob McMurray as part of the Experience Music Project Riot Grrrl Retrospective. I was also grateful for an opportunity to conduct one US oral history with Allison Wolfe in 2007, email correspondence with Kathleen Hanna, Layla Gibbon, Everett True, Andy Walker, and Paul Cox, and gain access to interviews with 3 UK and 3 US participants conducted by Michal Cupid and Lisa Cupcake in 1999 and a written interview with Andy Roberts from Cazz Blase. This amassed hundreds of pages of transcript and the description of riot grrrl experiences of 28 women and 11 men. This was complemented by involvement in a Ladyfest Brighton riot grrrl retrospective panel with Tobi Vail and Allison Wolfe in October 2005, and a long table discussion on writing riot grrrl histories at Ladyfest London in May 2008. In addition to oral histories many participants took the opportunity to generously share other sources of riot grrrl documentation including letters, zines, tapes, media articles, photos, videos, records, flyers and posters. I am also grateful to Sarah Dougher, Jacob McMurray and sts who provided me with access to original US riot grrrl and queercore zines and recordings during fieldwork in Portland,

Seattle and Olympia in November 2007, and Cazz Blase who kindly lent me her UK riot grrrl fanzine archive.

The second study focused on an auto/ethnography of contemporary DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural participation. This incorporated the documentation of, and critical reflection on, my everyday activism, participation and co-production of UK Ladyfests, Ladies Rock UK, Manifesta meetings, gigs and events, alongside discussions with (sub)cultural participants across the UK and Ireland.<sup>21</sup> This incorporated the articulations of 19 queer feminist (sub)cultural producers involved in projects and collectives across the UK. These semi-structured interviews were again loosely based on an interview schedule (see appendix 1) whilst remaining open enough to enable the participant to guide the interview around individual concerns and experiences. Interviews with queer feminist participants often became dialogues enabling the reciprocal exchange of experiences, ideas and memories. A small number of participants preferred to contribute their accounts via email; this was often due to geographical constraints, but was also a distinct preference to articulate ideas in writing rather than in face-to-face situations. In these cases I attempted to preserve a dialogic ethos, often extending the email interaction by adding further questions or responding to the participant's questions. Face-to-face interviews took place in public locations and domestic spaces, lasting between 1 and 2 ½ hours, and some participants chose to be interviewed as pairs. These interviews were complemented by my own archive of written, sonic and visual documents of queer feminist (sub)culture encompassing zines, flyers, posters, programmes, media articles and recordings.

The majority of data I collected, therefore, consisted of various texts including transcribed interviews, oral histories and discussions, lyrics, zines, field-notes and email correspondence. In the third study I was keen to incorporate the analysis of everyday visual and aural elements of queer girl music production. Drawing on the benefits of video diary methodology for researching everyday performances of non-heterosexual identities (see Holliday 2000, 2004), I distributed camcorders to case study bands and asked them to produce video diaries of their rehearsals, performances and band life. I compiled a list of possible bands based on my experience of queer feminist music culture and approached bands that explicitly self-identified their music-making as queer and/or feminist. I explained the project in an email, in conversation and in an information sheet (see appendix 1). Initially five bands were involved; Smartypants, Fake Tan, Drunk Granny, Jean Genet and Drei; however, Smartypants broke up and dropped out of the study, the interview responses given by Drei illustrated that the band exceeded the specific remit of a queer/feminist focused band, and I first encountered Party Weirdo at a gig in 2007 and they joined the project later. Band documentation occurred from November 2006 to

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<sup>21</sup> It must be noted that I did not manage to locate any active collectives in Scotland during my fieldwork. I have subsequently become aware of (sub)cultural activity in Glasgow, including Queerbash events, the radio show Suck My Left One, and the all-girl queer band Scragfight.

January 2008. I acquired two camcorders and circulated these around the bands, and other forms of recording were also used by the bands including mini-discs, cds and tapes. In addition to video-diary documentation I interviewed the bands about their music-making practices, listened to their recordings, saw them perform live, collected media coverage, and attended to lyrics to gain a situated understanding of how bands understood their music-making practices at different moments and spaces of articulation. I also asked queer feminist (sub)cultural participants about the role of these bands' musics in their everyday lives. Unfortunately, due to time and space constraints, only the interview and ethnographic data could be included in the current analysis. These data, therefore, represent an innovative direction for future research to explore the private dynamics between music-makers invested in the social construction of queer feminist (sub)cultures.

### *2.6.2 Data Analysis*

Emergent themes were derived from the data through the use of grounded theory. Originally conceptualised by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1967), grounded theory refers to 'systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories "grounded" in the data themselves [...] Thus, data form the foundation of our theory and our analysis of these data generates the concepts we construct' (Charmaz 2006, p. 2). Therefore instead of an assessment of testable hypotheses or established theoretical concepts, grounded theory enabled the development of themes rooted in the talk of (sub)cultural participants. This analytical approach was particularly suitable for the in-depth exploration of subjects obscured from dominant social, political and cultural theory. Therefore data analysis was conducted alongside and informed the direction of data production and theorisation. For instance, when new themes emerged, or became saturated, theoretical sampling was used – participants were included on the basis that their participation would lead to theory construction. Within the practice of memo-writing key themes and concepts were refined over time and existing literature was consulted in order to situate concepts within a wider social, cultural and political context.

### *2.6.3 Sample*

I approached riot grrrl oral history participants, queer feminist participants and queer feminist bands based on my own (sub)cultural knowledge, contacts and networks. I have already discussed problematic issues about sampling in personal activist communities and social circles. These practices have inevitably been shaped by my social position as a white, middle-class queer girl subject, which unfortunately reflects the general character of queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance. However, this is not to discount the experiences and contributions made within DIY queer feminist (sub)culture by participants who spoke from positions that are non-white, working-class, male, masculine and gender-queer. Overall of the 46 participants involved

in these interrelated studies; 7 identified as men, 7 as working-class, 5 as non-white, and 3 as gender-queer. In terms of sexuality; 17 self-identified as heterosexual, 9 as lesbian, 4 as gay, and 16 as queer. The participants were involved in projects and collectives including Local Kid, Manifesta, Kaffequeeria, f.a.g. Club, Riot Grrrl London, Riot Grrrl Leeds-Bradford, Girl Frenzy, Slampt, The Bakery, Get Bent!, Homocrime, Irrk records, Queer Union, Queeruption, Pink Bus, Club V, Colouring Outside the Lines, Magical Girl, Lola and the Cartwheels, Rag, Rock Camp for Girls UK and UK Ladyfests. These queer feminist (sub)cultural activists were located across the UK in cities of Manchester, Leeds, Bristol, Cardiff, London, Newcastle, Brighton and Sheffield, as well as outside the UK, for instance in Dublin and Berlin. Participants were spread across a wide variety of educational backgrounds and occupations including: resident worker in a Buddhist Meditation Centre, chief economist, secondary-school teacher and women's support worker. More detailed information about the specific self-positioning of each participant can be accessed in self-authored biographies included within the relevant chapters of the current study.

#### *2.6.4 Ethics*

I have already dealt with what I felt to be the most pertinent ethical issues faced by the current project. These issues included managing informed consent as a process through allowing participants to control the visibility of their contributions within academic and popular commercial texts. Emphasis was also placed on collaborative knowledge production, whilst acknowledging the partiality that my position and academic constraints generate. Although many researchers have found that this reiterative process hinders research progress (Jones 1997; Weatherall et al 2002) the experience of negotiating meaning through establishing collaborative relationships with participants was positive (see Borland 1991). Critical feminist ethnographies and interviews underline the importance of connecting research to political praxis. In this case the project is driven by a desire to construct an experiential archive of music and music (sub)culture in British feminism and queer life; therefore, my reading and analysis of queer feminist visual, textual and sonic (sub)cultural life is framed through making this political and personal standpoint visible, allowing readers to evaluate my research.

To summarise, this chapter has explored the challenges that an interdisciplinary research project on contemporary DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance represents to dominant disciplinary boundaries. I have reflexively discussed how my position as a (sub)cultural producer-fan and researcher have shaped methodological issues, including access, data production, ethics, friendship networks and the distinction between the home and field. The recognition of the ephemeral aspects of queer feminist (sub)cultural life has led to a critical awareness of the privileging of particular cultural objects and works within disciplines. These disciplinary constraints can obscure an in-depth interrogation of the meaningful everyday music

practices of queer feminist (sub)cultural participants. The contributions of feminist, lesbian, gay and queer musicologies to the study of music, gender and sexuality have been critically assessed in the formulation of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of DIY (sub)cultural music participation. The current study challenges the gaps in the study of local amateur music-making which can be limited by a focus on male, rock cover bands, embedded in an idealised commercial career trajectory. Or, in the case of Mavis Bayton's scholarship, reproduce hegemonic gender discourses in the construction of distinct women's music practices, and dismisses the relevance of feminism and lesbianism for contemporary music-makers. Overall this chapter has sought to justify the importance of an auto/ethnographic approach to understanding music and music culture as collective social action and to incorporate the diverse meaning-making practices of a range of non-expert music participants within a variety of ephemeral spaces, moments and processes. This is a queer feminist methodology that privileges the lived meaningful experiences of counter-hegemonic genders and sexualities, and refuses a narrow focus on aesthetic evaluation of the musical works of professional musicians.

## Chapter Three

### British Riot Grrrl Histories

In the recent past I have been involved in the perpetuation of a predominantly US historical narrative of riot grrrl (see Downes 2007). The story of US origins represents a relatively well-documented mythological account of riot grrrl (see also Kearney 1997, 1998a, 2006; Andersen & Jenkins 2001; Gottlieb & Wald 1994; Cateforis & Humphreys 1997; Schilt 2005; Schilt & Zobl 2008). One of the aims of this chapter is to re-examine these dominant histories, representations and stories of riot grrrl from the perspective of marginal British experiences of riot grrrl music participation. In a synthesis comprising the analysis of original oral history interviews, secondary transcripts and taped interviews, films, fanzines and media articles, I explore the role of music and music culture in the provocation, experience and embodiment of social change in 1990s Britain (for a selected list of sources consulted see appendix 3). This chapter consists of four main sections. The first section focuses on the emergence of a distinctive British riot grrrl discourse within the specific social, political, economic and cultural nuances of a particular historical period. I explore the main points of influence and examine the critical challenges riot grrrl posed to dominant norms of hetero-feminine girlhood and masculine entitlements in (sub)cultural life. The second section focuses on the discursive power struggle over the naming, representation and meaning of riot grrrl between riot grrrl participants, the music press and British newspapers. Local riot grrrl gangs struggled to negotiate (sub)cultural activisms across Britain with limited information, resources and experience. In the third section, I focus in detail upon the spatial, sonic and visual tactics of power mobilised by riot grrrl (sub)culture in the 1993 UK tour of Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill and the significance of riot grrrl music participation for the construction of politicised queer girl communities and localised (sub)cultural activisms. Finally, riot grrrl participants' accounts of the decline, continuity and impact of riot grrrl on life trajectories are explored.

In addressing how oral history participants make sense of their past riot grrrl involvement, I seek to understand how the contemporary context of oral histories interact with the political, personal and social investments of the speaker's position, to shape riot grrrl recollections and silences. I chose to refer to what follows as 'histories', to acknowledge the multifaceted dimensions, indefinite interpretations and decentred authority of any one story, voice or truth claim. This can be reflected in the use of multiple quotations associated with a crucial historical incident or practice, and where this is used I have been careful to qualify the source and temporal position of each speaker, that is, press article, retrospective oral history account, interview or journal entry. These histories are driven by a desire to document the events, press articles, recordings and bands that constituted the public character of British riot grrrl; however,

these histories also seek to engage in the emotional, embodied and contradictory experiences of occupying and producing riot grrrl spaces, sounds and visions. These are often ambivalent spaces in which shame, confrontation, hipness, youth liberation, frustration, connection, ecstasy, confusion, confidence, isolation, violence, hope, revolution and failure intermingle. I have also recognised the multiple layers of riot grrrl involvement, to include the voices of shy spectators, riot grrrl and non-riot grrrl music-makers, fanzine writers, DIY organisers, interested journalists and record label owners.

An important caveat to all research that relies on narratives produced using oral history methodology concerns the reconstructed nature of recollections of past involvement in music movements. In popular music studies and rock criticism there is an overwhelming tendency to reproduce nostalgic and romantic interpretations of past music movements. Within these histories, oral historical narratives are privileged as authentic accounts, imbued with the authority to speak about 'the way things really were' (McNeil & McCain 1997; Aubrey & Shearlaw 2005; Moore & Coley 2008). Music history, like history itself, is not static but is continually reconstructed according to the values and investments of speakers, institutions and audiences. In music history, mythology, romanticism and nostalgia are useful discursive mechanisms to justify a particular movement's or band's importance within the popular music imagination. However, in oral history research into women's histories of activism, the opposite pattern was found; for instance, women tended to underplay their involvement in textile strike actions, minimising their involvement as motivated by a social 'opportunity to go downtown' (Sangster 1994, p. 18). Furthermore, women's oral histories were linked to their material situations; recollections were limited by discursive resources available within particular class, ethnic and gender positions to describe their strike involvement. Therefore, oral histories research that attempts to understand a music movement like riot grrrl, which combined music and activist spheres, means negotiating a balance between the tendencies to evoke discourses of nostalgia alongside inclinations to undermine politicised intentions and contributions. The oral history narratives I present here need to be considered not as authentic truthful accounts, but as reconstructed accounts spoken within a particular point in time by speakers with particular stakes in the representation of riot grrrl history. The resultant British riot grrrl histories can also be understood to be an incomplete and partial starting point, hoping to provoke other voices, memories and stories.

### ***3.1 Riot grrrl participants***

As mentioned above, these oral history interviews took place between May 2006 and February 2007, with the exception of my interview with Lucy Thane in June 2008. Sadly, by the time I was conducting riot grrrl oral histories Andy Roberts had passed away. Andy Roberts was a key figure in London's riot grrrl and queer music (sub)culture, most recently as an organiser of

Homocrime. However, I was fortunate to have known him and include excerpts from a written interview Cazz Blase carried out with him in 1998 and from his 1993 journal.<sup>22</sup> I also carried out an oral history with Allison Wolfe; email interviews with Kathleen Hanna, Layla Gibbon, Gary Walker, Paul Cox and Everett True, and included an excerpt from a taped interview with Andy Brown in 1999.<sup>23</sup> With the exception of Jon Slade, other members of Huggy Bear, including Jo Johnson, Niki Eliot and Chris Rawley, left invitations for oral history interviews unanswered. The majority of individuals who participated in riot grrrl, reflecting the social construction of whiteness in indie music culture (see Bannister 2006), came from white middle-class backgrounds; however, this is not to undermine the importance of working-class and non-white identities of some key protagonists in British riot grrrl culture. The oral history participants present a more complex array of backgrounds of intersections of class, 'race', age, gender, sexuality and education than previous US-based accounts have suggested. In order to illustrate the social positions and diverse projects, interests and personalities of the oral history speakers, I asked each participant to write their own biography, these follow below:

### **Amelia Fletcher**

*Interviewed on 5 January 2007*

Amelia was born in 1966 and was a prolific figure in the UK indie-pop music scene in the mid to late 1980s as a member of Talulah Gosh, signed to Bristol's Sarah Records who disbanded in 1988. Amelia resurfaced in 1990 with Heavenly who were signed to K records in the US and Sarah Records in the UK and toured with paradigmatic Olympian bands such as Beat Happening and Bratmobile. Amelia's brother and Talulah Gosh/Heavenly bandmate Mathew Fletcher was also the original drummer for Huggy Bear. Amelia was an early supporter of Huggy Bear and riot grrrl culture on both sides of the Atlantic. Later bands include Marine Research and Tender Trap. Amelia

<sup>22</sup> Andy Robert's 1993 journal is available online <<http://www.linusland.co.uk/Andy93.html>> [accessed 2 March 2007]

<sup>23</sup> Allison Wolfe: co-author of *Riot Grrrl* and *Girl Germs* fanzines, member of Bratmobile, Cold Cold Hearts, Dig Yr Grave, Deep Lust and Hawney Troof, and co-founder of Ladyfest in 2000. Allison currently lives in New York and is a member of Partyline. Gary Walker: Rough Trade employee, co-ran Wiiiija records and organised gigs in London, now works at Domino Records in New York. Email interview in June 2008. Layla Gibbon: Member of Skinned Teen, Petty Crime, Modern Reveries and wrote *Droptabies* fanzine, current editor and columnist at *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll*. Email interview in June 2008. Everett True: Real name Jerry Thackery. Wrote indie-pop fanzines as The Legend, turned to rock journalism and became assistant editor and a high-profile writer for *Melody Maker* before founding and editing independent music magazines *Careless Talk Costs Lives* and *Plan B*. Recently emigrated to Australia. Email interview in July 2008, subsequently published by True on his blog as a seven part series <<http://everetttrue.wordpress.com/2009/06/07/riot-grrrl-1>> [accessed on 15 August 2009]. Kathleen Hanna: Member of Amy Carter, Viva Knieval, Bikini Kill, Suture, Wondertwins, Julie Ruin, The Troublemakers, The Fakes and Le Tigre, contributed to fanzines *Bikini Kill* and *Riot Grrrl* and wrote *April Fools Day* and *A Day in the Life of Evan Dando*, co-ordinated art shows and gallery space in Reko Muse and Spring Street Gallery, currently at NYU studying art. Email interview January 2008. Paul Cox: Co-founder of The Sausage Machine gigs at the White Horse in London, set up Too Pure record label, current 'Artrocker in Chief' of *Artrocker* magazine. Email interview June 2008. Andy Brown: a participant of the UK independent music scene since the 1990s. He has been a member of various bands including Sawtooth, Michael Dracula, Bricolage and Divorce, and was a co-founder of Catmobile records. Interviewed in 1999 by Lisa Cupcake and Michal Cupid.

gained her PhD in Economics from Oxford University and currently works as the Chief Economist at the Office of Fair Trading. Amelia currently lives in London with her partner Robert Pursey and her children.

### **Bidisha**

*Interviewed on 30 September 2006*

Bidisha was born in London in 1978 and started her riot grrrl fanzine *Grrrl Pride* and became involved in the London riot grrrl scene when she was just fourteen. She subsequently went on to write for *i-D*, *Dazed and Confused*, and *NME* at fifteen and became a columnist for the *Big Issue* at sixteen and published her first novel *Seahorses* at eighteen. Alongside Suzy Corrigan, Bidisha unsuccessfully attempted to create a UK feminist magazine *Girl Power*. Bidisha has subsequently written for a variety of publications including *The Independent*, *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The List*. Bidisha attended Oxford University and the London School of Economics, gaining a BA in English Literature and MSc in Moral and Political Philosophy and Economic History. Bidisha published her second novel *Too Fast to Live* in 2000, and published a compendium of contemporary fiction, journalism and design entitled *The Stealth Corporation* in 2001. Bidisha worked as an arts critic for BBC London until 2002 contributing to many anthologies and delivering talks and readings. 2003-2004 saw Bidisha work as a Senior Lecturer in Political Theory, Journalism and Ethics at The London College. Bidisha currently works as an arts reviewer and contributor to Radio 4 as well as continuing to write books.

### **Charlotte Cooper**

*Interviewed on 7 August 2006*

Charlotte was born in 1968. She's the daughter of white working class people who wanted to be middle class, and she's a big, fat, complicated queer. She came to feminism as a young teen, developed an ambivalent relationship to it, and doesn't know if she's a riot grrrl or not. She lives in East London, not far from the Olympic zone. She writes stuff, including zines, journalism, websites and blogs, academic papers, and books. She does stuff too, she works as a counsellor, she lectures and does workshops and performances, and she's a fat liberation activist. Everything is explained at [CharlotteCooper.net](http://CharlotteCooper.net).

### **Delia Barnard**

*Interviewed on 30 September 2006*

Delia was born in London and has the grimy brick dust of it running through her veins. She went to an all girls school and learnt some classical guitar (wanted to learn electric!), xylophone (wanted to learn drums!) and flute (wanted to learn oboe!). She joined every choir going a) because she liked it, b) cos you could get out of detention by going to choir instead. Even though it was an all girl school at the end of term discos they'd still draft in boys from nearby schools to be in the school band and only had the girls singing. She was involved in her first fanzine *But That's Downbeat And Ridiculous, Sharon!* when she was about 16 (which ran for 2 issues and included the first ever My Bloody Valentine interview, interviews with Half Man Half Biscuit, Rolf Harris, Bogshed, Wedding Present and many more plus lots of crap cartoons). She did a year in a losers music course thingy in Holloway where she was told that she only 'won' a place because they 'didn't have enough girls' - this made her feel really confident about her musical abilities as you can imagine. She

used to keep diaries and calendars of all the gigs she went to (about 5 a week through her teens). She was in various bands that never played or recorded (in front of people) until she met some girls at a Gallon Drunk gig and they formed Mambo Taxi (a reference to a film that Delia still hasn't seen).

Mambo Taxi were involved with the riot grrrl scene although they didn't have a manifesto (much to the disgust of various other bands, journalists etc) as not everyone in the band had the same point of view! Outrageous! Mambo Taxi released an album *In Love with...* and the singles *Prom Queen*, *Poems on the Underground* and *Do You Always Dress Like That?* on Clawfist records before disbanding in 1994. Other bands since then have included The Phantom Pregnancies (featuring Seanie from Hard Skin/Wat Tyler and Karen from Huggy Bear (singing not drumming)), Baby Birkin (featuring Debbie Headcoatee and Raechel Leigh), The A-lines (all-girl band including Kyra and Debbie Headcoatee and Julie Stuck-Up), The Family Way (including too many people to go into), The Action Time (a girl/boy punk-soul revue band). All the aforementioned had albums out. She was also in VA6 (an electro rockabilly synth guitar band with some of Add N To X and lots more), Punjab Rovers (A Cornershop/Mambo Taxi collaboration), Manic Cough (an all-girl/3 girl one boy punker band), The Schla La Las (an all-girl band) all of which had singles out. Until recently Delia was a regular contributor to indie magazine *Artrock*. Delia has also been involved in dance troupes the Actionettes and The Panther Girls. She also DJs and writes for various people here and there. Delia currently lives in London, plays guitar in the Nuns, books bands for the bi-monthly club night Purr in Bath, and works for a PA listings company.

### Erica Smith

*Interviewed on 9 August 2006*

Erica was born in 1963 and grew up in the North West amidst a punk backdrop of Buzzcocks, The Fall, Joy Division, Ludus and Penetration before moving south to study typography and graphic communication at the University of Reading in 1981-1986. Erica moved to Brighton in 1986 and driven by an interest in anarchy-feminism, feminism and comic art, started self-publishing *GirlFrenzy* using withheld Poll Tax payments in 1990. *GirlFrenzy* was a space created 'by women for people' for the publication of women's comic art, book, fanzine and music reviews, interviews, feature articles and the key resource list 'Demand the Supply'. Over its lifespan *GirlFrenzy* ran 6 issues plus a 100 page millennial edition in 1998. Riot grrrl developed in parallel to *GirlFrenzy*; riot grrrl ideas, music and fanzines from the US and UK mingled within its pages. In connection to *GirlFrenzy*, Erica also organised gigs predominantly featuring riot grrrl and women-led bands, including Avocado Baby, Heavens to Betsy, Lianne Hall, SexLoveBusterBaby and Madigan. Erica then moved on to organise *GirlFrenzy* spoken word events, highlighting female performers, culminating in two dates in Blue Stockings and Dumbar in New York in September 1999. Today Erica lives in Hastings, works as a freelance graphic designer and continues to be unconventionally politically active by hosting the occasional band night in her local community.

### Jon Slade (a.k.a Knight of the Comet)

*Interviewed on 22 October 2006*

Jon Slade was born in May 1968 and grew up in South East London. After leaving school in 1984, with his first few dole cheques, he bought tickets to see shows by The Redskins, The Fall, The Ramones, Billy Bragg and the Sisters of Mercy. When that initial DHSS windfall was exhausted he moved on to

smaller, cheaper shows at places like The Ambulance Station in Old Kent Rd, the Enterprise in Chalk Farm and Thames Polytechnic in Woolwich where he saw bands such as The June Brides, Big Flame, Very Things and Sonic Youth, and it was at these smaller shows that he met the likes of Everett True (then The Legend!), Amelia & Mathew Fletcher, Emma & Miki (Lush), Chris P (Silverfish) and a thousand fanzine writers and paisley shirted dreamers. It was through this scene that he also met the other individuals that would later become Huggy Bear, a band that he played with from 1991 until early 1994. In 1993 Huggy Bear hooked up with US Riot Grrrl band Bikini Kill for a three week UK tour that changed everything forever. Huggy Bear split up in December 1994.

Since Huggy Bear he has played with I'm Being Good, Comet Gain and Electric Bull, amongst others. Jon Slade wears suits and currently lives in Brighton. He has never had a proper job.

### **Karren Ablaze!**

*Interviewed on 31 May 2006*

Karren was raised by wolves in the North of England. Her first fanzine, written at age 14, was called *The Value of Defiance*, although she lacked the courage to publish at the time. She then produced *I Hate Punks* (1986), *Made in Manchester* (1987), *Ablaze!* (1987 – 1993) and a number of shorter zines. From 1994 – 1999 she fronted the pop groups Coping Saw, The Bogus Pony Club (alongside Simon Cain), Wack Cat and Action Central. Since then she has spent five years living in a Buddhist Centre in the East Yorkshire countryside. She can now be located in the Hyde Park district of Leeds where she works as a writer.

### **Lianne Hall**

*Interviewed on 31 May 2006*

Lianne was born in 1973 to folk-club attending parents in Peterborough, England. Weeks after moving to Bradford in 1993 Lianne attended the first Leeds/Bradford riot grrrl meeting and met Sarah Bag, with whom she formed Witchknot. For six years Witchknot toured the UK and Europe and released an album and single on Flat Earth Records. During this time Lianne was also working on solo material and formed an acoustic duo with cellist Bela Emerson who she met at that first Riot Grrrl meeting. While living in a bus on a traveller's site in Bradford, Lianne was interviewed by John Peel for a channel 4 documentary. From that point on he championed her music, particularly her ambient electronica project called 'Pico'. She recorded four sessions for his Radio 1 show. In 2000 Lianne moved to Brighton and has since been active in the d.i.y. queer scene there and continues to work on solo material, self releasing a 7-inch single, cd and album on Bristol's Local Kid label. She is currently collaborating with Orbital's Paul Hartnoll and d\_radio from Newcastle and running a not-for-profit venue (Westhill) in Brighton. Lianne is self-employed as an online bookseller and musician.

### **Liz Naylor**

*Interviewed on 27 January 2007*

Liz Naylor was born in 1962. She discovered music at an early age, first record owned being a Yogi Bear (cartoon character, not some obscure band) 7" on red vinyl. She was brought up listening to her sister's T-Rex, Roxy, Bowie and

Uriah Heep records. Between the ages of 10-15 she immersed herself in Jefferson Airplane, Captain Beefheart, Blue Cheer and Lou Reed and just about anything else she could listen to. As a teenager in Manchester in 1978/9 Liz experienced the exciting music scene first hand through her co-running of the infamous *City Fun* fanzine with Cath Carroll. Producing *City Fun*, promoting gigs and playing in her band Gay Animals, Liz was closely involved with all the city's legendary bands such as Joy Division, The Fall, The Smiths as well as co-managing messy feminist artsports, Ludus.

Moving down to London in 1985 Liz worked as a press officer for (among others) New Order, ACR, Danielle Dax, Poison Girls and James. She then went to work at Blast First as press officer for Sonic Youth, Lydia Lunch, Butthole Surfers and Big Black. In the early 1990s Liz moved to work with Kitchens of Distinction and The Sugarcubes at One Little Indian. Disillusioned with the music industry, Liz moved to Northern Portugal in 1993. Returning to the UK she was tipped off about the emerging riot grrrl scene. Reading about Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear she decided to bring Bikini Kill to the UK and release a shared LP with Huggy Bear on her newly formed Catcall records. This was followed by an album by pioneer UK queercore band, Sister George.

Business was not, still isn't, a strong point and Catcall folded after two (important) releases. Following this Liz worked as a DJ until 1999. Having been expelled from school, Liz decided it was time to get some education and after completing an access course studied at Queen Mary, University of London for a BA and MA. She then went to Birkbeck to work on her PhD at Birkbeck with academic Esther Leslie. This was abandoned half way through with the realisation academia held no allure whatsoever. During this period Liz became involved in training former problematic substance users to work as drug and alcohol workers. Now working as part of the co operative Inspirit Training & Development, Liz continues to teach/train. She listens to more music than ever before. Both new and old.

### Lucy Thane

*Interviewed on 13 June 2008*

Lucy Thane was born in North London in the Summer of Love 1967. She studied in Norwich and Sheffield and later lived in New York and San Francisco and currently lives in uber-gentrifying east London. She used to make Documentaries, most notably *It Changed My Life: Bikini Kill & Huggy Bear in the U.K.* in 1993, *She's Real, Worse than Queer* in 1997 and *As Is your Due* in 1999. From 1994 to 1998 she worked as a Staff member, Curator and Editor at Cinema/Gallery/Cultural Hub, Artists Television Access in San Francisco. From 1998 to 2003 she managed Sidecar Ltd., a Video Access and Production company in East London, working a lot with Young People labelled 'At-Risk'. From 1992 until the current day she helped organise many mixed-media/live events 'Shoot the Women First', 'Lick and Flicker', 'Wallflower Filmmakers association' and, currently, 'The Ladies Film and Hair Club'. In the early noughties she suffered and eventually found a way through Heartbreak and Burnout by Flamenco Dancing, Living on a Boat and trying to activate against the greed of her local authority. At the current time she works mostly as a Video Artist in collaboration with Live performers, currently working on 'There ain't No Black in the Union Jack' at Hackney Empire and 'Grunts for the Arts' with Rational Rec and also with SilverSmith Dance Company. She is studying Ballet and Contemporary Dance and over the next few years is planning to re-emerge as a 'Site-Specific' 'Socially Engaged' 'Live Performer'.

'You're so weird' Lynn BreedLove, 1995

'You are a very eccentric person Lucy' Guillermo Gomez-Pena, 2008

**Pete Dale (a.k.a. Vitamin P)**

*Interviewed on 24 September 2006*

Pete Dale was born in Aldington, near Ashford, Kent in 1970. He smashed his fist through a window (still got the scar) and threw a stone through the windscreen of a passing car around the time of his parents separation and divorce c.1977-8. His father was an HMI of Schools, his mother fantastically well-read, so most British people would identify him as middle-class because most British people hate people who read books and think that the twang of a person's accent demonstrates their class position (hence the fact that bands-I-could-name from extraordinarily wealthy backgrounds routinely get described as working class because they have a Sunderland accent - after all, everybody knows that they're all poor up North, right?). Pete grew up with his mum, her partner and his 3 older brothers in a tiny 3-bedroom house in Wye, near Ashford, Kent. He got free school meals throughout his years of state education, which included 5 years at a state grammar where he got a Latin o-level and learnt how to write 4-part harmony in the Bach-approved style, not to mention acquiring a lifelong love of something generally known as PUNK ROCK and the attendant hatred of war and authority. In terms of 'crass (but unfortunately necessary) categories of class, gender, sexuality, race' (since you asked), he would define himself as being from the educated classes, being male, being tri-sexual (as the New York Dolls said, that means I'll try anything once!; but right now I'm in a straight monogamous relationship the first 10 years of which have been fantastic, and the next 30 or 50 years of which I look forward to eagerly!) and pink-English with no English blood (25% Jewish, 50% Scottish, 25% Irish, I'm told).

Pete co-ran Slampt Underground Organisation in the North East of England (where he had relocated in 1989) with Rachel Holborow whom he met in 1988 in a school corridor in Kent. The purpose of Slampt was to do something local, something punk and probably most importantly in our eyes (especially at the outset, c.1992-4, when we were besotted with Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill) something which would hear and amplify the voices of girls. Slampt was 'big' in the underground until it folded up in 2000, in other words it mean a lot to a few dozen people in a few dozen towns/countries/streets-of-Newcastle-on-Tyne. During the Slampt years, Pete played drums in Pussycat Trash and lots of instruments in the ultra lo-fi Avocado Baby. He has been guitaring and singing in and writing songs for his own group Milky Wimpshake since 1993, which still gigs occasionally. He was in Red Monkey (again with Rachel of Slampt) from 1996-2005.

Pete became a school teacher in 2001, acquiring an MA (with distinction) in Music in 2005. At the present time he has written half a PhD on the questions of whether punk is essentially a form of folk music and whether anyone really can do 'it'. He has two children and still likes to take his slippers off and listen to PUNK ROCK cranked up really high. He is a lifelong pacifist and doesn't smash glass in anger anymore, but might be in favour of damaging property in order to prevent loss of human life or with the aim of preventing any other form of abuse or violence. Nuclear weapons are immoral and should be illegal: Pete, therefore, is in favour of unilateral disarmament.

**Rachel Holborow (a.k.a Rachel K. Rocket)***Interviewed on 24 June 2006*

Rachel was born in 1971, a virgo, to professional journalists in Wythenshawe, Manchester. Her mother was a seventies style feminist and on following her lead Rachel often called boys at school 'male chauvinist pigs' and hated dresses and skirts for many years (whilst she likes them in principle now, she still finds them a bit chilly and impractical). After a childhood of moving house (Manchester, Surrey, South Wales, Kent) Rachel moved to Newcastle-upon-Tyne to study art at University, and be nearer to her compadre Peter Dale. As a teenager Rachel had made fanzines and 'networked' with many fanzine writers and consumers worldwide by post. Rachel learned to play the bass guitar and started her first band Tadpole, featuring Amanda Doorbar (later first drummer of Lung Leg). When Tadpole split up, Rachel started Pussycat Trash with Rosie Lewis and Simon Coxall, and a front room experiment, Avocado Baby with Pete Dale. Rachel dreamed up the idea of The Slampt Underground Organisation – a small-scale, lo-fi, local, pro-female, documentation of creativity. Pete was her collaborator in this scheme, which Rachel claims was a good job as she was grief-stricken (her mum died of cancer) and sick of a world that disrespected women. Rachel also felt an affinity with riot grrrl and started a North East chapter.

Rachel travelled the squats of Europe and USA on tour and gradually became more eco-politicised (although Rachel had always been feminist, then 'socialist', vegetarian, 'gender aware', not heterosexual) becoming vegan, and working in a vegetarian workers co-op, shop, cafe and bakery. Rachel became involved in squats, critical mass and reclaim the streets actions in Newcastle, completing a permaculture course and briefly working as a permaculture teacher. After Pussycat Trash split, Rachel started the short-lived Matter of Exact with Pete Dale and Rosie Lewis which then led on to the formation of Red Monkey with Pete Dale and Marc Walker. In 2000 Slampt stopped after Rachel grew tired of 'helping' people Do It Themselves! Since Slampt, Rachel worked in an organic 'supermarket' ordering vegetables and after Red Monkey's third US tour gave birth to her first daughter. Rachel worked at the North East organic grower's co-op. After the birth of her second daughter (one week after our oral history) parenthood began to take up the majority of Rachel's creativity. Rachel home educates her children and has been involved in setting up a Steiner kindergarten in Durham, near her home. After Red Monkey split up in 2005, Rachel did a duo called Do the Right Thing with John Coburn. Rachel is currently engaged in parenting, growing food and medicinal herbs and runs an art group for home educating families and occasional creative workshops for women.

**Sarah Bag***Interviewed on 10 July 2006*

Sarah was born in 1963 and grew up in Telford where she became involved in the local punk scene collectively writing zines, putting on gigs, running a practise room and setting up a venue. A drummer and lyricist influenced by the musical style of early punk bands The Slits and The Raincoats and later by the DIY ethic of anarcho punk bands Crass, Poison Girls and The Ex, to form a series of (mostly!) all-female bands between 1980 and the present. These include Curse of Eve, Dancing Around Our Handbags, Witchknot and Baba Yaga. Witchknot released material on the Flat Earth label and toured the finest squats and bars of Europe in a reliable vehicle known as Fanny the Tranny.

Sarah promoted female led events at the world famous autonomous venue the 1 in 12 Club in Bradford throughout the 1990s, Docs & Frocks and Witchfests, which included appearances by Bikini Kill, Huggy Bear, Mambo Taxi and the Thistle Fairies. She was also involved in the Leeds/Bradford Riot Grrrl collective producing fast-zines and swapping gigs with other bands. Her current band Baba Yaga has played festivals such as Frock Off, Frock On and Ladyfests (tunes available on line this time round). Sarah is also a mum, gardener and visual artist working with community groups, who is currently in the process of moving to West Wales to be by the seaside and make Eastern European influenced folk punk racket.

### **Suzy Corrigan**

*Interviewed on 8 November 2006*

Born in Minneapolis and educated with scary rich kids in New York, Suzy has been writing for *i-D* ever since she moved to London in 1991, alongside a whole host of other extra-curricular activities including curating art events, editing books and writing fiction. When pushed, Suzy says that her taste for glamorous, elegant things comes from a fashion-buyer grandmother who (legend has it) spurned the attentions of Clark Gable in a Jazz Age bar, danced with JFK, and warned her never to marry a man who couldn't make a decent Bloody Mary.

### **Tammy & Jen Denitto**

*Interviewed on 10 August 2006*

American sisters Tammy and Jen Denitto moved to England with their parents in 1987. Tammy studied Photography and Film and Jen studied Art History at Richmond College, The American International University in London, both graduating in 1993. In 1992 Tammy (vocals) and Jen (bass guitar) formed the band Linus alongside Andy Roberts (guitar) and Peter Frost (drums). Tammy and Jen both became involved in the riot grrrl scene in London from late 1992. Linus initially attracted the attention of the riot grrrl scene with their fanzine *Plague Your Eyes* and Jen and Tammy went on to attend and organise riot grrrl meetings and tea parties. They established a Riot Grrrl newsletter and links with riot grrrls around the UK, and set up a PO Box called BM Nancee for girls to use as a place for the exchange of riot grrrl correspondence. Linus played with many key riot grrrl bands such as Huggy Bear, Bratmobile, and Bikini Kill and garnered music press attention during this period. Jen organised a girl-only gig called the Girlygig and Tammy and Jen came up with the idea of the Pay In Advance Only (PIAO) festival. They organised the first PIAO festival along with Chris Phillips and Loretta Cubberley-Gomis in 1994. Although Jen left as the bass player for Linus in 1997, Tammy continued as lead vocalist for Linus until the untimely death of Andy Roberts in 2005 which signalled the demise of Linus. Jen and Tammy presently live in London, Tammy started a new band called Doxie and Jen plays drums for Scarlet's Well and The Low Edges. Jen briefly ran a record label called Evil World records 1999-2001, and Tammy currently runs Mole in the Ground records.

### 3.2 *'The arrival of a new renegade girl/boy hyper-nation':<sup>24</sup> British riot, grrrl*

The significance of a girl music (sub)culture that disrupted public space and interrupted the (re)production of dominant discourses of gender and sexuality, needs to be situated in the wider socio-political context of Britain during the 1990s. Under the control of the conservative government – whose policies and legislation sought to defend traditional gender roles, protect the nuclear family, withdraw public expenditure and privatise national services (see Durham 1991) – Britain experienced increases in social inequalities, unemployment and proportion of people living in poverty (Gordon & Pantazis 1997). Widespread social tension and anti-government reaction were evident in the activities of anti-poll tax campaigns, Reclaim the Streets protests and anti-nuclear, road protest, and animal rights activism throughout the 1990s (Bagguley 1995; McKay 1998; Roseneil 1995).

Within this social, political and economic milieu the social problems of deviant genders and sexualities frequently dominated public debate and conservative government agendas (Durham 1991; Stacey 1991; Smith 1994; Weeks 1995). For instance, the HIV/AIDS crisis led to a re-deployment of homophobic discourse in the public consciousness. The 'pretended family relationships' of gay men and lesbians were positioned as threats to the British nation, capable of polluting the traditional family and corrupting children into a deviant lifestyle. Homophobic fears became coded in policy with the introduction of Section 28 in 1988 which sought to symbolically re-secure heteronormativity, stunt progress for homosexual rights and discipline the visibility of erotic communities in British culture throughout the 1990s (Stacey 1991; Smith 1994).

In terms of feminist gains the social problems of young women's increased use of violence, alcohol, drugs and promiscuous sex questioned the desirability of feminist progress for the wider social order. For instance, in England and Wales a 4.4% rise in young women's convictions for violent assaults was reported between 1990 and 1999; furthermore a 1995 survey found that young women between the ages of 15 and 17 scored higher than their male peers on a 'pleasure in violence' item (Muncer et al 2001). These findings fuelled moral panics concerning the increase of masculine attitudes amongst young women. The rise of the 'ladette' in 1990s British popular culture facilitated a return to the neo-conservative regulation of heterofemininities. Pathological discourses (re)circulated within public debate to encourage the discipline (and self-discipline) of girls and young women who stepped outside of their 'natural' places of domesticity, commercial consumerism and conformity (Jackson & Tinkler 2007; Muncer et al 2001). In particular young women's occupation of public space disrupted long standing masculine entitlements as Carolyn Jackson and Penny Tinkler argued, 'an important dimension of young women's hedonism is its public visibility. Both the modern girl and ladette

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<sup>24</sup> Huggy Bear, 'Herjazz' (Wiiiija/Catcall records, 1993)

are presented as occupying space outside the traditional feminine domestic sphere, and crucially, as taking space once regarded the principal or sole preserve of men' (2007, p. 254).

Riot grrrl (sub)cultural life was embedded in social movements that engaged in public spatial and discursive challenges to inequalities in British society. Ironically policies like Section 28, intended to quash gay and lesbian communities, led to the growth of politicised social networks of gay, lesbian, bisexual, feminist and queer individuals and the creation of public spaces, events and venues for non-heterosexual life (Stacey 1991). Riot grrrl (sub)cultural resistance can be connected to a wider network of creative activists in Britain dedicated to the production of alternative lifestyles motivated by a desire for radical social and political change, including anti-road protests, squats, women's peace movements, independent presses, autonomous social centres and movements for ecological sustainability (see Grrrl & Wakefield 1995). These (sub)cultural activisms became subject to the regulatory powers of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 which criminalised many forms of direct action protest, squatting and independent dance music events. Read against the backdrop of the increasing global commercialisation of youth culture, this legislation can be read as a direct attempt to curtail involvement in alternative cultures, political protest actions and unconventional activisms. The creation of riot grrrl music (sub)cultures across Britain became key sites for young people to question and resist society's dominant codes of genders and sexualities, and explore alternative (sub)cultural possibilities for life outside hetero-gendered norms.

However, I do not want to overstate the connections between different (sub)cultural groups. In comparison to the US, independent music (sub)cultures in the UK tended to be more fragmented and estranged from each other. For instance, it has been argued that the aftermath of 1970s split punk into two factions: oi punk and post-punk (Laing 1985). In the mid 1980s the anarcho and crust punk scene, inspired by Crass, proliferated across the UK. Key bands, such as Amebix, Doom and Extreme Noise Terror, created nihilistic and bleak sound montages that focussed on issues of anti-capitalism, animal rights and nuclear disarmament (see Glasper 2006). In contrast, the indie-pop scene associated with the independent labels Creation, Postcard Records, The Subway Organisation and Sarah Records and bands such as The Pastels, The Shop Assistants and Talulah Gosh, infused optimistic 1960s pop elements into a colourful fun childish aesthetic. Indie-pop music culture was more amenable to national coverage by the music press who enthusiastically christened the genre 'C-86' after a compilation cassette of indie-pop bands, named C-86, was released by the *New Musical Express* (Reynolds 2005; Bladh 2005). British riot grrrl tended to draw more influence, inspiration and support from an indie-pop heritage and ethos.<sup>25</sup> In particular, Sarah records, founded in 1987 by Clare Wadel and Matt Haynes in

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<sup>25</sup> An important exception was Riot Grrrl Leeds-Bradford which used the 1in12 club in Bradford for meetings and events. The 1in12 club is an autonomous centre set up in 1981 by members of Bradford's anarchist-orientated Claimants Union, rooted in the anarchist principles of self-management, mutual aid

Bristol, which articulated an aesthetic that combined anti-machismo politics and lo-fi pop sensibilities with a critique of the music industry, attracted the attention of young women and men who would later be involved in riot grrrl.<sup>26</sup> The independent indie-pop label K Records based in Olympia, Washington, set up by Calvin Johnson in 1982, became the logical transatlantic ally for British indie-pop enthusiasts. The (sub)cultural exchanges that occurred between Olympia and the UK became crucial in shaping how riot grrrl was expressed in British culture.

Within oral history recollections several main figures, sites, events, friendship circles and relationships emerged as factors in the development of distinctive British riot grrrl practices. In a pre-Internet era, independent record labels relied on the production of newsletters and mail-order catalogues which were posted out to subscribers and adverts in fanzines to publicise new releases, band information and tour dates. The Olympia-based independent record label K Records, who had co-organised the critical US riot grrrl event 'girls nite' at the International Pop Underground Convention in August 1991, produced their nineteenth newsletter which carried a distinctive cover including artwork from the Heavens to Betsy and Bratmobile split record accompanied with the term riot grrrl. For some, contact with K Records publicity material and personal communication with K Record label owners Calvin Johnson or Candice Peterson became the first encounter with the term riot grrrl:

I first saw the term on an ad for the K Records International Pop Underground Convention in 1991. I was impressed with the punky humour of it, and I photocopied the ad and stuck it on my wall. (Andy Roberts 1998)

Myself and Rachel were really interested in K Records and [had been] ordering stuff from them and communicating with Calvin Johnson through the post for a year or two at that point [and] we were really interested in the kind of scene that Bikini Kill were coming from. (Pete Dale)

It was probably mainly from American women who were writing to me in connection to *GirlFrenzy* which I'd already published two issues of; it would have been around the time of the publication of the third [1992] that I was getting things through from American riot grrrl, either women involved or people like K records started sending in through their catalogues (Erica Smith)

A minority of oral history participants had face-to-face contact with key US riot grrrl conspirators. For instance, one participant, Lucy Thane, stumbled across Bikini Kill member

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and co-operation. The 1in12 club is well affiliated with European anarcho-punk culture and infrastructure. Witchknot, a band that involved women who met through their involvement in riot grrrl Leeds-Bradford released their records through Flat Earth records and were able to tour the European anarcho squat circuit. Tentatively positioned between the anarcho crust scene and riot grrrl movement, Witchknot often faced perceptions of being 'too crust' to be riot grrrl and 'too riot grrrl' to be considered crust.

<sup>26</sup> For more information on Sarah Records see <<http://home2.btconnect.com/smoke/shinkansen.htm>> [accessed 2 July 2008] and Ryan Foley's article 'There and Back Again' available at <[http://www.stylusmagazine.com/articles/weekly\\_article/there-and-back-again-a-guided-tour-to-sarah-records-first-50-singles.htm](http://www.stylusmagazine.com/articles/weekly_article/there-and-back-again-a-guided-tour-to-sarah-records-first-50-singles.htm)> [accessed 2 July 2008].

Kathi Wilcox in the Spanish city of Pamplona during the volatile atmosphere of Fiesta de San Fermin; the Bull Run. Lucy and Kathi became travelling companions and Lucy was introduced to riot grrrl ideas as the pair explored Europe in the summer of 1992. The girls' relationship and Lucy's discovery of riot grrrl was sustained after the pair went their separate ways through 'care packages' containing fanzines and mix-tapes that Kathi mailed to Lucy from her home in Olympia. Thane's oral history contained the following vivid recollection of meeting Kathi Wilcox and learning about riot grrrl (sub)culture. In particular, Lucy emphasised the machismo of Pamplona and coldness of Thatcherite Britain, which both served as stark backdrops to riot grrrl meanings:

She was at school in Olympia Washington and her friends had started this thing [riot grrrl] but they'd just had this thing the International Pop Underground and her friends like the Nation of Ulysses, Nirvana and, just amazing sounding, it's a combination of this incredible independent music scene and then this feminism within it [...] [riot grrrl] was discussing stuff that I thought, one it seemed really thought out and it was also acted upon in a really fun way because it was so much fun. I think I felt quite isolated, I knew lots of people but [riot grrrl] just connected much more to, like this combination of a political and feminist sensibility and you know a great love of music just to be simplistic and making things and creativity and those things, and it was in this context of a barrage of macho violence and she was offering this kind of response which was really, she was describing all this, it was a long time ago I can't remember exactly, but it just sounded fun and cool and sexy, all these people just sounded really cool and they were, so I was like I want a bit of that man. You know it just sounded a lot funner than what in early 90s Thatcherite London was like at that time and, it was. And then we were about to run with the bulls and then this man started throwing stones at us and we were just like 'okay that is the last fucking straw, let's get the fuck out of here, let's go find a beach' so we went up to the train station and we were completely knackered by this point so we decided we were going to get this train to southern Spain and we ended up going to Morocco but that's a whole other story, but she had a walkman and so played me some Bikini Kill songs, so I first heard all the Bikini Kill songs lying flat on my back at Pamplona station and it was just like, you know there's always people in bands and I just thought it'd just be another rubbish band do you know what I mean? And it was just like 'fuck oh my god' first thing like 'we're Bikini Kill and we want revolution' I mean it was like so exciting it was completely exactly like, just completely exciting, completely great, [...] we just ended up travelling [together], we were just of a similar sensibility, just like, you know your own kind and so it was just natural to carry on travelling to go there and then I went back to London and then she came to stay with me a bit on her way back to the states and then she sent me care packages, she'd send me lovely parcels full of like tapes, like compilations, awesome completely wonderful, like there'd be Bikini Kill, Heavens to Betsy, L7, the Headcoats, Beat Happening, Nirvana, Nation of Ulysses, Fugazi it was really good

Some oral history participants positioned Amelia Fletcher as a crucial actor in introducing riot grrrl to Britain. Amelia's indie-pop band, Heavenly, who were signed to K Records in the US and Sarah records in the UK, frequently visited Olympia to tour with underground indie bands such as Lois and Beat Happening. It was on one of these routine trips that Amelia encountered riot grrrl protagonists and gained knowledge of riot grrrl spaces, sounds and ideas and acted on

it. Fletcher wrote letters to other young women in British indie-pop music culture about the girl-positive scene. This included the fanzine writer Rachel Holborow, who went on to form Pussycat Trash, Slampt and a riot grrrl Newcastle group. Members of Huggy Bear who were already invested in US indie-pop culture also cited Fletcher as a key riot grrrl champion:

I first heard about it from the originators of it, Molly Neuman and Allison Wolfe, they'd invented the term because they'd started this fanzine and just called it riot grrrl and what happened is Heavenly went on tour to the US and we were on K Records which is based in Washington state, Olympia, which is where all those girls were living [...] and that year everyone was kind of talking about this thing riot grrrl [...] I just thought it was really exciting and really inspiring [...] and so what happens is that I got really excited about it, came back to the UK and immediately wrote a letter to Rachel actually to say 'have you heard about this, it's absolutely brilliant, you've got to get doing something' (Amelia Fletcher)

At some point Amelia Fletcher from Heavenly wrote to me because I'd done loads of zines and things, so she was aware of me, basically I guess she must have written to lots of people, but she wrote to me, saying that they were trying to get some riot grrrl things going (Rachel Holborow)

We probably heard about these riot grrrls in America, quite early on we was into K records, been into Beat Happening and stuff like that for a long time, I don't know, I can't remember the first riot grrrl thing, where I first came across it, where I first heard the word, or I first understood what it was. I think, actually, Amelia Fletcher from Heavenly was very important in introducing riot grrrls to the English punks [...] She was friendly with Calvin, the K scene, she'd met a lot of these people a long time before any of us met them, Molly Neuman, she knew Lois, people involved in Olympia and DC riot grrrl scene [...] You can trace this all back to Heavenly, Amelia Fletcher is really the one that introduced riot grrrl to this country and no one really says that's the case but that is the case in my mind I think that's true, Amelia Fletcher had all the contacts man and the passion and she was fully into it and enabled so much that she hasn't got credit for (Jon Slade)

In particular, some friendships emerged as critical to the formation of British riot grrrl sounds and public profile of riot grrrl. The friendship circle that involved Amelia and Mathew Fletcher (Heavenly), Rachel Holborow and Pete Dale (Slampt), Everett True (assistant editor of *Melody Maker*), Jon Slade, Jo Johnson, Niki Eliot, and Chris Rawley (Huggy Bear) became distinctively productive in the construction of what became known as riot grrrl in Britain. The following oral history extracts reinforce the word-of-mouth quality of queer girl (sub)culture as riot grrrl gradually became articulated within the music practices, fanzine and friendship circles associated with Huggy Bear:

I was down in Kent quite a lot of the time because my Dad was living there so I was going to gigs and things in London [...] I was lucky enough to know some people a bit, like Amelia and then I got to know all the Huggy Bear people kind of through sort of mutually all doing zines (Rachel Holborow)

We were also aware of the Huggy Bear thing about 1991 because I was saying to you before, they initially weren't a riot grrrl band, but friends of mine who lived in London started telling me that they'd taken this kind of musical turn, nobody was particularly using the term riot grrrl at the time but it was that they'd changed

musically and become this really exciting band [...] we went to Oxford to see them and we stayed with our friend Amelia from Heavenly whose brother Mathew had been in Huggy Bear (Pete Dale)

Huggy Bear at that time were really good friends of ours, I don't know whether we kind of told them about it [riot grrrl] or whether they kind of found out about it at the same time [...] they were friends with Everett True we were all mates with Everett True [...] and he's really good mates with Jon, they lived in a house with him for years and years, and he got really excited when he realised that basically his mates had created this thing that was really good fun and he was the editor of the *Melody Maker* (Amelia Fletcher)

Mathew [Amelia's] brother who played in Huggy Bear for the first two shows, me and him would talk about [riot grrrl] things, so that might have been the first time I heard about it, it definitely was the first time I heard about Bikini Kill was from Mathew [...] just before the third Huggy Bear gig, the punk show, or the first one where Mathew wasn't in the band and Niki was playing bass and we had like punky songs and we'd really worked out the set and killed everyone, it was a great show, just before that we moved into, our friend Everett True moved to Brighton and bought a house and asked me and Jo to move in with him, and of course he had loads of stuff fanzines, would get sent all the latest records for reviews, because he was working at this time at the *Melody Maker* [...] we had access to everything there and we certainly knew about riot grrrl, but not too much, we didn't know who they were exactly (Jon Slade)

Jon and Jo had moved in with me in Brighton, start of 92 – me and Jo were having all-night conversations about feminist language and doctrine and behaviour. Before Huggy Bear discovered Bikini Kill I think they were out-and-out cutie. It would have made sense they were, knowing my friends' musical preferences. Encountering Tobi, Kathi and Kathleen's writing and songs politicized them (Everett True)

Within oral histories riot grrrl was commonly interpreted as new content that could be applied to established (sub)cultural projects within British indie music culture:

[Riot grrrl] related to what we were doing already and just spoke to us because it did make you want to change your behaviour. It gave you ideas for what you could be doing, the ways of communicating and having all these forums and having all-girl gigs. There were lots of things that came out of it that weren't anything we never thought of doing, setting up your own gigs we'd kind of done but we hadn't done all-girl gigs, doing fanzines we had kind of done but it's like different subject matter. (Amelia Fletcher)

Riot grrrl often complemented already active interests, (sub)cultural activities and political ideas. For example, in 1992 Rachel Holborow and Pete Dale had already begun to formulate politicised girl (sub)cultural productions, setting up the tape label, Slampt ('the Slampt Underground Organisation') in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Two interrelated motivations emerged in the talk of each founder. The first focused on attempts to question the dominant cultural status of music produced within capital cities in order to claim cultural importance for local DIY amateur music participation, as Dale described, 'This idea, that punk rock can just happen anywhere, you shouldn't worry about what is happening in the capital city of your country, you should think about punk rock in your own town, that's really what Slampt was about'. The

second emphasised the desire to claim cultural space specifically for women by including music made by young women and girls thereby linking Slampt with riot grrrl. As Holborow explained, '[Slampt was] certainly entwined [with riot grrrl] because it was a definite thing for me that I wanted to have pro-female stuff on the label'.

The shift in the music practices of Huggy Bear – the playful incorporation of punk sounds and political rhetoric – observed by riot grrrl participants can be attributed to transatlantic influences of Bikini Kill and Nation of Ulysses. In 1992 the Washington DC-based post-hardcore band Nation of Ulysses (N.O.U.), comprising of Ian Svenonius (vocals and trumpet), Steve Kroner (guitar), Tim Green (guitar), James Canty (drums) and Steve Gamboa (bass), embarked on a UK tour. Jon Slade stated that this music performance heavily influenced the outlook of Huggy Bear: 'we went, Huggy Bear en masse, went to see Nation of Ulysses at the Underworld in Camden, that was a changing point for us I think certainly [...] I think after that point we thought we should be more joke political, no, more political. I think around that time we were finding out more about the riot grrrl stuff [...] We had to get involved somehow, well not get involved, but do something like this'. N.O.U. satirically referenced politicised ideologies and drew on situationist theory within their use of language, fashion and music. Rituals within live performance, including the distribution of the fanzine *Ulysses Speaks*, dubbed 'the party organ for the Nation of Ulysses', enabled N.O.U. to construct an ideology of 'P-Power philosophy'. This activating DIY rhetoric encouraged fans to engage in a 'quest for kicks', to disturb the status quo and produce a 'revolution of everyday life'. N.O.U. offered an aesthetic manifesto to reorder language, fashion, behaviour and sound in order to subvert social constraints and create a space for youth revolution. N.O.U. claimed to be more than a band and sought to provoke a youth-centred body of anti-establishment resistance – the Nation – as the following fanzine extract demonstrates:

Nation indicates common-visions army of the new Ulysses underworld and does not indicate either 'rock'n'roll group' (passé) or 'state' (Off the Pigs!). The Nation of Ulysses begets its lineage not from musical bands, but from terrorist groups and political parties. The term 'Nation' implies self-construction of the highest order beyond the old r'n'r tradition of re-naming one's self and into a new wilderland of complete rejection of the dictates of parent-culture laws/hegemony. We declare the Zero Generation (the destruction of the past) and cast off the restraints of precedence and history which would attempt to define our limitless and explosive revolution in their own failed terms. (*Ulysses Speaks* no. 009 circa. 1992)

The N.O.U. aesthetic, rhetoric and performance made an impact on members of Huggy Bear, especially on vocalist and youth worker Chris Rawley. In an interview Rawley described – in his typical stream of consciousness style – the appeal and relationship between N.O.U., youth delinquency and riot grrrl; 'N.O.U. are like classic, i.e. 50s archetype boyfriends, but non-predatory. N.O.U. exist forever in my heart, the truest fuckin luv – isolated... it comes about cos the delinquency N.O.U. helped redefine, the Riot Girls use delinquency as empowerin'' (cited

in *Ablaze!* circa 1993, p. 23). The idea, rhetoric and aesthetic of Huggy Nation, a term developed to describe the organisational impulse in the fanzines, flyers and record inserts of Huggy Bear, can be read as a direct successor of the Nation described by N.O.U. Crucially members of N.O.U. had experienced the emerging riot grrrl scene in Washington DC in 1991, befriended many riot grrrl protagonists, and toured with Bikini Kill. A symbiotic creative relationship prevailed between many young women associated with riot grrrl and young men involved in making independent alternative punk music in 1990s America. Members of Nirvana, Fugazi and N.O.U. have reported creative, personal and musical allegiances to the ideas, influence and energy of riot grrrl (see Andersen & Jenkins 2001; Koch 2006). For instance, speaking to Karren Ablaze in 1993 Ian Svenonius emphasised the importance of girl audiences to N.O.U. and the creation of girl-specific music (sub)cultures such as riot grrrl:

The people who understand us best are girls and we really wanna speak to girls. I don't think we're the end all, there's a lot of room for a broad based girl revolutionary critique – things that we can't by virtue of our gender, really embark on [...] Whenever we talk in interviews we embrace our own defeat by saying that the most interesting thing going on is the noise being made by girls, which would instantly exclude us, but that's alright because N.O.U. isn't about power, it's not about pigs, and the term 'nation' means common vision, it doesn't mean hate (cited in *Ablaze!* # 10 circa. 1993, p. 14)

Therefore, as N.O.U. toured the UK in 1992 they took the opportunity to make young women and men aware of US riot grrrl subcultural activities. In the case of Karren Ablaze, a central figure of Riot Grrrl Leeds-Bradford, contact with N.O.U. performances, words and conversation inspired her to seek out and create grassroots DIY girl-positive community: 'It was Tim Green from the Nation of Ulysses, he told me about it [riot grrrl], he was like, "wow, there are these girls in America and they're organising stuff and having meetings" and he was really enthusiastic about it'.

To summarise, riot grrrl (sub)cultural resistance needs to be understood within the wider socio-political context of Britain during the 1990s, a period characterised by increases in social inequalities, the re-circulation of hegemonic discourses of gender and sexuality, and disarticulation of alternative cultures, feminist activism and protest actions. Information about riot grrrl managed to surface within an exclusive circle of individuals in the UK, who, despite a lack of coherent information, began to apply and relate riot grrrl ideas to their own indie music (sub)cultural practices. The next section focuses on the construction of a distinctive British riot grrrl discourse within oral history narratives and participatory experiences. Within British indie music culture riot grrrl was expressed as a range of strategies that disrupted the social (re)production of masculine entitlements within music (sub)culture. Riot grrrl interrupted the naturalised social performances of heterosexual masculinity in the roles of music-makers, organisers/promoters, the audience and fanzine writers. This took the form of challenging norms and conventions in music participation including music-making, conduct and behaviour in live

gigs, use of language, and aesthetic appreciation. Crucially riot grrrl participants' accounts argue that riot grrrl was not a static identity category, but rather incorporated a fluid set of contested sonic, spatial and linguistic practices. These riot grrrl processes aimed to incite a radical girl gang into being that aimed to resist the grip of hetero-feminine norms on girls and young women's (sub)cultural lives and feminist participation.

### *3.3 riot grrrl discourse: Secret vocabularies, participatory actions and girl gang life*

Oral histories consistently argued that riot grrrl cannot be understood simply as the construction of a new identity; the term riot grrrl was used to signal girls' participatory actions: to riot, grrrl. This understanding of riot grrrl was reinforced in Delia's recollections;

Niki from Huggy Bear once said that to her way of thinking riot grrrl wasn't what a person was, a person wasn't a riot grrrl, it was more a kind of I can do it riot grrrl, like riot, grrrl, go for it do what you wanna do [...] I mean the thing is people wouldn't have ever really said that they were riot grrrls anyway, people never said 'I'm a riot grrrl are you a riot grrrl?', people were just sort of organising things and putting on gigs and [if] somebody would ask Mambo Taxi to do a gig we'd say 'yeah if Skinned Teen can support', people were just looking out for each other.

Rather than an identity, riot grrrl referred to a fluid set of practices, strategies and acts that challenged masculine entitlements and provoked the (sub)cultural political participation of girls and young women. Riot grrrl actively resisted a fixed definition and was open to different responses and diverse situations: as Everett True argued, 'Riot Grrrl was Nikki McClure going for walks through the forest, able to name every flower, and attending Swap Meets and Pot Lucks; Riot Grrrl was Stella Marrs and her incredible array of homemade postcards; Riot Grrrl was never supposed to be static, definable, but ever-changing, fluid – a movement in every respect of the word'. A loose girl-positive philosophy emerged which subverted the gendered regulation of creative worlds to prioritise the voices of girls and women, as Jen Denitto explained: 'normally you listen to men before you listen to women so it's just an idea that you would listen to the women first, not that you were ignoring the men but you were putting [a] priority on women and also that would enable you to be creative and do what you wanted to do in terms of art and music'. In this section I highlight the main practices, strategies and acts that emerged within the recollections of riot grrrl experiences within 1990s Britain. Riot grrrl re-ordered the norms of fanzines, gigs and music-making to open up discursive space to resist hegemonic gender relations, compulsory heterosexuality and the disarticulation of feminism.

Within Britain riot grrrl inspired many girls and young women to become (sub)cultural participants. For instance, figure 1 illustrates the widespread (sub)cultural activities of girls and young women loosely grouped as riot grrrl within the UK. The poster, authored by Karren Ablaze!, depicts the diverse (sub)cultural resistance of girls and young women including letter-

writing, graffiti, fanzines, bands, radio, gigs/discos, workshops, record labels, skateboarding, fly-posting, picnics, exhibitions, networks and gangs. Researchers of young women's fanzine practices have noted that various normative conventions of fanzine production were challenged within riot grrrl (sub)culture (Triggs 1998, 2004; Schilt 2003b; Piano 2002, 2003; Leonard 1998; Duncombe 1997). Fanzines produced within riot grrrl (sub)culture have been argued to demonstrate a more personalised, subjective and engaged writing style; to prioritise politicised explorations of individual experiences and social issues over the standardised punk-zine staples of band interviews, gig and record reviews. In the 1990s fanzines were a critical communication tool in underground music (sub)culture, especially within marginal (sub)cultures not considered commercially viable. It could be estimated that hundreds of fanzines were produced as a direct effect of riot grrrl in Britain (see appendix 3). The explosion of fanzines created an epistolary network which fostered critical communication and relationships between girls and young women. For instance Bidisha emphasised how riot grrrl encouraged her to start her own fanzine *Girl Pride*. The production of *Girl Pride*, which relied upon written communication and postal channels, connected Bidisha to a global network of politicised young women and girls who became an essential emotional resource and support system throughout her teenage years:

The great thing about the [riot grrrl] fanzine network, I think I was in contact with girls from all over the world [...] it had that lo-fi dynamic and it did have that kitchen table quality where you did stay up [late] [...] riot grrrl produce[d] all these letters, tonnes and tonnes of letters and fanzines and views and opinions which women are doing between themselves [...] you see cool female energy and action which is always great and it's not just Adrian Mole stuff, it's politicised stuff about the world around us and you realise through something like that, that women do notice the misogyny of the world, they do want an outlet, it's not like we're all Stepford wives who are kind of floating around the world and we don't notice, and that outpouring of energy that riot grrrl provoked through these letters and fanzines was a testament to that. So yes I was in touch with, oh god I remember the postman like knocking on the door every single day there were that many letters, there's something very touching and moving about just opening a letter, they were real artefacts and they had this kind of materiality which all artists' objects do have, and it was inspiring, the letters were really funny, these were really witty intelligent young women

Discursive strategies within riot grrrl writing practices aimed to activate young women and girls' (sub)cultural participation. Language was used consciously to provoke emotions, (re)actions and responses within an intended or imagined readership. In terms of British riot grrrl, authors intended to incite the participation of girls and young women, thereby displacing a dominant cultural perspective that typically presumes an audience of males aged between 18 and 34 (Kearney 2006). Within riot grrrl girls were actively writing for each other, to encourage dialogue, to validate young women and girls' opinions and viewpoints. For instance, the first *Riot Grrrl* fanzine to appear in Britain in 1992, commonly thought to be primarily due to the efforts of Sally Margaret Joy, contained the following call to arms on the first page:

Here lies in your hands the first fanzine from Riot Grrrl. Read it and scream with joy Girl, this is the start of the New Feminism, we've all got lots to say about this 'Man's World' we live in, and I bet you do to! This belongs to all us girls, a way to say what you feel without editing, without censorship. Get together with some friends and write your own fanzine, get your thoughts down on paper and spread the word GIRL POWER REVOLUTION. You are strong girl, you are bad and beautiful, you can do anything you want to do. And you can do it NOW.

THE FUTURE BELONGS TO US GO FORTH AND RIOT GRRRL!!

Within British riot grrrl, girls authored visionary and emotive accounts of how they wanted the world to be and re-wrote feminist ideas for the everyday experiences and situations of (sub)cultural girls in Britain. Riot grrrl opened up feminist ideas and made feminism accessible for a wider population of girls and young women. For instance, when asked about the popularity of riot grrrl in Britain Jo Johnson argued that 'it was so much more of an exciting and alive idea of feminism than we were coming across in books. It was imagination and active, and it not only worked in theory, it also related to everyday life. Well, everyday life for punk rock girls anyway' (cited in Raphael 1995, p. 151). This re-engagement and identification with feminism was backed up in oral history accounts:

In England at that time there was this word feminism, but I think we all felt that we were girls not women and there was a lot of stuff about this word women, but we felt that we were girls and we felt really not interested in lots of the battles that were in the workplace [...] it [feminism] just didn't have a good image basically, it wasn't a punk rock image, it wasn't an indie image, and me and I think a lot of other females even though we were feminist and we were doing our own thing and wouldn't take any rubbish from boys we didn't really think of ourselves as feminists and we didn't really sit and feel comfortable with that tag.[...] Then suddenly there was riot grrrl which really seemed to be speaking to the issues that we had [...] I really liked the DIY nature of it [...] just all the real encouragement to get girls in bands, the influence of having lots of girls in bands and girls really shouting out in bands and being spirited (Amelia Fletcher)

In this way riot grrrl attempted to re-articulate feminism within an era marked by the emergence of post-feminist popular culture and the disarticulation of feminism (McRobbie 2009). As mentioned in chapter one, the reception of riot grrrl in feminist academia has been mixed and discussion has focused upon the generational divides between 'second-wave' and 'third-wave' feminisms (Henry 2004). Riot grrrl participants were not the devotional 'dutiful daughters' that established feminists might be comfortable passing the 'feminist torch' onto (Purvis 2004; McLaughlin et al 2006). Riot grrrl participants scavenged feminist history and rehabilitated the kinds of radical women that a respectable (that is, racialized, classed and heterosexual) liberal feminism would prefer to remain in obscurity. For instance, in British riot grrrl the SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) manifesto and its lesbian-feminist and working-class author Valerie Solanas was rehabilitated as a crucial (sub)cultural icon. For instance, Erica Smith described how her fascination with Solanas translated into her (sub)cultural production of

Figure 1: Riot grrrl UK map, authored by Karren Ablaze

# IN-GRRRL-LAND, SCATTERLAND & WAILS.

KEY	
	GRRRL LOVE!!!
	GRRRL LETTERS
	GRRRL NETWORKING
	GRRRL RECORD LABEL
	DICING GRRRL
	GRRRL SPRAYPAINTING
	GRRRLBOARDER
	WEEDKILLERGRAFFITI (OR GRRRL PIRATES)
	GRRRL FLYPOSTING
	GRRRLZINE
	GRRRL PICNIC
	HATCHING GANG
	GRRRL EXHIBITION
	GRRRL BAND
	GRRRL RADIO
	GRRRL GIGS/DISCOS
	GRRRL WORKSHOPS
	GRRRLS!!!



Scale: Enormous! Bigger than you could ever guess...

"...as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world."  
 Virginia Woolf,  
*Three Guineas.*

This map includes only those grrrls I know of from my work with the Riot Grrrls of Leeds and Bradford - hence the Northern bias. There are so many more grrrls I can't know about, so it's up to you to fill in the gaps...

**PUT YERSELF ON THE MAP!!**

*GirlFrenzy* fanzine: 'I was interested in characters like Valerie Solanas [...] it was almost as if she'd been written out of history and I was just interested in why people didn't know about her so it was interesting to try and find that history, and regenerate interest in her as a character [...] I do think the SCUM manifesto is a fantastic piece of writing and deserves to be more widely known'. British riot grrrl practices enacted many unanticipated reclamations, gradually gaining in confidence to propose radical re-imaginings of feminism within (sub)cultural spaces, histories and the wider social order.

In particular, the practice of writing a manifesto resonated with British riot grrrl. As a powerful authoritative mode of writing, the process of writing a manifesto was experienced as empowering and revolutionary. For example, Karren Ablaze reflected on the excitement she felt in constructing her own *Girl Speak* manifesto: 'It was very exciting writing my own manifesto, I was really inspired by the Nation of Ulysses habit of writing manifestos [...] I thought of a better manifesto really inspired by what they were doing and really inspired by the SCUM manifesto, so it was a fusion of them'. Below is an extract from *Girl Speak* which attempted to extend N.O.U. sentiments with the deconstructive power and revolutionary influence of radical feminism to re-vision the practices of a radical girl-positive (sub)culture:

The Nation of Ulysses from Washington DC, provoke, excite, and inspire a new way of being. However their aesthetic fails on various counts and is in need of reworking. We use it as a blueprint for something greater. They plan to destroy America, Girl Power intends to destroy the whole world and put something better in its place. Like Nation of Ulysses, Girl power possesses an aesthetic, but one which works along different continuums. We have specific methods of working, notions of time space and other resources [...] We propose the propagation of girl love by spontaneously finding ways to express how we feel about each other (i.e. that we see each other as really cool) that cut across the alienation that's enforced by media death machines and that keeps us apart. (*Girl Speak: The Organ of Girl Power International: a worldwide network of Girl Revolutionaries* reprinted in *GirlFrenzy* #3, originally written May 1992)

A related tendency within riot grrrl discourse was to overstate the scale of riot grrrl in the UK in order to provoke new terms, fantasies, and possibilities into an everyday reality, as Huggy Bear member Jo Johnson argued: 'Riot grrrl was about inventing new titles. You think up some name for a fantasy revolutionary group of girls, spread the idea of it and hope, for someone, it'll come true' (cited in Raphael 1995, p. 151). This strategy was reflected in Sally Margaret Joy's article on riot grrrl for the *Melody Maker* which she concluded with 'HOW RIOT GRRRL WILL BE DIFFERENT IN ENGLAND. IT already is' (1992, p. 36). Joy deliberately overstated the scale of riot grrrl in Britain, which in 1992 consisted only of a small network of dispersed friends connected through a handful of fanzines and indie-pop bands. Nonetheless these overstatements had an interesting effect on its readers, facilitating a search for riot grrrl (sub)cultural participation. For instance, speaking in 2007 queer feminist (sub)cultural participant Michal (see chapter four) reflected on his own reactions to the use of language in British riot grrrl:

I mean these people could write with such like, such like it's to a point but it also has such an edge to it and such a poetry to it and its not formulaic and it's not like academic at all but it's so smart and so sure of itself and so exciting and it makes you just want to jump up and run around screaming and just wanting [...] I mean bands like Bikini Kill the way Tobi Vail writes and Huggy Bear the way like Chris and Niki wrote in those zines and all the record sleeves and things it creates this vision and you can kind of see things in like this way that's been kind of spun by the way they've written about it and I think a real kind of strong way of kind of inspiring people and making something actually happen is to kind of build something up into this thing that was maybe bigger than what it was but at the same time but then makes people reach for that so that people are always reaching for what was actually there

An integral element of British riot grrrl discourse was the construction of the 'gang' as a critical part of girl (sub)cultural life. This was reflected in the rejection of the US term 'chapter' for 'gang' to describe the groups and collectives that were organised within riot grrrl. The gang offered opportunities for connection and solidarity that have typically been denied to girls and young women in (sub)cultural life (Groce 1990; Cohen 1991; Leblanc 1999; Krenske & McKay 2000). Within riot grrrl, young people co-created (sub)cultural spaces of belonging that disrupted hegemonic gendered definitions of (sub)cultural positions for girls and young women. Riot grrrl (sub)cultural practices resisted the constraints of hetero-femininities that confined girls and young women's (sub)cultural acts as consumable objects for a hetero-masculine gaze. Gangs offered real life practical solutions to challenge the exclusionary practices of music (sub)cultures. For instance, Karren Ablaze reflected on her desire to seek out a gang:

I was writing Ablaze! Going to lots of gigs, meeting bands and sometimes coming up against difficulties relating to being a woman, gender issues, but it was difficult to deal with on my own, so I wanted a gang, a grrrl gang [...] what we would do with riot grrrl was to effect change, but it was in a really practical way that we could actually do it and we weren't asking anybody else to make things different for us, we were like 'okay we're going to do it ourselves'

In particular, the interviews, record sleeves, fanzines, flyers and artwork of Huggy Bear are saturated with references to working-class British youth subcultural legacies, kids' liberation, and the revolutionary gang (see figure 2). Positioned as early 'experts' on riot grrrl – despite a lack of information or consensus on what riot grrrl was – Huggy Bear invented distinctive British riot grrrl practices; satirically drawing upon terms like 'dub beat mod squad', 'chimp-chiminey kids' and 'the ducky and the darling', and images of skinheads, mods and teddy boys. In her oral history Liz Naylor reflected on the idiosyncratic British character riot grrrl practices of Huggy Bear:

there's a thing with Huggy Bear about kids' liberation and all that and it's actually kind of not specifically particularly gendered in some respects it was very much about youth [...] I think Niki and Jo were quite explicit about empowering girls but it was mixed up with something else it was a certain kind of attitude a certain kind of cool that English youth do very well [...] Huggy Bear's kind of take on it [riot grrrl] was very resourceful they had to sort of

make it up and I think they're great plunderers I mean all the Huggy Bear artwork it's all kind of plundered from the 60's and there's a certain modish classic pop thing to Huggy Bear [...] their strange takings of English culture, on the inner sleeve thing on the Catcall album all the images they use are of skinhead girls and they really reference British working-class culture.

Chris Rawley and Niki Eliot are commonly credited as the main producers of the majority of Huggy Bear fanzines, flyers and record sleeves. Huggy Bear rhetoric resisted a straightforward organisation of coherent ideas and static definitions preferring open-ended, de-centred, stream-of-consciousness style sets of sharp, provocative and often contradictory statements to incite reaction, dialogue and resistance. The closest Huggy Bear come to a definition of riot grrrl can be seen in the liner notes on the back cover of Herjazz (1993) record:

A slippery, fishy network. Word of mouth, autonomous, selfish and girl positive. Off centre. IMMEDIATE NOW POSSIBILITY:- truck loads of girl groups and girl-boy groups ready to riot to the sound of their own desire. Out from bedrooms, hungry for new kicks and situations, never ending confrontations. Turning history into herstory. Challenging dull, restrictive conceptions of difference. Transforming noise friction into a precise beat critique. The scum always rises to the surface in days like these...

Although girls and young women were central to riot grrrl, British riot grrrl emphasised the idea of a mixed-sex gang and used the gender-neutral term 'kid' to (re)imagine radical new spaces and sounds:

At the end of the day, we just want new playgrounds for the kids. New places where they can write, new places where they can hang out, nice new music they can listen to and f\*\*\* anyone else who doesn't want any of that [...] It's like Bikini Kill say girls are always in the coolest gangs. And then they get distracted by boys and the gang splits up. But all boys wanna do is hang out with the girl gangs. There's so much rich stuff there. We're pro-mixed-sex gangs (Chris Rawley cited in interview zine by Everett True and Sally Margaret Joy 1992)

Crucially the ideology of the gang constructs an inclusive and validating space of belonging and solidarity for all of its members. In oral histories many riot grrrl participants commented on the inclusive intentions of the riot grrrl practices. For instance, Rachel Holborow recalled 'that was part of the thing - it was different - it was about including everybody, including your friends, or people that you hardly know, people who did fanzines and stuff, and "come along to this"'.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore Lucy Thane reflected on the emotional impact of feeling part of a gang;

It's like falling in love, it's like you feel suddenly you're given an invitation to meet the rest of the universe you're not just your own little planet. You're suddenly, like you join the universe and so it was an incredible sense of relief [...] Exciting, you felt bigger and you felt powerful and you feel strong and you feel cool and you feel sexy and like you're more likely to get laid, and you feel

Figure 2: A flyer for a Huggy Nation gig, authored by Huggy Bear


**HUGGY NATION** \*.\*.\*.\*.\*
 
  
 Present a sizzle meet scene
   
 ... the ducky + the darling

Suppose, instead of getting together with people you agree with in the abstract, or people whose economic interests are the same as yours, suppose you get together with people who are really into the same things you are, people who work and play well together. In other words, instead of forming political parties or unions or protest groups, suppose you form gangs or families or communes. (You don't all have to live under the same roof, just as long as you live in the same city—or better, the same neighborhood.)

The main difference between a revolutionary gang and a revolutionary party is that the party, by definition, seeks state power. It puts forth a program, which it takes very seriously, and expects the public to take seriously; for it is on the basis of that program that the party intends to reorder society once it gains the power of government.

**REVOLUTIONARY**

**GANGS**

A revolutionary gang (or family or commune) is more modest. It carries out projects which seem productive and are fun to do; but it understands that there are plenty of other gangs around with their own projects, just as worthwhile.

Since it is not a candidate for power, it does not need to present to the public a formal program for the reorganization of society. Since its members respect and trust each other from the start—they joined the group because it was congenial, not because it was "correct"—

In a gang/family/commune, communication isn't limited to a weekly two-hour meeting. People are always running into each other, so bright ideas can be converted into action quickly and efficiently.

The rules are simple and natural. If your bright idea needs five people to carry it out, then you have to get four other people excited enough to do it with you.

**Stereolab**

**Huggy Bear MOONSHAKE MAMBO**

**Taxi**

Films etc... **Scala** **28th Nov** all night etc

like the world is full of possibilities and you don't only exist in your own head like the stuff in your own head could actually get done and I think that's actually huge that it's not just about being validated so you feel cosy and nice it's like yes you can do stuff on your own but it's a fuck a lot easier if there's other people to do stuff with.

This realisation of real-life solutions to (sub)cultural marginalisation was also reflected in other oral history accounts. For instance, Suzy Corrigan described riot grrrl as a network of practical support to combat discrimination:

I thought the best solidarity that we could have was like looking out for each other at gigs, basic shit like making sure that people didn't step on you and there'd be girls down the front [...] just making people feel like they could actually come out of a night and they weren't going to get hassled, they weren't going to get guys frotting on their backsides when they were stood watching a band. You could have a discussion about 'well actually there are rights that you have and they are these these these and these'. So it was just a clearing house for a lot of information as well. That's the stuff I chose to remember about it, things like the gigs, the looking after people who come to your town to play, people getting up on stage for the first time

These challenges could take the form of symbolic gestures used by girls to intervene in the everyday spaces of music (sub)culture. For example, Karren Ablaze was inspired by Niki Elliot's use of defiant gestures to confront everyday situations of harassment:

I was quite inspired by the notion of assertiveness in that situation like at a gig I saw Jo from Huggy Bear at a gig. I think there was a guy who was hassling her in the crowd and I just saw her do this very definite gesture [puts hand out in front of herself to signal stop] and I was like wow you can just do that you just put your hand right in front and just you know it's like I'm not having this.

There were also some efforts to adopt the US 'girls-at-the-front' policy that reordered the normative gender and sexual regimes of the gig space. Spatial practices that enforced masculine and heterosexual meanings within gigs were challenged. For instance, men were discouraged from occupying the space directly in front of the stage and the use of aggressive movements, like 'moshing' and 'slam dancing', and sexual advances towards girls and young women were resisted. Various bands associated with riot grrrl attempted to reconfigure the gig space to discipline the (re)production of masculine dominance within riot grrrl gigs. For instance Niki Elliot outlined this perspective in reference to Huggy Bear gigs: 'our shows would make explicit our need and identification to point out the high female input potential at our shows. Also importantly, we absolutely wanted women to be right at the front [...] They were not peripheral to the event' (Raphael 1995, p. 156). Nonetheless some oral history participants noted problems in the translation of US-derived strategies to a riot grrrl (sub)culture submerged in British indie-pop music cultural norms:

The girls from the US came from a more punk [background] whereas the people who were riot grrrls in the UK came from more indie backgrounds including Rachel [Holborow] and Pete [Dale], including most of the people

you've talked to. In the US I think it did come from more of a punk background, so they came from gigs where people were moshing each other and it was quite dangerous at the front, so the girls at the front thing made a lot of sense. In Britain I'd always been at the front, it was a bit weird, but it was a statement and it felt important (Amelia Fletcher)

Riot grrrl disrupted the established gender order of music participation, opening up supportive spaces and audiences for girls' music production. Within riot grrrl young women and girls were encouraged to explore feminist ideas within music-making, often with very little knowledge or experience. London-based Skinned Teen, comprised of three teenage girls – Layla Gibbon, Esme Young and Flossie White, who formed and wrote their first set of songs within a week after falsely claiming to be a band in conversation with Kathleen Hanna at a Bikini Kill gig – are a good example of music-making practices within British riot grrrl. The focus of music participation shifted away from aesthetic judgements towards an intimate engagement in the processes of amateur music-making. For instance, when Delia reflected on seeing an early Skinned Teen gig she highlighted a sense of encouragement and involvement that she felt within their performance:

When I first saw [Skinned Teen], when they were just starting off, they used to have these songs and they used to try really hard and seeing them trying so hard was more entertaining, it was kind of like you'd feel you were part of their, you know, you'd be kind of like come on come on you can make it to the end come on you can all finish at the same time, you'd get really involved in their world, it was really nice to encourage them, these three little girls with their recorders and xylophones. I really liked that, that was better to me than a really proficient band usually a boy band who would know all their chords and be very slick

Riot grrrl opened up space to defy masculine authorities, traditions and entitlements in music-making practices. This was constructed in the talk of music-makers who emphasised the ability for riot grrrl bands to start from scratch and reject various rock music precedents. This could include the initial formation of a cover band, knowledge and appreciation of the rock canon, the need to 'pay one's dues' to gain and demonstrate virtuosity within performance (see Bennett 1980a, 1980b). Riot grrrl music making practices could be deliberately antagonistic, to actively resist normative tendencies and established rock practices and attempted to negotiate radically different practices, sounds and performances. US riot grrrl protagonist Allison Wolfe provided an excellent example of a riot grrrl songwriting process in the formation of Bratmobile:

We just made up this idea of Bratmobile as a band but we were just all talk for quite a while and we'd go up to Olympia every other weekend and go to shows and I think Calvin [Johnson] got wind of it that we were a band and he was like 'well then if you're a band then you should play a show' so he'd set up this show for us February 14<sup>th</sup> 1991 and it was just a month before when we found out [...] I remember being like hanging up the phone and 'what are we going to do?' so there were some old school punk rock people in Eugene this guy Robert Christy and his band and we went over to his house and we were like 'what do we do, we're supposed to have a show?' and he was really cool

he gave us the keys to his practice space and let us use his equipment and said 'here just use this and you need to write songs' and we were like 'but how do we do that?' and he was like 'I don't know if you listen to some Ramones records and then just go from there' and I didn't have any, we didn't have any Ramones records but also somewhere in my let's be contrary mind I was like well that's it we want to be different so we're never going to listen to the Ramones I don't want my songs to sound like everyone's. I'd already been writing songs like poem songs into a notebook and just making up melody's like sing-songy anyway so it was pretty easy to put some stuff together and Molly had taken a few guitar lessons and she had a guitar and knew the chords and stuff she could play stuff that she'd been jamming in her bedroom anyway and she would switch off between guitar and drums and I would sing [...] it was a really great experience and we were just on stage going like 'I have no idea what anyone thinks of this' and every band I've been in to this day the first show is like you're just curious is this total shit or does anyone care or is this relevant and I definitely felt that the first time, are these songs I don't know, but Bikini Kill were there and they were very supportive and really psyched that there was this other girl band to be like sister bands with them

In Britain music-makers also found new ways to engage in music-making in riot grrrl that deliberately disrupted taken-for-granted aesthetic conventions of music. For instance Pete Dale, a member of Pussycat Trash, Avocado Baby and Slampt, reflected on the appeal of riot grrrl as subversive punk sound that contrasted with his classically trained musical background. Pete also highlighted the excitement he felt in the unpredictable musical choices of amateur music-makers in riot grrrl, using the example of his band-mate Rachel Holborow's music-making in their later band Red Monkey:

I was attracted to girl bands or girls playing music because I was attracted to simplistic music and also weird atonality weird use of rhythms and harmonic principles I was classically trained and classically trained in music and I'm always excited by punk [...] the best punk the bands I like best have always been completely bizarre in harmonic terms you know and rhythmic terms and I like that I like it when people play the drums 'badly' I find it you know I find that exciting [...] you hear people like Huggy Bear actually you know who are completely untrained or like Rachel you know, I've played in loads of bands with and I've found it very exciting to play with Rachel and to hear people who are amateurs because they would play stuff that would have never occurred to me [...] playing with Rachel she can play an absolutely weird bass line when she was in Red Monkey and it was great from that point of view it'd spark interest no trained musician would be likely to play [...] people like Rachel who kind of on a subliminal level they do understand the rules of harmony and you know Rachel would always I could notice that she would play like you know the conventional perfect fifth on the bass and be like oh no that sounds too normal and might play a flattened fifth and go oh yeah that's the way well that's a good understanding of the rules of harmony on a subliminal level but I think a lot of the riot grrrl bands and a lot of the underground punk bands generally, they play weird notes and weird rhythms through some conscious urge to experiment

Therefore a riot grrrl music-making process can involve various challenges to taken-for-granted aspects of music-making. The band may be a fictional concept requiring a concrete gig invitation or opportunity to become active. This means that the initial song-writing phase may be brief often limited by time, space, skill, knowledge and access to equipment. There tends to

be a distinct effort to avoid the replication of a dominant band, disrupt the tacit 'rules' of music-making and evade established song-writing processes within a particular (sub)cultural canon. Therefore the conventions of 'song getting' and the formation of a cover band in order to realise genre-specific skills and abilities, are challenged. There may also be a tendency to swap instruments, or play unconventional instruments, that undermined rigid band roles and disrupted the hierarchical social order of alternative bands (as defined by Bayton 1998; Weinstein 1993, 2004). Live performances become crucial sites to test out unconventional and potentially disruptive musics. The live music performances associated with riot grrrl therefore enabled its participants to enact and embody radical power shifts within indie music (sub)culture, and to establish a girl-positive community.

In contrast, those who had already established music-making practices, with a certain amount of skill, knowledge and experience, within their bands before the onset of riot grrrl felt a need to establish a separation between their music-making and riot grrrl. This was the case with Linus, whose members Jen and Tammy Denitto stressed to me that their music-making was distinct from their riot grrrl activities in London;

I don't want to say much about our band but we were really different from the bands that were happening [in riot grrrl] we weren't scrappy we'd been going for like quite a few years before that [we had] normal songs and they [we]re really weird and they weren't punky. We didn't feel like we had anything in common musically which is why we really tried to really make sure we separated how we were with our band because we just thought well we're not you know we weren't disowning riot grrrl by saying our band's not riot grrrl [...] we're not really saying it's anything to do with music, we were in a band we tried to keep it really separate from our band even though we were both in the same band [...] I don't think we considered it a musical movement. No. We felt it was like an ideology.

All-girl bands like Mambo Taxi and Voodoo Queens also experienced ambivalence in being labelled a riot grrrl band. Therefore riot grrrl cannot be understood as a simplistic genre of 1990s punk music made by girls but refers to the deliberate deployment of a set of disruptive engagements with the conventions of music participation within a situated pro-girl community of shared understandings.

Previous research has focused on the symbolic power of riot grrrl style (Wald 1998; Kearney 2005; Turner 2001; Gamboa 2000; Starr 1999; Wilson 2004). Riot grrrl challenged the social and cultural devaluation of femininity and re-positioned girly identifiers, images and symbols within indie music (sub)cultural situations to disrupt the (re)production of hegemonic gender signification. This sartorial celebration of girly style has been understood as a kind of hyper-feminine drag that simultaneously asserts an anti-assimilationist agenda as well as a parody of hegemonic gender norms (White 2000). This revolt into girly signifiers evoked a symbolic 'return' to a stage in girlhood that is protected from the demands of hetero-femininity in adult

life; however simply viewing this tactic as a return reinforces the traditional binary between adolescence and adulthood. A more nuanced approach to the temporal boundaries of (sub)cultural life can be seen in Judith Halberstam's work on queer subcultures. Halberstam (2005a) has argued for an 'extended adolescence' within which the adolescent phase becomes stretched-out, consequently blurring a conventional temporal boundary between adult and adolescence. Within riot grrrl, women, and some men, from a range of ages were able to (re)identify themselves by transgressing age- and gender-determined boundaries. This was expressed in oral history accounts that situated the overt use of bright colours, dresses, flowers, handbags, and hair clips within riot grrrl (sub)culture as a retrieval of fun and femininity that interrupted the social (re)production of masculine conventions in music culture and the repression of girlhood in the dominant feminist subject. Riot grrrl spaces and practices enabled politicised and strategic embodiments, celebrations and performances of femininities: a queer fem(me)inist praxis. Participation in riot grrrl could lead to a re-exploration of femininities within political music (sub)cultures and opened an avenue for girls' (sub)cultural participation that did not require a symbolic assimilation to masculine norms. The dominant requirement to embody and enact a tom-boy position commonly found in research on women in punk subcultures became displaced (Leblanc 1999). For instance, Rachel Holborow recalled how riot grrrl enabled her to question the valorisation of masculinities in (sub)culture and go beyond tom-boy identifications to explore her identity and political beliefs in relation to femininities:

Riot grrrl for me, it gave me a space to really explore a lot of aspects of being female and being creative that I might not have gone down otherwise. I never explored what being girly meant before riot grrrl, I was always very tom-boy-ish, so I never really explored it and I think it's important to feel that whatever you want female to be, you can be it, and you're free to explore that. Whereas when you're in [a] society where anything that's female seems to be quite negatively seen then you don't necessarily have that opportunity and a lot of feminist groups, they're not usually frequented by young women so I think riot grrrl is very good for that, it's cool in a way, so if you're really into music things then it's a good place to go and a good place for you to explore identity.

Furthermore, the indie world stereotype of the rational connoisseur who prefers a serious detached approach to the appreciation of music (Straw 1997; Railton 2001; Bannister 2006) was displaced by scores of emotionally charged kids and girls who defied the behavioural norms of indie venues. The presence of collective uncontrollable positive emotions that could not be attributed to the use of alcohol created dilemmas for those employed to discipline drink-related aggression and violence within public music venues:

When you get a gig that was like Bikini Kill or Huggy Bear and there'd be people from Skinned Teen wandering around and people from Linus and all little kids with hair-grips in and then you'd get them juxtaposed with the bouncers at the venues who didn't really know how to deal with it because there's all these kids being really excited, because you used to get kids being really excited and really like over the top jumping up and down and screaming but they were totally sober (Delia)

Furthermore in an interview, Sarah Bag, a member of riot grrrl Leeds-Bradford, reflected on the impact of girly and feminine signifiers within music performances: 'A lot of them are dressed up on stage and have mad handbags and frocks. You can say that's really superficial but in another way it creates a better atmosphere. It's a lot less threatening for people in the audience who can sometimes feel excluded by the deadly serious conventions of male musicianship and politics' (cited in Grrrt & Wakefield 1995). Therefore, the use of feminine signifiers challenged the exclusionary practices of music and activist (sub)cultures. This argument was elaborated upon by Delia who talked about how the juxtaposition of a feminine visual aesthetic within conventionally masculine acts of music performance created a powerful effect of resistance:

It's like if you're in a girl band that's being sort of a bit punky and like for example Huggy Bear and they'll be singing some quite fierce strong lyrics and they're playing really well and fast and hard but they had like little flowery hair-clips or whatever that kind of juxtaposition of that sort of emphasised it in a way [...] I like incongruity it's like I like it when I go to a gig sort of an indie-schmindie gig and everyone's in black and I've got a bright red Eskimo coat on and like yellow hat

The social (re)production of heterosexual masculinity was interrupted as (sub)cultural spaces were queered by riot grrrl spatial practices. The 1in12 club in Bradford, the main site for the activities of riot grrrl Leeds-Bradford, a place saturated with hardcore punk and crust music (sub)cultural conventions, was effectively re-worked by riot grrrl participants. For instance, Sarah Bag reflected on her involvement in Witchfest, an all-day riot grrrl event held at the 1in12 club, where the inclusion of candles, seated area and presence of women-centred alternative economies (Piano 2003) shifted the meanings of the space and enabled the music participation of non-heterosexual women:

We used to put seats out and have candles on the tables, we had much more seated area so that it wasn't all standing and we used to put fairy lights up, so when you walked in, it wasn't just like this black hole it was quite party-ish, at some of the Witchfests we had little stalls of stuff with women-made clothes or artists and we had a lucky dip at one, people could do a lucky dip and get a little present and you'd have sweets [...] it was a bit more of an event than just a gig [...] more of a sort of festival feel to it, we did have quite a lot of older women coming over from Hebden Bridge and Todmorden, some older lesbian women used to come [...] so it was quite a good mix of people [...] I think it opened up more possibilities because I think the hardcore punk scene had got quite conventional in that it had to be quite macho and thrashy and you had to take your shirt off and stagedive

In Britain riot grrrl practices enabled participants to explore other ways of being and living as a girl in Britain and re-configuring girlhood beyond the confines of dominant hetero-feminine norms. Girls' commercial cultural practices of heterosexuality – that is the engagement of beauty/fashion practices to compete against other girls to secure masculine affection – are positioned as central to girl subjectivities (McRobbie 1991, 2009; Harris 2004). However within riot grrrl practices the hetero-feminine pursuit to satisfy heterosexual masculine desires was

interrupted; spaces were created for girls and young women to explore the complexities of their own sexual desires. Riot grrrl provided discursive space for resistant femininities that could embrace risk and danger over conformity, viewed girls as (sub)cultural producers and not just as commercial consumers, encouraged pursuits within public spaces as well as the home and facilitated the exploration of feminist ideas in a post-feminist society. In a 1992 interview Niki Eliot described riot grrrl as a resource to protect girls' autonomy from compulsory heterosexuality: 'It's always the girls who are the spirited, enthusiastic, fun, exciting dangerous and then something goes wrong. You get to 15 and they're autonomous, then there [are] boyfriends and girls get bitchy [...] Riot grrrl is about catching them when they're 15 at their most dangerous, before they've gone through that boyfriend quest channel'. Despite this critique of heterosexuality the vast majority of riot grrrl oral history participants tended to identify as heterosexual, thereby creating a set of 'queer-straight' (see O'Rourke 2005) practices that legitimated creative, emotional and political bonds between girls and women living within a homophobic anti-feminist social order. This resonated with Liz Naylor who, as a self-identified lesbian, felt that exposure to such a message in her own youth would have eased her experiences:

Women aren't particularly taught to respect each other in society, this is what's so amazing that there are these ostensibly heterosexual bands Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear saying 'yeah love other women' though there is a certain amount of fear that 'oh well they're all dykes' that is actually a big fear people have. I think it's a very brave thing for them to say and it's a message that I wish had been around when I was younger because it would have stopped me going through pain (cited in *It Changed My Life* 1993)

Some researchers have critiqued a tendency to undermine the influence of lesbian identities and culture in shaping riot grrrl (Kearney 1997, 1998a) and it would be inaccurate to assume a homogenous heterosexual character of British riot grrrl (sub)culture. For some riot grrrl (sub)culture facilitated lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer practices and acted as a resource to negotiate non-heterosexual identities, relationships and lifestyles. Riot grrrl was entwined with the emergence of queercore, a genre of subcultural music that consisted of a network of queer-identified bands and performers. In London, bands such as Children's Hour, Mouthfull and Sister George, the latter of which released an album on Liz Naylor's Catcall records, constructed a visible queercore presence in music (sub)culture. Frustrated with the lip-service riot grrrl gave to queer ideas whilst enacting heterosexuality – as Lucy Thane argued 'Huggy Bear used to use [queercore] a lot [and] we were like "they're not queer, we'll use it"' – various individuals began to organise queer events and articulate a queer music (sub)culture to challenge the limitations of gay and lesbian commercial club culture and heteronormativity of indie and punk music (sub)cultures. Taking into account the homophobic public sphere and normalisation agenda of gay and lesbian political activism in the 1990s, queercore engaged in a playful disruption of dominant codes of non-heterosexual life (see DeChaine 1997). Queercore sought to embrace the

grotesque, degenerate and offensive meanings of queer to challenge the homogenisation and commercialisation of gay and lesbian identities and cultures. For instance, Liz Naylor explained how her attraction to queercore was driven by a desire for raw impulsive noise made by people who positioned themselves as visibly queer:

[Children's Hour] they just didn't really rehearse and didn't have any songs and I just thought they were great you know it's what I wanted and they they'd looked great they'd looked like total freaks they were queer you know they weren't gay they were queer they looked like total freaks they just made a noise and that was enough

Lucy Thane reflected on the motivations of Sister George - 'they just didn't want those stupid ghettos they wanted it to be absolutely in your face and absolutely honest and open [...] [queercore] was tongue in cheek, because it was such an unfashionable group of people it was so un-hip to be a dyke, it's not cool for anyone, probably the most hated people'. Non-heterosexual riot grrrl participants frequently reported a greater feeling of belonging within queercore. For instance queercore was a critical (sub)cultural resource for Sarit, who later went on to organise Club V (see chapter four). She recalled how queercore acted as a crucial social, emotional and political resource:

I'd heard about riot grrrl and I was like wow and started kind of listening to records and everything and it was really wonderful it was amazing but I, don't really think I was a member of that scene I don't think I went to enough shows to really get to know it well enough I did a bit, and then queercore I felt like I was really, I belonged to it, it's not in a social sense as much as, like it really answered so many political ideas and feeling alienated on the straight indie scene and on the gay mainstream scene it was a really strong thing to me at the time [...] I think that's the central thing like going to gigs where like there were lots of gay people like gay themed lyrics, all of that plus I was just coming out and it was all like completely mixed in.

To summarise, the translation of US riot grrrl within British music (sub)culture incorporated a range of actions and tactics within music participation that interrupted the naturalised (re)production of heterosexual masculine authorities, entitlements and privileges. In this sense riot grrrl represented a collective attempt for girls and young women to access (sub)cultural resources and exert control over powerful symbolic codes of gender and sexuality in music participation. Behavioural norms and conventions of (sub)cultural production were reworked in fanzines, music-making and gig spaces. Crucially the redeployment of feminine and girly signifiers within places and practices associated with the social performance of masculinity in music culture can be understood as a strategy of queer fem(me)inism. Riot grrrl evoked a critical awareness of the restraints of hetero-femininities for girls and young women; girl gangs acted as crucial resources to enact practical interventions in everyday (sub)cultural life. Importantly these strategies did not demand the rejection of femininity and/or heterosexuality to authenticate a politicised practice, but instead reworked these positions to claim authoritative power over codes

of gender, sexuality and feminism. Nonetheless, the audible and visible spectacles of riot grrrl in British popular culture were limited by the narrow repertoires available for comprehending the (sub)cultural resistance of young women and girls. In the public eye riot grrrl quickly became synonymous with violence, a monstrous form of man-hating feminism and distasteful cultural production. In the following section I focus on how riot grrrl participants struggled to maintain control over the representation of riot grrrl culture within the public sphere. In Britain the complex interrelationships and intersections between riot grrrl (sub)culture and key music journalists presented particular challenges to those attempting to articulate riot grrrl practices and resist the disarticulation of a burgeoning hetero-feminine critique in their local (sub)cultures and everyday lives.

### 3.4 'Fake soul conspiracy':<sup>27</sup> *British riot grrrl and the music press*

The media coverage of riot grrrl needs to be situated in the wider social, political and cultural climate as well as the specific workplace practices within which British journalists and music writers were located. In popular music studies it is widely understood that music journalists do not simply provide an objective account of music culture, but instead provide the ideological and social positions to construct an imagined readership; (re)producing communities of taste. Simon Frith explains, 'the issue in the end isn't so much representing the music to the public [...] as creating a knowing community, orchestrating a collusion between selected musicians and an equally select part of the public – select in its superiority to the ordinary, indiscriminating pop consumer' (1996, p. 67). In the specific context of British indie music journalism, studies have indicated that in the 1990s the two main indie music weeklies *Melody Maker* (MM) and *New Musical Express* (NME) experienced threats to their critical authority (Toynbee 1993). The rise in popularity of new pop, rave and hip hop, subsequent refusal of the MM and NME to widen its boundaries to incorporate these new genres within its coverage, and success of rival publications that capitalised on these gaps in music coverage led to an increased urgency to construct new communities of indie taste. Jason Toynbee (1993) described this discursive process of panic taste-making that saw the British rock press construct a fast succession of hip new underground indie-rock music scenes as 'periodisation', referring to a process in which particular movements, artists and genres are legitimised within a historical order. At the initial stage 'particular artists are set up as exempla, and aesthetic and axiological criteria are defined. The period (scene) receives a name' (Toynbee 1993, p. 297). The rapid rise of media coverage of riot grrrl exemplified the first stages of periodisation in the music press, a common feature of structural insecurity over the position of indie music within British culture. Music press articles contained riot grrrl as a fixed music scene and identity associated with specific bands, fanzines, behaviours and styles.

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<sup>27</sup> Huggy Bear 'Teen Tighterns' *Don't Die* (Wiiiija, 1993)

Research on gender and music has established a strong critique of the common practices of the popular music press and media industries in the marginalisation of women's and girls' cultural participations (Railton 2001; White 2006; Coates 2003; Feigenbaum 2005; Davies 2004; Kruse 2002). As a key 'gatekeeper' in the articulation of taste, music press articles are argued to stereotype and undermine the music participation of women and girls, as musicians and audiences, to naturalise the authenticity and credibility of masculinity and justify the dominant social positions of men within indie music cultural production (Thornton 1990; Jones 2002; Shuker 1994; Regev 1994). In particular, the trend in the music press to contain girls' and women's music-making by constructing gendered novelty periods like 'women in rock' and 'all-girl groups', noted by other scholars (Coates 1997; Tucker 2000) as 'new' developments in indie and rock music culture, reinforces the masculine dominance of music culture and history whilst simultaneously protecting the liberal character of the music industry from accusations of sexism. Riot grrrl, as a pre-formed emotive term, could be easily slotted into the conventions of music press production. However, it was these media discourses and working practices that were the targets of riot grrrl (sub)cultural resistance which sought to disrupt the authority of meaning-making practices in a struggle for 'cultural citizenship' (see Stevenson 2003). The subsequent failures of the music press to represent riot grrrl illustrates the limitations of music press discourses and practices; therefore 'when the music press wrote about riot grrrl, it was less that they mis-represented it and more that they *couldn't* represent it' (White 2008, p. 9, her italics).

Traditionally academic debates concerning citizenship have been concerned with institutional recognition, legal entitlements and national belonging; however, cultural citizenship takes these questions of recognition beyond the corridors of political institutions to apply these principles to the interplay of culture and power evident in everyday life. The issue of cultural citizenship questions whether the cultural participation of marginal communities are granted with the rights of recognition, self-determination and mutual respect. In contemporary society the 'power to name, construct meaning and exert control over the flow of information [...] is one of today's central structural divisions' (Stevenson 2003, p. 4). Within this media-saturated age the public sphere, it has been argued, operates as a 'signalling device' used to highlight matters of public importance, detect social problems requiring state attention and justify the containment of social dangers to preserve hegemonic order (Habermas 1996). In relation to riot grrrl and the media, (sub)cultural resistance was invested in a struggle for cultural citizenship in the public sphere, to reclaim control over the naming of women's and girls' cultural practices and resist the redeployment of hegemonic codes of gender, sexuality and disarticulation of feminism. Within the context of 1990s Britain, an era marked with moral anxieties over gender and sexuality, riot grrrl became a media-friendly example of moral panic. Riot grrrl culture was drawn on to

demonstrate the harm that progressive shifts in gender and sexual relations represented to the wider social order.

Additionally the relationship between the media and riot grrrl confounded the idealised binary between an 'underground' subculture and 'mainstream' media industry. Traditionally the subcultural narrative polarises 'underground' and 'mainstream' positions; an autonomous music subculture is situated firmly underground to be periodically forced into the mainstream through the exploitative and profit-driven practices of the music industry. The subculture or scene is compelled to 'sell out'. Selling out refers to the process through which a subculture is commodified and interpreted through the activities of a host of cultural industries that render a subculture palatable and saleable to a mass consumer market. The outcomes of selling out for a subculture are costly, effectively eliminating the original radical intentions, integrity and potential of a subculture. However, as previously mentioned, a burgeoning area of scholarship on new cultural industries has blurred the neat division between the 'mainstream' and 'underground' spheres, to argue for a fresh perspective concerning how concepts of the authentic, the underground and subcultural are entwined in the discursive practices of the new creative industries (Strachan 2007; Bloustien 2008).

The personal relationships between music journalists and British riot grrrl protagonists trouble a straightforward reading of riot grrrl as a mainstream co-optation of a pre-formed music subculture. Acknowledgement of complex intersections and constraints of media production enables a different relationship between riot grrrl and the music press to emerge. Instead of replicating a conventional story of how the music press exploited an existing riot grrrl subculture for material gain, the music press can be implicated in the active construction of a British riot grrrl music (sub)culture, even before a coherent riot grrrl (sub)culture had 'happened' in Britain. As Everett True argued, 'the British Riot Grrrl movement didn't exist before the music press coverage of it. Or if it did, we're talking a matter of weeks: everything happened and was hatched at once'. In this sense claims to cultural citizenship were threatened as journalists could exert more power over the public discourse of riot grrrl; however, this power was limited by the pressures of the workplace. Despite an initial burst of supportive and positive coverage of riot grrrl, particularly in the music press, the majority of media coverage became increasingly marked by gendered discourses that stereotyped, undermined and ridiculed riot grrrl (sub)culture. Media periodisation practices constructed riot grrrl as an identity associated with an array of consumable goods including fanzines, records and fashions as well as distinct behaviours and emotions, commonly anger, violence and aggression. The multiple positions of journalists as insiders and outsiders of riot grrrl (sub)culture and the need to regain control over public discourses became key sources of conflict and frustration for riot grrrl participants, especially for those located in London. Key to the production of media coverage of British riot grrrl were the music journalists Everett True and Sally Margaret Joy.

3.4.1 'I was fucking itching to start a revolution from within':<sup>28</sup> Everett True and Sally Margaret Joy

In order for knowledge of riot grrrl to move beyond intimate friendship circles it took the controversial actions of Everett True and Sally Margaret Joy and one high profile television appearance to bring British riot grrrl possibilities to (inter)national attention. Everett True initially took little interest in his housemates' band Huggy Bear, but as media coverage of US riot grrrl and grunge intensified on other side of the Atlantic, the then assistant editor of *MM* encountered the British manifestation in his own home. Relatively unaware of the US riot grrrl blackout stance against the press and a limited understanding of riot grrrl ideas, members of Huggy Bear initially enthused over possible media coverage. The following extract from Jon Slade's oral history detailed the initial steps and interactions that enabled the production of music press coverage of riot grrrl. Slade's recollection neatly captured the scarcity of information available about riot grrrl, the lack of awareness of the US riot grrrl media blackout strategy and the persistent efforts of Everett True and Sally Margaret Joy to persuade members of Huggy Bear to collude in the co-construction of riot grrrl in the public sphere:

[Everett] tried not to [write about Huggy Bear] at first, but you know he'd help us out, he's been my friend since I was sixteen, from 1985, he's been my friend for a long time at that point, then he came to see us one time after I'd been totally 'have you seen my band, it's good', then we were good and of course he was blown away, it was excellent, but he didn't want to write about us because he thought that wouldn't be appropriate, so he got Sally [Margaret Joy] to write about us, Sally saw us at the same time and Sally used to write then and she did, that was alright Sally was nice enough [...] but then after that yeah we became their pet band and I think a lot of the riot grrrl thing, well it was to do with Everett and Sally because they were both very excited about it [...] We were really excited to be in the paper. I think when we started having photos taken though we realised it was false especially when yeah, we did a couple of things, we had to stand around, jump up and down, do a bit of jogging on the spot or something [...] for the *Melody Maker*, the pictures that came out were pretty good, I don't think we had problems at this point, I don't think we'd heard that riot grrrls didn't speak to the press, I don't know if that was even the case, I don't know if people said that [...] there weren't many riot grrrls in Britain at this point [...] This might be controversial but I think it was a lot to do with Everett and Sally, we were really into it but we didn't really know what it [riot grrrl] was and there was that interview that we did with Sally and Everett together, which was around June or July 1992 and yeah, Everett especially kept asking us, 'well what about the riot grrrls?' and we were like, I don't know, I think Chris said something, we didn't really know what it was at all just read about it somewhere and we said 'well this is what we think it is'.

The pair interviewed Huggy Bear in the summer of 1992, the full transcript of the interview was produced as a fanzine and extracts were published in an article titled 'Furpowered' in *MM* on 3 October 1992, just after the release of Huggy Bear's debut single 'Rubbing thee Impossible to

<sup>28</sup> Everett True, interview, 4 July 2008

Burst' on Wiiiija records. Heavily inspired by US riot grrrl, the music journalist Sally Margaret Joy set her polemic into motion, spearheading both the public profile and underground organisation of riot grrrl in London. A week later, the 10 October issue of *MM* saw riot grrrl make the cover; however instead of featuring a photo of Bikini Kill or Bratmobile, a pair of anonymous mud-wrestling women and tagline 'You Wanna Play...?' prevailed. Inside, in a three-page feature entitled, 'Revolution Grrrl Style Now', Sally Margaret Joy enthusiastically profiled US riot grrrl culture. The exposé clearly identified and named riot grrrl for its readers, featuring lists of essential riot grrrl releases, influences, quotations and fanzines. When questioned about this particular piece of journalism Everett True alluded to the main pressures that shaped the decision-making process in the production of the feature article. True's account confirmed the hegemonic gender order of the music press; this is reflected in his construction of music-press readers as intelligent cultural connoisseurs, an editor who viewed riot grrrl as punk rock for females and his use of a 'strange' image of mud-wrestling women that would make an 'impact' with the *MM* readership:

Um, that first Riot Grrrl cover...the picture of the two females fighting, covered in mud, drawn from one of the Re:Search books series of Incredibly Strange Music or something. The hand-lettering on that cover is actually my own, done in such a way to make it look more 'fanzine'. I chose that image – and it's a fucking strange image, in retrospect – simply cos I knew it would make an impact. 'Do you wanna play?' I believe was the tag-line. Music press readers are far more intelligent than editors and publishers give them credit for – if they weren't, they probably wouldn't be reading the music press. They also like to think of themselves as 'cutting edge'. So you appeal to that side of their tastes: our editor approved of my championing of Riot Grrrl because he understood (male-dominated punk rock and he thought it was punk rock for females. Of course it wasn't). Sally supplied the ideas and I – being by some distance the most loved and loathed music critic at the UK music press at the time – supplied the focus. We tried to leave them in the originators' voices as much as possible. We tried to make the stories entertaining and exciting, and also played the 'alienation' card as much as humanly possible: if you're not with us, you're against us...but if you're against us, you're a total fucking square.

Joy proceeded to create the first British riot grrrl fanzine, *Riot Grrrl*, which was collated and handed out at gigs in London at the end of 1992 and beginning of 1993. The fanzine, accompanied by Huggy Bear bullet-teens and fanzine *Huggy Nation*, provoked the organisation of riot grrrl meetings at various locations across London, including Joy's home. The *NME* followed the *MM* with an interpretation of riot grrrl written by Steven Wells and Liz Evans on 6 March 1993. This depiction replicated lists of 'vital riot grrrl' fanzines, records and quotations constructing riot grrrl as an identifiable period. The national publicity made information and images of riot grrrl accessible to young people across Britain, some of which decided to take action: riot grrrl gangs and collectives developed across the UK including Newcastle, Leeds-Bradford, Portsmouth, York, Birmingham and Aberdeen. Several riot grrrl participants

highlighted the role of music-press articles in consolidating their leap to (sub)cultural participation:

I heard about it [riot grrrl] again, I think it was around the time of that article in the *Melody Maker* by Sally Margaret Joy, she did a really good piece about what was going on in America [...] yeah it was about the time of that article and then at that point I decided to do something [...] I thought well we can do this here as well, we can do it in the north of England (Karren Ablaze)

[I] read about Huggy Bear in the *NME*, the article with the four pictures of them kissing/sticking tongues out/holding up their riot grrrl emblazoned knuckles. That totally made me want to be part of it as opposed to just buying things/being in the audience, which is kind of how I interacted with music before riot grrrl. (Layla Gibbon)

However, the close personal ties between riot grrrl and the music press proved increasingly problematic for British riot grrrl (sub)cultural participants. The origins of riot grrrl (sub)culture became entangled with music-press practices of periodisation; it became unclear whether British riot grrrl was contrived by the music press, or was a self-contained underground culture in its own right. For instance, riot grrrl London participants Tammy and Jen Denitto summarised this widespread feeling: 'I don't believe there was anything really going on [...] because if it was from Sally [Margaret Joy] it would be hype to make it seem bigger than it was to get more girls interested and excited in the idea'. The construction of British riot grrrl (sub)culture was submerged in the documentation practices of the music press. Over time riot grrrl participants experienced a loss of control over the public discourses of riot grrrl; therefore, in a struggle to regain control over riot grrrl practices many participants chose to reject a riot grrrl identity, as Slampt organisers Rachel Holborow and Pete Dale reflected:

Riot grrrl was weird because the term was pushed by the *Melody Maker* in Britain and it seemed to be a crazy situation where there was supposedly this scene but nobody wanted to actually identify themselves as definitely being part of that scene (Pete Dale)

[The music press] got hold of it very early and it became something that quite a lot of music people knew about quite early on. My feeling at the time was that it would have always been better if the press and London people had not really been involved because, it cheapened it and commodified it too early before it had any strength at that point [...] to me it was about female identity and young women exploring that and trying to reclaim space in [music] culture [...] and a lot of young women at the time were just kind of like 'well I can't call myself riot grrrl' in the same way that feminism becomes co-opted because lots of things are pinned onto it whereas it's your own thing and you can be it can be whatever you want it to be and it's your space to explore once it's in the music press, you know, it's like the new wave of new wave, it's not really a place for personal exploration, it's a new lie (Rachel Holborow)

### 3.4.2 *The Word: Sensationalism in the tabloid and broadsheet press*

This initial spatter of riot grrrl in the music-press weeklies quickly became considered newsworthy for the national daily tabloid and broadsheet newspapers after February 12 1993. Huggy Bear appeared on *The Word*, an eclectic youth-orientated late-night culture television programme broadcast on Channel Four.<sup>29</sup> In riot grrrl recollections Huggy Bear's performance of 'Herjazz' on *The Word* emerged as a key controversial event that propelled riot grrrl further into the British popular consciousness. The band's performance was followed by a pre-recorded feature of the Barbie Twins that proved to be the last straw for Huggy Bear and their entourage, who proceeded to protest live on air. The feature ended and the programme returned to the live studio feed where a nervous looking Terry Christian was being confronted and humiliated by an outspoken and disruptive group of hecklers, including Jo Johnson, Niki Eliot, Chris Rawley, Sally Margaret Joy and Liz Naylor. *The Word* took the programme off the air as the hecklers were forcibly ejected from the studio. The next issue of *MM*, published on 27 February 1993, was dominated by the 'riot' on *The Word*; Sally Margaret Joy produced an exclusive eye-witness report feature and a still from Huggy Bear's performance of 'Herjazz' was featured on the cover. This event was also picked up by tabloid and broadsheet newspapers as demand for coverage about riot grrrl culture intensified. Amelia Fletcher recalled: 'everyone was like what is riot grrrl? [...] it really exploded [...] it was like we knew about it and lots of other people knew about it but it was pretty small, people who watched TV to find out about music and read the papers to find out about music didn't know about it and suddenly it was everywhere'.

Contradictory reports envelop *The Word* incident: some accounts have suggested that unreasonable violence was used by the hecklers against the production staff, whilst other recollections critiqued the demands imposed by production staff who sought to produce an appropriate and predictable audience response for *The Word* by controlling audience behaviour. Riot grrrl participant memories of *The Word* situated the protest action as motivated by a desire for fun, a need for something to happen, a response that was contrived but also spontaneous. However, the protest can also be read as a disruptive strategy that exposed and resisted the contradictory construction of popular youth culture. The protest represented a challenge to the 'controlled pleasures' (Fiske 1990) of adult-produced commercial interpretations of youth culture. Young women and men introduced the spectacle of subversive youth rebellion and feminist outrage to disrupt the safe cultural formula of *The Word*, and so destabilised *The Word's* claims to youth authenticity. The following passages, taken from oral histories, media accounts and journal entries, offer different recollections and representations of *The Word* incident;

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<sup>29</sup> After a lengthy cultural absence Huggy Bear's 'Herjazz' performance on *The Word* has recently been archived by Channel 4 and can be viewed on You Tube <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfP5HNvsWAo>> [accessed 17 September 2009]

I never had a plan, it was at and of the moment exactly everything was in the moment for me [...] of course *The Word* were going to have Huggy Bear on because they were all over the *Melody Maker* and I think unconsciously we all knew we were going to start kicking off in the studio, I think that was weirdly always going to happen and it did and it was excellent. (Liz Naylor)

I didn't know that people were going to make things happen so basically Huggy Bear played their set and they ended and that was it and it was back to the show and basically it wasn't us who had the idea, I think it was Jo and Niki [...] Liz Naylor and Sally Margaret Joy decided between themselves that they would cause a fuss at *The Word* and so they just said to us 'ohh we're going to cause a fuss, stand down the front and protest at the Barbie Girls' and so we did, and they threw us out and they stopped the show, it was like the idea it was all organised

I didn't care about the Barbie twins or whatever, it was just fun to stand at the front of whatever the guy's name is at *The Word* [Terry Christian] and just shriek and scream your head off just because you wanted to disturb *The Word* because it's a live show and you just thought this would be hilarious

And we got thrown out and that was that

And then we took a taxi back to Sally's and watched it (Jen and Tammy Denitto)

'I've just been called a woman-hater, which I'm sure will come as a surprise to my mother, my sister and my girlfriend. If these garbage bands don't want to come on the show, that's fine by me' [...] A spokesman for '*The Word*' commented: 'They were the most ill-behaved guests we ever had on the show. One member of their entourage bit the face of a member of our production team, who had to be treated by the studio nurse. They acted like animals. Huggy Bear are a crap band, and we should never have had them on the show' ('Grizzly Bearrrs!' *MM*, 27 February 1993, p. 3)

It was really brilliant fun when we went along, have you seen the video of that where it's got me shouting in the background and it's got me on stage with them? [...] I think they just wanted more shouting essentially and more anarchy and so I went and shouted as well and then it kind of just got out of hand and it was really really good fun and there were moments when Chris Rawley was standing next to me and my brother shouting insults at Terry Christian and then he'd duck down and then Terry Christian stood up and went who was that and there was just me and my brother and I remember just laughing so much I don't think I've ever laughed that hard actually, but I didn't, even though I laughed very hard and was part of the gang I didn't end up being chucked but they all got chucked out. (Amelia Fletcher)

Friday Feb 12<sup>th</sup>

Huggy Bear on *The Word*. The famous 'riot' occurred, as far as I can remember, when a couple of people heckled an item about porn stars the Barbie Twins, and Sarah from Wiiiija got some hassle from a bouncer. She was ejected and then the rest of us followed her out in disgust. It was not a pleasant place to be, the security people were very heavy-handed. Early on, Tammy had been told to 'smile or get out'. (Andy Roberts 1993, journal entry)

I look around me. Jo from Huggy Bear is watching the monitors and laughing, 'This is complete shit'. A dozen or so girls, some in bands, most not, gather nearby. We make our way to the front where Terry, Henry Rollins and Paula Yates sit around nicely ignoring the item on The Barbi Twins. Terry isn't going to comment on the item. He never does. So Jo asks, 'So Terry, you think all f\*\*\*ing women are shit, do you?' Terry and Henry and Paula flinch. And we start shouting, 'Crap! Crap! Crap! Crap! Crap!' The audience starts

applauding. A bouncer starts shoving at us. Jo is whacked in the face by a security man. Some girls are lifted up and carried away. Strangely none of this is picked up by the cameras, usually so eager to pick up on a controversy. We are told to get out. A girl who's come to the studio on her own follows us to the back of the studio to check we're alright. She is told to get out. She refuses, saying she didn't do anything. She is grabbed and dragged outside. She kicks and scratches people because she doesn't want to be man-handled. On our way out, a friendly female production assistant smiles and says, 'Well done, I'm glad you did that'. Others smile, too. (Sally Margaret Joy 'The Revolution Will Not Be Televised' *MM*, 27 February 1993, p. 36)

The spectacle of Huggy Bear's appearance on *The Word* sparked the interest of the national newspapers which struggled to meet the public demand for information on this new subculture. However, this meant that accounts of riot grrrl were authored by journalists who lacked knowledge and experience of, and personal ties with riot grrrl (sub)culture. This round of coverage became entwined with narrow interpretative repertoires available in the public sphere to conceptualise the politicised (sub)cultural participations of girls and young women. Riot grrrl was undermined as a distasteful subculture that threatened to recruit young British women into an extremist feminist cult. Media discourses effectively disarticulated feminism, to (re)produce a population of civilised young women and girls who would self-discipline themselves back into 'natural' hetero-feminine positions and reject a need for feminist activism.

One common theme in the media representation of riot grrrl involved highlighting the potential for actual physical harm to men and boys: riot grrrl became synonymous with violent girl gangs who indiscriminately terrorised innocent men. Column space was filled with confessions of man-hate and anger, spectacles of threatening girl-gang behaviour and descriptions of physical attacks on men. For instance, writing for the *Independent*, Hester Matthewman characterised *The Word* incident as a direct violent attack on Terry Christian motivated by a deep-seated hatred of men rather than an irreverent protest:

Riot grrrls are here. And they're angrrry. Described by the rock music press as girl-punk revolutionaries, these radical young feminists are not keen on men. ('Man-hating is simply the attitude that most men suck, and they do', according to Jo of the band Huggy Bear.) Riot Grrrl bands have been grabbing media attention recently – Huggy Bear attacked Terry Christian, presenter of the Channel 4's *The Word* (Hester Matthewman, 'Rock Against Men is Music to the Riot Grrrls' Ears' *Independent*, 14 March 1993)

Meanwhile in the *Guardian*, Caroline Sullivan chose to include a rape revenge narrative within her profile of riot grrrl. Sullivan's account stressed how riot grrrl is capable of transforming harmless 'sweet-looking' teenage girls into angry gangs built to inflict violent attacks on men:

Sophie is a sweet-looking 16-year-old. She stands in the University of London Union foyer, selling copies of her homemade fanzine, Pink Surf, to kids filing in for a concert by femi-punks Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill. Words spill from her 'Riot Grrrls have changed my life, put me in touch with girls I'd never

normally meet. It's made us stronger. A friend was raped and a bunch of us girls went after the guy and broke his leg' (Caroline Sullivan, 'Angry Young Women' *Guardian*, 24 March 1993)

In some instances journalists used first-hand eyewitness accounts in which they confronted 'the riot grrrls' head on in order to satirise and ridicule riot grrrl. For example, John Poole, reporting for the *Daily Star*, demonstrated how even a man keen to show his readers that the riot grrrls just needed 'handling by a real man' was reduced to a nervous wreck by the abusive actions and threatening behaviours of these gangs of scruffy 'teenage girl bruisers':

And so a scorching Saturday evening finds me outside the Dome, a premier London rock venue. Headlining bands include Skin Teen and Huggy Bear, but it's the sadistically named Blood Sausage, which makes me quiver. To steady my nerves, I have an ice-cold beer in the bar next door. I start to calm down... until I feel a burning sensation in my back and turn to find 10 pairs of eyes focused on me like laser beams. A gang of teenage girl bruisers has followed me into the pub. A shiver goes down my spine as an incredibly scruffy girl spits: 'Oh no! It's the Daily Star' [...] A ferocious looking bouncer comes to my rescue. Blocking my entrance he says: 'No way, Sonny, you're not coming in'. I gently put forward my point of view, but the words are drowned out by shouts of "F\*\*\* OFF" from the dim depths of the club. While I talk, visions of Huggy Bear's first appearance on late-night TV show *The Word*, flash before my eyes. They start abusing Terry Christian, before starting a mini punch-up. [...] I scurry away in a cab. The chilling screams are ringing in my ears and I'm just thankful I wasn't stripped naked and hung from the nearest lamp-post. (John Poole, 'I Brave the Riot Grrrls', *Daily Star*, 9 July 1993)

Other journalists were keen to attack the credibility of feminist strategies of riot grrrl as incapable of producing any 'real' widespread change in the lives of young women and girls. For instance, Anne Barrowclough pathologised riot grrrl feminism as an irrational hatred and fear of men and struggled to comprehend how the riot grrrl music-making practices could achieve any lasting social change:

They screech, they spit, they snarl, they swear. Every word they scream through the microphone is a prayer against men. When their music stops, you are left with a pounding head, buzzing ear drums and no doubt that Men are The Enemy [...] Riot Grrrls don't like men much. They don't like anything much, except for other women – as long as they're 'enlightened' and don't 'act like their parents' [...] They're angry, anarchic, full of loathing. They call themselves feminists but theirs is a feminism of rage and even fear. At its simplest, their message is that men have held women back in the music industry and subjected them to violence in everyday life. By forming all-girl bands and screaming tunelessly at their audiences, they believe they can change the balance and ensure that women rule OK. What makes them frightening is the virulence of their message. They attempt to instil in young fans a deep loathing of men, based on the fear of violence that most young women have. Their (male) detractors have dubbed them, with reason, 'feminazis'. [...] In many ways their actions contradict what they are trying to achieve. Bikini Kill have an especially revolting modus operandi in which they take off their tops, dance in their bras, and even toss their sanitary towels into the audiences [...] Riot Grrrls is probably little more than a particularly unpleasant phase in the evolution of music. After two years have they really

achieved anything for women? The answer is no. Even their fans are beginning to admit disillusion (Anne Barrowclough, 'Save the World? Not a Hope Grrrls', *Daily Mail*, 27 March 1993)

This inability of tabloid and broadsheet media to comprehend riot grrrl was frustrating for those active in the production of riot grrrl (sub)culture in Britain. In relation to the grip of media power on the public consciousness, riot grrrl participants were disempowered; as Tammy Denitto recalled, 'The idea from the media of what was going on [was a] total misinterpretation because we were at the core, you know we were right in the middle, we knew what was going on but we couldn't tell the whole country what was going on'. Riot grrrl (sub)culture struggled to claim power back from media practices, to enact various (re)negotiations of (sub)cultural boundaries, practices, relationships and disclosures to journalists.

### 3.4.3 *Blackout, Backlash and Bruises: Managing media discourses*

In the US, the negative media representation of riot grrrl in articles in a range of mainstream publications including *USA Today*, *Rolling Stone* and the *Washington Post* (Snead 1992; Spencer 1993; France 1993) was challenged by a media blackout strategy. In an attempt to withhold the power of naming from the media, those invested in riot grrrl (sub)culture were encouraged to sever all communication with the press in order to concentrate on small-scale (sub)cultural production and community, as Kathleen Hanna recalled:

We wanted to stay small because we wanted to develop what we were doing before it was picked apart by the media, our parents and everyone else. We also watched what fame did to some of our close friends, and didn't want to get into drugs or lose each other in the shuffle of attention. We were into youth culture and believed in the power of minutes and moments as much as we believed in books and music. Because of that we were guarded in terms of letting others frame what we were doing. We weren't doing what we were doing to get rich or famous we were doing it cuz it mattered. Would it have helped if we were more media savvy at the time? Maybe, but honestly, I have no regrets about it all. In order to help anyone else, we needed to take care of ourselves first; refusing to be abused and fucked over by journalists was a part of that self care. It sucks that more smart feminist journalists weren't around at the time, but that's hardly our fault. We would've loved to have complicated public dialogues with the media, but as it is, and was, that just isn't possible.

In Britain there was no centralised media blackout strategy, although concerns were raised over controlling media access to riot grrrl (sub)culture. The power imbalances and internal conflicts between riot grrrl participants and music journalists quickly became difficult to manage within riot grrrl (sub)cultural spaces. For instance, Sally Margaret Joy occupied a dual position: Joy was an 'insider' as an instigator of riot grrrl London, but she was also an 'outsider' in terms of her professional position as a music journalist. Other riot grrrl participants also pursued journalistic career paths; however, there was conflict over who was considered an 'acceptable' journalist in riot grrrl circles. For instance, within riot grrrl London Delia recalled her own

discomfort over moves made by Joy to justify her position as a 'different' journalist in contrast to Suzy Corrigan who was framed as a 'careerist' journalist:

There was a meeting with Sally Margaret Joy, I remember one specific meeting and Sally Margaret Joy was there and she was saying we shouldn't talk to journalists and I think I might have said but you're a journalist and she was like but I'm different and I was thinking but that's not fair for one person to say we can't, you can't talk to journalists apart from the ones that are different which is me [...] there was Suzy Corrigan [who] used to write about the bands, at first people really respected her and she was kind of quoted or looked up to and then I really don't know it kind of got switched around and it was like 'oh Suzy Corrigan she's using it for own to further her own career and she's a traitor and she's writing about things she ought not to write about' that was a bit odd whereas all that time she was a good journalist

Huggy Bear continued a conflicted and controversial relationship with the media. Within riot grrrl (sub)cultural circles the band declared their non-cooperation with dominant media requests due to a mistrust over media representation of their actions, music and opinions. Huggy Bear preferred to articulate their ideas within the underground press, in fanzines and record inserts, and sought to distance themselves from personal relationships with media professionals. However, oral histories revealed the continuation of a relationship between Huggy Bear and the media. Members of Huggy Bear negotiated beneficial contact with media professionals whilst under the guise of a media blackout, as Jon Slade confessed:

Let me tell you we did talk to the press, but we believed ourselves that we weren't talking to the press even though we had a meeting with Steven Wells and talked to him and then be like but you can't quote us directly but just write an article and say this is what we think, I don't know why we would do that [...] It seemed pretty cool because even though we did talk to the press everyone thought that we didn't, it's excellent, like 'wow they're so cool, don't talk to anyone', [...] and that tour with Bikini Kill in March 1993 Sally came along for the ride, Sally Margaret Joy, and Bikini Kill didn't really talk to the press that was it for them, but Sally was allowed to hang out and everyone talked to her Bikini Kill, Kathleen, Tobi, me, Jo and Chris we all talked to her she was our friend, again we're not going to do an interview but you can hang out, she hung out for days and days and we got to stay in her hotel, it was excellent, took us out for dinner, pretty good, we were wined and dined.

In other areas of the country media interference was less of an issue, and riot grrrl was relatively un-interrupted as localised small-scale (sub)cultural productions. For instance, Sarah Bag reflected on a moment in which riot grrrl Leeds-Bradford received communication from riot grrrl London that proposed a national media blackout. This request seemed incompatible with northern riot grrrl (sub)cultural life as riot grrrl activities outside of London tended to be disregarded by the music press: 'Something came from London saying don't speak to the media which we thought was kind of funny because they didn't want to speak to us anyway [...] I don't think they were interested in anyone who wasn't from London particularly I think it was that music journalist kind of London-centric thing'. Nonetheless northern riot grrrl gangs did attract

the interest of other media professionals, but these interactions tended to be framed by dominant media narratives of riot grrrl as violent, anti-men and aggressive. Sarah Bag remembered an incident in which riot grrrl Leeds-Bradford were approached by a journalist interested in featuring riot grrrl within a documentary of girl gang street violence:

We had a journalist asking about riot grrrl gangs as if it were like street gangs, and I was like 'no we just sit around and talk about peoples' experiences and then how we're going to get bands together and do gigs and stuff and she was 'so you don't go out fighting then?' No no more or less sitting around drinking cups of tea and beer. She was very disappointed [...] she was making some sort of documentary on what I suppose now has become ladettes [...] she wanted to find girl gangs that were out looking for other girl gangs to get in fights with and she was hoping that riot grrrl would be these kind of girl gangs as in fight gangs and she was quite disappointed and I was quite disturbed by it.

The media coverage shaped riot grrrl (sub)cultural practices. The inclusion of contact addresses within national coverage granted young people with an access point into riot grrrl (sub)culture. Riot grrrl gangs received hundreds of letters from young women and girls. Sarah Bag reflected on the response received shortly after a contact address for riot grrrl Leeds-Bradford was included in the *NME*: 'it did make a lot of younger girls aware because once, I think we got our address printed somewhere I think it might have been in the *NME* they did an article and we wrote a press release and sent it down and they didn't print any of it, but they put our contact address in and then we got back loads of letters, I think about forty or fifty in the next week'. Central organisational figures of riot grrrl (sub)culture emphasised the arduous and time-consuming task of writing back to each person who enquired about riot grrrl. Over time the topic of letters became formulaic as public discourses of riot grrrl led to widespread reluctance amongst young people to independently claim riot grrrl as a set of fluid and contested politicised (sub)cultural actions, as Jen Denitto of the riot grrrl London BM Nancee PO Box explained:

Basically just writing back to people who wrote to us so every time we got a fanzine or a letter we would write back [...] we definitely did a lot of that [...] there weren't that many people who would actually write back in the context of riot grrrl as far as I know [...] most people in England for some reason felt like that they had to have permission to be a riot grrrl whereas Bikini Kill or Huggy Bear or somebody even said you know even in that fanzine I think it says if you think you are a riot grrrl then you are one [...] So most people didn't take that idea and push it along themselves so we spent a lot of time writing back to people with that idea.

Members of Huggy Bear also received letters from young people desperate to attain riot grrrl (sub)cultural belonging. Music-press coverage led the general public to assume the existence of an organised riot grrrl (sub)culture across Britain as opposed to an unstable, small-scale and emergent (sub)culture. Jon Slade reflected on how the absence of a coherent riot grrrl (sub)culture produced a sense of mythology, excitement and ambiguity that propelled a search for riot grrrl (sub)cultural life:

We got a lot of mail there [Everett's home address] and loads of mail to Wiiija records and Rough Trade and everyone wanted to know, what is a riot grrrl? How do I be one? How do I? Where are the meetings? I don't fucking know. There was no organisation, it didn't exist at all, it just didn't, it existed in Everett and Sally's head and some kind of fantasy that we had which existed somewhere else in a different country, we didn't know. But that was exciting as well, that was a good thing I think because everybody wanted to know, we couldn't tell them anything and it seemed very mysterious and incredibly exciting, everyone wanted to find the riot grrrls or be a riot grrrl.

However this absence of riot grrrl (sub)cultural infrastructure also acted as an effective strategy for critics seeking to undermine riot grrrl (sub)culture as a contrived press invention: a fake scene produced by a small elite of music journalists and careerist individuals and bands. Riot grrrl (sub)culture was merely emerging during the height of its publicity; therefore, the inability to answer formulaic requests for evidence and examples of British riot grrrl (sub)culture bolstered accusations of inauthenticity, as Jo Johnson argued:

The most effective of the many ways riot grrrl was undermined was to continually ask us – and other girls who were involved, or were seen to be knowledgeable on the subject because they were female musicians – where is this network? Where are the bands? Are you a riot grrrl? So even before girls had the chance to get into the idea and make efforts to approach girls in some way – ways they weren't sure of – the whole thing became production proof. And if the proof wasn't there it was as if it didn't really exist. But there were thousands of girls inspired by the notion of punk rock feminism; a lot of them were young and were just learning to express themselves, just coming to feminism. How were they going to initiate an entire network of zines and bands overnight? (cited in Raphael 1995, p. 165)

Authenticity became a crucial feature of the backlash that developed against riot grrrl in the music press. After the initial burst of positive coverage, the next stage of periodisation followed: 'a point which often depends on imperatives appearing elsewhere in the industry-audience circuit, the order is perceived as unstable. Now journalists move quickly to initiate collapse, by roundly condemning previously paradigmatic artists/texts, and at the same time disciplining recalcitrant readers who cleave to the old order' (Toynbee 1993, p. 297). The music press played a regulatory role: readers were encouraged to identify with the editorial position and collectively (re)produce a discriminating indie taste community. Reader letters, reviews and editorial viewpoints engaged in a struggle over the ridicule, disgust and defence of riot grrrl as a contrived, pseudo-political and dire music movement. The discipline of indie music tastes may not have been as calculated or mechanised as Toynbee suggests, but it was highly dependent on the resources of music journalism. In particular, the growing demands and pressures for more writers to document riot grrrl led to the introduction of 'outsider' perspectives to evaluate riot grrrl culture as Everett True explained to me:

Look, this is what happens at the music press, the whole legendary 'build 'em up, knock 'em down' syndrome. It doesn't actually exist, or rather it does – but it's not as premeditated as that. What happens is this...

New band (or movement) appears.

Its handful of champions ardently and enthusiastically bring it to the outside world's attention. All the initial articles about said band or movement are written by these folk.

Time goes by. Either new band or movement tamely disappears back into the mire from whence it came, or it becomes more popular – and hence editors need other people to write about it. These aren't going to be the band or movement's enthusiastic early champions: these are going to be the cynics, the critics, the ones barely bothered by music at all...those with different taste. So negative reviews start appearing...

And so on.

However, riot grrrl was not simply a new music movement but a politicised girl-centred music (sub)culture and subsequent criticism of riot grrrl was marked by gendered and anti-feminist discourses. The social construction of indie music culture as a masculinist realm that aimed to satisfy a predominantly male readership meant that music weeklies were prime sites for the regulation of the 'indie public' (White 2006). Within this context young women and girls are constructed as exhibiting erroneous kinds of fanhood, being interested in the wrong (pop) musics for improper (extra-musical) reasons (Davies 2004; White 2006). Music journalists discredited the challenges proposed by riot grrrl by attacking criteria essential for the acceptance of musicians and music movements in cultural industries: authenticity and credibility. These standards, discursively (re)produced by the music press, work to exclude women, especially feminist women, from being accepted within rock and indie music cultures as serious audiences and performers (Davies 2004; Kruse 2002; McLeod 2002; White 2006). The letter and review pages inhabited by the 'knowing community' of readers and journalists at the *NME* and *MM* observed an amplification of arguments that undermined performers, ideas and audiences of riot grrrl (sub)culture as inauthentic. Riot grrrl was critiqued as (i) a contrived media-savvy elite of (ii) inept and untalented musicians, who (iii) used sex and gender as a gimmick, and (iv) conveyed a confused and misguided sense of politics, that resulted from (v) being uneducated, childish and naive.

Critics concentrated on the lack of evidence of a widespread riot grrrl music (sub)culture in Britain, therefore to support the argument that riot grrrl was a mere product of media hype entwined with the dubious personal political and musical interests of Everett True (often ignoring the fact that the majority of riot grrrl features were authored by Sally Margaret Joy). *MM* readers became incensed by the amount of riot grrrl coverage which undermined the credibility of music publications, as the following statement from *MM* reader Bevis Jones illustrates:

It has really saddened me recently to see all this fuss and hype over what is basically a right on press man's invention. I am talking of course, about this Riot Grrrl revolution that has hit our shores [...] Where is it, ET? While I

would not cut down any such revolution if it was a genuine force for change, I'm afraid that all this Riot Grrrl talk is merely hype [...] Thanks to you ET, the music industry and especially my precious Maker, has become a vehicle for right-on crap music bollocks that pushes aside any other form of new music that does not conform to your revolutionary agenda [...] You are killing music, just as Stalin killed communism (Letter to Editor, *MM*, 16 January 1993)

Despite a general acceptance of the political role of music in British culture, discussions on riot grrrl politics reproduce conventional conceptions of what constituted 'legitimate' political activism to dismiss the political challenges of riot grrrl. Reliance upon a contentious politics model stereotyped authentic political activism as organised direct action against institutional political targets. Within this framework the cultural activist strategies of riot grrrl became an easy target for criticism. Riot grrrl (sub)cultural participations were described as 'encouraging more girls to pick up guitars', 'grubby little fanzines' and 'reecaally good music'; thereby reduced to a range of uneducated tactics incapable of conducting large-scale challenges to dominant structural and institutional powers. The following extracts from *MM* reader Ian J Goodchild and music journalist Sarra Manning demonstrate this critical tendency:

Riot Grrrls, eh? What a concept! I wish I could join your club, 'cause I just know that 'encouraging more girls to pick up guitars' is really going to make the world a better place. Yup, by the time the old Riot Grrrl movement gets going, it'll have abolished the Tory government, destroyed our patriarchal society, and created some reecaally good music as well. Wise up suckers, you're flogging a dead horse (Ian J. Goodchild, letter to Editor, *MM*, 14 November 1992)

Show me three ways in which Riot Grrrl has come any closer to overthrowing the dominant ideology – patriarchy. The best thing that any riot grrrl could do is go away and do some reading, and I don't mean a grubby little fanzine[...] your Skinned Teens and your Huggy Bears and yeah, the whole damn lot of you are as rigid and formulaic as the boy noise that you so right(eous)ly criticise (Sarra Manning, 'Viewpoint', *MM*, 29 January 1994)

The rejection of riot grrrl by self-identified female journalists and readers was often an effective means by which riot grrrl could be undermined. If even the potential beneficiaries of riot grrrl expressed shame and anger, riot grrrl demands on the 'indie public' could be shown to be unnecessary and unwanted. For instance, *MM* reader Justine offered a scathing attack on riot grrrl that focuses on Huggy Bear's unfair manipulation of gender in order to gain undeserved publicity, an opinion legitimated by music journalist Cathi Unsworth:

YOU'VE made me so angry. A cover and three sides of complete wank dedicated to a group of so-called 'Grrrls' who have got absolutely f\*\*\* all to say. After reading about them and seeing them live, they've made me ashamed to be female, using their sex to manipulate the ways others react to them [...] you're an attention-seeking collection of spoilt brats who can't play music for toffee and who are milking the media for every scrap of publicity you can get (Justine, letter to Editor, *MM*, 13 March 1993)

To quote Johnny Rotten (who should know) – ever had the feeling you've been cheated? Certainly seems so. Like Rosie and Justine I too am fed up with

my sex being used as a tool in an absurdly cloudy political debate. Preaching is pompous, alienating and one-dimensional, on whatever scale (Cathi Unsworth, 'Viewpoint', *MM*, 13 March 1993)

The music press could also resist riot grrrl demands, retain a liberal reputation, and mask its role in the (re)production of gender power relations by accusing riot grrrl of being responsible for causing gender inequalities in indie music culture. *NME* editor Steve Sutherland proposed that Huggy Bear, as corrupt copy-cats of an authentic US riot grrrl (sub)culture, were to blame for the discrimination now experienced by women musicians:

Huggy Bear appear to have hi-jacked a movement that actually meant something on a grassroots level in America [...] and have used it as a gimmick to further their own ends. I have no idea how it must feel to be female in a band playing in Britain right now but I bet it stinks [...] thanks to Huggy Bear claiming a problem existed, it does exist and girls, whether of the Riot variety or not, are being put on the spot and forced to take a stance (Steve Sutherland, 'Viewpoint', *NME*, 24 April 1993)

Another damning critique mobilised within the music press attacked the attitude and aesthetics of riot grrrl musics. The politicised amateur music-making practices of girls and young women were ridiculed as childlike, incompetent and trivial. The music-making practices of riot grrrl that sought to disrupt and ridicule masculine entitlements, privileges and authority were simplistically interpreted as a damaging redeployment of essentialist gender discourses of women's inability to create 'great', serious and important music, as *MM* reader Neil Jordan and guest letters editor Courtney Love demonstrate:

Huggy Bear's attitude was not in the least anarchic or threatening, merely childish and laughable. As for their music – sorry, but it is completely lacking in any depth or maturity (Neil Jordan, letter to Editor, *MM*, 13 March 1993)

"Riot Grrrl" celebrates the anarchy, but also the clumsiness and incompetence of femme musicians [...] GIRL is not menstruating, GIRL is non-orgasmic, GIRL is naive, cute, bratty, unthreatening in her clumsiness and incompetence. (Courtney Love, 'Viewpoint', *MM*, 3 April 1993)

The fans and individuals invested in riot grrrl (sub)culture also became targets of ridicule as the 'indie public' sought to discipline its members to take up rational, intelligent and authentic modes of music appreciation. For example, in a letter to the *NME*, Derek Renny sets up a stereotype of the typical riot grrrl fan: 'those who do not have the intelligence or ability to scratch beneath the veneer of self-instigated hype or image-mongering that these bands have' (20 March 1993). Furthermore, in a review of a Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill gig, music journalist Gina Morris takes time to ridicule a male riot grrrl fan by effectively feminising his appearance and behaviour:

Martin is a 19-year-old student from Sheffield. Across his forehead, scrawled in black eyeliner, is the word BITCH. He's heavily made-up, and his clothes and skin are covered in slogans. Mention Manic Street Preachers and he screams. Martin is a self-professed exhibitionist, exactly the kind of person

you don't want to find at this sort of gig (Gina Morris, 'Grrrls Just Wanna Bait Scum...' *NME*, 20 March 1993, p. 11)

Therefore hegemonic gender discourses were (re)produced within riot grrrl music criticism. This meant that the threat that riot grrrl presented to the gender order of indie music culture could be contained and defused. If a reader was still in any doubt of the limitations of riot grrrl in Britain, the publication of reader opinions such as 'The Black Crow King' reduced the (sub)cultural resistance of girls and young women to a passing phase in their 'natural' development of a reproductive hetero-feminine identity:

Regarding the current debate concerning Riot Grrrls and Huggy Bear etc. What is all the fuss about? Just let the lasses get it all out of their collective system before they settle down and start having babies – which, to be honest now, is what you all really want, ain't it grrrls? ('The Black Crow King', letter to Editor, *NME*, 24 April 1993)

To summarise, in Britain the discursive practices of the media industries produced public accounts of riot grrrl that could not represent the (sub)cultural resistance of girls and young women. The conflicted relationship between the media and riot grrrl (sub)culture can be characterised as a struggle for cultural citizenship (Stevenson 2003). Riot grrrl sought to interrupt the social construction of gendered norms in music culture and wider society, whilst the media, as a key 'signalling device' (Habermas 1996), (re)constructed riot grrrl as a social problem in order to undermine gains in power experienced by young women and girls in 1990s Britain. Riot grrrl (sub)cultural resistance enabled girls and young women to command public space, claim cultural authority and explore feminism in the fabric of their everyday lives. Therefore, the threat riot grrrl represented to a hegemonic gender regime was minimised in the deployment of media discourses that equated riot grrrl with violence, man-hate and a distasteful music (sub)culture. These discourses attempted to discourage young women and girls' self-exploration of riot grrrl and discipline girls into their 'natural' social positions of hetero-femininities: the domestic, the consumer and the conformist. The overlapping relationships between music journalists and riot grrrl (sub)cultural participants meant that in Britain, particularly in London, riot grrrl (sub)cultural life became entwined with music-press practices. This created a complex struggle over who had the power to define riot grrrl (sub)culture in the public sphere and an inconsistent media blackout strategy was employed which caused widespread social tension within riot grrrl communities. The media coverage also shaped riot grrrl (sub)cultural activities as published contact addresses attracted hundreds of letters from girls and young women. Nonetheless the monotony of formulaic written requests for acknowledgement of riot grrrl identity and belonging, shaped by the discursive practices of the media, frustrated riot grrrl organisers who emphasised riot grrrl as (sub)cultural participation not a fixed identity category. Furthermore, despite acting as early champions of riot grrrl, the demand for more information about riot grrrl led to the influx of journalists with little knowledge

or contact with the riot grrrl community to evaluate riot grrrl (sub)culture. The ensuing backlash and regulation of the indie music taste community remobilised gendered discourses to in-authenticate riot grrrl demands for change to the dominant gender order of indie music culture.

### ***3.5 Forging queer girl activism: Noise and emotion in the production of riot grrrl***

To elaborate on the importance of music participation in British riot grrrl (sub)cultural resistance this section develops an in-depth discussion of the experiences of music participation in riot grrrl spaces and sounds. I also highlight the pivotal role of emotion in riot grrrl musics, in the production of a set of contested practices that interrupt the social construction of masculinities in indie music culture and produce possibilities for pro-girl (sub)cultural communities. These arguments are based on recollections of the Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear joint UK tour in March and April 1993, which emerged as critical memories in the constitution of British riot grrrl (sub)cultural life. However in order to interrogate these recollections and experiences the current relationships between feminism, music, emotion and activist communities need to be explored in relation to existing research.

Patriarchal associations between women, the body and emotion have been well discussed within feminist theory (see Gorton 2007; Probyn 2005). Dissatisfied with perspectives that devalued the role of emotion in explanations of social life, feminist scholars began to explore the social and cultural constitution of emotion within society. For instance, in *The Managed Heart*, Arlie Hochschild (1983) proposed the concept of 'feeling rules' to refer to the social norms that shape our emotions in a given situation. In the context of gender inequality, maintained, in part, by discourses that (re)circulate dominant ideals of women as nurturers and associate femininity with irrationality, Erika Summers-Effler (2002) argued that women, as a marginalised group, engage in more emotional labour to negotiate a misfit between feeling rules and experienced emotions. Furthermore, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed (2004) develops a comprehensive understanding of emotion as a set of social and cultural practices. Ahmed evokes the idea of 'affective economies' to emphasise the sociality of emotion: 'emotions are not simply something 'I' and 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces and boundaries are made: the "I" and the "we" are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others' (2004, p. 10). This perspective is deeply concerned with how emotion and power interact in our everyday lives to shape our relationships to social worlds and bodies. Furthermore, Ahmed is hopeful about a potential to 'feel our way' towards new emancipatory ways of being, feeling, and doing (2004, p. 12). A good example of how dominant emotion rules can be broken within feminist activism can be seen in Verta Taylor's (1995) application of Hochschild's concept of 'emotion cultures'. Taylor argued that feminist groups provided communal resources to resist the demands for the emotional labour of women within

patriarchal society. Feminist activist communities could transform these subjugated emotions into ones conducive to protest, within feminist groups. Dominant 'feeling rules' could be reworked to effectively enable women to construct counter-hegemonic identities and behaviours. Furthermore, an 'ethic of care' was created in order to 'promote organisational structures and strategies consistent with female bonding' (Taylor 1995, p. 229), or in riot grrrl terms, an ethos of 'girl love' was encouraged.

Critical perspectives on emotion have permeated scholarship on social movements and protest. Earlier models of social movement theory have tended to delineate social movements in terms of material interests, social stratification, state-orientated political concessions and sets of cognitive and rational processes (see Goodwin & Jasper 1999). However, more recently, emotion has been recognised as 'clearly important in the growth and unfolding of social movements and protest' (Goodwin et al 2001, p. 16). This 'emotional turn' highlights the importance of emotion to the realisation of a collective identity and the diverse role that emotion can play in activists' lives, for instance in the constitution of identities, pleasure and formation of erotic and social bonds (Polletta & Jasper 2001). In particular, social movement theorists have argued that the more culturally 'rich' a social movement is, in terms of offering shared values, songs, stories and rituals in its everyday movement culture, the more pleasure is derived by its participants (Lofland 1996; Staggenborg 2001). Therefore culture, including music, can act as a critical factor to ensure the long-term life of a social movement.

Studies of 'women's music' culture have explored how experiences of feminist sounds and festival spaces can evoke women's consciousness and confidence for future engagements in feminist activisms (Staggenborg et al 1995; Love 2002; Staggenborg 2001). Furthermore, Ann Savage (2003) argued that listeners of women's music experienced 'moments of articulation' in which emotional engagements with music transformed women's lives personally, culturally and politically. In *An Archive of Feeling* Ann Cvetkovich (2003) binds politics and emotions in the cultural activisms of bands Le Tigre and Tribe 8 and the lesbian public cultures that surround them. Her exploration of (sub)cultural discourses of trauma and recovery allows her to theorise about grassroots archives as offering 'ways of thinking about trauma that do not pathologise it, that seize control over it from the medical experts, and that forge creative responses to it that far outstrip even the most utopian of theoretical and political solutions' (2003, p. 3). Therefore grassroots music-makers and the counterpublics that surround them offer critical resources for the articulation of counter-hegemonic ways of being and creative modes of resisting.

But how can music operate as such an emotionally powerful medium to shape queer girl space, identities, bodies, and politics? Despite a widespread acknowledgement of music's emotive effects and involvement in political movements there has been little scholarship that links emotion and grassroots music in contemporary feminist movements (see Garofalo 1992;

Eyerman & Jamison 1998). However, Susan J. Smith asserts that music is 'a performance of power (enacted by music-makers and listeners) that is creative: that brings spaces, peoples, places "into form"' (2000, p. 618). Similarly Martin Stokes argues that music 'evokes and organises collective memories and presents experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity' (1994, p. 3). Music performances can therefore be thought of as a set of social relations whose practices create and shape emotional spaces of belonging. Ethnomusicologist Christopher Small (1997, 1998) flags up the need to understand how taking part in a music performance, what he terms 'musicking', induces powerful emotional responses for certain social groups and fulfils individual, social and political desires. For Small, music participation enables a community to will a set of relationships into being which do not model the way the world is, but the ways in which a particular community would want the world to be. Musics and music (sub)cultures can therefore be understood as crucial resources to articulate and affirm different ways of being in the world: 'different groups within society pattern their musicking in different ways in order to generate different sets of relationships which model their ideal' (Small 1997, p. 9). Music participation offers the potential to construct a radical imaginary to resist, rework and reorder dominant feminisms, genders and sexualities. For instance, one ethnographic study of lesbian and gay choirs in Manchester reinforced the key role of grassroots music-making in queer place-making - the process in which a space is ascribed meaning to become a place for the expression of queer sexualities (Miyake 2008).

Small's concept of 'musicking' – albeit in gendered terms – argues for a democratisation of music as a diverse social participatory action that requires multiple roles:

To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance. That means not only to perform, but also to listen, to provide material for performance – what we call composing – to prepare for a performance – what we call rehearsing or practising – or any other activity connected with the performance of music. We should certainly include dancing, should anyone be dancing, and we might even stretch the meaning on occasion to include what the lady is doing who takes the tickets on the door, or the hefty men who shift the piano around, or the roadies who set up the instruments and carry out the soundchecks, since their activities affect the nature of the event which is a musical performance. (1997 p. 2-3)

This connects to research that has focused on 'ordinary' music participation whether in localised music-making, attendance at music festivals, as a fan of a specific music community or the use of music to accompany everyday activities (Finnegan 1989; Cohen 1991; Pitts 2005; Cavicchi 1998; Savage 2003; DeNora 1999, 2000). This body of work emphasises how participation in musical worlds shapes an important sense of personal and communal identity. Music participation – as a listener, performer or fan – offers a rich resource for the articulation of personal affect, social identities and communities. Emotions can be formed within the diverse ways that people come into contact with music in their everyday lives: as private listeners,

participants in gig and festival spaces, dancing at clubs, karaoke parties, aerobics classes, or as performers and amateur music-makers and so on. Involvement in music can be used to manage emotional states (DeNora 2000; Cavicchi 1998); negotiate intimate and personal lives (DeNora 2002); mark the passing of time, aid memory, and construct biographies (Cavicchi 1998; Leonard 2005); provide a sense of status or escape from mundane life (Pitts 2005; Cohen 1991); distinguish space and place (Stokes 1994; Cohen 1995); map life-courses (Cavicchi 1998); construct fan communities (Cavicchi 1998; Pitts 2005) and deal with challenging problems and issues (Cvetkovich 2003; Cavicchi 1998; Savage 2003). In short, music participation offers a powerful process of meaning making for its participants to make sense of their identities, experiences and worlds.

Drawing on the work of Jacques Attali, Smith describes how music can be understood to occupy a position 'between the myth of silence and the threat of noise' (2000, p. 616). This is an unstable and contested position which (re)defines which sounds are valued as music and which sounds are othered as noise. Therefore, instead of understanding value as inherent to the essential quality of particular sounds, critical musicologists have argued for the recognition of the social and cultural contingency of musical value (Leppert & McClary 1987; McClary 1991; Clayton et al 2003; Scott 2000). Feminists working in musicology have explored how the sounds and sound cultures associated with 'other' bodies (feminine, queer and non-white) are marginalised by white western masculinist frameworks and values that operate within culturally privileged sites of knowledge production (McClary 1991; Cook & Tsou 1994; Citron 1994; Dunn & Jones 1994; Cusick 1999a). Noise is considered threatening, an issue for social control - 'it is necessary to ban subversive noise because it betokens demands for cultural autonomy, support for differences and marginality' (Attali 1985, p. 7). Marginal musics can act as sites for the transformation of society: 'all music, any organisation of sounds is then a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community [...] equivalent to the articulation of a space, it indicates the limits of a territory and the way to make oneself heard within it' (Attali 1985, p. 6). This means that the realisation of music and music (sub)culture can offer subversive feminist potential as 'the act of appropriating and controlling noise (the act of making sounds into music, through composition, performance, and/or listening practices) is, in short, an expression of power' (Smith 2000, p. 616).

Therefore, the construction of riot grrrl musics and music (sub)cultures can enable young people to co-create emotionally charged music counterpublics in which girls could claim cultural authority and contest hegemonic gender power relations in (sub)cultural life and wider society. Young people could 'feel their way' to other ways of being seen and heard in riot grrrl music (sub)culture and British society. Riot grrrl musics facilitated young women and girls' production of public spectacles of anger, an emotion considered to be particularly socially dangerous, threatening and intolerable for women to display (Gibbs 2001). Riot grrrl sounds created new

politicised spaces and identities and conjured new experiences of bodies, genders, sexualities and feminisms. I now want to trace how music, emotion and power threaded through the experiences of riot grrrl musics and music (sub)cultural life in the memories of oral history participants.

### 3.6 'Do You Believe in the Power of Now?':<sup>30</sup> *Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear UK Tour*

The joint tour of Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill was organised by Liz Naylor with the assistance of Noel Kilbride, who Naylor was put in touch with by Paul Smith – Naylor's key Blast First indie music-industry contact, friend and mentor. Two other 'riot grrrl' tours also took place later in 1993 organised by Amelia Fletcher: Heavenly and Lois, Bratmobile and Huggy Bear. However, I chose to focus on the Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear tour that took place in March and April 1993, as it emerged as a key memorable moment in the majority of oral history narratives. Furthermore, instead of focussing on just one particular geographical area, the tour managed to create sonic sites of riot grrrl culture across the breadth of the UK. The tour was accompanied by a rise in national daily tabloid and broadsheet press interest in riot grrrl, which followed the appearance of Huggy Bear on *The Word* the previous month, discussed above. Largely as a result of this media coverage, Huggy Bear became a high-profile band in Britain whilst Bikini Kill, on their first trip to the UK, remained relatively unknown. The tour was accompanied by the release of a split Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill LP by Liz Naylor's newly formed Catcall record label on International Women's Day, 8 March 1993. This mainstream visibility of Huggy Bear and riot grrrl in Britain attracted the attendance of many girls, young women and men across the country eager to experience a riot grrrl space: the tour was well attended and the majority of the gigs sold out. The tour offered crucial sonic spaces and emotional moments for the introduction of strategies to resist and reorder power relations within British music (sub)culture.

Memories of performing in and occupying these spaces highlighted the intense emotional spectacles that riot grrrl created. For instance, in his reflections of the tour Jon Slade recalled that: 'Some of the shows were very good, Niki especially because she was at the front singing [...] I only watched her from the side but I imagine must have been excellent [...] it's quite entertaining to see that kind of spectacle'. In riot grrrl the sonic articulations of 'outlaw emotions' opened up the possibilities for powerful collective identificatory moments (see Collins 2001; Goodwin et al 2001, p. 9). In feminist history personal testimonies of pain, discrimination, anger and violence have been crucial to the formation of feminist subjects and collectives (Ahmed 2004, chapter 8). However, instead of replicating the verbal, intellectual and confessional strategies of feminist consciousness-raising groups, music enabled critical

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<sup>30</sup> Reported by Lucy Thane as the opening comment made by Kathleen Hanna at the University of Sheffield Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear gig, 5 March 1993

identifications to be made with testimonies of anger, pain and silence in different ways. The sonic spectrums of riot grrrl engaged participants' bodies producing transformative emotional experiences:

I think there's something much more exciting when [Kathleen Hanna] was just talking between the songs and then singing these songs and [it] was just [this] whole complete expression of pain and what I found really amazing was [that] this expressing [of] pain created this incredibly, peaceful atmosphere. It didn't create an atmosphere of violence, but it didn't deny it either, it was like something in that acknowledgement of things that almost everyone in that room can relate to was just so like, almost spiritual I remember, I can't quite locate what made the memory, not what made the thought, but I had such a strong thought of I can hear discord in the electric guitar and the sounds and the shouting but at this other level there's silence like it was just beautiful, do you know what I mean, there was that thing you get in all music and it could be in all art or nature where you're just in your body you're in the moment and it's just right, it's like it's a, it's a clarity and a kind of fusion and an honesty and beauty like I suppose it's the spirit, it is literally the spirit because it's that absolute spirit of life (Lucy Thane)

Emotional and embodied engagements within riot grrrl spaces and sounds revealed possibilities for the production of politicised communities of (sub)cultural resistance. The potential of musics and music (sub)cultures in the revitalisation of feminist activisms for young women and girls was a conscious intention of riot grrrl performers, as Kathleen Hanna detailed:

I like that music engages people's bodies and can be simultaneously intellectually and physically stimulating. I also like that concerts create an immediate sense of community. I've found that the only way change occurs is if we taste it for moments and then seek to make it a part of our every day. I guess that's one reason I like working in the performing arts, to be able to create community instantly while exploring the power of the moment to go from horrible to glorious and back again depending on the performance, locale and will of the crowd.

To support Hanna's account several girls and young women pinpointed Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear gigs and musics as integral to the activation of their riot grrrl (sub)cultural participation. For Layla Gibbon music was the most important factor in activating her riot grrrl participation: 'Music was the reason I got into riot grrrl, I would not have been interested if it had been a subculture just based on zines and meetings'. Riot grrrl gigs were crucial transformative sites for riot grrrl participations, as Jen Denitto recalled: 'the big sort of facilitators, conduits, would have been gigs where Bikini Kill played or when Huggy Bear played [...] that Bikini Kill tour was probably one of the bigger events that would have promoted the idea'. Even those who classed themselves more as spectators rather than participants of riot grrrl reported long-lasting emotional impacts based on their occupation of riot grrrl (sub)cultural sites. For instance, Lianne Hall argued that riot grrrl 'just opened my eyes [...] seeing what amazing things people create in that sort of atmosphere and spirit of DIY and it just really hit home [...] it was so exciting it was like nothing like that had happened before, it was really amazing, that feeling of "oh wow I've

been waiting for this all my life”’. Therefore in contrast to media constructions of riot grrrl, as associated with anger, aggression and violence, oral history accounts of riot grrrl gigs were described as positive, hopeful and fun sites. Riot grrrl spaces were packed with young women and girls, and many oral history accounts emphasised the energy, innocence and excitement of predominantly youthful audiences:

I wasn't [angry] when I was involved in riot grrrl, riot grrrl was really positive, really positive and damn good fun in a non-drinking, non-smoking kind of way. I was so innocent and that's also what's really nice because everyone was very young and it was such an innocent time and you really did just have fun and you didn't realise how much fun it was to just have fun, which again is a revolutionary realisation (Bidisha)

### 3.7 'This is fucking revolution':<sup>31</sup> Resisting British indie hegemony

The music-industry links Liz Naylor had at her disposal to organise the tour led the majority of gigs to be situated in relatively conventional indie music venues organised by 'professional' promoters - licensed bars and clubs including Sheffield University, the Boardwalk in Manchester, TJ's in Newport and the Cathouse in Glasgow. However, a handful of gigs were organised by riot grrrl (sub)cultural participants themselves in quasi-autonomous spaces. For instance riot grrrl Leeds-Bradford organised gigs at the 1in12 club in Bradford and The Duchess pub in Leeds. Nonetheless riot grrrl challenged and interrupted the hegemonic social order and taken-for-granted rules at work within conventional venues in indie music culture.

In *Empire of Dirt: The Aesthetics and Rituals of British Indie Music*, Wendy Fonarow describes the typical gig as 'indie's preeminent participatory event. The gig converts the indie community from one of discourse to one of interaction [...] The gig, occurring regularly and bringing together large numbers of indie fans, is the key event for face-to-face interaction' (2006, p. 79). Due to the reliance of British indie music culture on utilising space within licensed venues with age (18+) and late-time constraints (11pm finish), however, such gigs often excluded the participation of young people. In particular, as girls experience greater restrictions on their leisure time; poor finances, restricted mobility, domestic duties and parental expectations further curtail girls' ability to attend gigs (see Bayton 1998). The spatial organisation of the indie gig tends to be structured around the consolidation of indie masculinities. For instance, live music performance at the indie gig is a key site for the performance of authenticity: a chance for fans to assess whether a band can 'really play' or not (see Thornton 1990). Indie gigs are also dependent on particular spatial and aural distinctions being made between the performer and audience; the band is elevated on a lit stage and amplified, to command the sonic dimensions of the gig space, whereas the audience is excluded from the stage and observes the performers from the floor. Typically little interaction occurs between audience members and performers before and after

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<sup>31</sup> Liz Naylor, oral history

live bands sets, as the audience tends to congregate in small friendship groups and performers retreat to a backstage area. During live band performances the spatial organisation of the audience privileges 'the mosh pit', a densely populated area located immediately in front of the stage, in which audience members engage in physical and forceful dancing known as 'slam-dancing' or 'moshing' and occasional 'crowdsurfing' and 'stagediving' (see Fonarow 2006, p. 79-121; Tsitsos 1999).

Researchers have found that this typical gig space is highly gendered. The 'mosh-pit' is vital to the social production of gender in gig spaces. Studies have explored how men tend to dominate the pit and engage in homosocial strategies of moshing and stagediving that effectively marginalise the full participation of women through fear of physical and/or sexual assault (Krenske & McKay 2000; Roman 1988). A couple of strategies have been observed in which young women negotiate access to the pit - the creation of 'safe pockets' in which girls collectively assert space at the periphery of the pit (Roman 1988), and the identification and full immersion in masculinist ideologies of toughness to enable participation as 'one of the boys' (Krenske & McKay 2000; Leblanc 1999). However, women involved in alternative music scenes have highlighted their lack of bodily confidence in their decisions not to participate in moshing practices (Krenske & McKay 2000).

The spatial hegemony of indie gigs in Britain, as described by Fonarow (2006), tends to restrict the participation of girls and young women. Gigs frequently take place in the evening within licensed venues of major cities throughout the week. These locations curtail the participation of girls who have to negotiate their gig attendance with age restrictions, lack of transport, educational and domestic responsibilities. The corporeal practices of slam dancing, moshing and stagediving can relegate girls and young women to the sidelines. Attending a gig alone is more difficult in this context, as gig attendees tend to socialise in small pre-formed friendship groups and distance between the performer and audience is maintained. Riot grrrl music performances attempted to disrupt these gendered power relations within music culture, to encourage the participation and involvement of young women and girls in a variety of ways.

### *3.7.1 Unconventional locations and times*

One way in which riot grrrl could challenge the (re)production of gender power relations was to shift the location and time of the gig: to use an unconventional gig venue within daytime hours. For instance, the opening gig of the tour took place in Conway Hall, a community centre in the Holborn area of London, and was held during the day as an all-ages space. Conway Hall was an unconventional venue for an indie gig as the space lacked a PA; an inexperienced Liz Naylor was forced to beg and borrow the equipment needed for the bands to perform. By withholding information about the exact nature of the event from the manager of Conway Hall, Naylor

managed to co-create a situation in which other community-hall users, including Weightwatcher members and the manager, were forced to confront the sights and sounds of riot grrrl. Conway Hall was not equipped as regular site for gigs and the stripped back and stark performance space enabled the construction of a riot grrrl gig space as less contrived and more honest than conventional indie gig spaces. In her narrative Naylor stressed her inexperience and poor planning skills, a discursive tool Naylor used to emphasise how her genuine passion and enthusiasm, not business sense, motivated her riot grrrl participations:

[Conway Hall] was my first show, it was a nice venue, nobody had ever used it for a gig and the Conway Hall's a secular humanist thing and I really liked the idea of putting it there. I had to lie about what it was because obviously they'd never had a gig before and went to meet the manager at the Conway Hall and went 'yes I'm kind of putting on a sort of feminist event thing erm would you erm you know I'll hire the big room how much is it?' And he was like 'urrrr it's 150 quid' and I was like 'okay fine'. I didn't tell him that it was going to be loud music and on that day. It was just wonderful, it was a great day, that that was the first date of the tour. I kind of remember arriving and I didn't know what the fuck I was doing I was completely like urrrr how do you put on a gig erm and I can remember we kind of had to hire some gear and we had to beg ride cymbals, I think they were Pete Shelley's ride cymbals which were sort of quickly destroyed [...] I was both like 'oh god this is great' and also like trying to avoid the manager from the Conway Hall so I was kind of running around a bit kind of like I'm not here. What was really really great was there was a Weightwatchers meeting going on at the same time and they complained of course because it's loud fucking punk and there were all these women with these really huge kind of badges going 'ask me about losing weight' and they were roaming around going 'what is this' kind of madness. Another friend of mine who'd been a tour manager, again a man, kind of told me things like 'oh you need a float of change' and it hadn't even occurred to me that people would kind of arriving with five quid notes or whatever so my planning of it was absolutely atrocious. I had no idea. We managed it by the skin of our teeth. It was a great gig, the hall had no lighting, I really liked the way there was no rock'n'roll lighting, there was nothing there, it was pretty nakedly presented, it's like here's a band on stage, the PA's a bit shit, I think we borrowed it off somebody, there's no groovy lighting and there's no smoke machines, but here's a band and it's daytime and it's full of kids and it was wonderful, and above it is a sort of motto above the stage 'to thine self be true' which was just great, really framed it beautifully.

### *3.7.2 Disrupting performer and audience distinctions*

The conventional relationship between the performer and audience was critiqued and broken down to provide ample opportunities for girls' involvement. Girls and young women were actively invited to contribute to the performance: to come up on the stage to dance, sing and speak. Band members made attempts to include the audience and encourage their projects and participation. Riot grrrl performers commonly relocated their performance space; bands often dismissed the stage and chose to play on the floor or crossed over between the stage and floor, thereby animating a space traditionally associated with the audience and passivity. Other

attempts were made to trouble the distinction between the audience and performer, for instance band and audience members frequently handed out flyers and fanzines, and performers made an explicit attempt to be available to the audience, often rejecting the privacy of backstage areas to socialise within public venue spaces. Rachel Holborow, member of Slampt and Pussycat Trash, highlighted how riot grrrl practices on the Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill tour attempted to change the dynamic of the typical gig space to ensure that girls felt involved and included:

The Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill tour was something amazing and Pussycat Trash played at a couple of things with that, and I think what it was, was that it was really different to going to a gig because we were, you were involved and the girls were invited to come up on stage and sing along [...] all these little things like handing out flyers and being around to talk to, trying to play on the floor and trying to change the dynamics [...] in London there were all-day events which changes the dynamic already, Conway Hall I remember a lot of things were in, which was kind of a community hall, so rather than it being about you go to a gig you get your entertainment you get your drink it's daytime and everybody hangs out and lots of different people are doing fanzines and trying to do bands or doing bands and there was an effort to include people.

In this inclusive context it was possible for girls and young women to come along to gigs alone, meet others, and become part of a girl-centric community, as Bidisha, who was then fourteen years old, remembered: 'I turned up at [Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear ULU gig] and began handing the fanzine [*Grrrl Pride*] out and met people naturally through that. It was very very organic and it was very very easy to do'. The participatory moments that riot grrrl gigs constructed inspired girls to produce their own (sub)culture and supportive networks. Layla Gibbon recalled how the riot grrrl critique of the performer and audience dichotomy was a key influence in her decision to become a (sub)cultural producer: 'The thing that was most important to me about the discovery of the DIY underground was the idea that I could be on stage or in the audience, there was nothing separating me from "them": we were all just as important'.

Passing the microphone around the audience was also a common practice that troubled the distinction between the audience and performer. Passing the microphone offered the audience powerful opportunities to contribute sonically and shape the performance. This practice encouraged participants to speak out about everyday issues that had affected them. However, the involvement of men often became a point of contention in riot grrrl space. Young women and girls often questioned men's naive use of the microphone to voice their feelings about women's rights and speak for women. These dilemmas, as described by Pete Dale, successfully disrupted and contested the powerful reproduction of hegemonic gender power relations in the aural and spatial boundaries of indie gig contexts:

The microphone's passed around at riot grrrl gigs sometimes such as the first Bikini Kill gig in London at the Conway Hall which we went on first, Pussycat Trash [...] When the mic was being passed around this guy grabbed it and jumped on stage and started going on a big rant about abortion rights, and

some girl shouted out 'who are you to talk about women's rights' or some comment along those lines and the guy went 'I'm talking you shut up while I'm talking keep quiet' so I think a guy like him was all ready to shout for women's rights but when it came to a deeper level of actually thinking about the use of space and the real space of a gig, it was people being challenged on many levels, even people who thought they were feminist orientated were having to admit that they had inherited some of the structures of society, of sexism and you can't just wave a magic wand and say I don't like sexism and therefore suddenly become devoid of what society's always putting you into, it challenged me definitely, it made me think 'oh wait a minute I am a hypocrite'

### *3.7.3 Girls/Women at the front: Policing audiences*

Riot grrrl protagonists actively resisted the spatial norms of conventional indie gigs that forced women to occupy peripheral spaces at gigs (see Fonarow 2006, p. 93-4). The construction of girl-centred 'safe pockets' on the sidelines or assimilation as 'one of the boys' in order to access the mosh-pit were not adequate solutions for young women involved in riot grrrl; instead attempts were made to radically reorder the gendered arrangement of gig spaces. Some riot grrrl protagonists would actively encourage young women and girls to congregate en masse at the front, near the stage, in the space conventionally dominated by men. Men were encouraged to support this practice, thereby expected to relinquish the spatial privilege previously taken for granted in indie music subcultures. On the tour Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear handed out flyers (see figure 3) at their gigs that called for girls to congregate at the front of the stage to (i) critique the masculinist conventions of moshing and stagediving at punk gigs; (ii) provide opportunities to collectively challenge threats of physical and sexual assault experienced by girls at concerts; and (iii) to construct a performance that involved and included girls and young women as the target audience.

In addition to using the 'girls/women at the front' strategy, both bands were also known to actively police audience behaviour within their performances. Any audience complaint, allegation or observed discriminatory behaviour led the band to halt the performance so that the offender could be disciplined by the performer(s) and audience. Accused audience members were publicly shamed before being ejected from the venue. As Jon Slade, guitarist for Huggy Bear explained, it was a practice that escalated between the two bands throughout the tour:

We were taking turns to headline, and Bikini Kill had played already and there was this guy that was, heckling or dancing too wild and he'd got sent to the back or Kathleen had put the spotlight on and got the bouncers to get him out. That happened quite often that kind of thing and I think there was competition between the two bands to see who could find the most troublemakers and sort them out, they had to be dealt with harshly.

Figure 3: Girls/women stand at the front flyer, authored by Kathleen Hanna

At this show We ask that  
girls/women stand near the  
front, by the stage.

Please allow/encourage this  
to happen

Since we can't talk to everyone at our shows  
due to Time/Energy/shyness factors, We  
ask that you write to us if you have  
something to say: X O X O X O X O X

HUGGY BEAR  
% Catcall  
142 b St BULLS Rd  
Islington London N12 1L

BIKINI KILL  
C/O KILL ROCK STARS  
120 NE STATE #419  
OLY WA 98501

★ Also: If you are a girl/woman who does a fanzine and  
would like to have yr work printed and distributed  
in the U.S.A. (FOR FREE by other girls) please write to:  
RIOT GRRRL PRESS POBOX 11002 WDC 20008-0202 USA

This threat  
and strategy  
experienced in their  
audience members that  
shared between the performers and audience, to co-produce a space that acknowledged and  
challenged the violence and abuse that women experience in the immediate gig situation and  
wider social order, as Kathleen Hanna explained in Lucy Thorne's documentary of the British  
Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill tour *It Changed My Life* (1993):

I want girls to be able to go to shows and have a good time. It's not going to  
happen all by itself, like we have to recreate the environment that we're having  
these shows in, like actively recreate it by doing flyers that say women up  
front that are the reason why, or by saying it before shows and if any  
violence erupts like stopping shows and dealing with a right off instead of just  
pretending it's not happening because that's what my parents always did  
pretend nothing was happening and just let it get worse.

WHY?????

Because I am a female performer who has been verbally / and physically assaulted while being on stage and its really scary when men are taking up the first few rows, to me, I mean.

And also: A lot of times several girls/women will have trouble with the same guy or group of guys BUT cuz the girls dont know each other and are scattered about, we cant warn each other about said jerks presence OR protect each other effectively. If we are in a big gang we are less isolated from each other and more likely to start talking and dancing together and having some FUN

I mean if yr a guy could you just realise for a minute that us girls have no way of knowing if you are a "good boy" or a "bad boy" (as if these distinctions REALLY exist)

And, like, it is not cool or "punk rock" in anyways for guys to smash into us or rub against us while we are trying to watch a show. You know? I am sick of going to shows where I feel completely unwelcomed and banished to the back cuz I just get grossed out by moshing, harrassment, etc . . .

**IT IS NOT SUBVERSIVE TO ACT LIKE YR UNCLE**

And also, I really wanna look at female faces while I perform. I want HER to know that she is included in this show, that what we are doing is for her to CRITISIZE / LAUGH AT / BE INSPIRED BY / HATE / WHATEVER . . . Her opinion is more important to me than some guy from Melody Maker and so I (along with my friends) are gonna make the effort to let her know this.

Because this is our fucking show: the GIRLS the QUEERS, the WIMPS, the OUTCASTS . . . . .

And the kids who wanna act like their PARENTS are the ones who arent welcome. DIG.

This threat of disciplinary action produced an atmosphere which offered a supportive channel and strategy for young women and girls to speak out against and challenge the abuse they experienced in their immediate environments whilst simultaneously spelling out to other audience members that discriminatory behaviour would not be tolerated. The onus was therefore shared between the performers and audience, to co-produce a space that acknowledged and challenged the violence and abuse that women experience in the immediate gig situation and wider social order; as Kathleen Hanna explained in Lucy Thane's documentary of the British Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill tour *It Changed My Life* (1993):

I want girls to be able to go to shows and have a good time, it's not going to happen all by itself, like we have to recreate the environment that we're having these shows in, like actively recreate it by doing flyers that say women up front these are the reasons why, or by saying it before shows, and if any violence erupts like stopping shows and dealing with it right off instead of just pretending it's not happening because that's what my parents always did, pretend nothing was happening and just let it get worse.

However, these acts of audience policing and assertions of power within gigs also brought discrimination and conflict into play within riot grrrl spaces. In particular, Pete Dale described a situation in which his friend and Yummy Fur drummer Lawrence Worthington was wrongfully ejected from a Bikini Kill gig in Glasgow:

I think there was a lack of analysis perhaps of some of the problems that the approach of Bikini Kill in particular have taken which is singling out men in the audience [...] Lawrence actually got booted out of Bikini Kill's Glasgow gig because there was some tousling going on, some guy stood next to Lawrence pushed a girl she turned round and started having a go at Lawrence mistakenly having thought it was him and now there's no way it could have been him, just because I know Lawrence and there's no way he would ever push a girl in any context he'd just you know, Lawrence described this to me in great detail, this girl had accidentally got the wrong guy, understandable that she was annoyed but unfortunately the band stopped the song and said 'what's going on down there?' and this girl's like 'this guy just pushed me, bouncers get him out' so the bouncers roughed up Lawrence up outside the venue booted him out.

It is possible that numerous incidents of mistaken identity and confusion occurred during the tour. Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill gigs acted as battlegrounds for the struggle over the gender power relations in British indie music subculture. Gigs would often attract people with a vested investment in a hegemonic gender order who sought to disrupt the transformations riot grrrl proposed. In particular, men often felt excluded from riot grrrl spaces and responded with outrage. Therefore, riot grrrl gigs were also sites for the reproduction of sexism as men attempted to reassert masculine dominance within gigs, as Rachel Holborow recalled: 'Although sometimes nobody would say that, I feel there was also an atmosphere of conflict a lot of the time because the boys would be like "why aren't we being included it's just not fair" so in some ways things like being groped were more likely to happen'. Riot grrrl gigs were intense interactive spaces in which gender power relations were physically fought out and won at a grassroots level, a scenario epitomised in Pete Dale's neat summary of the riot grrrl period: 'It was a very intense time, there was a lot of confrontation at gigs, people standing around and arguing with each other, people pushing each other around at the front, usually one guy pushing one girl and then fourteen girls wading in and pushing him out, which was really exciting'.

Although many oral history participants emphasised an optimistic account of riot grrrl spaces, it is important to recognise the multifaceted emotional life of riot grrrl. Riot grrrl participation was also turbulent and stressful. Challenging a romanticised narrative of riot grrrl, some participants offered recollections of 'ugly feelings'; these are histories that emphasise the painful and uncomfortable aspects of occupying particular spaces (Ngai 2005). They are the memories of paranoia, frustration and confusion that document the arduous aspects of (sub)cultural resistance that involves extreme stress and burnout. Despite opening a valuable space for (sub)cultural politics and community, riot grrrl was also experienced as a space of physical danger,

humiliation and assault. From the onset of the tour, life within Huggy Bear was fraught with anxiety as Jon Slade recalled:

At that point in time March 1993 I think really we thought everyone was against us, everybody was our enemy at that point, especially our audience paying punters, not the girls but the guys that would come to our show, we just really hated them, well they hated us, some people in the band thought that everybody who came to the show that paid five pounds to come and see us just came to shout abuse or just to watch us and not like us [...] there was a feeling that Huggy Bear had was that everyone was against us.

Oral histories demonstrated that at least one major physical assault on riot grrrl performers occurred during the tour. In her work on British punk culture, Helen Reddington (2007) argued that the hostile physical, verbal and sexual assaults experienced by women punk musicians signalled young men's attempts to aggressively exclude women from punk music culture and enforce rigid standards of (white middle-class) feminine respectability. In the US, Bikini Kill members were frequently subjected to physical assaults by male audience members (Hanna 2003; Juno 1996). Huggy Bear, the reluctant national icons for British riot grrrl, became prime targets for misogynistic threats, taunts and violence. For instance, at the Derby gig, Jo Johnson was physical assaulted by a male audience member. In recollections of the incident, Huggy Bear member, Jon Slade described the assault:

Yeah I think there was this one guy, supposedly been taken out by the bouncers but Jo passed him on inside the club and he was laughing with one of the bouncers about you know 'feminist blah blah blah' other ridiculous things. So Jo started having a go at him, I think his girlfriend was there or something and it turned into a big brawl and she got hit in the head and the ear. It was very upsetting and a horrible thing to happen to anyone for any reason, and then we had to play the show.

Huggy Bear, visibly shaken from the attack, played a shortened set of just one song 'Into the Mission' and quickly abandoned the stage. The crowd, unsatisfied with the performance, became incensed and demanded a refund. Tour manager Liz Naylor interpreted the physical fallout surrounding Jo's assault as evidence of the authentic challenge riot grrrl represented to the social order in enabling punk-feminism to confront the 'wrong' audiences and places:

One of my favourite gigs was Derby which was really horrible and there were loads of pissed up lads from Mansfield and Derby [...] So the wrong people are at the gig, it's full of blokes. Right so Huggy Bear got on stage and they're just really kind of annoying and baiting the crowd and then sort of a riot breaks out and I kind of liked those moments in a way because I think they're more challenging [...] I remember being at the front, I had the money belt from the t-shirt stall, and I was at the front kind of fighting, thinking I hope they don't nick me money, it was really hands on physical fighting. But it's like, welcome to England this is what it's actually like outside of London, and I quite liked some of that confrontation.

### 3.7.4 Women-only gigs

Another strategy available that was used to minimise the ramifications of producing a girl-centric subculture in a traditionally masculine culture, was to exclude the presence of men from the audience altogether. Media accounts have tended to overstate the scale of women-only events in British riot grrrl. In contrast to 1980s women's music culture, previously studied by Mavis Bayton (1998), strictly women-only events were rare occurrences and often proved practically impossible. Instead women-only gigs referred to an effort to ensure a women-only audience, as many key riot grrrl bands had men within their line-ups, for instance Andy Roberts played guitar in Linus, Billy Karren played guitar in Bikini Kill, and Chris Rawley and Jon Slade were members of Huggy Bear. This meant that men were an inevitable feature of riot grrrl (sub)cultural life. In his 1998 written interview Andy Roberts challenged the dominant media construction of riot grrrl as harmful sites for men and boys: 'Contrary to the ignorant stereotypes portrayed in the press, I never got shit from anyone for going to riot grrrl events; the atmosphere was almost always open and fun, even though riot grrrls themselves took a lot of shit from men (and some women)'. The only joint women-only gig<sup>32</sup> on the tour, which featured Huggy Bear, Bikini Kill and Linus, was organised by The Sausage Machine at the White Horse in Hampstead. The organisers of The Sausage Machine, which included Paul Cox (who went on to form Too Pure records), supported the concept of a women-only gig and, if somewhat begrudgingly, removed themselves from the event to allow women to visibly dominate the space:

I still don't feel 100% about the Women's only gig mind you - proud we did it, but not sure if it should happen because it's EXCLUSIVE rather than INCLUSIVE. I would always rather create an environment in which girls feel comfortable to be in - surely that is better? On those nights we made sure there was a female sound engineer, bar staff and person on the door. No men at all. We stayed upstairs just in case something went wrong or happened.

However the 'check your gender on the door' policy caused problems for Delia, who was asked by The Sausage Machine organisers to ensure a women-only audience. Delia found herself enforcing an essentialist model of gender that discriminated against queer gender presentations, as she recalled:

One unfortunate by-product of that particular evening was that I kept on trying to turn away girls that looked quite masculine because I wasn't very good at noticing the difference and I remember some boys came dressed in dresses and skirts and were going 'oh we're showing solidarity' and I got on my high horse

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<sup>32</sup> Huggy Bear also played a women-only gig with Hole at the Subterrania in London on 24 March 1993 organised by Liz Naylor and to some extent hi-jacked by Dave Philips, although oral history testimony constructs this gig as untypical of riot grrrl spaces produced on tour with Bikini Kill. For instance, in her performance Courtney Love openly criticised a *Daily Star* reporter, Linda Duff, by denigrating her weight and appearance. In addition Mambo Taxi pulled out of the gig as Courtney Love wanted to change their stage times to produce a more democratic roster whilst paradoxically ensuring that Hole kept their headlining slot. Sources have suggested that the animosity between Courtney Love and Bikini Kill was sparked by jealousy concerning Tobi Vail's past relationship with Love's husband Kurt Cobain.

and said 'I can't go to things where only boys are allowed by dressing as a boy, so why should you be able to come in here just because you're dressed as a girl?'

To summarise, in 1993 the joint Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear tour carved out spaces for riot grrrl sonic spectacle across the country. The tour made it possible for attendees to convert riot grrrl discourse into interaction; to feel and do riot grrrl. These gigs, albeit situated in a variety of commercial and quasi-commercial venues, disrupted the gendered conventions of the typical indie gig (as described by Fonarow 2006) to ensure the active involvement of girls and young women through the manipulation of sound and space. Tactics – including shifting the time and location of gigs, traversing audience and performer distinctions, inverting the gendered spatial arrangements of audiences, policing audience conduct, and producing women-only gigs – disturbed the social (re)production of masculine privilege and encouraged the participation of girls and young women in indie music subcultures. However, these strategies were also problematic as young women's subcultural resistance (re)produced conflict within riot grrrl space: riot grrrl performers and audiences experienced an increase in gender-based discrimination and anti-feminist violence. The tour was charged with positive and 'ugly' emotions, as members (and audiences) of Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill negotiated confrontation, intimidation, media intrusion, violence and verbal taunts in their attempts to create counter-hegemonic spaces and sounds for their target audiences of girls and young women. Nonetheless, in Britain riot grrrl denaturalised gender power relations of indie music culture and demonstrated how (sub)cultural norms could be disrupted and redrawn. Crucially riot grrrl produced emotional spaces that enabled its participants to co-construct riot grrrl (sub)culture and forge politicised possibilities in participants' everyday lives and local communities. Nonetheless the severe stresses and strains experienced by riot grrrl participants curtailed future involvement. Huggy Bear split up in December 1994 and Bikini Kill eventually split in 1998. Kathleen Hanna has justified her move to electronic music-making in Julie Ruin and Le Tigre by citing her experiences of violence associated with performing punk music (see Long 2004). The next section focuses on this public decline and continuities of riot grrrl (sub)cultural resistance in Britain.

### ***3.8 D-GENERATION: Riot grrrl shame, burnout and ripple effects***

By the time riot grrrl faded from the public eye, the intensities of the previous year had already taken their toll on riot grrrl participants. After touring the UK with Bratmobile, America with the Frumpies, Japan with UFO or Die and a low-key UK and European tour in 1994, Huggy Bear played their last gig at the Laurel Tree in December 1994 and have since declined all

opportunities to publically discuss their involvement with riot grrrl.<sup>33</sup> The final fanzine (see figure 4) by Huggy Bear stated clearly that 'HUGGY NATION IS DEAD'. The text mocks media attempts to 'assimilate our defiance' and requests the reader to 'Kill Huggy Nation'. Pete Dale, a close friend of Huggy Bear, was present at the last gig and shared their reflections of why members wanted to end Huggy Bear and Huggy Nation:

I was chatting with Niki from Huggy Bear after they finished playing, they'd kind of cleared everyone out of the venue and me and Rachel got to stay because we were very tight with the people in there, so there was just us and we were sat around a table and she was just like these past years have been absolutely terrible in a lot of ways, she had been personally attacked in the national daily newspapers, it really did their heads in [...] they're just really wanting to put the whole thing behind them [...] it seems like they were quite shy people, because they'd been such a strong focal point and once they disappeared that seemed to be the end of it.

The loss of Huggy Bear was devastating to British riot grrrl (sub)culture, especially in London. Layla Gibbon argued 'I felt like it dissipated or something when Huggy Bear broke up somehow, and the Slampt people kept things alive, but I felt like the movement lost its energy somehow, no one replaced Huggy Bear'. Exhausted from media regulation riot grrrl fell off the radar and girls' (sub)cultural participation in collective girl-gangs began to dwindle.

The stifling effects of the narrow representations of riot grrrl circulated by the media could be implicated in the attrition of girls' participatory actions as riot grrrl Leeds-Bradford member Karren Ablaze! argued; 'there was a surge of enthusiasm and then people got bored with it, perhaps it was trendy for a while like with the press, then the press would come down very hard on riot grrrl things, a bit of a backlash and it wasn't very cool [...] I've just got a vague memory of there being less people at meetings'. Layla Gibbon backed up an inability to maintain riot grrrl (sub)cultural participation in Britain: 'I felt like riot grrrl in the UK really shifted things and opened things up, but not enough people used that energy to make their own zine/band/show space'.

A sense of disappointment pervaded oral histories: riot grrrl promised utopic possibilities of pro-girl (sub)cultural resistance and hope for lasting social and cultural change that were left unrequited. Those who did pursue (sub)cultural resistance experienced British riot grrrl as a short intense burst of energy, but, due to the stress, strain and lack of support, quickly became burnt out and struggled to maintain the enthusiasm and interest necessary to maintain riot grrrl music participations, as Tammy Denitto detailed:

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<sup>33</sup> With the exception of Amy Raphael (1995), who managed to coax them to produce a chapter for *Never Mind the Bollocks Women Rewrite Rock* (London: Virago) in 1994, albeit prior to the breakup of Huggy Bear.

Figure 4: Back page of the final Huggy Nation fanzine, 1994

D - GENERATION

There is an organic, germy thing we can unsatisfactorily call an underground. spreading tendrils in radom, implicit, unnatural ways. And exploding epicentres are blooming in previously ignored towns & cities. Fuck centralization. Viva letter writing. Have love will travel.



FUCK WINSOME PICTURES OF GLAMOUROUS GIRLZ WITH HANDBAGS = the first attempts at RIOT GRRRL fashion spreads. As NOU says clothes are the voice of the disenfranchised, the only uniformity being self-expression. Thus begins the commodification of the revoluti9on of every day life. I don't want to buy it back. And another thing: SHAMPOO ARE THE INDIE BARBIE TWINS somebody talk to them. Bob stanley as 90's Phil Spectør what an icky idea.

Everyone got burnt out and bored of each other [it was] a really intensive year, you know, same people like every weekend and you know I just got bored of hearing bad bands and trying to encourage people and stuff and I remember sitting on the tube with Andy and saying I'm really sick of music and I didn't listen to music again for like a year and a half after, I was so bored of everything I started listening to hip hop.

The tendency for riot grrrl protagonists to seek out radical cultural distance from riot grrrl was also reflected in other oral history participants, several of which had refused to talk about riot grrrl until the opportunity to contribute an oral history for the current project became available. For instance Lucy Thane struggled to understand why she left riot grrrl behind her, citing over-ambitious visions of riot grrrl, the disillusionment in the re-establishment of 'normal' life and disarticulation of feminist radicalism within post-feminist popular culture:

Why didn't I want any communication with it for years and years and years? That's what I'm wracking my brains [for], maybe it was so idealistic we wished for so much, maybe we didn't define that very clearly, we thought we knew what we wanted and we had a real dream, vision, clarity, future, present, community, family. We felt we were a part of something wonderful that really changed and what did we get? The Spice Girls? Do you know what I mean? and normal life and we carry on and the world is what it is.

The Spice Girls became an increasingly cited example of the popularisation (and problematisation) of riot grrrl within Britain. Various scholars have tended to polarise riot grrrl and the Spice Girls in order to assess their relative success (Driscoll 1999). Whilst some riot grrrl participants castigated the Spice Girls as a commercial co-optation of riot grrrl energy and ideas, other participants viewed the Spice Girls as involved in the same practice of re-visioning feminism for girls and young women, albeit within different structures of cultural production, as Amelia Fletcher argued:

I kind of thought that the point of riot grrrl to some extent was to popularise this form of idea of feminism well at least that's what it did to me it was like suddenly feminism felt like something I could relate to and in a way I felt like [when] the Spice Girls did it it was exactly the same except that their audience was 13 year old girls instead of 15-year old girls being excited. I guess the only annoyances is whether they got the people that liked the Spice Girls whether actually any of those messages hit home and whether actually their messages were there at all and all it was was zig-a-zig-ahh

Other oral history narratives emphasised the futility in making assessments about the relative success and failure of riot grrrl, as Liz Naylor stressed to me: 'I liked the backlash I think it was a really important part of it, it needed to it helped it kind of go underground again [...] I don't see it as a failure [...] it was never intended to be a success you know that's the point, it's just exist in the moment'. As well as a declaration of suicide the last Huggy Nation fanzine (see figure 4) also hinted at the continuing presence of uncontrollable, decentralised and unpredictable queer girl (sub)cultural resistance in the UK. Riot grrrl expanded the possibilities of (sub)cultural activist pathways in Britain which were free to mutate over time in relation to

individual biographies, interests and activities. Andy Roberts introduced the idea of ripple effects of riot grrrl in encouraging future generations of young queers and feminists to engage in amateur music-making and (sub)cultural activism;

In 1993 at the Bull and Gate I remember a conversation with Jo Huggy where we agreed that whatever criticisms people might have of riot grrrl and the bands connected with it, many more women (and male misfits) were being encouraged to pick up musical instruments for the first time because of it. Those ripples continue to spread (1998 written interview)

As a set of fluid and contested participatory actions, riot grrrl was constructed as a source of strength and confidence to encourage girls and young women to support each other and realise their own abilities. Therefore riot grrrl could apply to a variety of contexts and situations beyond indie and punk music (sub)cultures, as Niki Eliot explained: 'There is so much that I want to do and see my friends do and all the other girls and women I have in my head when I'm writing, when I'm really letting go. I want them to want to be something, to stand out, whether it be education or law or music or whatever it is that you need to do to be tough to not be told this thing that you want to do is not within you to do' (cited in Raphael 1995, p. 172). Conversely riot grrrl could also be seen as another way for girls and young women to (re)produce hegemonic femininities, that is to rely on external validation to justify their own abilities and avoid taking credit for their own actions, as Kathleen Hanna warned:

I think a lot of girls already have this thing going on. I think they are really creative, they already have a lot of energy and a lot of dynamism in their lives, like in their heads with what they're thinking. It's just a matter of seeing someone else doing it and it validates them and then they go out and do it and it's easier sometimes for them to give me, my band or riot grrrl or whoever and whatever credit for it ('It Changed My Life', Lucy Thane 1993)

After the public decline of riot grrrl, the Newcastle-based Slampt continued to function as a vital source of DIY (sub)cultural resistance, to produce politicised records, gigs and fanzines until 2000.<sup>34</sup> However, the aesthetics of Slampt shifted: Pussycat Trash mutated into Red Monkey a post-hardcore band that became a staple band in the US hardcore punk scene. For co-founders of Slampt the visible decline of riot grrrl was framed as positive, allowing them to diverge into different activisms and radical lifestyles. Pete Dale argued that 'it was good once riot grrrl was supposedly finished because it meant that you could get on with the process of really discussing and involving, for me and Rachel involving ourselves more with a broader range of radical thinkers'. In particular, Rachel Holborow in her oral history, resisted the dominant narratives of music history to emphasise the continuity of radicalism that has informed her adult life as her

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<sup>34</sup> Slampt recently held a Slamptrospective benefit all-day event, on 27 September 2008, at the Star and Shadow Cinema for Newcastle Time Exchange. Mainly organised by Pete Dale, the event featured several Slampt associated bands including Red Monkey, Milky Wimpshake and Bilge Pump, a screening of an updated version of Slamptumentary with a Q&A session, as well as sets from a new generation of bands constructed as continuing in the legacy of Slampt, including Humosexual, Corey Orbison, Chaps, Sad Shields and Hotpants Romance.

priorities have shifted from (sub)cultural production in Slampt, to green activism and home-schooling her children:

I think [riot grrrl] just phased into other things for me myself personally, in a way riot grrrl kind of became activism, green activism, growing vegetables, it's more the focus of my life really changed [...] I don't believe that things I like, like they're presented in mock histories where there's a musical movement and then it's over, I think it just flows from one thing to another if there's any genuineness to it.

Within participants' talk, moments of riot grrrl were linked to the formation of critical attitudes, friendships and ideas that acted as a resource to guide riot grrrl participants' lifestyles and choices. For instance, Andy Brown argued that his interaction with riot grrrl improved his sense of confidence, self-motivation and self-esteem by opening up options and choices:

It's not just a musical thing, it's a complete lifestyle [...] riot grrrl itself it becomes a simple kind of self motivation and a self esteem, it gives you a sense of self worth, and that's another thing as well. If I hadn't of been into it I probably wouldn't have found out as much about myself and worked out as much about what I was thought about things and my own identity as well. [...]these people aren't telling you what to do, they're giving you options, they're telling you this is what happened to us or this is how you could decide, so they're offering you a chance to have a brain in your head and make decisions. That's what kind of ended up happening, I was listening to a lot of music and I was picking and choosing and finding stuff that resonated more. (Interview by Lisa Cupcake and Michal Cupid, 1999)

For Layla Gibbon riot grrrl acted as a crucial catalyst for her present-day immersion in DIY punk (sub)cultural life as a musician and underground-press music writer:

I am still involved in the DIY punk scene as a direct result of being a riot grrrl. I am still friends with a lot of girls I met through that scene. I feel like riot grrrl opened a door into a world I wouldn't have known to exist, where you make your own sounds and your own community where mainstream acceptance and media attention are kind of irrelevant

Other participants also linked their development of self-control and non-traditional life course to their experiences within riot grrrl. For instance, Lianne Hall cites her riot grrrl music participation, as a member of Witchknot, as a key turning point that has continued to inform her life trajectory:

To be honest I wasn't really that involved, I kind of just went and absorbed it really, I was dead shy at the time, so like speaking in meetings, I couldn't. What I wanted was to meet girls to make a band with and that's what came out of it for me, that was the most amazing thing and it was a big turning point. Witchknot became this great thing [that] opened the world up for me so much [...] because it was built on proper DIY anarchist principles which a totally new thing for me [...] [it was] music where politics became part of the music and it became part of the culture, it's just informed the rest of my life since.

To summarise, this short section has explored the public decline of riot grrrl, to discern what 'doing' riot grrrl meant to participants in a long-term capacity. Oral history narratives noted a

decline of riot grrrl (sub)cultural participation around the same time that Huggy Bear disbanded and the media lost interest in riot grrrl. Those invested in riot grrrl (sub)cultural life experienced a reduction of interest, collective involvement and support which led to burnout, disappointment and cultural distancing. The emergence and popularity of post-feminist popular culture in Britain epitomised by the Spice Girls was contentious: some participants considered it a corporate dilution of riot grrrl whilst others constructed it as a comparable, yet limited, rewriting of feminism for girls and young women. Other participants were optimistic of the potential 'ripple effects' riot grrrl could have on the (sub)cultural and radical imaginary of British society. Several participants cited riot grrrl experiences as critical points in the negotiation of a radical life-course, in terms of a deepening commitment to DIY (sub)cultural life or moving on into other areas of activism.

### *3.8.1 Towards contemporary queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance*

This chapter has re-examined riot grrrl experiences from the perspectives of British participants. These recollections and memories of riot grrrl construct a narrative of the lived struggle within gendered spaces, sounds and (sub)cultures necessary for the realisation of a girl-positive 'participatory culture' (Duncombe 1997). Sonic and spatial tactics disrupted the (re)production of hegemonic hetero-femininities in the immediate social and cultural contexts in which particular young women felt excluded. (Sub)cultural resistance took many forms in everyday life; for instance, in meetings and organisational activities of girl gangs, in letter writing, in music making, in fanzine production and in the consolidation of grassroots networks of mutual support, encouragement and solidarity. In particular, this chapter has emphasised the role of riot grrrl music participation, as bodily, communal, sonic and emotional moments, in the agitation of feminist (sub)cultural resistance. Riot grrrl (sub)cultural resistance, embedded in the legacies of queer girl culture discussed in Chapter One, constitute key grassroots sites that deserve proper consideration in British histories of feminism and the women's movement, as well as shaping contemporary queer and feminist life.

The continuities of riot grrrl cannot follow in a neatly ordered or logical way, but, as the final Huggy Bear fanzine indicated (see figure 4), may emerge in decentralised and unpredictable ways. Rather than being simply erased from the public imaginary, riot grrrl left crucial traces and questions within British (sub)culture open to be recuperated and explored by future generations. In her oral history Karren Ablaze hinted at the new generations of girls and women, too young to have experienced riot grrrl the first time round, who are forging their own 21<sup>st</sup>-century (sub)cultural activisms and communities: 'All riot grrrl is, is an idea in peoples' minds, [there]'s nothing that is physically out there that is riot grrrl, so once there was the idea of riot grrrl there's always going to be some girl somewhere thinking about riot grrrl and thinking about Ladyfest or whatever manifestation it's in now'. New DIY generations spurred on by the

'ripple effects' of riot grrrl become the subject of the next chapter. The development of DIY (sub)cultural resistance in Britain takes a queer turn as DIY feminist and queer anarchist discourses are negotiated in the creation of communities, spaces and sounds for non-normative sexualities and genders in the margins of commercial culture. Even though the moment of 'riot grrrl' had passed young people from around the country followed the trail of riot grrrl, some even used the commercial-friendly faces of 'women in rock' (see Schilt 2003a) as a starting point, to reformulate contemporary DIY (sub)cultural lifelines. In the summer of 2006, Michal Cupid sits outside on the grass next to his bandmate Irene Revell after their performance at Ladyfest Cardiff in Corey Orbison. He looks into the lens of my camcorder and declares:

The beginning of this decade really felt like the start of something, I guess with the whole riot grrrl thing, it just felt like, it was our turn now to do something new and continue on this tradition of feminism and punk rock and it just happened at the right time in our lives.

## Chapter Four

### British DIY Queer Feminist (Sub)cultural Resistance

In the previous chapter I discussed how the subversive use of space, sound and style within riot grrrl (sub)cultural life disrupted the social (re)production of hegemonic masculine entitlements and hetero-femininities in indie music (sub)culture. The decline of riot grrrl as a controversial moment of feminist resistance in 1990s popular culture became associated with the rise of post-feminist popular culture; the entrenchment of global neo-liberalism; and the (re)circulation of conservative discourses within British institutional, social, and political life (see Chapter One). For some feminist theorists, riot grrrl became entangled with neo-liberal 'girl power' discourses which minimised the potential for widespread radical feminist resistance (Driscoll 1999, 2002; Taft 2004; Munford 2004). However, in this chapter I contemplate contemporary radical engagements with riot grrrl legacies and consider the continuation of young people's DIY music (sub)cultural resistance within Britain. I develop on the term DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance to refer to these enduring social processes within (sub)cultural music participation that attempt to disrupt hegemonic genders and sexualities that circulate within phobic consumer cultures. In the context of a consumer culture that seeks to annihilate queer and feminist subjects, music (sub)culture can be transformed into a cultural political impetus to co-create critical spaces, experiences and resources to articulate queer feminist selves, subjectivities, life-courses and communities. The term 'DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance' aims to acknowledge and recuperate the historical fragments of girls' and young women's (sub)cultural resistance to recover a radical political imaginary crucial to the cultural transmission of (a queer) feminism - an imaginary which, as Angela McRobbie argued, is most often forged from cultural forms to act as a crucial resource for the survival of marginalised individuals:

These imaginaries are a resource, a source of hope, a space that offers vocabularies, concepts, histories, narratives and experiences which can illuminate the predicament or powerlessness and help to find ways of overcoming such circumstances. Of course the raw materials for the construction of such imaginaries will often exist in cultural forms, in books, films, pieces of music, or in artworks (2009, p. 49)

Queer feminist (sub)cultural music participations that resist and rework dominant meanings of feminism, gender and sexuality can be implicated in the construction of a radical political imaginary that offers its participants counter-hegemonic possibilities for negotiating their everyday lives. However, to posit a queer feminism acknowledges a number of contentious overlaps between feminist and queer activisms. The debates concerning the apparent incompatibilities between queer theory and feminist theory have been recently questioned

(Richardson et al 2006; Jagose 2009), and an appreciation of the intersections, conceptual entanglements, historical debts and productive engagements of queer feminisms has gradually become possible (Roseneil 2000; Withers 2008; Gržinic & Reitsamer 2008; Jagose 2009). In the context of DIY (sub)cultural worlds I develop an understanding of queer feminism as a radical political imaginary and praxis that incorporates, (i) a desire to disrupt static identity categories of gender, sexuality and feminism, (ii) a critique of neo-liberal normalisation discourse within political movements and consumer culture, and (iii) a tactic of cultural politics to shift activism beyond conventionally legitimised and traditionally recognised channels.

In this chapter I focus upon the co-creation of (sub)cultural musics and music (sub)cultures that contest and interrupt the normalisation of hegemonic gender and sexualities that are reinforced in 'post-feminist' consumer cultures (see McRobbie 2009; Gill 2007; Lemish 2003; Arthurs 2003). I concentrate on music participation that occurs in the construction of queer feminist music (sub)culture with particular attention to the experiences of the *producer-fan* and the *music-maker*. It is important to note that many (sub)cultural producer-fans also engage in music-making and the distinctions between producer, music-maker and fan frequently overlap. Nonetheless it is possible to clarify the general responsibilities of these roles. Producer-fans are dedicated (sub)cultural workers who organise and promote music events: primarily live music gigs and club nights. Their (often hidden) organisational actions are integral to the proliferation of queer feminist music (sub)culture. Queer feminist music-makers are creative activists who perform powerful sonic displays of cultural authority to ridicule and undermine hetero-gendered codes of conventional musicianship. Producer-fans and music-makers may also run record labels and distros, write fanzines, organise tours for (or with) DIY queer feminist bands, participate in voluntary initiatives like Girls Rock Camp UK and attend music events across the country. Together queer feminist participants forge meaningful music (sub)cultural lives, from what would otherwise be considered 'noise' (Attali 1985), to offer glimpses of queer feminist possibilities.

This chapter explores the meanings that (sub)cultural participants produce within their music participations. What identities, needs and desires does the production and occupation of grassroots music (sub)cultural spaces satisfy? How do the individuals engaged in these counter-publics attempt to resist and rework powerful disciplinary agendas within post-feminist and gay consumer cultures and recover a queer feminist politic? Finally, how do these individuals, collectives and communities (re)create (sub)cultural space, sound and vision in an attempt to relocate power and meaning? In particular, in what follows, I attempt to trace the mutations of queer girls' (sub)cultural resistance that results from the entanglements of DIY feminist discourses and queer anarchist discourses. The creation of queer events and communities has opened up space to discuss and challenge the gender and sexual categories that circulated in riot grrrl that obscured gender-queer subjects and queer sexualities. The growing influence of queer

activism has opened up space for the exploration of queer genders and sexualities characterised by ambiguity, transgression and complexity within music (sub)culture.

#### ***4.1 Locating contemporary DIY queer feminist (sub)culture: Ladyfest and Queeruption***

Although the role of contemporary queer music (sub)cultures has been studied to some extent in the US (Halberstam 2005a) scant attention has been paid to queer and feminist music (sub)cultures within Britain. A growing amount of research has focused on politicised subcultural events like Queeruption (Brown 2007; Vanelander 2007) and Ladyfests that have been held across Europe and Northern America (Zobl 2004; Bridges 2005; Feigenbaum 2006; Leonard 2007; Keenan 2007a, 2007b; Schilt & Zobl 2008; Aragon 2008). Ladyfest, in particular, has strong links to riot grrrl: the concept of Ladyfest was realised when a group of riot grrrl participants gathered in Seattle to be interviewed as part of the Experience Music Project's documentation of Pacific Northwest music movements (Downes 2007). Riot grrrl protagonists Tobi Vail and Allison Wolfe were heavily involved in the inception of the first Ladyfest which took place in Olympia Washington in August 2000. Motivated by a desire to realise new politicised, pro-girl and feminist cultural spaces, Ladyfest Olympia set out an explicitly feminist event template as 'a non-profit, community-based event designed by and for women to showcase, celebrate and encourage the artistic, organisational and political work and talents of women' (Zobl 2004, p. 448). Similar to use of the term riot grrrl, the reclamation of the term 'lady' can be seen as a continuation of a desire to disrupt a perceived feminist heritage that has disciplined young women's politicised self-identifications with taboo terms. This culminates in a defiant refusal of the subject position of established feminist terminology in favour of an exploration of the multiplicities, contradictions and complexities of identities and practices:

there appears to be a consensus that 'lady' has been banned from the approved feminist lexicon. this name debate is boring. how could we ever decide what to call ourselves, when we can't decide what we are? AND WE DON'T WANT TO. SO WE WON'T. could be that she is a southern belle, or maybe a drag king. i am a lesbian lovemachine wearing the mask of a happy hippy, this crowd is full of rock stars & fatass asskickers trannies and new wave semioticians disguised as die-hard old skool punk rockers (Ladyfest Olympia 2000 programme)

A Ladyfest would typically comprise of an intense three- or four-day series of events based within a given locality. In general this would often include a mixture of music performances, spoken-word artists, film screenings, club nights, distros, art exhibitions and workshops. Ladyfests are organised by volunteers and all profits are donated to local feminist and women's charities. The Ladyfest template was seized upon by young women who between 2000 and 2006

realised 123 Ladyfests within their own communities across Europe, Canada, South America and the United States (Schilt & Zobl 2008).

Predating and continuing alongside Ladyfest, annual queer autonomous spaces known as Queeruption were produced. The first Queeruption took place in November 1998 at the 1-to-1 Centre in London. Queeruptions were created to counter the heterosexism experienced in direct action circles as well as frustration with the homonormativity of gay consumer culture. The first Queeruption was funded by the DIY queer indie club night Club V and provided a template for a queer autonomous event which subsequently went global. International queer communities made localised Queeruptions happen in New York, San Francisco, Barcelona, Berlin, Amsterdam, Sydney, Tel Aviv and Vancouver. Like Ladyfest, a Queeruption would consist of a series of events including music, art, workshops and discussion groups. However, at Queeruption more emphasis is placed on the co-creation of space for sexual pleasure and direct action, therefore sex parties and public protest actions are integral parts of Queeruption. In contrast to Ladyfests, which tend to use a range of 'commercial', 'quasi-commercial' and 'autonomous' venues (see Brown 2007) and engage with DIY feminist discourses, Queeruptions tend to operate within a queer-anarchist political structure and discourse to advocate the realisation of an autonomous queer space within squatted venues. However, it is common for some DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural activists to invest in queer anarchist and DIY feminist discourses and participate in both sites.

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, the presence of these subcultural spaces, alongside the cultural transmission of the legacy of riot grrrl, has re-vitalised young women's participation in DIY (sub)cultural resistance. Producer-fans' and music-makers' experiences of organising and/or participating in Ladyfests, in Glasgow (2001), London (2002), Bristol (2003), Manchester (2003 and 2008), Cardiff (2005 and 2006) and Leeds (2007), as well as Queeruption based in London in 2002, created a network of individuals with skills, resources, contacts and working relationships that could enable more sustained and localised (sub)cultural activisms. Rosie's experience of Ladyfest London is a good representation of the feelings of empowerment and activation commonly experienced within Ladyfest spaces. She recalled, 'there were loads of people there [at Ladyfest London] doing good things and being supportive and it felt like a community which I guess I hadn't [experienced], I'd never been to a Ladyfest before or anything like that before and I was like "oh wow this is cool, we can do this too" [...] it totally changed both of our lives'. After Ladyfest London Rosie was involved in the organisation of Ladyfest Bristol in 2003, where she met Michal; after Ladyfest Bristol the pair set up Local Kid, Cafe Kino and the Here shop and gallery in Bristol. This amounted to a staggering array of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural projects including a record label, tour management project, the organisation of numerous gigs and festivals, a vegan cafe co-operative and an independent shop and art gallery.

Ladyfests have facilitated the growth of a network of localised collectives across Britain interested in the production of queer feminist (sub)cultural spaces, including club nights, film screenings, gigs and workshops. These (sub)cultural music spaces typically operate within a DIY not-for-profit framework within quasi-commercial venues (including licensed pubs and clubs that offer rooms to hire for public entertainment, and radical social centres that gain an income from hosting events). Participants are charged a low door-entry fee and any profit – money made beyond venue charges, PA hire and band travel costs – is either reinvested in supporting the next event, or passed on to an appropriate project or charity. Events are promoted on a grassroots level through the use of photocopied flyers, posters and word of mouth, but also through the use of online web 2.0 technologies including facebook, myspace and local music-scene forums. The use of press releases to disseminate information to the local and national press and event listings services is discretionary, although often a point of contention.

The (sub)cultural participants whose experiences form the basis of this study involve the following collectives: Local Kid, active in Bristol since 2003; f.a.g. club, which operated in Cardiff between 2005 and 2008; the Leeds-based Manifesta, which has been active since 2002; Kaffequeeria in Manchester, active since 2004; and The Bakery (2002-2006) and Homocrime (2003-2006) in London. Other collectives include Female Trouble (Manchester), Lola and the Cartwheels (Sheffield and Leeds), Peppermint Patti (Cardiff), Fake Fight (Exeter) and Queer Union (London), and related club-night ventures would include Lipstick on Your Collar (Bristol), Bollox (Manchester), Club Brenda (Manchester), Pottymouth (London), Sapphic Traffic (Leeds), Unskinny Bop (London) and Club Wotever (London). In addition, numerous bands and fanzines have emerged within this DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural network (see appendix 4). Although this is not an exhaustive list of marginal sites, these (sub)cultural spaces represent some localised sites available for the realisation of queer feminist life within a contemporary British context. These spaces tend to be missing from current research and discussion on (sub)cultural resistance: the lack of documentation, archives and theorisation is amplified by the often ephemeral nature of (sub)cultural resistance. Collectives may only be active for a few months or years and events often leave few physical traces. Therefore this ethnographic study of grassroots (sub)cultural life engaged with subcultural activists' everyday experiences, justifications and explanations in the production of queer feminist music spaces and communities. This incorporated the analysis of fanzines and Ladyfest programmes, alongside semi-structured interviews and ongoing dialogues with 19 (sub)cultural participants and three band case studies that involved 7 music-makers. As a participant of this DIY (sub)cultural community since 2002, my own experiences, 'fanzine field notes',<sup>35</sup> and observations have informed the analysis. I aim to focus on the role that these amateur DIY

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<sup>35</sup> The term 'fanzine field notes' refers to my long-standing contribution to fanzines, in particular to the Manifesta collective fanzine *Reassess Your Weapons*, in which I often commented on my research and experimented with links between theory and experience on (sub)cultural topics.

music participatory practices play in the construction of a queer feminist political imaginary and set of resources for the establishment of alternative life-courses, identities and activisms.

I have focussed on two fundamental themes that emerged from the experiences of contemporary DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural participants. The first theme, 'Gaps', considers how (sub)cultural productions were constructed as solutions and challenges to the problematic exclusions of dominant political activist groups, music cultures, and gay and lesbian club cultures. Queer feminist participants sought to co-create spaces of comfort, community and validation for complex genders and sexualities. The second theme, 'DIY intimacies', examines the social and cultural production of comfort and intimacy within (sub)cultural participations. In particular I focus on the particular decisions used to justify the use of specific sounds, spaces and aesthetics and examine how these choices connect to a politicised desire to disrupt a hegemonic repression of the queer and/or feminist in contemporary British culture. Once again, in order to enable participants' self-identification (sub)cultural producer-fans wrote their own biographies, whilst I authored the biographies of the three bands with assistance and clarification from the music-makers themselves.

#### ***4.2 DIY queer feminist producer-fans***

##### **Amy Brachi**

*Email interview September 2007*

Amy grew up in Shropshire and Mid-Wales and has lived in Leeds since 2000. She co-founded Manifesta in 2002 and was a founding organiser of Ladyfest Leeds 2007. Amy has contributed to various collaborative zines, a personal zine, and edited the first incarnation of Manifesta's collective fanzine *Assess Your Weapons*. Amy has worked with women experiencing domestic violence since 2003 and continues to organise DIY feminist/queer-friendly events in West Yorkshire.

##### **Boitel**

*Email interview October 2007*

Boitel was born in 1976; he grew up and lives in Germany. He found out about punk/DIY politics in the early 90s, and spent some time within British queer subcultures in London subsequently becoming involved in Queeruption London and IRRK. Presently Boitel makes music in Humosexual and is involved in the organisation of Entzaubert film festival.

**Charlotte Cooper:** see riot grrrl biographies

##### **Daniel Cuzner**

*Interviewed on 28 September 2008*

Daniel was born in 1977. Living in Brighton in 1998, he was frustrated to learn of the first Queeruption gathering two weeks after it happened, and having moved to London, became involved with the Queeruption group in 2001. From

2003 until 2006 he was part of the Homocrime collective, and organised the Homocrime Singles Club CD-R label. He now runs Everard Records, helps out friends with their various projects, and is studying for a PhD in Education at the University of London.

### **Debi Withers**

*Interviewed on 15 September 2007*

Debi has been involved in d.i.y queer feminist organising since 2004. Whilst living in Cardiff she was involved in Cardiff Queer Mutiny, Ladyfest Cardiff and f.a.g club. Debi has made music alone under various monikers and plays guitar and sings in Drunk Granny. Debi was recently awarded a PhD in Gender Studies from Swansea University, currently lives in Bristol, and is planning to self-publish her thesis using POD technology.

### **Emily Jane Graves**

*Interviewed on 22 August 2007*

Emily was born in 1984 in Grimsby, and became interested in cultural activism through zines and riot grrrl music as a teenager. She moved to Leeds in 2002 to study Philosophy, but controversially left in the final semester of her final year, and still stands by this decision. She now works as an administrator for the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board. She has been part of the feminist collective Manifesta since she moved to the city, and co-runs the Manifesta Distro. As a teenager she wrote the per-zine *Perfect Imperfection* for a number of years with her then-girlfriend Emm, and has since written several one-off zines including *Dear Dr Griffiths* and *Anecdotal Evidence*, as well as starring in her own photo-story adventure *DIY Challenge Emily*. She was involved in Ladyfest Leeds in 2007 and has since worked with various groups of people to organise the sorts of DIY events that she wants to go to. She plays in the indie-pop band Robin Osterley, has two cats, and a passion for sewing & textile reconstruction.

### **Fergus Evans**

*Interviewed on 30 August 2007*

J. Fergus Evans is a 'shit-kicking, boy-kissing activist-in-training, independent producer, and art maker'. He has worked with a number of DIY arts and social change collectives including No More Productions, Kaffequeeria, and the Basement. Fergus helped to organise and deliver two of Manchester's Get Bent! festivals and has worked on a number of projects in the independent arts sector. He is currently working with Moksha Arts, a company which uses performance and poetry to address climate change, and Ikebana Performance, a lo-fi theatre which creates immersive interactive environments for participants to explore. Fergus has also produced a number of poetry zines and performs regularly across the country.

### **Heather Crabtree**

*Email interview April 2009*

Heather is 28 years old and currently works in the construction industry. She comes from a South Yorkshire coal mining village, is from a working-class family that became single parent, and attended a comprehensive school that was voted the worst in the country in 1997. She left home in 2000 to attend

university to study Art and Architectural history and Italian. After studying for an MA in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Art and Architectural history she moved to Leeds in 2006 and immediately became involved in Manifesta before becoming an organiser at Ladyfest Leeds. Along with Melanie Maddison she researched and co-curated the Ladyfest Art project and regularly contributes art for flyers, posters etc., for Suck My Left One and Manifesta gigs. She used to illustrate her own comic/fanzine *Bottom Rung of the Ladder* about her years working in retail before becoming an illustrative contributor to *Reassess your Weapons*, and has had work published in *Last Hours*. She now writes and illustrates her own per-zine *Seasons*. She was a founding member of DIY band Sailor Tongue and produced the Sailor Tongue comic. As well as being involved with Manifesta gigs and events she also assists at the club-night Fallopian Rhapsody and Lola and the Cartwheels events.

### **Heena Patel**

*Interviewed on 19 September 2007*

Heena was born into a Gujarati Hindu working-class family in the West Midlands in 1980. She has lived in Manchester since 1998. She was involved in organising Ladyfest Manchester, which took place in 2003, and is part of Manchester's Kaffequeeria collective. She has worked in the voluntary sector since 2002.

### **Humaira Saeed (Humey)**

*Interviewed on 21 August 2007*

Humaira was born in Manchester in 1979, and lived in Birmingham and Brighton, before returning to Manchester in 2003 as one of the organising collective of Ladyfest Manchester. She started the queer-feminist collective Kaffequeeria with Clare Tebbutt in 2004 and has been organising a range of events through that group and independently since then. Humaira edits the fanzine *Race Revolt* which was started in 2007 to address silences surrounding race in diy queer feminist communities, she also co-edits a fanzine on queer polyamory *Friends of Polly* with Len Lukowska. She is a trained facilitator who runs workshops on a variety of themes including race and identity, and is currently researching a PhD on contemporary Pakistani women's cultural production and the traumatic impact of the 1947 partition of India.

### **Irene Revell**

*Interviewed on 26 September 2007*

Irene was born in London 1980 to university educated ex-working class parents with a Polish refugee heritage. She studied at the University of Oxford for a BA in Physics (1999-2002) and MSt in Women's Studies (2002-2003). Irene co-founded the DIY record and tape labels Youth Club Tape Club (2001-2004) and IRRK (2004-present) as well as co-founding club nights Homocrime (2003-2006) and A for Agnes (2004-present) in London and Bring Yourself Fest in Bristol in 2004. She has played music in bands including Xhit Xhit (2001-2002), Lesbo Pig (2002-2004) and Corey Orbison (2004-present). Since 2004 Irene has been the co-director of independent non-profit interdisciplinary London-based visual arts agency Electra within which she curates, commissions and produces a wide range of local, national and international projects.

**Lizzie Guinness***Email contributions September 2008 and photo*

Lizzie was raised in Surrey by a white, middle-class, strictly Catholic family. Lizzie first encountered feminism through studying Women and Islam during the 2nd year of her undergraduate degree at Durham University. This led her to study Women's Studies at postgraduate level at the Centre for Women's Studies at the University of York. Lizzie was actively involved in the Women's Committee at York and set up the fanzine *Matrix Reloaded*. Lizzie became involved in Ladyfest Leeds 2007 as an organiser with financial management responsibilities. Post-Ladyfest, Lizzie became a member of Manifesta and a contributor to *Reassess Your Weapons*. She has recently moved to East London where she works for local government in equalities and cultural services.

**Melanie Maddison***Interviewed on 22 August 2007 and email correspondence October 2008*

Melanie is 28 and lives in Leeds, UK. Melanie gained her MA in Women's Studies at York University in 2002/3. Her thesis focused on female DIY collectives and their challenges and contributions to feminist activism and the aesthetics of activism. Melanie now works in the University of Leeds law department in the fields of disability discrimination, equality and human rights. Melanie is a former member of the Manifesta collective in Leeds and has edited feminist zines, such as *I'm Not Waiting*, *Reassess Your Weapons*, *UK Ladyfest Artwork*, *With Arms Outstretched*, and her current zine *Colouring Outside the Lines*. Melanie has run several workshops on self publishing and feminist activism, co-runs the Manifesta zine and crafts distro, and has curated art exhibitions such as *The Truth Isn't Sexy* (art exhibition and auction, Leeds, in benefit of anti sex-trafficking organisations), *UK Ladyfest Artwork Exhibition* (shown at Ladyfest Leeds 2007, and FEM08) the *UK Female Comix-Zines Exhibition* (The Women's Library, London 2009) and *Colouring Outside the Lines* (Gallery II, Bradford University 2009).

**Michal William***Interviewed on 16 September 2007*

Michal was born in Cardiff in 1977. As a child he campaigned passionately for animal rights. In 1995 he left school and, with best friends Lisa Cupcake and 'Baby' George McKenzie, co-founded the band Headfall, and the tape label/underground organisation Spazoom, who organised DIY shows in Cardiff and Newport (including the bi-monthly 'Cafe Kino' events). In 2002 Michal moved to Bristol where he became involved in organising Ladyfest Bristol 2003, and helped transform a derelict shop into the Here Shop & Gallery. At the end of 2003, with fellow Ladyfest organiser Rosie Hadrill, he co-founded the DIY/feminist promoter and record label Local Kid. In 2004, Michal and Rosie also started the catering co-op which in 2006 became Cafe Kino, Bristol's first vegan cafe. He continues to co-run and produce records for Local Kid, and works as a self-taught artist and graphic designer. He also sings and plays guitar in Headfall and Corey Orbison.

**Nazmia Jamal***Interviewed on 8 August 2007*

Naz is an East-African Asian Muslim who grew up in South Wales. She has been writing fanzines for over a decade. In 2001 she became involved in organising Ladyfest London, which led her to become a regular organiser of queer and feminist events on her own and with Queer Union, The Bakery Ladies, and most recently Queer Institute. She currently teaches English in a London Sixth Form, programmes for the London Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, volunteers at Lambeth Women's Project, and is co-ordinating Girls Rock! and Ladies Rock! UK.

**Rosie Hadrill***Interviewed on 16 September 2007*

Rosie was born in London in 1981. In 1999 she moved to Bristol where she became involved in Ladyfest Bristol 2003. Following the festival, she co-founded the DIY/feminist record label and promoter Local Kid, with fellow Ladyfester Michal William, and continued to organise shows, festivals and international tours, including 2004's Bring Yourself Fest. At the same time, Rosie and Michal worked as vegan caterers with the intention of opening a cafe/social centre, and in 2006 were two of the key organisers responsible for opening Cafe Kino. Rosie currently works at, and co-runs, Cafe Kino - a not-for-profit workers' co-op in Bristol.

**Sarit***Interviewed on 27 September 2007*

Sarit M (now known as Sered) was part of the London Queercore scene, since first seeing Huggy Bear and Sister George, upon arrival in London in 1993. One of the founders of the (legendary to some) Club V, that began life as Club Vaseline and ran fortnightly from 1994-2000, serving as a sort of home to a group of socially inept, alt-indie obsessed LGBT-queers. The club hosted many, if not all, of the queer-identified bands in existence during its five and a half year run, produced a monthly zine, and a music compilation. Sarit took part in organising the first ever Queeruptation queer anarchist Gathering, held in September 1998, and the second Queeruptation, held in NYC in 1999. Active in the London Lesbian Avengers, a group that did direct action from 1994-1996, and then in a second incarnation under the same title, as part of the group notorious for hijacking a double-decker bus and painting it pink in London's Piccadilly Circus, to protest the homophobic actions of the privatised bus company's owner. Sarit returned to Israel in 2004, to take part in the struggle against the occupation, primarily as part of Anarchists Against the Wall and the now defunct Black Laundry, queers against the occupation and for social justice.

**Sam Lowe (a.k.a. Edie Pain)***Interviewed on 15 September 2007*

Sam was born in 1981. She participated in Cardiff Queer Mutiny and Ladyfest Cardiff and became one of the organisers of f.a.g club. In 2007 she was a drum tutor at Ladies Rock! Camp held at Lambeth Women's Project. Sam currently lives in Bristol and works with the independent feminist record label Local Kid and plays drums in Drunk Granny.

## Victor Grayson

Email interview October 2007

Victor was born in Oldham during the 1976 heatwave. He moved to Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1994, where a healthy underground music scene exposed him to DIY cultural activism. Later experiences with anarchist and queer activists in London and Brighton led to involvement in several Queeruptation gatherings and Queer Mutiny. Victor has written or contributed to various zines including *Cheshire Cheese*, *FAQ*, *The Pink Pauper* and *Queerewind*, and from 2003, he organised gigs and club nights as part of the Homocrime collective. He continues to organise gigs in London through the Toowee underground organisation, and makes music with Humosexual and The Firmturds.

### 4.3 DIY queer feminist music-makers

#### Drunk Granny



Figure 5: Drunk Granny band members Debi (left) and Sam (right)

Long-term friends Sam Lowe (a.k.a. Edie Pain: drums) and Debi Withers (guitar and vocals) formed Drunk Granny in September 2005 (see above for individual biographies and involvement in Queer Mutiny, f.a.g. club, and Ladyfest Cardiff). Debi had started playing guitar at the age of thirteen and had created and performed 'solo punky grrrl folk messy stuff' for a few years, whilst Sam had been learning drums since 2003. Together they wrote and performed their first gig in Cardiff in October 2005. To date the pair have recorded and self-released four CD-Rs: *The Brownie Opera e.p* (2006); *It Could Be About Girls* (2006); *Postcards for Auntie Julie* (2007); and *Bed Death* (2008). All of this material was recorded at Grassroots, a city-centre youth project based in Cardiff that provides cheap recording facilities. Drunk Granny have also released a split record with Husbands on Local Kid/f.a.g. club records in 2009, which was recorded and mixed by Sherry Ostapovitch of Music for One. They have contributed 'Leotard' to the Homocrime singles club and 'The Passion' to the Points//Lines compilation released by IRRK records.

Drunk Granny have performed at a variety of events across the UK including Ladyfests, DIY gigs, Ladies Rock camp, and queer events and toured the UK with Husbands in February 2009. They have attracted some music-press attention and have been featured in *NME* and *Plan B* magazine, the latter of which described them as 'awkward post-Ladyfest pop played with conviction - loping, yelping, more or less harmonising, meandering, and moving' (October 2007, p. 30). Currently based in Bristol the pair practise at the Old Station, a co-operatively run rehearsal space, and continue to make music inspired by personal 'experiences as queers/lesbians in a less than queer world, wanting to see more queer females telling their own stories, d.i.y. queer feminist culture, the opportunity to meet like minded folk, and staying young'.

### **Jean Genet**

The first incarnation of Jean Genet formed in 2004 when the Leeds-based DIY feminist event collective Manifesta needed a support band for a Scream Club gig held on 30 October at the Fenton. With only a week before the gig, Manifesta members Emily Jane Graves (keyboards and vocals) and Bob Henderson (a.k.a. Bob Robert Hefferson: guitar and vocals) wrote a short set of indie-pop songs to perform as Jean Genet. Both members had moved to Leeds to attend University and subsequently come into contact with the independent music scene in Leeds, which included Cops and Robbers and Manifesta. Since the age of 15 Bob has been a self-taught guitarist and at 16 was the bassist in the local punk band Qwerty who used to be the main support act at Bedford Esquires for bands like Drugstore and My Vitriol. Although Bob was not 'out', the use of flamboyant style as a 'teen glitter kid' wearing feather boas and tiaras on-stage set the precedent for the development of a trashy, queer and pop aesthetic and agenda within Jean Genet. Emily and Bob were also organisers and DJs at Razzmatazz, a club night that

focused on indie-pop, Britpop and trash aesthetics that ran at Bar Phono during 2005-2006 and wrote various fanzines.

After the departure of Emily, Bob eventually persuaded his friend Helena Lukowska to join Jean Genet. With the addition of Helena (a.k.a Len Lenski Jackoffki, now known as Len: keyboards and vocals), who had no prior music-making or band experience, Jean Genet developed a more explicit and engaged queer mode of live music performance. The pair have self-released 3 CD-Rs *It'll Do!* (2005), *Live & Unplugged* (live recording at Kaffequeeria 2006), and *Come Again* (2007), which were recorded by friends and members of the local Leeds DIY music community. To date Jean Genet have played queer gigs and DIY events across Europe, toured with Lesbians on Ecstasy in 2007 and have played alongside artists such as Vaginal Creme Davis, Gravy Train!!!!, and Rhythm King and her Friends. Len and Bob currently live in London where Bob works as a writer for *Gay Times* and writes a blog,<sup>36</sup> and Len works as a library assistant and writer/performer. Despite taking several breaks the duo still make music together and occasionally perform as Jean Genet.



**Figure 6:** Jean Genet band members Bob (left) and Len (right)

<sup>36</sup> Bob Henderson's blog 'Chic Alors' can be viewed at <<http://chicalors.blogspot.com>> [accessed on 16 August 2009]

## Party Weirdo



**Figure 7:** Party Weirdo band members Cara (left), Therese (centre) and Emily (right)

Cara Holmes started playing electric guitar when she was 14 years old and played in the all-girl local band Nurse Nanci with a couple of school friends in Dundalk, Ireland,<sup>37</sup> where she grew up. Cara's relocation to Dublin meant that she was keen to continue to make music with other women. Cara decided to place an advert for a female drummer on the Irish music forum GigsMart in 2003. Emily Aoibheann responded and the duo formed Pinboy Skinny with Sarah Smith. The trio played together for five months and recorded an e.p. before splitting up without playing a gig. Cara and Emily went their separate ways: Cara played guitar in the post-rock band Inches who played gigs in Dublin and Kerry, whilst Emily quit playing drums for a year. Emily eventually began playing in a number of bands including Killateen and Star Kicking. After Inches came to an end, Cara decided to get back in touch with Emily, and the pair began making music together. After a few months the pair set themselves a target to play a gig. Emily met Therese McKenna (flautist and cellist) at a party in Cork and Therese joined the next rehearsal and the trio played their first gig as Party Weirdo a month later on 23 June 2006 in Dundalk. Party Weirdo were championed by Siobhan Fahey who, in 2006, set up the DIY queer feminist collective Magical Girl in Dublin which ran until February 2009. When Cara and Emily moved to Berlin in January 2007, the trio managed to continue making music together, and played numerous Ladyfests, DIY gigs and queer events around Europe and the UK. In 2007 Party

<sup>37</sup> Due to forming in Ireland and spending time living in Berlin, Party Weirdo are not officially categorised as part of the United Kingdom; nonetheless Party Weirdo did play a number of gigs in the UK and became part of the DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural circuit. For instance, Party Weirdo played gigs organised by Peppermint Patti, Vile Vile Creatures, and Manifesta.

Weirdo released their first 7-inch single *Chart Your Cycle* on the Ireland-based Stitchy Press DIY label. Whilst living in Berlin, Emily formed Holy Ghost Toast with Jule Jurgesson who recorded the album *Pestersome Nichts*. Party Weirdo eventually went into indefinite hiatus in May 2008 when Therese took up a temporary position as the sub-editor of the *Sun* newspaper, she currently works as a freelance journalist. Cara and Emily moved back to Ireland. Currently Cara lives and works as a freelance broadcaster in Co Waterford; she is currently writing songs on her banjo with the aim of starting a new project in the near future. Emily has continued to create culture within an array of collaborative projects including the bands Janey Mac, Fringilla Montifringilla and Avanti Maria; has played gigs with Niamh Corcoran (Angkorwat) as Meganekko; makes computer music as Cixous Ghost; and engages with performance art, burlesque and film projects.

#### ***4.4 Gaps: Yearning for DIY (sub)cultural activisms and spaces of comfort***

The first theme focuses on the motivations that drive the fabric of queer feminist (sub)cultural communities within contemporary British society. What experiences with pre-existing cultures have produced the desire to construct queer feminist musics and music (sub)cultures? What needs and desires do these actions fulfil? I will explore how active participation within DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural spaces can be understood as an attempt to construct a new queer feminist imaginary from the gaps and resources present in existing political organisations, subcultural legacies and consumer cultures. In particular, I set up a focus for the second theme, 'DIY intimacies', to explore how (sub)cultural music participation can offer hopeful spaces of comfort that offer participants key sites and resources for the embodiment of queer feminisms, genders and sexualities.

##### ***4.4.1 Experiencing Exclusions: Heterosexism and homonormativity in everyday life***

A desire to engage in (sub)cultural resistance can be rooted in experiences of marginalisation in the heterosexism of political groups, the enduring sexism within post-feminist commercial music culture and the homonormativity of lesbian and gay commercial culture. One common experience involved the struggle to negotiate a queer agenda within conventional gay and lesbian political structures and spaces. Homocore producer-fans, Daniel and Victor, both experienced a struggle to find space for the realisation of a radical queer stance within University union politics in the 1990s. Over time Daniel and Victor became attracted to the potential of DIY cultural activist strategies. Victor, who held the position of LGB officer twice at Newcastle University, felt restricted by the hierarchical structures of University student union politics and was gradually drawn to a combination of cultural activism and anarchism. In the following extract Victor reflected on the constraints of his role as an LGB officer and articulates

an argument for a DIY cultural politics that offers an empowering and constructive set of tactics for enacting small-scale disruptions of power.

I can't help thinking that so much of what I was doing back then [as an LGB officer] was a massive waste of time, particularly when compared to some of the stuff I've done since leaving Newcastle. Running an LGB group, and helping people out when they had problems, was surely worthwhile, but the amount of time spent on elections and student union meetings, all the emphasis on positions and hierarchies, and the lack of empowerment makes me cringe when I look back. It was these troubling things, together with some wider reading (not much, though), some work with other (non-socialist) activists, and me receiving some hard lessons about communication and unconstructive activism around the time, that helped change my politics towards the end of the 1990s. I began to have a bit of an interest in anarchism and became less interested in structured campus-centric student union activism. I was starting to understand the problems that power and authority bring with them at all levels (be it in government, mainstream cultural industries, land ownership, organised political groups, organised religion, student unions), and I was becoming impatient with the amount of my activist time that was being taken up by all the bureaucracy, positioning and faffing. At the same time I was becoming more aware of – and excited about – the various ways in which people were taking control of many aspects of their lives and empowering themselves. I began to see the parallels between, for example, a DIY label completely bypassing the music industry, and people baking their own bread, and people rejecting the authority of government. There seemed to me to be a perfect fit between the principles of DIY cultural activism and wider ideas of anarchism. It occurred to me that as well as entertaining ourselves (in ways that we're told we shouldn't or can't), we could also control other aspects of our lives without using the hierarchies, tools and structures that we're told we have to use.

Through an engagement with cultural activism Victor advocates a participatory model of culture that challenges the alienation experienced in a society characterised by a democratisation of consumerism (see Duncombe 1997, p. 105-7). Instead of constructing identities through the consumption of popular commercial culture, a DIY world is created within which people co-produce culture and trade with producers directly. This means that participants can enjoy more intimate meanings and bonds with cultural creations, producers and processes of making culture outside legitimate spheres of production.

(Sub)cultural participants who were not involved in conventional politics, outside political institutions and University Unions, could explore their relationship to anarchist politics and DIY culture within a network of direct-action groups active in contemporary Britain, which have been investigated by several researchers (McKay 1998; Lacey 2005). Contemporary protest cultures that follow in a tradition of civil disobedience include various anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation protests to challenge gatherings like the G8 and G20, Reclaim the Streets (St. John 2004), Animal Liberation Front (Plows et al 2004), Earth First! and Camp for Climate Action (Plows 2006, 2008). However, some (sub)cultural participants highlighted the problematic

discursive practices of hegemonic genders and sexualities embedded within these groups and spaces. For instance, Sarit, an organiser of Queeruption and Club V, who was involved in autonomous direct-action politics in Britain during the mid 90s argued that:

What I thought was [the] political scene – which was like a squatter, anti criminal justice bill that was a big struggle in the mid-90s like a party protest scene, anti-road building environmental stuff that was just starting there – it was so straight it was so hetero and I felt like whenever I'd go to parties it was always really really repressive to me [...] The direct-action movement Reclaim the Streets started during that period and, in retrospect, some of the people, some of good friends of mine are involved in that but I didn't know anyone; I was peripherally involved, I'd go to street parties like Reclaim the Streets, but I also felt that it was a really straight scene, so straight, and quite sexist and women there had a big struggle.

Sarit became involved in the search for alternative modes of political protest that challenged the construction of heterosexual masculinities in direct-action movements. The masculine agenda of gay rights groups were key to the formation of radical lesbian political groups in the mid- to late-1990s. For instance, lesbian disillusion with the gay rights group Outrage enabled the focus group LABIA (Lesbians Answer Back in Anger) to develop, which eventually evolved into the Lesbian Avengers in 1993, who were responsible for various public actions aimed to highlight the problem of lesbian invisibility. Sarit recalled her involvement in high-profile protest actions, including a 'zap-action' of Queen Victoria's statue, to protest against Queen Victoria's role in the promotion of lesbian invisibility, and the anti-Section 28 pink bus action, where a stagecoach bus was hijacked in central London and painted pink to object against Stagecoach-owner Brian Souter's financial support of Section 28 (see Jennings 2007c, p. 187). The cultural and political dominance of hetero-masculinities remains a key concern for queer feminist participants. Heena explained how the presence of Kaffequeeria within a radical social centre contributed to the otherwise normative conventions of the activist space; 'it gave The Basement a queer feminist aspect. There was a lot of other [activism] Climate Camp, animal rights and [it] was pretty male dominated and not very queer at all, so it gave it that aspect and some visibility to the traditional activist scene'.

Heterosexism in commercial music culture was another source of alienation that motivated the search for the construction of new radical counterpublics. For instance, in her reflections on undergraduate University life within Leeds, Amy emphasised how constructions of white hetero-femininities were embedded in a normalised masculine dominance of public space within nightclubs. The assumption of a passive hetero-feminine sexuality set to cater for male desire enabled men to justify their access to queer girl's bodies despite girls' attempts to mark out a non-heterosexual identity. Public displays of queer girl desire were recuperated as heterosexual titillation and ploys to engage with male attention; a theme strongly associated with post-feminist consumer culture (Levy 2005; McRobbie 2009). Amy also argued that the demands of

hetero-femininities even seeped into 'indie' club night spaces in Leeds that tend to position themselves as 'underground' and more tolerant of alternative sexualities:

At regular club nights you get GROPED and HIT ON IN AN UNSOLICITED FASHION. In my first two years at uni I used to (feel I had to) go to horrible het bars and clubs where you literally get your arse and boobs felt all night long. You are just expected to be a passive female. So gross, but so so very normal. And then in my second year I did discover indie nights where that didn't happen but you would get nasty beery men all over you if you kissed a girl.

Women's struggle with the perpetuation of conventional gender relations and sexual identities within 'underground' music communities has been reported in other alternative music cultures (Schippers 2000, 2002; O'Brien 1999; Reddington 2007; Bennett 2001; Davis 1995; Pini 1997; Hutchinson 1999). For example, empirical research within the heavy metal nightclub 'Club Thrash' argued that although 'many women gravitated toward the heavy metal setting to escape oppressive stifling adolescent situations, they ended up in another oppressive context' (Krenske & McKay 2000, p. 287). Instead of a space liberated from hegemonic gender and sexual power relations, young people encountered a gender regime – in which men territorialised space, dominated corporeal practices, and objectified women's bodies – that restricted women's participation within music subcultures.

The experiences of music-makers also illustrated how local amateur music-making practices could be limited by gendered discourses. For instance, Party Weirdo member Cara commented on the gendered legacy of local music-making culture in Ireland: 'music until recently in Ireland was reserved for the boys and men. Ten years ago it was exactly the same in my first band, it was seen as being very odd for women/girls to be getting up and rocking out'. Gendered norms and assumptions about women's music-making shaped how some audiences responded to Party Weirdo's live performances. As a skilled queer girl drummer, a role which previous research has argued to be coded as 'masculine' (Bayton 1998; Clawson 1999a, 1999b), Emily noted how audience responses to her performances varied according to her fluid gender presentation: 'I in particular get attention for my "hard hitting" as a drummer. You really get some stunned reactions. Funnily enough, when I shaved my head people seemed less surprised to see me drum aggressively'. Emily's displays of heavy drumming were normalised within masculine presentations but positioned as incomprehensible in queer feminine presentations. Therefore, the perceptions of queer feminist music-making are limited by the (re)production of a heterosexual matrix that legitimates women's same-sex desire within a masculine gender performance. This means that the complexities of Emily's queer fluid embodiments of femininity, her queer fem(me)inism, were incomprehensible within the hetero-gendered logics of local music-making cultures.

Gendered discourses of music-making could also discourage the music-making participations of queers, girls and women. For instance, a small body of literature has constructed a normative 'career' path for an amateur musician that requires adherence to various (gendered) pressures of rock music culture including instrumental virtuosity, band hierarchies, fixed instrumental roles and standard songwriting methods (Bennett 1980a, 1980b). These pressures can restrict and exclude queers, women and girls from music-making. For instance, as an inexperienced music-maker, Len reflected on how her perception of musicianship had prevented her from creating music and being in a band prior to her involvement in Jean Genet:

I'd never been in a band before and never thought I would be due to my musical limitations, but I think what was good about Jean Genet was [that] we proved that you don't need any kind of mystical musician quality to be in a band and to have people enjoy your shows. The only reason for not being in a band is if you don't want to be. I always said I didn't want to be in a band but I really did, I just didn't think I could because I had this idea that people in bands were superhuman

The local DIY culture in Leeds was an important facilitator for the formation of Jean Genet, which developed a queer approach to music making that was an overt critique of the conventions and professionalism of music-making that, as Len argued, could 'stick two fingers up at this whole idea that music must always be some highbrow professional thing'. Whilst Bob also located the queer aesthetic of Jean Genet in a distinct 'approach to what was required to be in a band – namely [the] idea [of a] queer aesthetic that doesn't value virtuosity or talent in the traditional sense of fancy guitar riffs or complex song structures'. Similarly when discussing the music-making practices of Party Weirdo, Emily chose to highlight the distinct efforts made to challenge a perceived rock tradition: 'I think our style of writing is more organic than traditional rock norms which follow a verse chorus bridge solo sort of map, but rather, as the Slits described, a more fragmented, "female sound"'. Therefore, queer feminist music-makers acknowledged the lack of visible queer and/or feminist music-makers in their local communities and expressed frustration with the dominant models and pressures in local music-making. This often led to the exploration of a queer feminist music aesthetic that sought to disrupt, ridicule and challenge the power within taken-for-granted conventions of music-making.

Since the 1980s, dominant control of gay and lesbian identities has shifted away from pathologisation towards an approach that 'understands lesbian and gay politics through the language of equality, rights, dignity, multiculturalism and citizenship' (Stychin 2006, p. 900). This new discourse of 'active citizenship' means that the government has a responsibility to provide equal access to services, benefits and legal recognition for the whole population, including the gay and lesbian community. Subsequently legislation was passed to expand the legal rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered individuals. For instance, the 1988 local government Section 28 act was repealed, the Gender Recognition Act 2004 enabled transsexuals

to legally change their gender, the Adoption and Children's Act was passed in 2002 to allow same-sex couples to apply to jointly adopt a child, and in 2004 the Civil Partnership Act was passed in Britain and from late 2005 same-sex couples became eligible to register their relationships. It is not my intention to undermine the positive impacts that such legislation has had upon the lives of gender and sexual minorities in Britain; however, I aim to build on other critiques of gay normalisation and the re-establishment of binaries that position the couple as the most socially responsible unit within a neo-liberal British society, culture and economy (Stychin 2006; Richardson 2005).

Changes in legislation were accompanied by the growth of consumer culture and distinct urban areas for a gay and lesbian market, to the extent that local government, and commercially, funded Gay Pride marches and Mardi Gras events have been theorised as 'consumption-related cultural resistance' (see Kates & Belk 2001). Although these spaces act as potential sites for the resistance of heterosexism identified in a range of music subcultures, queer feminist participants reported experiences of marginalisation, isolation and alienation within spaces of lesbian and gay consumer culture. For instance, the organisers of Kaffequeeria in Manchester critiqued the well-known gay district Canal Street and annual Mardi Gras as a predominantly white and male commercial space that perpetuates exclusions of gender, 'race' and class. Heena explained to me 'I don't know if you've been to Canal Street but it's pretty white, it's pretty male, it's pretty expensive. [...] In Manchester [Mardi Gras has] become a really commercial thing where you pay £15 for a wristband; it's all centred around drinking and fairgrounds; it's not political, it's passive; it will attract a very particular crowd'. The transformation of the gay and lesbian community into an expensive enterprise of consumption is experienced as an intolerable de-politicisation of gay and lesbian practices. Sites of lesbian and gay club culture were experienced as spaces of discomfort where queer feminist participants failed to fulfil homonormative aesthetic demands. In the initial stages of her 'coming out' Nazmia recalled the impact that the 'candy bar look' had upon her increasing sense of discomfort within commercial lesbian culture in London:

Well okay there's this thing called the candy bar look, where you go into the Candy Bar and they look at your feet and then they look you up and then they just look at you like this (pulls funny face) and it was just you know the kind of thing where like the main lesbian venue in London you have to pay to go in you have to go past the bouncer the entire bar will turn round and stare at you and you will never be dressed right, and, you will never fit in, you will never like the music that they are playing, it won't be a place where you feel comfortable

Experiences of exclusion from specific situations of homonormativity within British gay urban culture were echoed in the experiences of other queer feminist participants across Britain. The widespread assimilation of gay and lesbian identities within commercial culture has facilitated

the development of a subtle disciplinary regime; in an era of individualist self-improvement culture, gay and lesbian bodies are also subject to in a similar investment in a 'body project' (Giddens 1991; Featherstone 1999). Within homonormative commercial gay culture individuals are placed under pressure to correctly choose and embody the appropriate cultural styles, tastes and behaviours in order to successfully pass as gay or lesbian. This may involve the display of particular gay and lesbian signifiers in the 'free choice' of fashion, style and music and 'liberated' attitudes to money, sex, drugs and alcohol. Visual logics are integral in the recognition of lesbian sexual location and to avoid the dilemma of misrecognition for non-heterosexual subjects (see Walker 1993; Phelan 1994; Holliday 1999; Hemmings 1999). These visual signifiers and behaviours intersect with racial and class categories to (re)construct distinctions in the presentation of lesbian sexualities within counter-cultural locations. Anne Enke (2007), in her exploration of the counter-cultural Women's Coffee House space in Detroit found that the heterosexist oppressive context of 1970s mid-west America meant that women's coffee houses invested in discourses of white middle-class respectability. Lesbian sexuality was legitimised through the use of church sites, which facilitated the construction of 'nice', sober women-only spaces that avoided the connotations of deviancy associated with 'seedy' and run-down gay bars.

Within queer feminist participants' narratives are traces of a similar concern with the construction of 'nice' or 'lovely' spaces which meant displacing alcohol for other less lucrative DIY activities like communal meals. There was also a common belief that the realisation of such spaces would enable the participation of a wider range of women and children. Of the range of (sub)cultural collectives studied, the Kaffequeeria collective were the most reminiscent of the women's coffee-house model, prioritising the construction of small-scale food and music events that often omitted the sale of alcohol in order to produce a site distinct from commercial gay and lesbian culture. This was also accompanied by a sense that the communities and relationships created within sober spaces were more inclusive and genuine. For instance, Humey emphasised how Kaffequeeria spaces were 'lovely', 'nice' and 'like just having kind of a Sunday afternoon tea in someone's house'. Heena described how Kaffequeeria was held 'in places where alcohol was not the focus, [and] although there have been gigs where there has been alcohol served, you would probably get a lot more women. With Kaffequeeria it was all ages, you'd have people with kids and young kids [...] trying to provide an alternative to Canal Street and bars and drinking'. In London Naz emphasised how possibilities of constructing a supportive queer community are enhanced through the participation in (sub)cultural life that avoids corruption of drink, drugs, sex and commerce within gay and lesbian club culture:

The other problem with the gay scene was that it's really about spending money and about getting drunk and there's something really destructive about building a community around the idea of going out and you have to have a

good time and you have to dress up and you have to get drunk and you have to pull and you have to take drugs and you know whatever it is. But it's just, I, you can't really form friendships that, well you can, but your support system is going to be so different if it's built up of people you've met in clubs as opposed to people that you've met doing things that you're genuinely interested in.

Interestingly all three queer feminist participants are speaking from non-white ethnic locations: Heena described herself as Gujarati Hindu working class, Humey identified as South Asian and Naz located her identity in her East-African Asian descent. For these women (sub)cultural participation with communal meals and alcohol-free activities draw on different ethnic cultural legacies beyond a simplistically white and middle-class model of feminist activism. For instance, Naz related her role in cooking communal meals and baking back to her ethnic heritage; 'I grew up in an Indian family and if you cook then you're showing love for someone, you know and it's a really big part of my community like the religious community I grew up with and my traditional community'. Heena links her role as a DIY producer-fan to her parents' involvement in their local Hindi community; 'my parents have always been involved in I guess it is DIY stuff within their Hindu community and they've got a community hall [...] it's pretty DIY, it's almost the same as what I do or have done like recently [...] They don't get paid for it and it's a social thing and it's people mucking in and they don't make money or anything, they want to do it for their community'. Furthermore the predominantly white middle-class values of queer feminist (sub)cultural life are acknowledged and critiqued by all three women who collectively engage in race-related activism within DIY (sub)cultures, a theme which will be explored in Chapter Five.

Individuals involved in queer feminist (sub)cultures tend to be critical of commercial music cultures and are invested in a process of constructing and defending tastes, behaviours, practices and styles that lie outside of the homonormative logic of gay and lesbian consumer culture. The predominant structures and spaces on offer in commercial culture deny queer feminist participants a source of cultural validation for their sexual and political identities. Attempts to code alternative distinctions into (sub)cultural practices draw on a complexity of class and ethnic meanings. Nonetheless queer feminist participants' narratives shared a sense of yearning for a queer feminist sexual politics beyond the spaces, identities and interests currently validated by gay and lesbian consumer cultures.

#### 4.4.2 'When do we get to meet?':<sup>38</sup> *Sociality, community and connection*

The process of realising local-level small-scale (sub)cultural events was fuelled by sociality, a need to actively reach out and find others with whom to create meaningful social bonds and form a queer feminist community. Homocrime member Irene explained:

I think you can have quite a deep and meaningful relationship with people you actually organise events with. For queer people in punk music it's not like there'll be many people like you around you unless you actively seek them out and how do you seek them out? [...] how would you get someone to be friends with you without suggesting you organise a club together or something like that? [...] we used to joke at one point that we don't have a social life we just do meetings because that's sort of easier than being sociable.

For many participants the construction of queer feminist music community is primarily a social activity; DIY (sub)cultural music event organisation represented a possible avenue for the shy, socially awkward and those anxious to transcend their everyday inhibitions and open up different ways to communicate ideas and transform their immediate surroundings collectively with other people. There are important distinctions that need to be made between different collective structures in (sub)cultural production. Some collectives can be thought of as 'closed': the relationships between members of the collective are based on established or forming friendships and there is no attempt to publically advertise meetings or encourage public participation in a core organisation group (for example, Homocrime). In this context the production of queer feminist music events may serve to solidify friendships and meet social needs as outlined by Irene. Other collectives can be considered to be more 'open' (for example, Manifesta): the relationships in the collective are a mixture of personal friendships and self-selected individuals who collaborate in the (sub)cultural output of the collective. Organisational meetings are publicised in a public forum and newcomers are encouraged to attend and contribute. It is common for friendships and relationships to develop amongst members over time, although friendship is not a prerequisite for (sub)cultural participation and there is no guarantee that friendships will develop. It is common for collectives to move across these categories either by momentarily opening up collective boundaries to the public or to organically expand and include new people from friendship networks that are a consequence of (sub)cultural activities (for example, Kaffequeeria, Local Kid and f.a.g. club). These collective formations produce diverse organisational dynamics and experiences of sociality within (sub)cultural production. Newcomers may experience some resistance to their involvement: suspicions may emerge over the extent of subcultural knowledge and experience. Furthermore, as the membership and energy of a collective fluctuates over time, the risk of participant burnout and hierarchical power relations increases. Therefore, whilst ideals of 'inclusion' and 'diversity' are

<sup>38</sup> Corey Orbison, 'When do we get to meet', *Your Name is Poison* (Everard records, 2008)

integral to queer feminist (sub)cultural life, the internal dynamics of queer feminist collectives, shaped by wider structures of class, 'race' and gender, may represent belonging for some whilst 'others' may experience exclusion and intimidation. A more comprehensive critical consideration of these conflicts and contradictions in DIY queer feminist organisation structures, in terms of class, 'race' and gender, will be revisited in Chapter Five.

The majority of DIY queer feminist collectives studied were, as mentioned above, brought together through the organisation of one-off DIY feminist events like Ladyfest. The skills, energy and enthusiasm that were gained within these organisational collectives often led to the establishment of friendships and relationships that facilitated the production of longer-term (sub)cultural spaces. For instance, many of the women involved in the organisation of Ladyfest London 2002 were involved in The Bakery collective; Ladyfest Bristol 2003 led to the establishment of the Local Kid collective; Ladyfest Cardiff led to the formation of f.a.g. club; and the core working group behind Ladyfest Manchester 2003 continued as Kaffequeeria. Ladyfests meant that previously isolated individuals were encouraged to partake in face-to-face organisation and/or participation with DIY feminist culture. The role of new technologies (Aragon 2008; Leonard 2007) and zine-making (Comstock 2001; Schilt 2003b; Zobl 2004) have been argued to be critical in the formation of contemporary 'third-wave' feminist resistance (see Garrison 2000); however Ladyfests also created an impetus for face-to-face meetings, interactions and practical organisation that can be considered crucial to the processes of queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance. Since the decline of riot grrrl in popular culture, producer-fans invested in riot grrrl were sustained by a national epistolary network of fanzines and letters;<sup>39</sup> however the interaction demanded by Ladyfest organisation meant that handfuls of scattered producer-fans and music-makers could engage in collective organisation that involved regular meetings and events. The emotional experiences invested in Ladyfest as a site of DIY feminist cultural activism and the identities, skills and relationships that emerged within a Ladyfest were critical to the formation of queer feminist community in Britain. For instance, during riot grrrl Naz was a zine-writer based in a rural town in South Wales. After settling in London, the opportunity to participate in Ladyfest London provided her with an opportunity to construct a (sub)cultural political community to belong to. Ladyfests supplied the potential to transform alienated individuals into concrete friendships and social bonds that could foster a creative community and shared (sub)culture:

It became really apparent especially after we'd started organising for Ladyfest London that most of the people who were going to meetings were people who had all read each other's fanzines, or had seen each other at the same gigs for

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<sup>39</sup> For more information on the role of fanzines in sustaining a DIY feminist community in Britain see Leonard (1998)

years and years and years and had never had the courage to say hello to each other and it just became it became so ridiculous, this idea that there were all these people out there who were interested in the same stuff and could be helping each other, particularly when you start thinking about people who need a drummer in a band or needed advice on a particular thing [...] It's about making London more bearable, or more homely, or just about creating a space where people can be different together, so, there was a big gaping hole there as far as the people who were involved in Ladyfest were concerned, I mean there are obviously other communities out there but we hadn't fitted into any of it

Michal also highlighted the critical role that face-to-face interactions had in the formation of queer feminist community. Michal had just missed out on being directly involved in British riot grrrl music subculture and as an isolated subcultural producer-fan he participated in fanzine circles, the Slampt gig circuit and the independent tape label Spazoom in Cardiff. His involvement with Ladyfest Bristol 2003 and Local Kid enabled him to build the queer feminist DIY community he had previously craved as a riot grrrl fan:

This was kind of [the] first time that it really felt like these people were all around me and it was the first time I ever felt like there was a real feminist DIY community where I was living and especially now when I think of DIY communities post my involvement in Ladyfest and before that. It feels a lot more solid [now] it's not so much of an imaginary community it really does feel like an actual community with people who are friends and probably would not have met [without] Ladyfest [...] It's a real strong community I feel really like these are not just acquaintances they're not just friends but these are all people who completely understand what we're all working towards [...] I got a real strong sense of in the last few years or the years when we were working with full time Local Kid stuff all of our time was basically spent working on this and creating this community and just supporting this community.

In establishing regular localised queer feminist spaces, (sub)cultural participants could actively 'fill the gaps' and challenge the marginalisation experienced in dominant cultures and political groups. Queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance meant that culture and space could be reconfigured to make new identities, practices and politics intelligible. Cultural transmission of the legacies of queer and feminist music offered inspirational models for the kinds of cultures, spaces and communities that could be mutually fostered on a grassroots level. For instance, Daniel managed to rework the gender-specificities of riot grrrl in order to construct a queer agenda and identity for Homocrime music spaces:

One thing that was really influential for me was an issue of Ablaze! that I bought in Leeds which had a big Huggy Bear article and I remember photocopying this Huggy Bear manifesto thing and like trying to give it to girls at school like 'you must be interested in this' and nobody being interested and reading the stuff that was published around riot grrrl [and] kind of in my head sometimes substituting girl for queer and trying to work out how it applied to me [...] [In Homocrime] music was always the thing and to be able to make a queer scene based around the kind of music that we like

Contemporary DIY queer feminist (sub)culture can be situated within the legacies of radical women involved in punk rock, post-punk and riot grrrl music subcultures. In particular, Ana da Silva and Gina Birch (the Raincoats) are significant intergenerational links and their support of initiatives like Ladyfest, Ladies Rock and Girls Rock Camp UK connects queer feminist participants to an ongoing (re)construction of a history of radical (sub)cultural resistance. The understated continuities of radical women's cultural activities have left a trail of possibilities which act as vital sources of strength, inspiration and validation for queer feminist community, as Michal argues:

I feel like as a whole group of people we've created so much stuff out of nothing, yeah created this amazing community which might not be visible to the rest of the world but it's just a special and empowering thing to be a part of. I mean I make it sound like it's a thing and it's not something that is separate, it's a continuation of stuff it goes all the way back to [...] the Raincoats [who] have been involved in lots of stuff and it's still going on now, it's just a continuation of what they've been doing since the 70s, so I don't want to make it sound like it's this completely new thing created out of nothing, but it's something pulled together from fragments.

The marginalised legacies of radical women's (sub)cultural productions can directly inform the political focus of DIY queer feminist events in an attempt to resist hetero-gendered histories of music. For instance, as part of the Bakery collective Naz took part in the production of a variety of spaces that sought to acknowledge the lines of influence that connect radical musics made by women, thereby (re)constructing a strong unified tradition of feminist music-making in British culture.

Ladyfests, clubs, performances, and other spaces that I have been involved in – e.g. The Closet Mixtape – are ways in which to document and value women's contribution to culture and also their historical contribution and therefore these [spaces] are part of the political project to make 'history' less patriarchal. By putting on The Raincoats, acknowledging the inspiration that Kate Bush can give us etc we are valuing and validating diversity which has already been ignored by history.

The production of (sub)cultural music events offers its participants the possibility to enact creative performances of power. Culture is reclaimed and critically redeployed to expose, challenge and question the (re)production of a dominant heterosexist cultural economy. The transformation of the unintelligible into the intelligible that takes place in queer feminist (sub)cultural life can produce emotionally charged experiences of belonging, empowerment and validation. Queer feminist participants' initial encounters with queer feminist (sub)culture harboured the potential to radically change subjectivities, identities and life-courses. Contact often led to an exploration of personal connections with the legacy of queer and feminist art, music and culture. For instance, Debi had no knowledge of riot grrrl prior to her involvement in Queer Mutiny, Ladyfest, f.a.g. club collective, and her band Drunk Granny. The discovery of

riot grrrl allowed Debi to articulate her own creative actions and activism in new ways and this, combined with experiences of local queer spaces, deeply affected her sense of self:

When I was lucky enough to move and pass through a DIY activist space or DIY subcultural space, it just propelled me into action and so it made me a human being, I wasn't really a human being before [...] because I was isolated and depressed and I had these ideas and I didn't have the facilities i.e. the connections and the community and the support to do anything with them, but luckily I met the people [...] that's essential how it changed my life, it had a very positive impact on my life.

Further north Kaffequeeria resisted experiences of alienation in gay consumer culture by creating queer feminist community focused spaces: a series of small-scale DIY daytime music and food events held at a local radical social centre in Manchester. In her narrative Humey emphasised the role of queer spaces in providing an affirmative experience for queer identities:

I think I saw a gap [...] I felt like I was constantly going to other places for things and thinking well it would be nice if people were coming here for something or that there was something here and as well frustrations with like the gay scene and things and really wanting there to be a space where you could just go and hang out in that more community focused kind of way [...] I think with Kaffequeeria it was just wanting to sort of, it's so nice to be able to hang out in queer spaces I think that's the thing it's like everyone you have you feel an association with a certain identity I think it is really exciting and affirming to be able to hang out in these spaces and when all the spaces you have to you are bars and that sort thing it alienates you at the same time as it affirms you I think so with Kaffequeeria it was trying to have somewhere where it wasn't doing that.

Emotionally charged experiences in marginal queer feminist events were confirmed in the narratives of audience members of Kaffequeeria events. For instance, the annual Get Bent event had a significant impact on Fergus an American postgraduate student who sought out queer subculture within Manchester and subsequently became involved in the organisation of Get Bent. He described his feelings and expectations on entering a DIY queer feminist event:

I met my boyfriend at Get Bent, it was just this amazing experience like I remember walking up to the Burlington room where it was held last year [2006] and just walking up by myself and I couldn't get this grin off my face because I was so excited about what I was going to find inside, I was absolutely not disappointed it was so cool to be in this radically queer space [...] it's hard to put into words but the excitement of being in those spaces because I didn't grow up in radically queer spaces it's like those spaces weren't available to me as a young person or as a teenager or even in my early twenties and now when I find them they're not perfect but like it's really exciting and it's really inspiring.

To summarise, this section has explored the situations and experiences that have initiated the search for and formation of queer feminist (sub)cultural community. Queer feminist participants were motivated by experiences of isolation, exploitation and marginalisation within the hetero-

gendered structures of club cultures, music subcultures and political groups. These exclusions were perpetuated in contemporary spaces of lesbian and gay club culture. Participation within Ladyfest and Queeruption events created the face-to-face interactions required to connect previously dispersed and distanced (sub)cultural bonds essential for the growth of queer feminist collectives, networks and community across the British urban landscape. In particular, the cultural transmission of legacies of radical women's resistance in music subcultures provided important models of inspiration and possibility. The processes by which queer feminist participants create (sub)cultural events that re-work and resist the exclusions of dominant culture are charged with emotion and harbour potential for participants to re-create their identities, subjectivities and lifestyles. The next theme seeks to delve into these experiences of comfort to examine how (sub)cultural practices produce these critical intimacies in DIY queer feminist events. How exactly do queer feminist (sub)cultural participants seek to challenge dominant cultural expectations of genders and sexualities in their use of space, style, language and sound?

#### *4.5 DIY Intimacies: (Sub)cultural negotiations of power in sound and space*

Dedicated investments in the spaces and sounds of queer feminist community in (sub)cultural participants' narratives demonstrated an awareness of the crucial social and political functions embedded within the participation within (sub)cultural music events. In this theme I address the discourses of comfort and intimacy that were threaded through the talk of producer-fans and music-makers as they sought to justify and explain their everyday DIY (sub)cultural labour in queer feminist music (sub)culture. In particular, I focus on the creative processes of producer-fans and music-makers who construct distinctive uses of sound, space and style in performative reclamations of power demonstrated in the reconfiguration of (sub)culture. This leads to an examination of the everyday experiences of queer genders, sexualities and feminisms within DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural spaces. Participants open up possibilities for the negotiation of queer masculinities, queer fem(me)inisms, and queer heterosexualities, within a queer feminist praxis.

In the same manner that comfort was found to be integral in the everyday performance of queer identity (Holliday 1999), the experience of spaces and communities as 'comfortable' was critical to the formation and maintenance of queer feminist (sub)culture. Tacit expectations in queer feminist (sub)cultural events meant that differences, in terms of queer gender and sexual identities, politics and practices, were not subjected to external pressures to explain and translate queer life to a dominant logic. In a phobic culture queer genders and sexualities are frequently subjected to repressive attempts to hypersexualise sexual and gender difference and re-stabilise the dominance of reproductive heterosexuality. A compulsive reification of a hetero-gendered logic secures the cultural viability of fixed gender and sexual identities – such as man, woman,

heterosexual and homosexual – but leaves queer ambiguities subject to dominant interrogation, surveillance and control present in social practices of gender discrimination, transphobia and homophobia, as Jody Norton noted:

a society in which dominance is characteristically the governing aim of male political and cultural action, contemporary scientific and cultural efforts to discipline transgendered subjectivities and bodies to conform to a dimorphic gender system constitute a special form of a broader political agenda – the repression of the queer (1997, p. 146)

Queer feminist community sought to challenge the dominant intolerance of queer gender and sexual ambiguities, and attempted to create spaces and practices that resisted the dominant impulse to impose hegemonic gender and sexual categories upon its participants. This means that producer-fans and music-makers constructed a collective cultural experiential base from which to perform confident queer identities, practices and subjectivities in everyday life. For example, in terms of music-making, queer feminist music makers made distinct attempts to challenge dominant models of gender and sexuality within their practices and open up space for multiplicity and ambiguity in a queer feminist cultural politic. For instance, Drunk Granny described their music-making practices as queer feminist activism. This referred to the power of music-making to create emotional spaces within which (sub)cultural participants could assert multiple genders and sexualities within a phobic culture:

We think our music definitely questions normative gender and sexuality and creates space for people to explore that if they want to because drunk granny doesn't sing about sex and sexuality the whole time, it puts out different ideas about being queer out there – affirming that queer is truly about multiple expressions of gender and sexuality. We do take our personal experiences and relate them to the wider social world e.g. everyone hates queers. We think the affective qualities of our music – i.e., the way we attempt to transmit our messages, our forces and energies – to the subculture is a form of queer feminist activism [...] we just want to empower people to express themselves

Other music-makers invented strategies to disrupt and complicate normative gender and sexual expectations. Len emphasised how, in live performances of Jean Genet, the use of style, nudity, perspective and gesture aimed to interrupt traditional assumptions about gender and sexuality in music performances:

Again there was the whole dressing identically thing. I do think that questions the idea that how you are biologically should dictate certain things [...] It's funny cos sometimes, when I'm fully clothed people think I'm a boy (usually depending on the length of my hair) and also, I would personally categorize my gender as falling somewhere between male and female, but in certain spaces, once you reveal your breasts all people can see is a girl. But then I don't think I acted especially in keeping with stereotypes about what it is to be female onstage [...] we didn't care about gender so much in our lyrics. I sang the lyrics to 'Tow Truck Guy' which was all from the perspectives of a gay man, Bob sang 'Pesky Wet Dreams' from a straight man's perspective and '69 positions' was sung as though Bob and I were fucking each other, albeit to

limited success. And we always ended up rolling around on the floor and wrestling and dry humping and stuff. That was fun! I liked the fact that our relationship onstage was kind of a bit ambiguous at times. People thought we were a couple or whatever, or they weren't exactly sure. Flirting with the audience, pretending to suck them off - obviously regardless of gender - during some songs, the list goes on and on.

Jean Genet's performances ridiculed and resisted dominant attempts to categorise the precise gender, sexuality and relationship between Len and Bob. For Party Weirdo, as an all-girl feminist band, band members regarded their ways of writing music and performing live as tactics to undermine conventional gender expectations. Cara argued that Party Weirdo resisted gendered conventions by engaging in experimental songwriting practices, unconventional instrumentation and political topics:

Women experimenting with song structures/formulas/ideas as well as 'rocking out' while playing along with a flute! Singing about issues about female objectification /menstruation /singing out against corporate babble [...] I guess being in a band with two other feminists in itself leads you to think that what you are doing expresses some of our feminist ideals, whether it's writing about equality, giving off about wolf whistling or proving that women can create 'rock' music, playing loud guitar and drums as fast and as furious as anyone else can. [...] Topics of gender and sexuality are not addressed in Irish music as far as I can hear and I think we do that by writing about personal experiences, being open in interviews about our politics and who we are without forcing anything on anyone else. We would like to create a space in Ireland for voices to be heard, exposing queer/feminist politics, lifestyles, musically if anything else.

In their live performances, Party Weirdo playfully questioned the established format of music performance. For instance, inspired by the performance artist Amanda Coogan, Party Weirdo adapted performance art within performances of the song 'Panic': Emily would wear an apron with Michelangelo's David torso on it and perform a repetitive dance routine, which incorporated pointing at her open mouth, breasts and crotch and then crying, whilst playing a keyboard part. Emily gave a good example to illustrate how Party Weirdo music performances challenged expectations and made the most of audience curiosity within punk music subcultural sites:

I used to get a kick out of screwing with peoples' perceptions and expectations. Sometimes a gob-smacked reaction is as good as a wildly enthusiastic response. People get so curious about you. In a punk situation I've noticed that there is a pervading attempt at arrogance or coolness, which gets sort of interrupted by peoples' curiosity. [...] For example, when we played in Kopei, a gigantic squat in Berlin, we supported a band called Nuclear Death Terror, a crust band from Copenhagen with an Irish front man. The Irish guy told me later on that he had turned to the drummer in Nuclear Death Terror and noticed the peculiar look on his face while we were playing. The Irish guy asked the drummer what he thought, presuming it would be dismissive and the drummer said 'I'm just fascinated. I can't take my eyes off the stage. What's going to happen next?' That was pretty damn cool. [...] Now that we have

created this kind of sound, we like to be playful and I certainly take pleasure in screwing with people minds in this way.

The spaces created within queer feminist music (sub)culture therefore provided a crucial resource for countering societal surveillance and intolerance of queer and feminist identities and practices; for instance, Boitel argued that the experience of belonging to a queer community was important to him by stressing 'the gain of being part of a group of people [within which] you do not have to explain what you are about constantly'. Likewise, Amy justified her long-term investment in the Manifesta collective by emphasising the role of DIY queer feminist events as providing 'the places I go when I need some back-up and to feel normal'. Furthermore in her experience of Queeruption Heena felt temporarily liberated from a pressure to explain her radical gender and sexual presentations: 'I felt like I was totally comfortable there and I didn't have to justify the way I looked or the way I acted or who I fancied to anybody'. Rosie expanded on why this construction of a 'safe space', protected from the wider societal hostility of queer gender and sexual practices, was integral to queer feminist (sub)cultures:

So often in wider society you have to justify your views in terms of feminist views or the way you look or why you've got a girlfriend or a boyfriend or whatever, and you have to answer questions all the time and it just feels so nice, in terms of being in a space where you can be whatever and you're not going to be questioned about it. Which I think [is] true and possibly true of Ladyfest events and Bring Yourself Festival and things [that] happen all round the country like in terms of gender and politics and sexuality and feminism and stuff. You can just go and be and know that people around you, I don't know because I guess it means we're not being challenged, but I think sometimes it's good to feel like you're just kind of safe and with people who understand what you're thinking and what you feel [...] in terms of gender you can go and be who you wanna be you know it doesn't matter if you're female or male or whatever like stuff like that you know it just doesn't matter and you can change within that and people aren't going to be like 'what are you doing?'

The production of localised queer feminist (sub)cultural events allowed participants to experience comfort, safety and confidence in queer sexual and gender expressions denied visibility and acceptance in dominant cultural spheres. Queer feminist events operated according to tacit rules that produced important feelings of community, 'safe space' and solidarity. Localised small-scale endeavours tend to attract tight-knit loyal audiences seeking to re-invest in a specific set of (sub)cultural political legacies and interests. Due to the obscure cultural political tastes celebrated, and the relatively small pool of enthusiasts combined with the DIY production ethic, direct connections between cultural creators and consumers become commonplace. This created an intimate 'participatory culture' of connections, friendships and mutual support between music-makers and producer-fans (Duncombe 1997). This intimate connectedness often transcended the local in a construction of an (inter)national network of similar others, as Lizzie highlighted in her account of Manifesta:

Manifesta provides a really important 'space'. I think that's what I feel most strongly about Manifesta, that it provides this safe space, this network of people, this connection to other similar people around the world, this space to talk/feel/share/be ideas/thoughts/your true self that - in itself - is a pretty radical cool thing.

The (re)production of discourses of comfort, intimacy and mutual participation within queer feminist (sub)culture informed creative and practical processes in a queer feminist cultural politic that sought to upturn the conventional spatial, sonic and stylistic conventions of music (sub)culture.

#### *4.6 The sonic construction of queer feminist community*

In contrast to the ubiquity of a heterocentric 'male soundtrack' (Bayton 1998, p. 5) within public spaces, a critical feature of queer feminist music events involved the high inclusion of queer, feminist and women musicians within the sonic dimensions of (sub)cultural space. However, I will not attempt to define a definitive queer feminist music aesthetic for the reader. I find such a project flawed and instead draw upon the work of Steven Feld (1984; Feld & Fox 1994) and Jonathan Stock (1998) to argue for greater recognition of the diverse social uses of music as integral to its meaning in society. Music cannot be understood as an autonomous object from which listeners extract pre-established meanings that mirror the desires and intentions of the music-maker; instead meanings are actively constructed by participants as they encounter music within particular social and cultural temporal moments. For example, from a musicological perspective, Susan McClary situates feminist music within 'women artists who, like myself, are involved with examining the premises of inherited conventions, with calling them into question, with attempting to reassemble them in ways that make a difference inside the discourse itself, with envisioning narrative structures with feminine endings' (1991, p. 19). Although the relative power and authority of meaning-makers may produce a hierarchy of interpretations, the process of making meaning in music is a complex activity contingent on the discursive and technological possibilities available within specific historical, cultural, social, economic, geographical and political contexts.

Individuals made different 'interpretative moves' (Cavicchi 1998) to construct musical meanings that draw on shared conventions and established ideas about music as well as individual, personal and biographical experiences. Therefore, as expected, queer feminist (sub)cultural participants had diverse interpretations of what constituted the critical features of queer feminist music. Overall, music was used by queer feminist participants to co-produce resources that validated gender and sexual ambiguities; to negotiate the experience of living within a dominant society hostile to queer genders, sexualities and feminisms. Music was a critical medium for the construction of a radical participatory community: as a shared

communal activity, music within DIY queer feminist events provided multiple points of participation, moments of embodied pleasure and an immediate forum for interaction.

#### 4.6.1 'Let's Run':<sup>40</sup> *Music fanhood in the construction of queer feminist music (sub)cultures*

Queer feminist participants tended to be passionate fans of contemporary international queer and feminist bands and musicians such as Le Tigre, Sleater-Kinney and the Gossip, bands associated with riot grrrl and queercore, and the record labels Kill Rock Stars, K Records and Mr Lady Records. Fanhood practices were strongly connected to the activation of political identities and prompted the (sub)cultural production of producer-fans and music-makers. For instance, Naz asserted that 'music was absolutely key to how I ended up where I am and doing the things I'm doing and have done'. Melanie confirmed the transformative effect of riot grrrl and queercore bands for her sense of politics and (sub)cultural participation: 'I probably wouldn't be doing anything now had it not been for discovering queercore and riot grrrl bands because that was totally my introduction to my life in terms of what I stood for as well as who I was and what I wanted to do'. Furthermore Michal described in detail how his interactions with riot grrrl music facilitated his feminist political identity;

For me music is just a huge thing in my life that, it's like food it's like air, you can't imagine [life] without [music] [...] I can definitely say I became politicised by music with regards to feminism [...] politics and music were kind of very separate things and when they came together it was this big, just a bomb going off in my head [...] I feel like I've learnt so much about feminist politics through like Bikini Kill records and things that really like made me question myself and how I felt about things.

Participation as a private listener of music offered a rich 'feelingful' activity (Cavicchi 1998) to negotiate everyday life. For instance, as a listener, Melanie could gain a deep understanding of what queer feminist music meant to her and how music spaces could be used to manage her identity and everyday life as a queer feminist within a phobic social and cultural sphere:

For me, certain bands made me who I am. And I know that sounds trite, but in terms of learning about myself, what was important to me, what moved me, what I believed in, who I wanted to hear, there were certain bands that formed 'my narrative'. And that includes me learning things from certain songs and lyrics. And that also includes the spaces (environments, and personal, emotional spaces too) I have been in whilst listening to bands/certain songs. These bands include, but are not restricted to female fronted and/or 'feminist' bands such as: Hole, Babes In Toyland, Bratmobile, Bikini Kill, Huggy Bear, Le Tigre, Chia Pet, 100 Watt Smile, and queer bands such as Team Dresch, The Butchies, Tribe 8, Sister George, God is my Co-Pilot, Pansy Division, Athens Boys Choir, The Need, Kicking Giant, Fifth Column, Third Sex, Boyskout, Gina Young, CWA, Infinite Xs, Family Outing, L.O.E, Cypher in the Snow, BARR, (early) Sleater-Kinney, etc. etc. Each of these bands, for me, has a certain, important, inspirational memory attached to them that helped me the fuck out. Whether it be queer/feminist/woman positive statements in lyrics, or in their presence and performance [...] I remember hearing Courtney Love's

<sup>40</sup> Le Tigre, 'Let's Run', *Le Tigre* (Wiiija, 1999)

voice for the first time, and getting deeply obsessed by Hole sometime in between *Pretty On The Inside* and *Live Through This*, and being somewhat scared by the power and the presence in her voice. And the simple knowledge of this power and presence was the catalyst for me to know that I didn't have to follow the tried and tested path of drudgery that schooling and society and parenting was dragging me against my will toward. I remember, as I said on the tape last time, hearing CWA for the first time and identifying and 'getting it' and knowing for the first time that it was ok for *me* to be gay; cuz here were women that were on the same page as me.

In scholarship on fanhood practices, immersion in the experience of live music in gigs has been considered a central component in the formation of a guarded distinction between fans and ordinary audience members (Cavicchi 1998; Fonarow 2006). Gigs offer a valued site for the experience of intense self-awareness, feelings of unity and a hedonistic loss of the self (Cavicchi 1998). For queer feminist participants gigs of significant international bands offered a communal site for the active construction of queerness and feminisms that deepened the connection between music and individual lives. For Amy, the live performances of Sleater-Kinney and Le Tigre acted as catalysts in the construction of a relationship between subversive feminist sounds and the validation of an assertive radical sense of being:

Watching Sleater-Kinney and Le Tigre were such mind-blowing experiences. I mean they weren't DIY gigs, but watching women who'd come from [a riot grrrl] background taking up so much space to express themselves... with Sleater-Kinney for me it was all about the sound they made that was so different to the sound that boy-bands made, the noises of the vocals that seemed so personal, visceral and real – unpretentious and unmasked – noises that women aren't supposed to make – that I certainly wasn't brought up to make but that I kinda feel like making – and them just doing it, as older-ish women too, and just owning it. For Le Tigre it was the passion that they put into very overt and fucking \*danceable\* feminism. Absolutely amazing and inspiring. Both bands were so validating to watch – like it's ok to be me and to feel this way

Melanie was also present at the same Le Tigre gig as Amy, which was held at Joseph's Well in Leeds on 30 May 2002. This particular gig stands out as a transformative moment in the cultural memory of queer feminist participants in Manifesta, the Leeds-based collective formed a few months after the Le Tigre gig. The Le Tigre gig combined with the presence of Ladyfests in Britain provided the energy and opportunity to challenge the lack of overt feminist politics within local DIY music culture and work to form a collective to create queer feminist events within Leeds.

I remember that Le Tigre Joseph's Well gig where, for the first time at a gig, I really felt like I belonged somewhere, due to the band's performance and their communications, and the audience response and support. Little did I know that I would later come to know and love over half the people that were there in the audience that night due to our shared understandings of just why that gig was so transformative for so many of us. Even now, years down the line, I find that somebody else I know was there that night too!

Live performances of music offer a critical source of emotional validation, an opportunity to experience solidarity with similar others and a communal memory that can be used as a tool for establishing bonds with others. Participation in gigs of high-profile queer and feminist musicians can transform an audience into a politicised community of individuals as energy is converted into everyday acts of resistance to the (re)production of gender and sexual norms and disarticulation of feminism in wider society and culture. Therefore fanhood practices associated with queer, feminist and women's musics can be linked to the activation of political identities and provide the impulsion to intervene in the dominant (sub)cultural order as producer-fans and music-makers.

For example, for producer-fans, the most common venture within the initial stages of queer feminist collective formation involved the realisation of a counter-cultural club night. In contrast to the technical requirements of a live music event, club night venues often provided in-house DJ equipment, meaning that club nights could be organised relatively easily and cheaply: the main issues involved promotion, coordination of voluntary DJs and organisation of CD/MP3 collections. The creation of a club night was also a logical extension of fanhood practices as club nights offered the opportunity to construct a queer feminist soundtrack that opposed the absence of music made by women, queers and feminists in other club night spaces. Club nights have served vital sexual and social functions for marginal sexual subjects throughout history (Jennings 2007b; Enke 2007); therefore, a queer feminist club-night enabled the establishment of regular communal spaces for queer feminist participants that could fulfil a variety of social, sexual and political functions.

Embodied participatory practices in queer feminist club-nights are loaded with cultural political meanings for participants. For instance, the everyday enjoyment of queer feminist musics, as a marginalised music, tended to be an isolated practice - listening to music in domestic spaces or as a private listener on walkmans and MP3 players. The translation of individual private experience to a shared experience of social dancing within a public club-night space holds transformative significance for participants. In Fiona Buckland's research on the significance of dancing in queer world-making in New York she reflected on how 'improvised social dancing was inspiring, tangible, beautiful, playful and affective. How it held potential to transform and transcend. How it could link the everyday and the utopic. How it was a way in which participants both remembered the past and imagined possibilities for the future' (2002, p. 1). Social dancing at queer feminist club-nights offered multiple fluid opportunities to (re)claim power and produce queer feminist identities and worlds. Amy's discussion of Razzmatazz offers an example of the transformative possibilities available in queer feminist club-night spaces for her negotiation of a queer subjectivity. The supportive actions between queer feminist participants as dancers enabled Amy to explore the relationships between her identity, body,

music and space in new ways. The club night represented a critical musical moment for Amy to lose her inhibitions, dance in public and negotiate her queer identity:

Razzmatazz was where I learned to dance. I remember Bob Henderson actually helping me to learn to dance with my arms above my head, like in this drunken, very tender way, actually dancing alongside me and lifting up my arms! You know how you just feel more exposed dancing like that. And now I can do it whenever. [...] [the DJs were] playing music that \*meant something\* - like they engaged with the lyrics and played songs that reflected what was happening in their lives at the time, and sort of \*took up space\* to have fun and express themselves and it was a deep lesson for me, for the year or so that it lasted.

Manifesta's first event was the club night Pussy Whipped held on Wednesday evenings each month at Bar Phono in Leeds city centre. In this extract Melanie highlighted how it was the music that attracted her to attend Pussy Whipped. The choice of bands playing within the club-night space enabled participants to (re)construct a personal and shared presence of queer feminist music. For Melanie, music participation within Pussy Whipped allowed her to sustain her identity as a queer feminist producer-fan. Within this description Melanie touches on the impact of social dancing in the production of a critical affective practice and musical moment that opens up possibilities to bring different queer feminist social orders into being:

When I first came to Pussy Whipped it was the music that got me there – I didn't know anybody to begin with, and I sat on the sidelines too scared and self-conscious to dance, but I broke into a smile and had a rush of blood just to be in this place that was playing Excuse 17 and Tribe 8 and Bikini Kill and X and Bratmobile and all these other bands that had been such a strong personal playlist for me; a playlist that had taught me about the personal, sonic, power of political lyrics, and the political act of women being so vocal and present in these bands; bands with such a strong DIY ethic that I connected with so fiercely; bands saying what I needed to hear – both as personal connection and identification, but also as eye-opening and educational, and vital. To be at a feminist night where it wasn't just that the people there were feminist, and the environment there was pro-active and grrrl friendly, but that it was powered and enriched with these hugely feminist voices and personas through the speakers that the people there were relating to in a really bodily way - people dancing as if this music, those feminist voices and productions meant the world to them; feeling every beat; screaming along to every line. Really *feeling* something. Really connecting and understanding and reacting.

For queer feminist music-makers, music was a crucial means of finding others to form productive music projects with. Shared esoteric music tastes and access to local DIY culture, led to the formation of amateur queer feminist bands. The creation of amateur music was constructed as an ideal medium with which to forge a queer feminist presence and community within local and (inter)national places. The presence of local queer feminist collectives enabled provided opportunities to perform at queer feminist events. As a communal physical activity, amateur music performances within queer feminist events, opened up more opportunities for instant participation, interaction and connection between individuals than other (sub)cultural

productions. For instance, Len justified Jean Genet's use of music as vital medium for a larger collaborative project between performers and audiences that was focused on the creation and maintenance of a queer feminist community:

Playing a gig is so immediate. We've both done zines and been involved in other sorts of performances (spoken word, go go dancing, etc) but being in a band gives you such a good platform upon which to do stuff. And you can fuck with it big time, by doing all the other things we do as part of our performance, and interacting with people between and during songs. Music's just a way of holding it together [...] I'm most inspired by the people at our gigs (including my friends) and good gigs are dependent on the people who go there. I really think the audience at our gigs are just as important as us in determining whether a gig is good or bad. We dance around/jump around/shout/get semi-naked and a lot of the time our audience does the same thing or some of the same thing (I'm not saying if you don't want to get naked then your contribution is less, cos it's just not for everyone!) so really what's the difference? My favourite gigs were at Ladyfest Leeds, the Queer Mutiny North squatted nunnery and the queerfest in Copenhagen. These events inspired me so much cos it was people working together to do stuff and when we played it really felt like we were all part of this big community and everyone was on the same level and we were really interacting with each other all the while we were onstage.

Queer feminist music-makers frequently highlighted the importance of their embodied and physical experiences of performing music in these marginal spaces. For example, Drunk Granny members Debi and Sam argued that 'music is different because it's physical, sweaty, bloody, dirty and can have such a physical reaction'. Furthermore Party Weirido drummer Emily emphasised her experience of physical intensity as crucial to her music-making practices:

I love making noise and totally exorcising myself when I play live. I think playing ferociously messy, loud, crazy shows is probably the best feeling in the world. It is so physically fundamental to my well-being [...] once I discovered that feeling of total relief, total energetic playful excited-ness I understood how important physical intensity in particular, is for us and specifically in a performance situation with other people around you. Absolute exchange of energy.

Queer feminist music-makers emphasised the fundamental role of immediacy in the co-construction of a meaningful musical performance that retained a strong focus on the agitation of participation and interaction with audiences. For instance Debi and Sam argued that for them music-making offered the opportunity 'to incite others to movement, laughter and love', adding that, 'music is something that is more commonly shared and is more conducive to participation'. Therefore in contrast to other queer feminist (sub)cultural practices (such as fanzines, film-making, direct action and art) music fanhood can open up more possibilities for experiencing emotional, physical and immediate interactions with others. Music offers multiple points of participation, as Naz argued: 'music is important because it has an accessibility that politics, literature, poetry and activism doesn't. Even if you don't get it on the same terms as everyone else you can still take part in some way'. Diverse participatory experiences with music in turn

can activate young peoples' radical identifications and cultural productive roles as producer-fans and music-makers in the realisation of queer feminist community. However, music does not merely act as a stepping stone to political identification; the spaces, performances and sounds of queer feminist music can also be used to resist and rework radical political agendas such as feminism.

#### *4.6.2 Tit-tape: Doing pro-sex feminism within queer feminist (sub)cultural music participation*

Feminism has a controversial history of debate on sexuality; privileged anti-pornography feminist voices have been criticised for the reproduction of conservative morals at the expense of erotic minorities (Rubin 1984). Within contemporary British feminism, anti-pornography agendas remain at the forefront of feminist organisations such as Object and the Fawcett society, who campaign against the normalisation of (heterosexual) sex culture in the UK epitomised by lap-dancing clubs and men's magazines. Therefore music (and music (sub)culture) can be used as a medium to explore marginal queer feminist positions on sexualities; however, these spaces frequently risk the discipline of national anti-pornography feminist organisations.<sup>41</sup> The live music performances of Jean Genet were used as a space to assert power in the articulation of queer feminist sex-positive ideas. Performances involved a combination of public nudity, faux-urination, sex positions and explicit lyrics about queer sexual practices. In particular, the development of a collective 'tit-tape' ritual within live performances of Jean Genet served a crucial function for a queer feminist community. The tit-tape ritual involved performers and audience members taking off their tops and placing black tape in crosses over their nipples (see figure 6). Unsure of the precise origins of Jean Genet's use of tit-tape Bob reflected on his enjoyment of the unanticipated eroticisation of censored nude bodies 'I've always found it hilarious that black X's are somehow censoring a naked body when they actually eroticise it – like if I have these tiny crosses on my nipples I'm not naked, but with them I'm acceptable?' Therefore tit-tape can be read as a ridicule of dominant attempts to censor the queer sexual body and control the use of nudity within music culture and feminism. The use of tit-tape re-eroticises the body and acts as a catalyst for moments of unanticipated mass audience nudity within queer feminist music performances. Nonetheless the use of tit-tape, introduced by Bob, initially presented various dilemmas for Len, as she described:

When I joined, our first gig together was a queer squatted event and Bob was really pushing the tit tape. I really had this feeling that I'd be very judged if I wore it seeing as I have breasts and all. I'm really not bothered what people think now, but I remember at the first gig I really was, so I wore a leather jacket and unzipped it to reveal my tit tape. As a joke, one of our friends shouted, 'put em away Helena!' Which is actually quite funny but at the time I

<sup>41</sup> See Downes (2008) for an example of Object's attempts to boycott the inclusion of a pro-porn feminist perspective in a 'Feminism, Censorship and Pornography' workshop held at Ladyfest Leeds 2007.

was like, 'oh god, I'm such an idiot' and sure enough, I put them away. It wasn't till a couple of gigs later when we played another queer event and Bob and I worked the bar before our set that I went topless again. What we did was hand out (and administer, if people gave consent!) tit tape to everyone coming to the bar who'd take it. So then when I stripped off so did loadsa queers and it was a really awesome, empowering gig

Tit-tape eventually became an established ritual within Jean Genet's performances; Bob and Len would distribute tit-tape to willing audience members to participate in collective displays of partial nudity within their performance. For audience members and producer-fans the tit-tape ritual represented a special aspect of Jean Genet fanhood practices. For instance, speaking as a Jean Genet fan, Humey reflected on how the tit-tape ritual produced political meanings about positive body image and queer sexuality within music culture:

I think they promote a positive body image at the same time with the whole taking their tops off and the tit-tape. I've never done that myself, but I think it's really great that at a Jean Genet gig loads of people will. I think that's a really positive thing, I think it's a rare thing, I think it's the kind of thing that people put aside as a shameful thing or a perverse thing, not the kind of thing that would happen at a music show and it's nice to have those two things merge

However, the crux of Jean Genet's queer feminist music performances – in terms of the use of nudity, dance routines, style and novelty props – was to provoke a reaction and interactive engagement with their audiences, no matter how negative. As Len described:

I now find it really liberating to go onstage [nude] [...] I love that it pisses people off at times. We aren't trying to be some serious talented group, we're sweaty, queer, shoddy trash. I think it definitely provokes people to feel something when we come onstage, whether that is a good or bad thing doesn't always matter. It's fun to shock and surprise people. Again, the dance routines are about being d.i.y. I can't really dance properly so we had a few really simple, stupid moves, but they were quite effective I reckon and showed that anyone could do it. We also used water pistols and glitter cannons and party poppers because we wanted our gigs to be fun. Again, it's a whole not taking yourself very seriously and being interactive with people. I don't want people to be stroking their chins, I want them to be interacting.

Queer feminist music participation sought to actively interrogate dominant conceptions of feminism, sexuality and gender, to create grassroots spaces, cultures and communities, which directly challenge the authority of legitimised ways of learning about feminism and being feminist. For example, Amy defended the validity of queer feminist performances of Jean Genet in relation to academic feminism: 'this in-the-flesh queer and feminist performance has a lot to offer over and above reading about those ideas. What's the point of it if it's only in books anyway?' Music participation offered an accessible resource for the (re)negotiation of queer genders, sexualities and feminisms within contemporary British society. In the next section I turn to discuss the social processes embedded in queer feminist music-making from the perspectives of amateur music-makers in the bands Drunk Granny, Jean Genet and Party

Weirdo and producer-fans. Music-making practices were entangled with (i) queer relationships and friendships, (ii) the conscious use of amateur sounds and a DIY process, and (iii) ways of writing music and/or 'creative fraud' that disrupted dominant music-making practices.

#### 4.6.3 'Ave It':<sup>42</sup> *DIY amateur queer feminist music-making*

Grassroots music-making in queer feminist (sub)culture tend to operate within a discourse of amateurism which displaced the dominance of professionalism and widespread success in favour of the immediacies, creativities and intimacies that can be gained within DIY small-scale music-making practices. In queer feminist (sub)cultures, music-making could become an extension, and expression, of intimate relationships and friendships. For instance, Jean Genet became an extension of the close friendship between Bob and Len, as Len described to me, 'I don't think you can separate our relationship as people to band stuff. We did not meet as musicians. We met as trashy gay musically obsessed kids who were interested in feminist and queer politics. And I think that's pretty much the same in Jean Genet'. Similarly Charlotte, a producer-fan associated with Homocrime and Unskinny Bop, described how music-making, in her occasional band the 1-2-3's, was a way to transform the queer intimacies of her home life into a creative process to share with her local queer community:

it's not really just being in a band because I mean I have a strange home life in that I have a boyfriend and a girlfriend [...] and we're kind of like this funny little queer family and our band which was our pretend band the 1 2 3's is a way of doing creative stuff together as a weird little queer unit. It's kind of pretend because we don't want to ever play the band circuit [...] it's not about you know being great musicians or anything and we don't even really write our own songs and we only really practise if we've got a performance coming up so and we usually just play one song and it's often somebody else's song a song that we just like or are obsessed by in some way that we just learn and do our own thing so that's where that's come from.

The way in which a queer feminist band rehearsed was also shaped by friendships and relationships. As opposed to the use of public spaces, like a music rehearsal studio, that can be restrained by time and financial pressures (Bennett 1980a, 1980b), within queer feminist (sub)culture band practices were more likely to take place within domestic spaces which, although restrained by noise pollution considerations, offered more flexible and affordable arrangements that enabled a looser and more informal mode of music-making to emerge. For instance, when based in Leeds, Jean Genet band practices took place within the cellar of Bob and Len's shared house. Music-making functioned within the context of their everyday life as friends and housemates, as Bob described:

We did practise with an imaginary audience [...] it was fun when we lived together to unwind at home, have a bit of cider, dress up in a new outfit and

<sup>42</sup> Jean Genet, 'Ave It', *Come Again?* (Self-released CDR, 2007)

practise in our tiny basement in Harold Grove. I would say that is the place where most Jean Genet songs were written, it was something that was fun, we'd have periods where we would only rehearse when we had a show coming up, but generally we were motivated by a desire to mess around and have fun.

The rejection of talent, skill and experience of conventional music-making, already discussed above as a potential barrier to music participation, shaped the kinds of sounds that queer feminist music-makers chose to work with. For instance, within Drunk Granny, Debi and Sam justified the particularities of their use of sound as queer and feminist in a variety of ways. Debi's guitar sound was a conscious construction in relation to the legacy of riot grrrl, created to disrupt conventional guitar playing standards, as the pair explain: 'Debi's guitar playing is classic riot grrrl style: i.e. often playing one or two strings, picking notes that are often neglected by standard guitar practice'. In terms of rhythms, in Sam's drumming style the pair argued that it is in 'the slightly off beat drumming where the queerness manifests'. In addition, vocals that crossed gender expectations were used to 'span a range gendered subjectivities [including] butch and femme vocal enunciations and new things altogether'. Time restraints were also an important influence on the choices of sounds in queer feminist music-making. Due to the limited time-frame within which Jean Genet constructed their first set of songs, a precedent was set to make music by taking, re-arranging and re-writing already existing 'original' pieces of music. Jean Genet's music-making was embedded in the processes of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural life, as Bob articulated:

The process of putting on gigs definitely makes you realise how DIY is a literal instruction [...] the whole reason Jean Genet formed was literally 'we need a support band' a week before the show 'we don't have a support band' 'let's BE the support band', that was initially why keyboard demos were used [...] I guess one thing that's quite strange about our music is that we're functioning like a punk band and sound like terrible pop music without succeeding at either. I find that an inspiration in other bands, a pop sensibility to make little tunes regardless of the medium that it's being made in

In a move in keeping with the legacy of the rebellious figure of Jean Genet - the controversial French intellectual writer with a background of criminal convictions for petty theft and indecency. The duo proceeded to construct songs by re-using sounds, rhythms and words of existing pop songs, keyboard demos and pre-set sounds, with popular cultural references, and combined them with queer meanings to produce a re-worked radical queer music performance. As Bob reflected on the use of Jean Genet as a band name, 'looking back Jean Genet does seem very fitting with our queer, explicit, trashy agenda [...] I love the idea of him being a thief too, in the way we pinch bits of music, lyrics and that our 'sound' is based on demos that someone else has written into the keyboard, creative fraud'. The most extreme example of Jean Genet's 'creative fraud' can be demonstrated in the song 'What the Fuck?' and cover song 'Fist' which Len described:

We just stole whatever we could get away with stealing, either from pop culture or from other things. Like we pilfered lyrics from whatever we happened to be hearing a lot of on the radio one particular summer for ‘what the fuck’ (Shaggy, Rage Against the Machine, Gravy Train!!!!, Aaliyah, Gwen Stefani and we did it all over ‘Eye of the Tiger’ by Survivor). We also did a cover of ‘Jump’ by Girls Aloud/Pointer Sisters called ‘Fist’ [...] The lyrics that are already in place actually really lend themselves to being a song about fisting. You just have to change the odd word here and there

This strategy has been discussed by Judith Halberstam, in the work of Lesbians on Ecstasy and Sylvester, as a queer mode of music performance that ‘reimagines the meaning of community and property; it redefines lesbian culture and the process of making it; and it draws attention to the ways in which borrowing, lifting, grafting, copying and sampling are all lauded in relation to turntable and DJ culture but might be frowned upon when practiced so blatantly by queer musicians’ (2007, p. 53-4). The negative feedback and frustration that Jean Genet were subject to within local DIY music culture often focused upon these practices of cultural pilfering and the blatant abandonment of music-making conventions and values. However, these idea(l)s of originality and virtuosity were the critical focus of Jean Genet’s music-making practices. Jean Genet disrupted and ridiculed conventions of ‘serious’ music culture to foreground queer meanings, communities and experiences of empowerment within music performances over the serious aesthetic contemplation of recorded musics, as Bob explained:

I guess part of it is that if you set out singing explicitly queer songs, with queer lyrics and aesthetics, you are going to find that there is a community who will support you with a less critical musical appreciation and be grateful to hear their experiences set to music – and to have an experience with that band when they play and with the kind of people who would go to their shows rather than sit down and musically appreciate them [...] We took a general DIY form of activism and used what we had around us to say something, that ended up having a queer feminist agenda – the DIY activism I mean is just making something happen using whatever you have around you and writing about our own sexual experiences led on to a critique of homonormativity [...] I would like for Jean Genet to have been empowering to experience for some people, that by having fun and not being ashamed of who you are, admitting you’re not perfect and dancing for the hell of it anyway, people could feel better about themselves and able to do more

The process of writing songs in Jean Genet was typically fast-paced and relied upon a sense of momentum. Len described the song-writing process of Jean Genet: ‘Bob said, and I agree with this, our songwriting is just a matter of throwing shit against the wall and seeing what sticks’. If a song required too much work to make it sound right, this was a sign that the song was in danger, as Bob noted, ‘it’s funny how the songs either came together or died – if we didn’t have most of the song mapped out within an hour, it probably wasn’t a goer. There was this one song that we spent ages on and it just never happened [...] for whatever reason whenever we tried to get it together it fell apart. Our decisions were based on practicalities and whether we thought it sounded alright really. This is going to sound rich, but sometimes we just thought a song

sounded rubbish and left it'. This meant that a sense of the ephemeral pervaded queer feminist music-making, a quality that Jean Genet was demonstrated in their multiple break-ups, reunions and desire to stay in the moment and not overstay their welcome. For instance, Len argued that 'within the framework of a band like ours, there is only so much you can do before that joke isn't funny anymore. [...] Someone once said that the best thing about seeing us play was we always looked like we were on the verge of breaking up'.

The seductiveness of a DIY-amateur sound can also be understood as a critique of a society in which music-making has been constructed as an expensive 'serious leisure', privilege of the talented, and opportunity for stardom highly contingent on legitimisation via the music industry (as seen in the British TV talent programmes *Pop Idol* and *X Factor*). In stripping music-making down to the basics, queer feminist music-making advocated the everyday process of music-making over and above material constraints, a lack of widespread appeal and poor musical education and experience. DIY music-making also challenges what is 'good' about a particular sound, displacing conventional aesthetic values of talent, virtuosity and technical ability to consider the value of music made by amateurs with items available in everyday life. Victor explained this appeal of amateur music-making in queer feminist (sub)cultural life:

The basic idea of DIY in music and art – the idea that you and your mates could organise exciting and stimulating events/output/entertainment without prior experience, perfected skills and huge amounts of money – was the most appealing aspect. Even a lack of equipment and instruments didn't seem to be stopping these people from getting creative - there are, for example, amazing Avocado Baby songs from around that time where they simply used a shaker, or spoons, or a saucepan, or a cardboard box, or a kazoo to accompany a voice, and it sounds great and punk as fuck. This was totally eye-opening, or perhaps ear-opening, for me at the time.

Identifications with these DIY sounds are critical to the production of queer feminist meanings in music culture. For instance, Melanie highlighted how the 'DIY and ramshackle' sound of CWA was critical in the construction of belonging in a queer community carved out as different from the overproduced aesthetics of dance-music in gay club cultures: 'I didn't need to feel alienated from being gay by all the gay-mainstream-culture, cuz here were rad women singing in a way that was so DIY and ramshackle, and seemingly freeing, and so damn sexy, that made me feel alive and included and part of something amazing'. These particular sounds were at the forefront of producer-fans' aesthetic considerations in the production of queer feminist (sub)culture. Daniel reflected on a shared 'celebration of the inept' between Homocrime organisers and the potential for this aesthetic to enable transgression of the performer-fan dichotomy by creating a space which was 'immediate [and in which] people would just get up and perform'. This concern with meanings of intimacy and immediacy within DIY music-making was reinforced by Irene, who outlined her preference for amateur musics:

I suppose it always feels a bit more immediate that's definitely one thing, and it's always brilliant to hear something that was really obviously recorded on a four track or on a Dictaphone and somehow I mean it's probably not even technically good and you feel closer to someone's, you can feel close to the person making it and think, and I don't know if you know Avocado Baby the Slampt band and just listening to that album always used to make me feel like I was almost in the room with them and obviously I didn't know anything about their relationship or what was going on at the time that they made it but it just made me excited that people could communicate so expressively in such a simple way I guess.

Irene's narrative touches on the significant relationships between music-makers and listeners in queer feminist community. Stephanie Pitt's (2005) research found that audiences invested more meaning in performers that they had a long-standing devotion to. Audiences can construct meaningful relationships with musicians and these relationships can be used to manage the daily lives of fans (Vermorel & Vermorel 1985). In queer feminist (sub)culture the possibilities for constructing friendships and relationships with music-makers can be realised and becomes another factor in solidifying emotional attachments within DIY sound communities. For instance, Amy argued: 'I'd always rather see my friends, and people who could become my friends because it's a DIY context, exploring feminist and queer ideas in music and zines and emails all around me'.

To summarise, as social collective action, music provided queer feminist participants with a critical resource to validate diverse genders, sexualities and feminisms. Queer feminist participants used music to collectively provoke a community of resistance, capable of activating political identifications and validating the organisation of small-scale radical (sub)cultural productions. The production of DIY club nights, music events and amateur musics aimed to challenge the redeployment of hegemonic categories of gender and sexuality and actively resist the disarticulation of feminism in wider society and culture. Intangible physical, social and emotional experiential qualities within queer feminist music (sub)culture constructed music as an intimate, accessible and immediate medium charged with possibilities for social interaction and participation. Surpassing the stereotype of music participation as a mere stepping stone to political identity (Staggenborg et al 1995; Staggenborg 2001), music participation provides a rich means to resist and rework political ideas and (re)create radical ways of living and being. Music harbours the potential to transform a room of isolated individuals into a grassroots local politicised community who can claim power by reconfiguring their immediate cultural situations to articulate queer feminist sensibilities in their everyday lives.

#### *4.7 Reconfiguring (sub)culture: Queering (sub)cultural space*

Queer feminist participants did not simply add-in a queer feminist performer or soundtrack to the established conventions of the gig or club space, but attempted to re-work the space in order to queer the taken-for-granted relationships, roles and rituals within music (sub)culture. This radical use of space attempted to interrupt the production of hegemonic genders and sexualities in 'mainstream' and 'underground' music cultures (Fonarow 2006; Roman 1988; Tsitsos 1999; Schippers 2000), and facilitates the development of a politicised participatory music community. Queer feminist producer-fans made collective decisions about the choice of venue, timing of event, inclusion of unexpected activities, the language used to represent collectives and events and the aesthetic look and feel of a music event space. Additionally the boundaries between the roles of the 'promoter', 'audience member' and 'performer' were challenged and special investments and expectations were placed on those who chose to attend and participate in queer feminist music events. This section will consider the significance of these collective decisions in the articulation of queer feminist events in music (sub)culture and development of an array of queer gender and sexual diversities. In the following quotation f.a.g. club collective member Sam illustrated some of the considerations that are contemplated in the construction of a queer feminist music event:

To make our spaces about self expression we invite all sorts of bands and artists to perform, particularly people who might be censored or judged for being gender freaks/queers elsewhere. We make sure in our statements on the website that FAG club is all inclusive. We decorate the spaces ourselves e.g. [with] our own hand-made banner. We also encourage this by encouraging fancy dress and themed events [...] I think the name says it all really! We also are clear in our promotion and mission statement, what audience we are putting on events for and what kind of performers we are looking for.

##### *4.7.1 Unconventional venues in queer feminist (sub)cultures*

Queer feminist producer-fans tended to favour the use of unconventional venues and times in which to hold events. For instance, Michal justified the use of unconventional venues by drawing on the subversive potential these spaces could offer in constructing a feminist identified space in an unanticipated site: 'it came down to the venues, it was a conscious choice to use venues that weren't like normal venues because then we could create the space that we wanted in them and create the atmosphere that we wanted in them, because it wasn't another dingy pub where people, mainly guys kind of go and drink all night it was a scout hut or something that we could make our own and that we could make a feminist space'. This preference was maintained despite an increase in organisational work, as spaces not accustomed to music events can lack the basic technical equipment for a music event. For instance, in Daniel's reflections on the dilemma of finding a suitable venue for Homocrime events in London, he emphasised how the

use of a 'blank canvas' venue – not already coded as a gay pub or a commercial music venue – could enable the establishment of a radical queer identified space:

Initially we were very set on not using spaces that were conventionally used for shows, so the place that we used for over a year didn't have its own PA [...] We were very adamant about [how] it needed to be sufficiently grotty and a kind of blank canvas that we could decorate ourselves, and somewhere that people weren't used to going because then it makes it easier to have your own identity, and as it turned out the venue that we used then started getting other people doing stuff there too. Later on we moved to a place called the Pleasure Unit which Unskinny Bop use for their club night and they've got a PA and it's [a] much more a recognised venue and I hesitate to say industry type thing, but yeah you do get the up and coming bands playing there, we also didn't want it to be within a gay ghetto we didn't want it to be in a gay pub necessarily but then that's also because there just aren't any that are suitable in any way.

Within Daniel's narrative, distinctions are made to construct a quasi-autonomous queer space that attempts to be separate from both commercial music culture and gay club culture. Other collectives also took advantage of alternative venues and spaces to host their events; Manifesta ran the club night Suck My Left One in the radical social centre The Common Place until it lost its events licence, and Kaffequeeria held events in a range of venues including The Basement social centre and the Islington Mill. To overcome the problem of technical equipment some collectives (for example, f.a.g. club and Kaffequeeria) invested in their own PA systems, whilst others borrowed PAs from other collectives (for instance, Manifesta borrowed the Queer Mutiny North PA for events held at The Common Place and Homocrime initially relied on Local Kid's PA).

One advantage of starting with a 'blank canvas' was the opportunity to exert more control over the aesthetic qualities, or the look and feel, of the space. Queer feminist spaces frequently took advantage of the potential to spatially reconfigure gig and club nights. This could include decoration – displaying artwork, posters, visual projections and banners – the preferred placement of the DJ booth and band performance space – DJ booth at the periphery and bands playing on the floor in the centre of the room – the use of everyday lamps and fairy-lights for lighting, and the inclusion of seating, tables and cushions. Unanticipated activities and practices were introduced within the ritual of a music event. For instance, communal activities like knitting, eating a meal or providing cake were made available and not-for-profit distros offered points to engage in the 'alternative economy' of DIY feminist zines, crafts and clothing (Piano 2002, 2003).

This spatial re-ordering reinforced the (re)production of DIY queer feminist spaces as intimate and comfortable. For instance, Humey highlighted how the lo-fi small-scale details of the first Kaffequeeria contributed to the homely feel of the event: 'Cat Attack played in like the back room there just like through these tiny amps and stuff and it was like just really shambolic but

nice'. Boitel reinforced this idea of intimacy in his preference for watching bands perform in a small space to a select audience; 'seeing bands play in practice space in front of 5 of their friends still makes more sense to me than watching some rock show in a large multi-purpose venue from 100 feet away'. In her account of Bakery events, Naz draws on familial metaphors to highlight the inclusivity and intimacy of (sub)cultural spaces:

You want everyone to have fun and to feel welcome and to really feel like, like they would do if they went to their Gran's house or something. I always think about it like you'd want to be thought of, you know, you want to be provided for and feel like you're there and that it's okay to be who you are [...] it really is just about providing a space for people to come and chat, enjoy something that's creative but also just be together that's always my reason for doing that kind of thing.

#### *4.7.2 Upturning Consumer Relationships: The audience in queer feminist (sub)cultural life*

This desire to construct intimate small-scale gatherings intersected with an interest in the attendees of queer feminist events. Many producer-fans emphasised the importance of welcoming newcomers and often included strategies to break down distance between the 'promoters' and the 'punters' to recreate participatory relationships. When posed with the question of how f.a.g. club events were different to other events based in Cardiff, Sam's response highlighted how, unlike non-queer feminist 'promoters', for her, the audience were the focus of her (sub)cultural productions: 'we're actually interested in the people who turn up and want to make them feel comfortable and make sure they enjoy it and [that] they've got the details and we can tell them about what's happening, so that's different because I think if you go somewhere else it's like people keep to their own groups'. Audiences were not assumed to be passive or secondary but were understood as active participants who in some cases directly intervened in the practical organisation of events. For instance, in Amy's discussion the Queer Mutiny spring gathering squat event held in a nunnery emerged as a crucial participatory moment:

That was one of the most validating, empowering, inspiring places I've ever been. It was very well organised and everyone was expected to muck in throughout the weekend [...] I know that a lot of people who came on Friday feeling intimidated by being in a scarily right-on space – myself to some extent included – were so into it by Sunday, it was beautiful to watch.

The distinction between the 'promoter' and 'punter' closely guarded in commercial music culture was reconfigured to disrupt the behavioural norms associated with each role. Debi illustrated how (sub)cultural space can be used to re-order and resist taken-for-granted relationships, dynamics and behavioural norms of consumer culture:

If a space is vibrant and spikey and is somehow different to your normal bog standard consumer relationship, which is what these spaces really do is re-order the dynamics of relationships [...] breaking down the relationship

between the consumer and the person coming to a normal club event, it forces an activity [...] [it's creating] those active relationships [...] upturning those [consumer] relationships

At queer feminist events it can initially be hard to distinguish the 'organisers' from the 'audience'. As part of the Manifesta collective's club night *Suck My Left One*, Amy commented on the differences she observed in the subversive use of the club night space and how this feeds into a deconstruction of a hierarchy between 'DJs' and 'punters'. Reflecting on the differences between *Suck My Left One* and a commercial gay club area in Leeds – Queen's Court – Amy stressed how:

being able to take a turn on the door/cloakroom (especially when feeling a bit nervous, having arrived on my own etc), it being ok also to sit by yourself (imagine doing that at Queen's Court on a Friday night), there being no division or hierarchy between punters and DJs – the DJs dashing out to dance to the songs they put on – clearly being really passionate about the music – was inspiring and energising

The desire to minimise the role expectations of commercial culture in order to produce an emotional participatory space in which marginalised queers and feminists can contribute to the cultural landscape of society was the heart of queer feminist (sub)cultures. This was well expressed by Debi: 'That's at the bottom of it really, that I can participate in this society, I can create a cultural space for me and people who are like me [...] that's a feeling that activated me into DIY activism, it sustains me in doing it [...] subcultural politics is where I found such joy and happiness'. The opportunity to experience a widespread queer feminist community was significant enough for some producer-fans to radically alter their life trajectories to quit jobs, leave education, relocate to a different city, and risk economic insecurity. This path was chosen by Rosie and Michal in order to set up *Local Kid* as a non-profit organisation which organised tours and produced records of queer and/or feminist bands with a focus on sustaining queer feminist community across Britain. Rosie described the impetus behind her dedication to maintaining queer feminist community:

Most of the stuff we'd done [in *Local Kid* was] basically about community and being part of a community and kind of fostering that community and creating spaces. Even if you're doing tours you're taking bands to places to help the bands but also to create events in those places. Mostly they were promoters that we knew like people who were doing things similar to us in terms of the politics and ethics. We would put on events and they would be these safe spaces and spaces that everyone would be going to and it was like everyone goes to the space and goes 'ahh' and has all these ideas and goes off [...] and they're going to bounce out and do a million other things in their communities. I think for me that was really important.

Queer feminist (sub)cultural producer-fans re-work culture and space in order to increase the likelihood of participants experiencing moments of activation. Previous studies of women's activation in feminist consciousness-raising groups have theorised about 'click moments' in which women connected their personal experiences to a shared experience of injustice (Reger

2004). In a similar concern with the production of an emotional moment of self-empowerment, queer feminist music events aimed to transform isolated individuals into collective actors within queer feminist community and wider society. Rosie reiterated this point, 'we were trying to create a space from which people could gain strength and inspiration and then go out into the wider world and do their own activism'.

The not-for-profit logic of DIY (sub)cultural resistance meant that the expectations and conventional experiences of consumerism were radically displaced. Organisation with a DIY principle had many practical benefits: it allowed for more creative control over the event; it eased financial pressure (the need to attract a large entry-fee paying audience to appease a performer's guaranteed fee); and alerted participants to a different set of shared expectations and understandings of an event's purpose. For instance, take Irene's positive recollection of organising events that emphasised the role of fun and friendship in DIY logics; 'The great thing about DIY is it's completely fun and there's no expectations and if you organise a gig for another DIY band and only ten people show up but you cook really nice food that's understood and that's fine and no one's got an expectation that it necessarily has to be any different'. For others, like Victor, meanings of DIY production are embedded within a broad radical praxis in terms of its ability to withhold and divert power from dominant systems:

Perhaps DIY can be summarised as 'bypassing the systems that you don't like' - those systems could be anything, including, say, the music industry, reliance on government and its agencies, patriarchy, the food industry, certain etiquette and the messages that continually tell you that you have to look or behave a certain way, products and services that are beyond our reach because of their price, products and services that are offered to us by organisations that we don't want to give our money to, home ownership and rental, the fear of talking to each other, the lack of community, the mainstream media.

#### ***4.8 Counter-hegemonic genders and sexualities in queer feminist (sub)cultural life***

Spatial and sonic reconfigurations of DIY (sub)culture can be read as attempts to resist the repression of queer genders and sexualities within conventional spaces and places of political organisations and music cultures. Queer feminist participants exposed the limitations of dominant ways of being and attempted to co-produce spaces that could validate the diversities and complexities of marginal gender and sexual presentations. This included opening up possibilities for the re-ordering of masculinities, femininities, androgynies, fem(me)inisms and heterosexualities within a queer feminist (sub)cultural context.

##### ***4.8.1 Queering masculinities***

Performances of female masculinity (Halberstam 1998; Kennedy 2002) have been argued as challenging conventional understandings of masculinity and femininity that are (re)produced in experiences of music cultures and political groups. Countering the lesbian-feminist strategy that

advocated a rejection of masculinities and its connotations of rock machismo in favour of the softer acoustic sounds and spaces of women's music (Bayton 1993), articulations of queer masculinities were an important part of queer feminist (sub)cultural music community. Queer masculinities in punk and rock-music culture represent a distinct gender and sexual identity located outside the binaries of white middle-class sex/gender systems. In queer feminist (sub)culture, some producer-fans constructed (sub)cultural spaces and collectives around a reordered masculine subjectivity. For instance, identification as a fag and disidentification with a lesbian identity enabled the articulation of a queer masculine feminine subjectivity that had more in common with gay masculinities and effeminacies than the gender identities perceived to circulate in lesbian cultures. This was reflected in Debi's explanation for the use of the term fag in the Cardiff based f.a.g. club collective:

I do think there's an embracing of certain type of male positionality within a queer [community] like Fags the fact that we call ourselves Fags I think traditionally that's an effeminate male homosexual man, I think we all at some level or another identify with that, we probably identify with that more than lesbianism, so I do and I think Sal probably does she's a big Fag, but it's still an effeminacy it's about being effeminised which is a kind of femininity so within this symbolic cultural system that produces these odd categories we're force to inhabit, so it's still female but it's male

Ultimately Debi concedes that categories of gender and sexuality (re)produced in society cannot fully recognise the gender-queer transgressions performed in queer feminist (sub)cultural spaces. The fanzine writer MissTer ScraTch backs this up in his frustrations over misrecognition as a masculine feminine Trans person of colour:

So, as a masculine Trans person who feels feminine; who am I? Male or female? (This is what I get asked a lot directly or indirectly) or, which pronoun do I use? I get 'she-d' a lot and very often get confused as a female masculine person, the kind Judith Halberstam made famous. But I am NOT. I use capitals not because I dislike the above or want to be disassociated from this but more because I want to be recognised for whom I really am; essentially masculine and yet feminine.<sup>43</sup>

In similar tone to Debi, MissTer ScraTch articulates a frustration in the misrecognition of queer-trans identities that straddle the dominant binary logics of gender and sexuality. A queer masculine feminine transgendered position is critical of a stable cross-gender transition that depends on a repression of femininities to conceal the fragility of trans-masculine genders which seek to successfully pass as male in wider society. Instead queer bodies and identities can perform a variety of masculinities and/or femininities dependent upon different situations, social relations and temporalities. Queer feminist (sub)cultural spaces and collectives offer a vital resource and community in which to struggle for the recognition of diverse queer genders and sexualities. Queer cisgendered men (a man whose gender identity matches his biologically assigned male sex) producer-fans also attempted to create alternative terms and identities that

<sup>43</sup> MissTer ScraTch (ed.) *Masculine Femininity* (self-published fanzine, 2008)

disrupted gender. For instance, Michal explained to me the origins and meaning of the term

Local kid:

The word kid, I like it, I use it a lot. I guess that is a label I've given myself [...] When I say kid I don't mean child, it's genderless, it sums up to me what this community is about. It's about being kids, it's not about work it's about having fun; it's about being rebellious and sticking it to the man. It sums up a lot in one word. I guess that's the word I've reclaimed, it's something that I wanted to explore. It's actually a description I put on a poster years ago when we put on a gig, it was one of the band's description, local kids. I had to explain to that band how I meant it in the best possible way. Like I meant local in the best possible way, and I meant kid in the best possible way, and so I think it's just something I've had in mind since then. Local kid, it's like two things could be derogatory like oh 'it's just a local thing a kid thing' but I mean like 'it's a local thing it's a kid thing!!!' I mean both those words they should both be really exciting words. Local, this is happening where you are, kids, this is fun, but the word kid it's genderless.

This desire for cisgendered men to articulate a queer masculine or genderless position within queer feminist (sub)culture was common. For instance, Russell, a member of the band *Husbands*, argued for a queer masculinity that, whilst grounded in feminist youth subculture, was dismissive of gay masculinities associated with gay club culture: 'we were the queer boys at riot grrrl shows, not the gay clubs'.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore Michal reclaimed the marginal masculinity of the 'sissy' in his use of the term *sissycore* to describe the hardcore band *Corey Orbison* – within which Michal produces prominent high pitched vocals – 'we were talking about doing a hardcore band, but most of the hardcore world was such a big macho thing and, we wanted to create hardcore but in a really wimpy way, and a masculine queer [way]'. Therefore hegemonic masculinity is denaturalised and queer masculine identities attempt to negotiate marginal masculinities within the context of queer feminist (sub)cultural spaces, practices and situations.

#### 4.8.2 *Queer fem(me)inisms*

The inclusion of feminine signifiers and practices within a music space draws on queer fem(me)inist strategies I have already described as the politicised and strategic embodiments, celebrations and performances of femininities in cultural spaces (see Maltry & Tucker 2002). This perspective seeks to challenge the dominance of butch identifications and de-politicisation of femme practices within lesbian feminist cultures and histories. In contrast to the amount of contemporary research on subcultural activities of female masculinity in drag kings (Halberstam & LaGrace Volcano 1999; Shaprio 2007; Halberstam 2006) the exploration of the contemporary (sub)cultural politics of the femme is limited to an older (and smaller) body of literature (Nestle 1992; Harris & Crocker 1997). Historically, the butch/femme dyadic model has legitimised masculine identifications as authentic, whilst feminine identifications tend to be troubled by a

<sup>44</sup> I interviewed Russell for my fanzine *Clean Hands Cause Damage*, which was a free fanzine made to hand out to attendees of a Manifesta gig featuring *Husbands*, *Drunk Granny*, *Vile Vile Creatures* and *Chaps*, held at the Packhorse, Leeds, on 18 February 2009

lack of visible distinctions between femme-lesbians and hetero-feminine women. Therefore, femme subjects are often considered to be ‘accidentally deviant’ and susceptible to becoming an object of heterosexual pursuit. This leaves femme queerness open to more scrutiny and suspicion. In addition, the contemporary media representation of the new ‘hot lesbian’, who is depicted as conventionally feminine and ‘heteroflexible’, demonstrates how the femme lesbian is understood as a consumable object of sexual fascination for heterosexual young men and women (Jackson & Gilbertson 2009). Furthermore, within lesbian-feminist politics the use of feminine signifiers is denied any subversive potential; this means that the embodiment and use of feminine signifiers is viewed as an uncritical, apolitical and deluded practice. However, if femme femininity is recuperated as a ‘sustained gender identity’ (Harris & Crocker 1997) the circulation of feminine signifiers can be understood as the performative incitement of an empowered gender and sexual identification that is critical of reproductive hetero-femininities. Currently little is known about the transgressive use of feminine signifiers within contemporary queer feminist (sub)culture by a new generation of young people in Britain.

Queer fem(me)inism in (sub)cultural music spaces can entail a form of disidentification with dominant hetero-femininities (re)produced in wider society: practices and symbols of conventional femininities are deployed, reworked and resisted in ironic, playful and denaturalised ways. One good example of queer fem(me)inism can be seen in the London-based Bakery collective, who combined conventionally feminine pursuits – baking, knitting and crafting – within their music events. Naz described how the inclusion of femme practices and identities attempted to critique femme lesbian invisibility within DIY feminist music (sub)cultures. Naz starts with an archetypal example of how feminine signifiers were mis-read as heterosexual by the lesbian hardcore-punk band The Haggard. The use of conventionally feminine activities, to challenge the rigidity of established lesbian and queer identities, became a central feature of Bakery events:

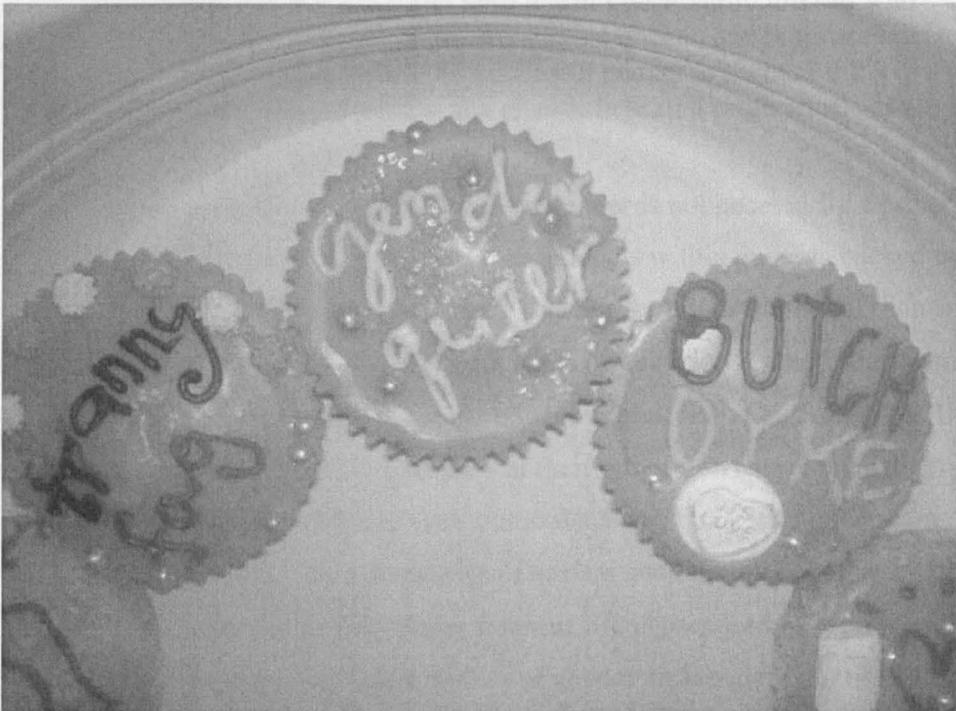
when the Haggard came to Ladyfest London they were absolutely shocked that any of us were actually lesbians because we all wore skirts, and it was that kind of idea of not being understood, wanting to find a space for that and, that you can wear an apron and it doesn't have to be a bad thing that you like baking [...] I'd learnt how to knit and people had started doing that and I'd always liked crafty stuff like cross-stitch, I was quite a 'girl' when I was growing up I liked all that stuff. I really liked the idea of exploding the idea of what you're supposed to do at a lesbian club or a queer-friendly club.

Bakery events included the spectacle of queer femmes dressed in aprons whilst simultaneously taking control of the production of a live music event. The significance of baking and sharing food as a historically feminine domestic practice was reworked to become another way to nurture a supportive public queer community; as Naz described, ‘the baking was just in a very real way it was really about me saying thank you to the community that really saved me because I really felt lost before Ladyfest London because I didn't have anywhere that I felt that I could

go and be, be who I was'. The inclusion of cakes also occurred at other queer feminist sites, for instance, the presence of queer cupcakes at Manifesta events could also be regarded as a playful attempt to combine a traditionally feminine apolitical practice with subversive queer messages (see figure 8).

For some the celebration of femininities could create a situation in which overtly femme ways of dressing and behaving informed a queer fem(me)inist praxis. For instance, some producer-fans who felt limited by the visual logics of lesbian and gay culture could use these spaces to gain confidence to produce queer femme sexual political identities. For instance, in my dialogue with Amy, she reflected on the period after her break-up with her girlfriend and the struggle she experienced subsequently in negotiating her sense of self within the narrow dress codes of LGBT culture: 'I remember giving all my skirts and glittery, femme clothes to charity as I left Leeds. [A friend] had told me that I needed to dress more like a lesbian if I was to meet someone else and get over [my ex-girlfriend] ([this friend], of course, feels comfortable in the LGBT "scene" and its roles and identity policing)'. Amy credited the presence of queer feminist music (sub)culture and network of friends in Leeds as a key factor which 'lured me back and supported me and showed me how to have a good time and relax, and wear the clothes I wanted, and start to be myself'. A critical aspect of queer femme identification entailed the recognition of the ability to choose and modify femininities in response to particular situations and social relationships. This resisted criticism of femme identities as a passive embodiment of patriarchal society and re-worked femme identifications into a set of active political participatory practices.

**Figure 8:** Queer cupcakes



### 4.8.3 *Queering heterosexuality*

Another controversial possibility explored within queer feminist (sub)culture was the inclusion of heterosexuality as a queer practice. Various queer and feminist academics have entertained the possibility of an ‘antinormative heteroerotic’ or ‘queer straight’ position (O’Rourke 2005; Wilkinson & Kitzinger 1993; Heasley 2005; Jackson 2001). This struggle to negotiate a radical position within a hegemonic position of gender and sexuality privilege created a conflict within producer-fans who identified as heterosexual white men. For instance, Michal described the reasons why he could not identify as queer; ‘I don’t call myself queer now and I haven’t for a long time and the reason for that is because I don’t feel like it’s really my word to re-appropriate because to most of the world I am a straight white male and to not be aware of the privileges this brings me in mainstream society would be really against any kind of feminist action I could take’.

However, in general, queer-identified producer-fans’ definitions of queer offered more space for radical heterosexuality within a continuum of queer feminist sexualities. Queer sexualities incorporated sexual practices that were theoretically open to a multitude of variations over time - in the gender of sexual partner, choice of sexual (in)activities and monogamous or non-monogamous relationship status. This focus on variation is demonstrated by Victor’s definition of queer:

Queer, I think, means being open to and accepting of all kinds of sexualities and genders, and being up for challenging the negatives around sexuality and gender (including stereotypes, hierarchies, fear, inequality, moralising, intolerance of polyamory, squeamishness, separation, ignorance, pigeonholing, roles, peer pressure and bigotry). The term doesn’t necessarily refer to who you have sex with - for example, there are asexual queers, and there are queers who have only had sex with people of a different gender to theirs. I think queers are more accepting of variety and change in sexual preferences, or at least they should be.

The practice of having sex with a person of the same gender is not necessarily a prerequisite for a queer identity and the inclusion of heterosexual individuals within queer is backed up by Daniel ‘as far as queer goes who you fuck is much less interesting or important than what you’re about and what you believe in [...] I’ve got loads of gay friends who I don’t consider queer and people who are heterosexually-identified who I think are’. f.a.g. club used the term QUAGS – queers of all genders and sexualities – in their promotion to welcome diverse gender and sexual differences into queer feminist (sub)cultural spaces. For Victor queer communities have a responsibility to challenge manifestations of sexism and homophobia that discipline sexualities and genders in everyday life. Queer feminist life is premised on a political praxis that takes micro-level action to resist dominant models of gender and sexuality in the fabric of intimate relational, cultural and social life:

Queers, by definition, challenge the rules (controlling their behaviour) created by society as a result of its fears, ignorance and hierarchies. It would be fucked up if we fought against the things that limit and control us as queers, but didn't fight the things that limit and control women at the same time. It doesn't always necessarily follow that way, though – there's still misogyny and patriarchy in queer circles. Queers should keep an eye open for this, should be willing to challenge it, should keep checking ourselves, and should be willing to have our own sexism challenged when we fuck up.

However there was also a feeling that a particular queer hegemony emerged which privileged a particular sexual practice – polyamorous same-sex sexual encounters – and preference for particular fashions, music and culture that excluded individuals. For instance, Emily struggled to articulate a definition of queer based on her everyday experiences of queer-identified individuals in Leeds. This often worked to her detriment within the queer feminist (sub)cultural collective Manifesta:

To be honest I find queer really problematic, there was a time it was probably about two years ago maybe longer [...] it seemed like a lot of my friends who previously identified as gay were now identifying as queer and with this new queer label came the whole side of, non-monogamy and polyamory and, it did seem to be a lot about the sex rather than gender identity or sexuality and it seemed like almost free love [and] even that makes it sound too nice and too fun it was almost like if you're queer you've got to be suitably open minded to want to sex with all your friends and if you don't then you're not really queer and I felt in the situation where, I previously identified not as heterosexual, possibly as gay, but I didn't feel that queer was appropriate but I felt well if I don't identify as queer is the alternative maybe to just identify as heterosexual and live the normal kind of two point four children life? And I found that really difficult and this is something that I found in Berlin with the Ladyfest like queer politics seem very fused with feminist politics and it seems especially in Leeds at the moment with the Manifesta I mean even the way it says we are a queer feminist collective I feel the two have become inextricably linked and because maybe I don't identify as queer I feel I'm not sure what I have to offer but then at the end of the day it's just a definition but I do find it quite excluding.

To summarise, this chapter has explored how contemporary British queer feminist (sub)cultural producer-fans and music-makers reorder sound and space to produce emotional and embodied experiences of intimacy, activation and participation capable of forging politicised queer feminist worlds. The production of queer feminist events open up critical sites to struggle for the recognition of queer transgressions of gender and sexuality that question the viability of dominant discourses of gender and sexuality that circulate in a phobic society. Dominant models of gender and sexuality consistently failed to fully account for the politicised experiences, practices and identities of queer masculinities, femininities and sexualities. Therefore (sub)cultural resistance offered a grassroots tool with which marginalised subjects could regain control over a phobic culture and society to resist, rework and reorder dominant genders, sexualities and feminisms. Diverse roles and experiences within the spaces of music (sub)culture

– as a dancer, listener, organiser and music-maker – contribute to the production of a critical emotional forum capable of transforming isolated marginal individuals into a politicised community dedicated to challenging dominant discourses of gender and sexuality in everyday life. DIY queer feminist (sub)cultures are experienced as close-knit intimate communities which unfortunately – like many interpersonal relationships in society – are open to abuse, exploitation and discrimination. The last chapter, ‘DIY fragilities’, will proceed to explore the weaknesses of DIY spaces and community. Queer feminist (sub)cultural spaces hold the potential to reproduce destructive exploitative practices and contrary to intentions actually reify the very social divisions – gender, class, sexuality, ‘race’ and ethnicity – that queer feminist (sub)cultural participants seek to dismantle and resist.

## Chapter Five

### DIY Fragilities: Conflict in queer feminist (sub)cultural life

Whilst chapter four highlighted how the creation of queer feminist (sub)cultural music events were important and meaningful practices for participants, in what follows a closer look is taken at the difficulties experienced by queer feminist participants. This chapter focuses specifically on the problematic experiences of organising, and participating within, local DIY not-for-profit music events in the context of a queer feminist agenda and informal small-group collective structure. In particular, attention is drawn to the everyday (re)production of 'race', class and gender power relations embedded in normative ways of working, behaving and thinking in DIY (sub)cultural worlds. I also explore the role of crisis and, despite acknowledgement of the devastating individual costs, I emphasise the potential for the transformation of feminism into a multi-agenda political praxis. In the second half of this chapter I situate DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance in relation to dominant sociological perspectives and definitions of social movements. I argue that, in contrast to formal feminist organisations, the presence of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural activism challenges dominant academic definitions of what counts as activism. I then turn to an exploration of the 'successes' of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance in contributing to widespread change in British culture and society.

#### *5.1 Balancing the Demands: Immersion and burnout*

One key problem, within informal DIY small groups, is the demands that collective life places on its members in terms of sufficient time, loyalty and practical commitments (Mueller 1995; Staggenborg 1995). DIY queer feminist practices placed pervasive pressures upon the everyday lives of participants. In many cases these mundane practical tasks are constructed as important markers that reinforced the importance of DIY subcultural participation. For instance, Daniel articulated how mundane tasks, involved in the running of his DIY record label Everard records, were critical to his subcultural identity in everyday life:

There have to be people who are not on stage and there have to be people who work behind the scenes, I don't know I just enjoyed it, like with the record label I'm doing now I really enjoy going to be post office and sending off packages and buying thick tape to package things up with just stationary and stuff in general [...] It's totally mundane but somehow I find it really exciting.

Nonetheless the organisation of a major event can also be an overwhelming and intense experience. The waking hours of participants' everyday lives can become fully immersed in the stresses and strains of organising a large-scale event. Michal's account of Ladyfest Bristol illustrates how this DIY immersion is experienced:

There was so much kind of momentum behind [Ladyfest Bristol] pretty much

everybody who was involved, like the core 6 people, it was really like that was all that was on our mind all the time because it was Ladyfest, it was all we talked about [and] dreamed about. Everybody, while they were at work, was just using any spare time they got to like check messages and doing all this stuff.

Immersion holds the potential to overload participants as they struggle to balance the demands of DIY event organisation, particularly when these demands become conflated with other responsibilities including employment, friendships and housing arrangements. For instance, Fergus reflected on the widespread effects of his Get Bent organisational responsibilities: 'outside of not being able to sleep or write my dissertation, it's kind of odd Get Bent, my life is Get Bent, I mean I actually work full time in one of the venues that we're using for Get Bent and I live with two other collective members so I eat drink and sleep Get Bent yeah it's affected tonnes of areas of my life'. Research has suggested that activist participation is dependent on the maintenance of 'emotional energy' within individuals and collectives (Summers-Effler 2002). The high demands and pressures within (sub)cultural production leave participants susceptible to 'burnout', a lack of emotional energy that incapacitates an activist from future commitments (Beres & Wilson 1997; Marx Ferree & Martin 1995; Summers-Effler 2002). However, beyond the common issue of burnout, these experiential examples also hint at the problematic terrain that lies underneath the spectacular surface of a queer feminist event. The intertwined personal demands of politicised (sub)cultural production with everyday life, in terms of sexual and social circles, can be difficult to manage at an individual and collective level. It can also lead the character of queer feminist (sub)cultural life to take on an exclusive character, as participants find themselves stretched and capable of different levels of commitment, leaving structural inequalities between participants unexamined (Mueller 1995).

### *5.2 Dangers of working within radical small-group collective structures*

The problems of radical small-group collective organisation structures within feminism have been well documented (Freeman 1972; Mueller 1995; Staggenborg 1995; Taylor 1995; Summers-Effler 2002; Beres & Wilson 1997). In general, these small groups aspire towards a participatory democracy model of organisation: each member's skills, ideologies and experiences are afforded equal weight in collective decision-making processes. Over time, informal ways of working develop from the common experiences of group members to produce a tacit division of labour, informal leadership and accepted ways of making decisions with each other that enable the group to fulfil desired actions and goals. Nonetheless, research has described the dangers that this organisational structure risks, commonly leading to interpersonal conflict, factionalism and dissolution of collectives (Mueller 1995). For instance, at times when large numbers of new members are introduced, the established informal ways of working the small group relied upon to survive are thrown into flux, and the collective struggles to regain a

clear sense of its ideology and aims from the multiple agendas and conflicting positions of its membership. In terms of DIY queer feminist collectives, those positioned as 'open' collectives are more vulnerable to this dilemma of struggling to work with multiple agendas and levels of experience. Without the presence of any formalised rules, central aims and ways of working, energy is diverted away from the achievement of goals towards group processes. Moments of heightened internal conflict can slip into interpersonal problems – or 'trashing' – between collective members (Freeman 1972), some collectives may dissolve entirely, or factions may occur as individuals and groups break off and generate new projects. This means that small-group radical collectives are often experienced as ephemeral and short-lived. However, some theorists are more optimistic about the life cycles of informal radical collectives. For instance, informal structures and the processes of dealing with internal conflict have been argued to be a source of innovative tactics and strategies in feminist activism (Staggenborg 1989; Mueller 1995). Internal conflicts can be re-positioned as a critical part of change within a social movement to 'provide occasions for organisational learning and cultural generativity that benefit the movement as a whole' (Mueller 1995, p. 275). For instance, in the following account Amy described her experience of an internal conflict between core members of Manifesta:

When I was in Manifesta the first time round I had a lot of problems with not being supported [...] I was insecure because I didn't feel like I fitted in the threesome that directed all of Manifesta, because I lacked musical knowledge, knowledge of riot grrrl history, and confidence. I was undermined and mocked increasingly frequently and my confidence went right down. When we had that meeting about Pussy Whipped and how people were coming down the stairs would just see a load of queers and it was putting people off and what were we going to do about it and as their friends would I talk to them so they wouldn't go on the door I thankfully realised I couldn't be part of it anymore. But sadly nor could I speak out about it at the time. It was weird because the homophobia was becoming more overt and it just felt bad to me as a queer but I had no way of talking about it, and no 'resources', basically, and it didn't really occur to me to expect better from a feminist collective. And in those days although loads of people involved in Manifesta events were queer there was no collective identity or unity or vocabulary at all.

Amy's experience of homophobia within the Manifesta collective highlighted the lack of a shared vocabulary and resource for the articulation of queer identities within a DIY feminist collective. Amy's solution was to remove herself from the Manifesta collective in 2004 and participate in queer events developed by a faction of Manifesta, who created the queer-indie club night Razzmatazz. Therefore, Razzmatazz emerged as an innovative tactic to deal with the internal conflicts of Manifesta. This eventually led to the development of an overtly queer agenda within Manifesta as those involved in Pussy Whipped and Razzmatazz united in the production of the club night Suck My Left One in 2006. In this sense internal conflict led to the creation of a valuable queer feminist agenda that, in the long term, benefited a wider community in providing opportunities to challenge homophobia and produce awareness of the intersections

between gender and sexual oppression. Nonetheless, as Carol Mueller warned, 'internal conflicts are almost invariably destructive of individuals' (1995, p. 275) and there were considerable personal costs within this transition. As the one member from this situation that continued to be involved in Manifesta I was subject to personal 'trashing' within feminist and queer social circles, which once revealed, years after the event, led to my departure from Manifesta in May 2009. Within my parting words, in an email to the collective email list on 3 May 2009, I reflected on my frustrations with being 'trashed', and my inability to work with, or trust, individuals who have taken part in my 'trashing'. I also outlined my perspective on DIY queer feminist (sub)culture and its growing incompatibility with Manifesta, as an informal 'open' collective structure that lacked a clear ethos, which could be illustrated by the moves I had made to be involved in gigs and projects outside of Manifesta:

I now find various people really difficult to work with and an uncritical use of space, language, gossip, resources and structure has really made me aware of how different my ideas and perspectives on queer feminist DIY culture are as well as how misrepresented I have been. I am, as far back as I can remember, deeply committed to the production of positive and empowering creative spaces for women, queers and feminists to be visible, loud and heard. This is reflected in the kinds of projects that are really close to my heart e.g. girls rock camp UK. The fact that I was the only member of Manifesta to volunteer at Ladies Rock in summer 2007 spoke volumes. Music making and queer feminist politics are both incredibly important parts of me, they feed into the majority of my everyday life in terms of my research, job, writing, thinking, bands, social life and teaching. I simply do not feel that Manifesta shares this passion anymore. I have increasingly been drawn to doing gigs and projects outside of Manifesta e.g. Mika Miko, New Bloods and Finally Punk gigs as well as fallopian rhapsody. These opportunities allow me to express my music geekiness without a sense of shame and work with people who just 'get it' and also get me. Despite the recent dips in energy, in the past Manifesta has been an incredible space and community for me to explore ideas of queer feminist cultural production and has enabled me to figure out so much personally and politically. I will continue to produce and support these cultural spaces on my own terms not as part of Manifesta.

Therefore, attempts to produce DIY queer feminist music (sub)culture within informal collective structures risk (re)producing harm, exploitation and power relations between members, which can result in personally attacked activists relinquishing their involvement in DIY queer feminist collective organisation. This could result in the gradual attrition in the number of active queer feminist (sub)cultural producers in the UK and subsequent decline in collective spaces and communities. The absence of formalised ground rules and ways of working can lead to harmful practices; as Amy explained, 'there's potential within collective organising [...] to seriously squash and hurt each other; to emotionally abuse each other, basically'. Queer feminist (sub)cultural participants who operate within unsupportive collectives and relationships leave themselves vulnerable to burnout and manipulation, as Heena explained:

People can end up taking on too much and there's not enough support. I've been guilty myself, of not looking out for people who needed that support and not be[ing] there and that makes me feel really bad. And getting burnt out [and] having bad experiences with some people where, they've not been reliable or you start to get paranoid, are they in some way trying to sabotage it or like there's a fear of manipulation because you're doing it out of your good will and then people have other motives and you're exposed to manipulation, being taken advantage of, being walked all over because you've been working so hard to achieve this goal

The ambiguous ideals embedded in DIY queer feminist collective life – the construction of (sub)cultural productions that are 'non-hierarchical', 'diverse', 'inclusive' and a 'safe space' – tend to be attempted by young people who lack adequate knowledge, skills and experience of working in radical organisations and collectives. Subsequently, the uncritical deployment of these ideals within DIY queer feminist collectives masks, silences and displaces the operation of power and privilege within collective interactions and projects. In 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness', Jo Freeman (1972) examined how the rejection of structure and authority can easily obscure subtle processes of power at work within informal non-hierarchical collectives. In marking a group as 'diverse' and 'inclusive', without any explicit criteria of what this entailed, membership, interactions, behavioural expectations and organisation processes can become entrenched in a white middle-class normative framework. Those who do not fit into the existing norms of the group – in terms of class, 'race', occupation, sexuality, gender and age – may be discouraged from participating, whilst those who do fit will develop vested interests in maintaining the status quo (Freeman 1972). The discursive deployment of the terms 'diversity' and 'inclusion' means that the problematic reproduction of power and privilege is effectively displaced and silenced. Instead of participants acknowledging and taking responsibility for the reproduction of a white middle-class status quo, the onus of non-participation is placed on marginalised social groups for choosing not to, or in becoming unable to, participate. A narrow definition of oppression is employed which can only recognise overt acts of discrimination as the moments where oppression occurs and ignores how hegemony is subtly reproduced in the fabric of everyday social interactions, within which everyone has a role (see Lewis & Ramazanoglu 1999). This shift in blame is reflected in critiques of diversity training in which attention is deflected to 'racial others' rather than dominant selves (Frankenberg 1997). Queer feminist (sub)cultural collectives represent critical sites for an exploration of this enduring struggle with subtle reproductions of white dominance, middle-class privilege, masculine authority, binary gender identities, hetero and homonormativities and youth-centricity within a group marked with progressive feminist and queer activist intent. The next section aims to explore the behind-the-scenes power struggles inherent in the everyday practical organisational processes of queer feminist (sub)cultural life as they pertain to 'race', class and gender.

### *5.3 'Race', class and gender in DIY queer feminist communities*

Many scholars who have engaged in analyses of girls and young women's (sub)cultural production have acknowledged the white, heterosexual and middle-class privilege within which feminist negotiations with popular culture commonly occur (Roman 1988; Gottlieb & Wald 1994; Schilt 2005; Garrison 2000; Wald 1998; Kearney 2006). Therefore unsurprisingly the majority of queer feminist (sub)cultural participants involved in this research were located in white and middle-class positions. However, to take this analysis further than a mere reinforcement of a universal white middle-class standard within the existing body of scholarship, I wish to emphasise the critical contributions and negotiations made by queer feminist (sub)cultural participants who identified themselves as non-white and/or working-class. I also want to draw on the work of scholars who have looked critically at the social reproduction of whiteness within feminism, and white women's subtle reproductions of classism and racism in daily life (Davis 1982; Frankenberg 1993, 1997; Brown, Gilkes & Kaloski-Naylor 1999; Skeggs 1997; Dyer 1997), to gain an understanding of how structures of whiteness and middle-class values are interwoven with constructions of gender and sexuality that shape the experiences of multiracial and classed (sub)cultural participants. Therefore in focussing on how whiteness is performed by subjects I join a project invested in marking the unmarked; exposing hegemonic positions that masquerade as the universal, and explore how particular white middle-classed gender and sexual formations are rationalised, legitimised and normalised within progressive collectives (Frankenberg 1997).

Acknowledging the whiteness and middle-class basis of queer feminist (sub)culture was often an uncomfortable experience within interviews. One particular question – Do you see any problems with the make-up of your collective in terms of race, class, gender, age or sexuality? – demanded a direct acknowledgement of, and engagement with, ideas of inequalities within DIY queer feminist communities. In general the responses to this question tended to avoid a direct discussion of 'race' and accounts diverted to the more comfortable issues of gender and sexuality. These silences reinforced the unspeakable and uncomfortable aspects of inhabiting and owning whiteness and the negative connotations of racism that whiteness evokes (Lewis & Razmazanoglu 1999). However, some participants did mark their whiteness and justified limited attempts to negotiate the problematic entanglements of whiteness and racism by highlighting a lack of anti-racist cultural resources within queer feminist community. For instance, in Amy's account her struggle to acknowledge and critique whiteness and classism is constrained by collective silence, a lack of vocabulary with which to undermine and critique 'race' and class, and reliance on non-white queer feminist activists to conduct anti-racist work. Taking account of whiteness and racism tends to evoke considerable guilt, discomfort and frustration for white

participants. This contrasts starkly with the confidence queer feminist participants' exhibit in everyday cultural critiques of heterosexism:

Manifesta has always been incredibly white. I don't know if it's cos we're doing something wrong. I was struck by how racially diverse Get Bent was the other week. It's the first queer thing I've been to that's been that diverse and that was really cool. Again, as with many things in Manifesta it's something we never really talk about and we need to. I think one measure of this stuff is the fact that we all have a good laugh about heterosexist attitudes all the time – it's the content of most of our conversations. But we don't have the vocabulary or knowledge or comfort level to take the piss out of classism and racism at all. And I feel supported in little ways when for example Swithun makes a joke (or a serious statement!) that references and undermines his male privilege, and I think that's a mark of how far the group has come that it now feels at ease with this stuff. And I've come to realise that I'm not a good friend or collective member until I can use language, seriously or casually, to reference and undermine my own class and race privilege. I've really only recently started paying attention to issues of race in regards to collective working, mainly due to Humey's efforts of making people think about it. And of course it mustn't just be up to the people of colour in our communities to draw attention to the issue and work on it.

Various critical 'race' scholars have critiqued constructions of whiteness as an absence in relation to the substantive exotic culture of the 'racial other' (Lewis & Ramazanoglu 1999; hooks 1992). Whiteness and white culture is constructed as an absence, a taken for granted backdrop of 'normality', which obscures the ethnic specificity of riot grrrl and queer feminist (sub)culture. This creates a context in which conflicted negotiations of racial and ethnic markers within normalised white girl subculture can occur. For Naz, a woman with East-African Asian heritage who grew up in rural South Wales, her widespread experience as 'brown' within white radical communities became so commonplace that encounters with racial and ethnic sameness in (sub)cultural music spaces initially produced feelings of discomfort:

For Ladyfest London I was the only Asian, everyone was white but then there was definite, there w[ere] a couple of people who had kind of European heritage [...] but it was really, it was very white. And I mean I grew up in a very white place, I grew up with Indian friends and Pakistani friends, but like, we all grew up in South Wales, isolated from kind of big communities of Indian people so it wasn't that weird to me [...] I was always the only, the only brown person at gigs, I was the only brown person at meetings [...] I'd started to ignore it, when I was younger when I was at school, I used to think it was really weird like I'd go to gigs and when I went to the occasional gig I'd always think it was really strange and then it became quite, and then sometimes you don't really notice that you're different until you see somebody who's the same as you, so you don't think about the fact that there aren't any Asian women in bands until you hear the Voodoo Queens or you see Echobelly and you think 'well where's everybody else?' [...] you don't notice until you notice that someone else is different and then you're like 'oh maybe everyone's looking at me like that' and I don't know, it never really bothered me, never bothered me, because I was the only Asian person in my school for a long time but it's started to bother me now [...] I wish I'd thought about it

more, or I wish I'd brought more of my own cultural heritage into my organising and sometimes I feel guilty like [...] I'm hiding my roots [...] I mind a lot more now because I've had such amazing conversations with people, other people who are doing the same kind of stuff that I am and I've been ignoring a big part of myself and I'd, I'd never go into organising a show pretending that I wasn't queer, I never would do that, I would never forget that I was a woman organising something, so why, why have I done that? I just feel that I've betrayed myself in some really strange way and I'd like to rectify that.

Naz's account demonstrates how assimilation into white culture gradually became intolerable for non-white participants especially as friendships and alliances between non-white queer feminist participants flourished. Other initial negotiations with white culture included an experience in which considerations of 'race' were effectively silenced until queer and feminist identities had been worked through. This reproduced the unquestioned middle-class and white dominance of queer feminist identities and ideas and obscured how 'race', ethnicity and class intersected with experiences of sexual and gender resistance. For instance, Heena described her decision to postpone her participation in a 'queers of colour' space at Queeruption and reflected on how her uncritical acceptance of white middle-class versions of feminism delayed issues of 'race' in her exploration of queerness and feminism.

When I went to Queeruption for the first time I was aware that there was a queers of colour space but I just didn't go to it, I didn't feel ready to go to it, I was just like I have to deal with queer first and feminism first, but that would have been from my kind of middle-class point of view rather than trying to say you know race is part of it and it's queerness too [...] Maybe the stuff that I know has just been quite a white view, I don't know much about I haven't read much feminist or queer theory and that's also like something I have a problem with I'm not always aware of people like Judith Butler or and that kind of worries me that it's going to exclude people who should be involved

Various classist assumptions are embedded in queer feminist (sub)cultures. Participation is contingent on resources that presume participants are privileged in terms of level of education, and access to secure finances, domestic space, a supportive family and spare time to contribute to the creation and attendance of not-for-profit DIY events. In his ethnography of autonomous queer events based in London Gavin Brown noted that 'one of the most striking facts that occurred to me [...] was how few people held down full-time jobs. The majority of core activists at the time were working part-time or were engaged, precariously, in the informal economy' (2007, p. 2688). In Brown's study a tension emerged between those who worked in full-time 'legitimate' occupations and those who did not; the exclusion of full-time workers was achieved through the organisation of meetings and social events within workday hours. I would argue that those able to survive in financially precarious positions could be linked, albeit not exclusively, to middle-class security. In the collection *Without a Net*, Michelle Tea undermines the powerful legacy of middle-class control and representation of working-class lives to explore how

working-class identities and experiences of poverty shape opportunities, subjectivities and experiences. For Tea the term 'without a net' typifies the crux of working-class experience; as she explains, 'I wanted to capture the breathtaking, exhilarating, and scary experience of going through life knowing there is no safety net to catch you should you fuck up and fail. There is no trust fund, no parents with cash on hand to cover a month's rent; the way the stress of being poor or working class can rip apart a family or destroy its members often means there's no family to call, period' (2003, xiii). Therefore from working-class positions, past experiences and additional day-to-day barriers constrain DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural participation. Coping with a life of instability and insecurity can limit the ability to work for free, fulfil voluntary commitments in working hours, restrict global and spatial mobility and shape comfort in squatted spaces and radical collectives. Frustrated encounters with un-reflexive middle-class privilege embedded in daily practices of queer feminist life were expressed by (sub)cultural participants who identified as working class. For instance, within initial encounters with Manifesta and queer anarchist subculture in Leeds Heather experienced ambivalence over the classed aspects of DIY queer feminist (sub)culture:

In terms of the type of person in Manifesta...well, it's all middle-class white girls and boys! As a working-class woman I did initially find it ironic that these kids from nice suburbs with houses paid for by their parents were trying to 'represent' and be 'inclusive' to many different ethnic and social groups, and furthermore couldn't understand why more people from these sections of Leeds society were seemingly uninterested in joining. I also found it and still do find it hard to relate to some members' inability to see the inherent hypocrisy in their positions as people from privileged backgrounds telling other people what to do and how to do it, from their towers of middle-class security. [...] I also think the same sentiment could also be leveled at the radical queer community in Leeds, which lends itself to white middle-class far more than anyone from working-class or different ethnic backgrounds. It's much easier to live in squats, do radical alternative stuff like attend lots of queer events all over the UK and Europe, and live a polyamorous lifestyle that takes up most days and nights, when you have a trust fund or parents with deep pockets to do it with.

Sarit also commented on how participation in Queeruption is limited by western, 'race' and class privilege. Within her depiction of queer subcultural life as a 'queer circuit party' Sarit draws critical attention to the ways in which although queer sites move around globally, in terms of class and 'race' diversity, these sites are saturated by a small group of individuals who find transnational travel and migration unproblematic:

It's like a queer jet set tour. It does connect as a global movement but I think it's as a result of cultural imperialism and the fact that we all basically consume the same queer culture through the Internet [...] I think queer identity and queer politics are western concepts and they suit western cultures [...] its global in a sense that there's lots of ways to travel around all the time and meet each other and have friends in different places and, get to spread the word, it's basically a queer circuit party in a way.

The taken-for-granted and disproportionate whiteness and middle-class comforts of queer feminist collectives and spaces, in relation to the racial and ethnic make-up of its geographical location, was a widely acknowledged problem within queer anarchist and DIY feminist communities (see Brown 2007). White participants shared a general impression of the homogeneity of the racial, class, gender, age and sexual identities of a typical queer feminist collective. This is expressed well by Fergus who argued that 'it is white, it is twenty something, and it is people who identify as queer but also have a primary identification with gay and lesbian possibly bisexual, almost entirely childless [...] looking round the room, everyone looks the same'.

Uncomfortable disclosures of privilege were accompanied by a lack of confidence to engage critically with the dominant logics of 'race', gender and class embedded within the organisation of a queer feminist space. For instance, Victor reflected on his experience within a radical queer collective who failed to consider racial politics as central in the organisational processes of a gathering planned to take place on indigenous land. The lack of input that the indigenous population had into the event was only flagged up as problematic at late stages of organisation. A last-minute strategy of 'reaching out' to indigenous people's social and support groups to provide information about the planned event and ensure this population was invited and welcome to attend was deployed with little to no success in attracting a heterogeneous community within the event. These ideas of outreach, inclusion and diversity were also a central concern in the collective organisation of Ladyfest Leeds 2007. Early attempts were made to advertise organisational meetings throughout Leeds and the initial general meetings did attract a large heterogeneous group who were interested in Ladyfest. However, as organisational responsibilities progressed, it was notable that various volunteers felt marginalised from Ladyfest. In particular, the dominance of white middle-class male community outreach and public relation workers reinforced a particular gendered, classed and racialised way of working. One particular example included the idea of an 'outreach roadshow' in which volunteers, selected for their minority class and racial positions, would be encouraged to deliver Ladyfest-awareness workshops in various parts of Leeds marked as ethnic and/or class diversity hotspots. Furthermore at Ladyfest Leeds a Ladysquat was set up by local queer anarchist activists to provide free housing and events to parallel Ladyfest Leeds events. However, the Ladysquat was set up in Little London, an inner-city area dominated by 1960s council housing, with little consultation with the local community, and experienced incidents of violence.

Several (sub)cultural participants discussed problematic experiences of working with men in queer feminist collectives. For instance, within Manifesta a lot of discussion focused on the exploration of queer gender and sexual practices; however, for some participants, this created a way of working that ironically re-established male dominance and interests and subtly silenced

the potential for feminist critique of masculine dominance. Emily's experiences of working with several uncritical men in the Manifesta collective illustrated this dilemma well:

This is something I really struggle with because I feel that, possibly it's from having spent last year in a relationship with [a gender-queer man] who was very much kind of into the whole gender queer thing and there was no inherent difference between men and women. I always feel if I voice the opinion that I have a problem with these three people in Manifesta, and it's because they're men and they behave in very masculine ways, I feel that's almost like a dirty thing to say and I've got to try and find a way of skirting round it and say it's because they behave in an aggressive way or a manipulative way [...] I feel that because as a collective we have been so welcoming of men, like even have a big we support men in feminism banner, I find to now say well my biggest problem is that there are men who are making me uncomfortable I almost feel like I've forfeited the right to say that and to say that there are men I'm having a problem with means that I'm somehow not sufficiently open minded or too binary which is a big fear of mine

An inability to deal with material gender inequalities within postmodernism is a criticism commonly hailed by some feminists, who have highlighted how the avoidance of gender privilege (re)produces white male dominance of queer theory: 'The deconstruction of identity politics (the recognition that identity categories can be regulatory regimes) may have some merit, but it can also, in the world of academia as well in other social spaces, become the vehicle for co-optation: the radical queer theorist as married heterosexual' (Walters 1996, p. 841). Therefore it is crucial that queer feminist collectives find ways to keep critical channels of communication open and produce ways of working that are conducive to the articulation of critical gender identities that do not reinforce male hegemony. These experiences also highlight how a reinvigoration of the 'politics of experience', to take account of the positions from which individuals speak, could safeguard against uncritical (re)productions of power and hegemony in DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural life.

Throughout my fieldwork, inadequate tactics and strategies that aimed to disrupt the (re)production of gender, class and 'race' hegemony operated within radical collectives, nonetheless participants were determined to pursue solutions for a multiracial queer feminist agenda. For instance, Victor reflected on the problems of a tokenistic 'add colour and stir' (Schilt 2005, p. 49) strategy in which claims of 'diversity' and 'outreach' masked the reproduction and dominance of a white middle-class framework in queer feminist communities. Instead Victor advocates multiracial community work open to the use of different frameworks or 'templates' to organise events:

It's simply not good enough to talk about ways of 'getting' or somehow persuading people of colour to come to our events, and to feel content when a few people of colour do show up, that would be totally bogus. We need to start building relationships and solidarity between all kinds of people, not for the superficial or tokenistic purpose of 'getting' people of colour to come to our

events, but to foster communication on a daily basis and to build trust, friendship and community. And this needs to be extended not just to our cultural activism but to our everyday lives if there aren't many people of colour in our existing social circles (as is the case with my social circles, which is weird given some of the very racially diverse places I've lived in, like Oldham and Brixton). And if, once those relationships are in place, we can work together in collectives that include a diverse group of people, then that would be great and could have wider positive outcomes, and would be so much more genuine than simply pulling a few tricks to up the numbers of people of colour at our events. [...] Perhaps we should also ask people of colour and ourselves if we need to use completely different templates for events, different templates that might be more effective in bringing us together.

In order to prevent white solipsism, the tendency 'to think, imagine, and speak as if whiteness described the world' (Rich 1980b, p. 299), and silencing of 'race' and ethnic difference in queer feminist communities, there was a struggle to articulate sensitive anti-racist strategies. However, this was countered by a danger of fetishising skin colour and a tendency to ignore existing diversity within queer feminist (sub)cultural networks (see Brown 2007). Therefore one strategy involved the reconstruction of queer feminism and DIY (sub)cultural narratives via the excavation of multiracial legacies of DIY (sub)cultural resistance. The stability of racial and ethnic specificity of queer feminist (sub)culture can be challenged through a disruption of whiteness as the norm. The coherent boundaries and naturalised dominance of whiteness in feminism are questioned and attention is drawn to the ethnic and racial diversities already at work within DIY (sub)cultural resistance, as Humey argued:

If you highlight the [...] whiteness of a community it is like you're at the same time undermining the contribution made by non-white people to that community [...] It's like okay we need to highlight a lack but we also need to also acknowledge that it's not, it's kind of not a lack, it's just a lack in the way we're engaging with something that's already there, or is it a limited way in which we're understanding like feminism or politics [...] I think feminism is so often understood in terms of movements even though you have like the whole personal is political thing it's still like 'oh look at these countries there's been no feminist movement and therefore there aren't any feminists' and it's like well, no, actually there are loads of feminists it's just existing in a different way it's just trying to change our context of how we think about it. [...] [I] try to think about heritage and DIY activist-y heritage and thinking a lot about my family and women in my family and the things that they've done and I'm kind of realising how I can connect a lot of how I feel about DIY and community and activism to a lot of what other women in my family have done or are doing, and that kind of connection made me really really happy. I think finding out that one of my Aunts was really active in movements in India when she was twenty and all the family events that my mum would put on like cooking for massive amounts of people just to bring them together all under one roof, and that's all stuff that's completely echoed within DIY feminist stuff that I'm doing now and that was really important for me to find heritage that I felt was for myself and was of a culture that I'd come from rather than [it] being the stuff that I was passionate about [that] I had to sort of get from somewhere else.

In acknowledging the parochial white middle-class values of queer feminism, non-white queer feminists are able to articulate multiracial DIY queer feminist resistant practices. This is epitomised in the anti-racist fanzine *Race Revolt*, visible 'queers of colour' spaces, email lists and gatherings dedicated to challenging racism in DIY (sub)cultural communities, for example the Race, Privilege and Identity gathering held in Bristol in April 2009, albeit with mixed levels of success. Much like the riot grrrl zine-writers analysed by Kristen Schilt (2005), white queer feminist participants are in the process of moving from 'racial awakenings' towards more developed deconstructions of race and power, or 'race cognizance'; however, the anti-racist work of highlighting whiteness in DIY communities tended to be the responsibility of non-white queers. Nonetheless, this process of learning from previous mistakes, for instance in the internal conflicts in *Manifesta*, demonstrates how conflict can be productive in future articulations of a multi-agenda queer feminism capable of critically addressing intersections of race, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and gender within grassroots feminist collectives and cultures.

#### ***5.4 Struggles and Successes: DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance as activism***

Various sociological perspectives have attempted to understand why social movements emerge within society and their role in social change. The first well-known perspective viewed social movements as the irrational outbursts of alienated individuals reacting to the breakdown of society (see Le Bon 1960; Smelser 1963; MacKay 1980). However, when the protests of the 1960s and 1970s became the focus of analysis, social movements increasingly became viewed as more complex, rational and astute social formations. In the 1980s resource mobilisation theory became the dominant model for understanding social movements. This perspective positioned social movements as rational social processes mobilised by a drive to maximise rewards and minimise costs for an individual (Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Jenkins 1983). Although this work refused to dismiss protest as mere emotional excess, it has been recognised that participation within social movements is also motivated by broader sets of values, morals and affective commitments beyond material gain and self-interest. The 'new social movements' approach, that developed in Europe (Klandermans, Kriesl & Tarrow 1988), questioned the rationalist preoccupations of resource mobilisation theory to open up an exploration of the role that new collective identities play in social movements. Participation within social movements was shaped by the experience of being a member of a social movement community. Therefore, instead of being solely motivated by individual material interests, social movements also offer participants emotional, social, cultural and sexual resources to enrich their everyday lives.

Overall, these dominant perspectives tend to fall within a 'contentious politics' model of social change. Social movements tend to be legitimised and recognised as a series of interactions with dominant institutions of power: marginalised groups organise around shared interests and

struggle for formal representation and right claims granted by dominant authoritative groups (McAdam et al 2001). This has led to a tendency to evaluate the effectiveness of a social movement in reference to rights claims and progressive legislation secured for a given marginalised group. Therefore, it is common to assume that effective social movements and activism focus their energy on challenging dominant targets – the government or state – in order to achieve social change. This means that the strength of a social movement is typically dependent upon the number and scale of public altercations with the state, which have traditionally taken the form of marches, demonstrations, rallies, public meetings, conferences, petitions and strikes.

In the context of feminism, the presence of a ‘cultural feminism’, which uses cultural tactics and targets to provoke social change, has been considered a weak permutation of more legitimate state-focused modes of activism. Cultural tactics are often positioned as an ephemeral go-between strategy, to be engaged with in periods of abeyance, in order to sustain a social movement until the next public conflict (Bagguley 2002; Taylor & Whittier 1997). Cultural activities are thought to produce personal satisfaction and empowerment for its participants and organisers; however, they are not regarded as politically subversive in their own right. Cultural activism has even been criticised for weakening and killing feminism, by diverting valuable time, resources and energy away from political targets (Echols 1989). Suzanne Staggenborg neatly summarised this position: ‘where the movement once sought radical political transformation, its radical wing has retreated into a “cultural feminism” that is concerned with building internal community and changing individuals rather than political and social institutions’ (2001, p. 507). These assertions are replicated in contemporary feminist commentary, ‘to believe that feminism’s rightful place is in the cultural and personal arena [...] remov[es] feminism’s teeth as a strong movement’ (Walter 1999, p. 9). The privileging of public state-focused protest within British feminism troubled queer feminist participants’ identifications with feminism and activism. Various (sub)cultural participants expressed a lack of confidence in understanding their (sub)cultural production and participation as political activism. For instance, in discussion with Emily and Melanie, both participants shared a reluctance to assert an activist meaning to their activities in relation to dominant categories of activism within protest culture and academia:

I almost feel that my form of activism, starting up a distro or putting on events or forming a band, is less valid than getting a coach to London and marching round London for an hour and getting a coach back. I feel the typical kind of political activism is somehow more worthy and, I suppose this kind of political cultural activism isn’t significant in the same way. I sometimes feel that typical feminists are more worthy than feminists like me (Emily)

When I was doing my MA people generally didn’t realise that I didn’t really know much about activism in terms of protests and demonstrations because for a lot of people that was activism. And for me when I was writing my

dissertation on how DIY collectives approach activism and how we can challenge conventional forms of activism I didn't actually know much about conventional forms of activism and nobody would believe that because the activism that I knew was DIY. That's why I think I find activism such a challenging term because what I mean by it is completely different to like what academics mean by it and I struggled big time with that [...] People genuinely think that DIY skills and crafts and non-consumerism and, creating your own life isn't activist, whereas to me that's the bare bones of anything (Melanie)

Queer feminist (sub)cultural participants also expressed difficulties in 'not being radical enough' to claim an activist identity. This dilemma frequently highlighted tensions and competition between queer anarchist and DIY feminist discourses within everyday performances of queer feminist identities. For some participants queer anarchist subculture placed specific demands – in terms of preferred appearance, occupation, living arrangements, diet, (sub)cultural tastes, political beliefs, sexual practices and social relationships – on its members. For some, whose lifestyle fell outside of the taken-for-granted assumptions of a radical autonomous lifestyle, sites of queer anarchist subculture held the potential to become invalidating and disempowering spaces. For instance, Naz illustrated her ambivalent feelings within queer anarchist subcultural sites like Queeruption:

I just felt really outside of that and I still do still feel a little bit outside of Queeruption, I don't feel kind of radical enough or DIY enough because I have a house and a job and I pay tax and, I can't ride a bike. I always feel like I'm wearing the wrong clothes or I'm too femme or I'm too interested in going shopping. I'm a bit too glossy or a bit too shiny and I feel sad about that because I really respect what they're doing, I love what they do. I just can't change who I am to fit into that

Previous research has argued for the exclusive character of queer autonomous spaces in terms of class and 'race' (Brown 2007). The policing of radical activist identities arguably prevents the involvement of a wider proportion of marginalised groups in society. Furthermore, several participants offered reflections that highlighted the presence of oppressive behaviour monitoring at queer anarchist events and an ironic (re)production of a power hierarchy of activist identities. For instance, Irene shared her experience at Queeruption Amsterdam:

I think there's often a danger of really creating a whole new hegemony almost of what is acceptable and what isn't acceptable and how you behave [...] I had a really bad experience at Queeruption in Amsterdam [...] there were a lot of people from America who had been doing all this activist training in conflict resolution and so there was this big drive to have conflict resolvers on call 24 hours a day, and to me that's like the police. I mean, can't two individuals resolve a conflict or can't they be pragmatic and involve a friend or someone else and can't someone step in if they see a problem. Something like that to me seems so important and instinctive that it's just assuming that people are all mindless idiots that need someone else to tell them how to resolve their conflicts. Or other people can't just naturally help [...] I think that's an example of how sometimes those organisers create their own hierarchies without really intending to [...] Within those circles they do emerge, people

that are seen as better activists, who know more about the right ways to behave, the right ways to organise a meeting, even basic stuff like the right hand movements to make and this is what the formalities should be and like it's practical but it's always the same people sort of, appearing very dominant which is difficult

Rather than restricting events to temporary autonomous squatted venues, DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural participants also organised music events and spaces within a wider range of quasi-autonomous and commercial venues. The decision to negotiate with a more consumer-centred model within sites that were open to the general public was a contentious one, especially in the context of queer anarchist discourses that advocated an anti-capitalist ethos and preference for autonomous venues. Nonetheless, there was more space within the DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural community to expand into civic space and build up a visible, long-term and accessible presence within the landscape of a city. One good example of this was the opening of the not-for-profit co-operative Cafe Kino in Bristol by Local Kid members Rosie and Michal. In contrast to earlier Local Kid projects that produced low-cost and free queer feminist community events (such as Bring Yourself Fest), Cafe Kino attempted to act as a public point to access alternative cultures, ideas and communities that was not confined to the constraints of a squatted autonomous venture. In the following extract Rosie and Michal discussed the rationale behind opening cafe Kino as a quasi-commercial vegetarian co-operative project:

Rosie: cafe Kino is much more about entering, like doing things on our own terms and in an ethical way, but also being a part of mainstream society. I see cafe Kino as a stepping stone in that anyone can come into it and hopefully be a bit inspired or learn things from it or pick up on the co-op side of it and it's more [about] reaching out to people who might not encounter alternative viewpoints otherwise.

Michal: I think when we were first starting to talk about doing the cafe we wanted to be more a social and political space, but we wanted, from the start, to do it in a mainstream way. We wanted to set up premises we didn't want it to be a squat and we wanted to do it professionally I guess not as in making money but

Rosie: Well we needed money we wanted it to be a long term thing. I guess the way that Michal and Lisa in particular made it look, it looks very much like a proper cafe. I mean I think squatted spaces and things are amazing and their own kind of merits and it wasn't a 'we don't want to do that' it's just that we were trying to do something different [...] the aim is that anyone can come in and not feel alienated by it or not feel like 'oh I'm not punk enough to be here'

The tensions between 'mainstream' and 'underground' positions can be traced within the talk of Michal and Rosie in their negotiation of a radical ethic within commercial pressures to be professional and dependent upon financial success. Cafe Kino attempts to challenge the codes that can exclude individuals and groups whose identities and lifestyles prevent participation within DIY queer feminist communities.

The experiences and (sub)cultural acts of queer feminist participants challenged dominant models and definitions of social movements, protest and activism. DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance does not share the clearly defined boundaries of formal social movement organisations and therefore cannot be understood within the established understandings of social movements. Instead Steven Buechler's term 'social movement community' is more appropriate in an attempt to capture a 'more diffuse feminist community' that has a 'significant role in movement activity despite its lack of formal organisation' (1990, p. 82). The concept of social movement communities opens up attention to submerged communities and (sub)cultures that may not always formally identify with dominant versions of feminism, but nonetheless play an important role before, alongside, and after feminism has become a formal organised presence in a society. Everyday actions and small localised acts of defiance have become central to recent re-definitions of activism within feminist scholarship. For instance, Deborah G. Martin et al define activism to refer to 'everyday actions by individuals that foster new social networks or power dynamics', that can add up to be 'a precursor to political action that transforms a community, develops a formal organisation, or extends in scale to reach social networks beyond the initial embeddedness of the instigating activist' (2007, p. 79). Therefore, within a UK context, DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance can be read as a continuous desire to transform power relations within local music communities and build social networks, practices, spaces and resources for marginal queer feminist actors to negotiate everyday life in a phobic dominant social order.

The dominant histories of feminist activism in contemporary British society frequently overlook grassroots (sub)cultural resistance in favour of the quantifiable, large-scale, public, government-focused, conventional protest actions and formal organisations (Byrne 1997; but see Lent 2001). Therefore, this research can be situated within a larger project to validate different ways of being and doing feminism within contemporary society across lines of class, 'race', gender, generation and sexuality. A growing body of research has explored unanticipated sites of women's (sub)cultural activisms that went beyond well-known formations, explicitly identified as feminist, and entered the communities, grassroots sites and everyday lives of working-class women and women of colour (Davis 1999; Enke 2007). For instance, in *Finding the Movement* Anne Enke (2007) argues for recognition of women's interventions in established public spaces in Detroit and Chicago between 1960 and 1980 as feminist activism. Women used space in new ways, for instance to occupy, create and re-order commercial and civic spaces – including bars, bookstores, cafes, parks, health clinics, shelters and coffeehouses – around women's interests and needs. Crucially women did not always identify their actions as feminist, but Enke argues that the spaces created by women became important precursors for the emergence of a feminist movement in and around the mid-west. In a similar way DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural

participants also attempted to relocate power in a subversive use of space, sound and culture that should be recognised as feminist activism.

The fluid character of grassroots activism makes an assessment of the 'successes' of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance within the UK difficult. Feminist movement scholars have argued that an absence of formalised goals, targets and boundaries within feminist social movement communities makes it hard to identify concrete victories and achievements. Instead impacts tend to be hidden and slow burning. Suzanne Staggenborg argued for greater recognition of the effects of feminist social movements within 'individuals, alternative institutions, and ideas, which are often perpetuated beyond the lives of organisations' (1995, p. 354). Therefore DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance can contribute to enduring and widespread change within British culture and society. In what follows I want to contemplate some of the wider impacts DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance has had, and will continue to have, upon British society. Queer feminist (sub)culture can be linked to the production of, (i) new generations of feminist activists and organisations, (ii) resources and networks for life outside the heteronorm, (iii) a shift in the collective consciousness of society, and (iv) an important source of legitimisation for queer feminist lives, creativities and (sub)cultural productions.

The presence of riot grrrl and local queer feminist music (sub)culture provided a critical entry point for participants to access political ideas. In many instances contact with queer feminist musics activated political outsiders to become insiders in a shared exploration of feminist and queer politics and practices within everyday life and local music (sub)cultures. For example, Emily discussed how riot grrrl was a critical entry point for her exploration of feminism: 'my starting point of feminism was riot grrrl that's how I got into it. I didn't approach it from an academic point. Everything I've kind of set out to do, like the fact that I write zines, comes from like reading personal zines and riot grrrl zines and so I think that will always be like where my feminism came from'. Queer feminist collectives can also be thought of as spaces that offered opportunities to gain critical skills and experience that could be carried forward to inform involvement in other social movements, occupations and political organisations. In this way DIY queer feminist collectives can be seen as fertile training grounds for the production of generations of politicised members of society eager to agitate for social change in a variety of fields. For example, in her narrative Emily emphasised how her experiences and duties within Manifesta enabled her to secure a job with Safeguarding Children, an agency responsible for protecting children from abuse and neglect:

I was able to get this reasonably well paid admin job because I've got like five years of experience of being a treasurer, of minute taking, of helping chair meetings and it's really helped in that sense, to kind of give me practical experience which I can use to help me with jobs. It's also improved my confidence and, I don't know what I would be like if I hadn't been in

Manifesta for the past five years but I imagine I would be less confident about speaking in public, less confident about meeting new people. So I think it has helped me work out what I want and how to go about getting it and how to give me the confidence to do things I want to do

Queer feminist and riot grrrl participants also pursued employment within areas dedicated to human rights, social equalities and animal rights, for instance within local government agencies and independent feminist organisations that tackle social problems such as substance misuse, domestic abuse, discrimination, sustainable living and climate change. One excellent example of the transformative potential of riot grrrl within Britain is in Amelia Fletcher's appointment as the Chief Economist at the Office of Fair Trading. Suzy Corrigan was insistent on the positive effects of riot grrrl within British society: 'It captured people's imaginations [...] A lot went on in Scotland, a lot went on in Leeds, a lot went on in London and a lot of that energy actually informs the contemporary visual art world, television and music because a lot of these people have actually gone on to enter these areas'. Many participants carved out positions within creative occupations as graphic designers, writers, visual artists, journalists, music managers, cultural commentators, musicians, broadcasters and performers. Education was another area that attracted the interest of participants who became school teachers, lecturers and library assistants. Interestingly a high proportion of queer feminist participants were undertaking, or had recently completed, postgraduate research degrees within areas of Education, Women's Studies and Gender Studies. In an information age, that positions knowledge as a key resource in society (Stevenson 2003), many (sub)cultural activists have begun to carve out positions within academic disciplines to produce critical knowledge informed by grassroots experiences and radical ideas (Grundy & Smith 2007). The potential for a 'politics of knowledge' that enables social change within productive interchanges between activism and academia, embodied in the increased presence of the academic-activist, has been discussed within a variety of disciplines (Wright 2008; Messer-Davidow 2004). DIY queer feminist (sub)cultures are rich in critical ideas that have the potential to challenge and transform academic disciplines. In terms of formal organisations, participants in riot grrrl and queer feminist (sub)cultures were also members of other social movement organisations including Feminists Against Censorship, Abortion Rights, the Fawcett Society, Anarchists Against the Wall, and The Truth Isn't Sexy. In some instances queer feminist participants attempted to organise formal feminist organisations, which led to an increase in public recognition of feminist activism in the UK (see D'Cruz 2008). For instance, Feminist Activist Forum (FAF) was set up in April 2007 by Debi Withers and Red Chidgey,<sup>45</sup> as a formal national organisation dedicated to the production of intergenerational dialogues and projects on histories of feminist social movements. Therefore one important 'success' of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance is in the transformation of political outsiders into new

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<sup>45</sup> See <<http://www.feministactivistforum.org.uk>> [accessed on 15 March 2009] for more information. In 2008 both Debi Withers and Red Chidgey went on hiatus from FAF.

generations of confident politicised individuals who continue to affect social change within their workplaces, formal feminist organisations and other social movements within wider society.

Another important impact of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance involves the construction of alternative life pathways within British society. Various sociologists have noted radical changes in contemporary trends in intimacy and care within British society. The dominance of the traditional family and heterosexual couple has become displaced by relationships and social networks that extend beyond the family (Weeks et al 2001; Roseneil & Budgeon 2004; Roseneil 2005). This can include an expanding array of non-normative intimacies such as friends, non-monogamous lovers, ex-lovers, partners who do not live together and partners who do not have sex together; but could also include relationships central to the realisation of queer feminist community such as band-mates, collective members, music fans and zine-writers. This places DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural intimacies within a wider decentring of heterorelations within society in which ways of living outside heteronormative pathways are increasing (Roseneil & Budgeon 2004; Roseneil 2005). Relationships and social networks within DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural life offered support for participants to negotiate life outside of a heteronorm. For instance, Emily argued that her life was braver than following a conventional life pathway:

I see this as being a braver way of [living] because like you're carving out something new [...] you don't have the 'you go to school you go to university you meet someone settle down and have kids get a steady job'. You don't have that blueprint to follow and it's not like you're straying away from a hard world you're almost accepting that you could have an easy conventional life but you want something more rewarding but more challenging.

Furthermore, Melanie emphasised how DIY queercore and riot grrrl musics acted as crucial resources for her negotiation of life beyond the heteronorm:

I knew that I didn't fit in at school with all these people who were going towards a certain life and this mainstream aim in their life. I think discovering queercore and riot grrrl at that time in my life I knew that hang on I don't want to do what these people are doing. Had I not discovered that then. I think it was a pinnacle turning point in my life, it came at exactly the right time for me [...] It was really opened my eyes to a different way of being that struck a chord for me and I knew that hang on there [are] these people somewhere on the other side of the world who are making, saying something that really made me feel it was going to be okay because I didn't have to be like those other people. I knew there were people out there somewhere that were making music that made my heart like flutter, it was saying things in the lyrics that I was thinking

Therefore, DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance enabled participants to carve out ways of living that displaced the centrality of the heterosexual couple, logic of the family and reproductive time (Halberstam 2005a). These queer lives prolonged adolescence, extended

opportunities for participation in (sub)culture, and constructed vital resources and social networks to resist conventional life trajectories.

Another way in which a feminist social movement community can be successful is in the instigation of 'broader change in public and private values and meanings [...] as new vocabularies and new ideas are introduced and disseminated [...] [that] affect far more people than those who participate in collective action [...] [and] have cultural consequences beyond the impact of their organised and public activities' (Staggenborg 1995, p. 341). Or, to use Carol Mueller's (1987) term, a new 'collective consciousness' is created, in which feminist challenges to existing cultural ideas, practices and assumptions are mainstreamed to produce widespread social change in social norms, behaviours and ways of thinking. In relation to riot grrrl, various scholars and participants have critiqued the co-optation of riot grrrl ideas within consumer culture. In the mid-1990s the rapid popularity of women singer-songwriters and performers, who exhibited normative gender and sexuality conventions, have been criticised for re-securing white middle-class hetero-feminine norms (Schilt 2003a; Wald 1998; Lemish 2003). Nonetheless, to re-position fans and listeners as active participants in cultural meaning-making processes, traces of radical ideologies can be excavated from seemingly innocuous popular culture and 'mainstream' musics (see Savage 2003; Cowman & Kaloski 1998). Radical ideas submerged within popular culture can be recuperated by girls and young women as resources for exploration of feminism and queer ideas. For instance, within a US context, Kathleen Hanna remained optimistic about the radical potential of the mainstreaming and normalisation of riot grrrl ideas as a phase within girls' adolescent development:

I have always thought that RG [riot grrrl] was a part of the larger movement known as feminism. To be honest about how it currently functions now, it seems like a stage that some high-school aged girls go thru where they learn about feminism and adopt a certain style as a part of that growth. To me that is a lot better than just going thru a 60s I love Jim Morrison phase, like I did!!!! It's kind of the best permutation of a movement that I can think of

There is some indication that a similar developmental stage has been established for girls and young women in other parts of the world. For instance, writing in the anarchy-feminist *RAG* magazine about her involvement in Magical Girl CD compilation project in Dublin Ireland, Siobhan Fahey (2007) reflected on her interactions with girls who received a free CD of DIY feminist music, produced by the Magical Girl collective, whilst out in town on a Saturday:

My happiness was immense. I did manage to give out about 10 CDs – and if I felt that if there was a lot of chat going on I threw out the question 'so if I said the word feminism to you, what do you think?' and I'm smiling even typing this because their reactions were so positive. It was something I didn't expect in 2007 but a lot of the girl's immediate response was to put their fists in the air and say 'Girl Power'. Now I know the Spice Girls get a lot of stick for promoting Girl Power as a commercial slogan, but I saw a lot of strength from the girls standing in front of me with their 'Girl Power' fists in the air. They

mean it in a strong individual here and now way – it wasn't just a catchphrase – you could see it in their eyes and the way they were. They had enthusiasm for being a girl, I'm telling you, it was real and it was strong and it was said with a belief. It was one of the best things I'd seen in a long time.

Therefore, although restricted by the operation of power embedded in the production of consumer culture, the widespread popularity and appeal of girl-positive ideas demonstrates the emergence of a new 'collective consciousness' amongst young women and girls who have made important gains in confidence, agency and ways of thinking about femininity and power. This can be seen as a trickle-down effect of riot grrrl in changing social and cultural attitudes around femininity.

The final 'success' of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance involves the lived production of spaces, networks and sites that counter the disarticulation of feminism and resist widespread social and cultural fears of gender and sexual diversities. Queer feminist participants have illustrated a consistent inability for contemporary society to validate and comprehend queer and feminist identities, subjectivities and practices. The construction of DIY queer feminist music (sub)cultural worlds attempt to reconfigure and reorder sets of dominant relationships and will a new social order into existence. Christopher Small has argued for the potential of music performance to 'model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society' (1998, p. 13). Furthermore Susan J. Smith (1994, 1997, 2000) has argued for recognition of music as a medium of cultural politics that can be used by the socially marginalised to claim powerful collective identities. The immediate experience of music events has the potential to create new social and cultural dynamics neglected by dominant society. Therefore these radical spaces, practices and sites exist as vital resources for the validation of queer feminist identities, subjectivities and ways of living as well as examples of what social change can look and feel like. For instance, Party Weirdo member Emily argued:

A lot of my ambition for what Party Weirdo were doing was to add to, if not transform, the conception and creation of music and performance within our environments. One of the great things about being a woman performer and musician is that I get to explore the kind of unseen lines of culture and art that are often neglected by other, more dominant modes or people. These unseen lines are literally the words we sing as feminists or as women or as queers, the way we make our music, or how we validate ourselves and our friends within our own communities, many of which are designed by people like us, for us, and are therefore mini-creations of what we would like to see more of from culture and society in general.

In summary, this chapter has explored how problematic exclusions and hierarchies can be (re)produced within the social processes embedded within DIY (sub)cultural life. Although conflict has been productive in the construction of a queer feminist agenda devoted to an analysis of the intersections of gender and sexuality, queer feminist communities struggled to

contend with the dominant structures of 'race' and class, as well as the personal risks suffered within the processes of transformation. In a defence of DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance, as a valid form of activism with widespread effects on British society, I highlighted how (sub)cultural participants experienced various inadequacies in asserting an activist identity. This dilemma also exposed the implicit policing of authentic radical identities and practices in activist worlds demonstrated by the conflicts and contradictions between the circulation of queer anarchist and DIY feminist discourses within DIY queer feminist music (sub)culture. In line with recent re-definitions of activism, DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance disrupts dominant definitions of social movements in its focus on unconventional targets, goals and activities, thereby troubling dominant evaluative frameworks for social movements. Taking into account the term 'social movement community' (Buechler 1990) alongside studies of women's activism within unanticipated communities and groups that resist a dominant feminist identity, I have argued for the recognition of different ways of doing and being feminist beyond national formalised feminist organisations. In the process I have managed to highlight some of the enduring and positive impacts that DIY queer feminist music (sub)cultural resistance has achieved within contemporary British society and culture. Radical music (sub)cultures offer vital sites for the wider access of political ideas that can help guide new generations of politicised individuals to instigate change within their workplaces and social movements. These spaces and communities can provide crucial social networks and resources to negotiate a life outside of the logic of the family and heterosexual couple, as part of a wider trend towards new intimacies in contemporary British society. They have also agitated a new 'collective consciousness' (Mueller 1987) within young women and girls, who can now invest in girl-positive sentiments as part of a normative development. Finally, these spaces, sounds and visions enable participants to resist dominant discipline and reorder their immediate social worlds to validate the complexities of diverse genders, sexualities and feminist activisms.

## Conclusion

I have argued that music can be a crucial resource for participants in the critical negotiation of gender and sexual diversities within culture and society. Unlike other (sub)cultural productions – fanzines, films and artworks – music performances are more likely to provoke an immediate, engaged and physical communal experience. Music is an emotional participatory medium that enables marginalised social groups and individuals to reorder their immediate social cultures and feel their way towards different ways of being. Therefore, I have argued for the greater recognition of music and music (sub)culture in the history, and contemporary life, of feminist, LGBT and queer activisms. This comprehensive qualitative study of riot grrrl and queer feminist music (sub)cultures has offered examples of moments in which music and music (sub)culture can be linked to wider political struggles to secure space for diverse genders and sexualities, and (re)engage with feminisms. For instance, in oral histories, reflections on riot grrrl participations demonstrated how music was central in the formation of a feminist participatory community that enabled girls and young women to re-write feminism and become (sub)cultural producers. Riot grrrl amateur music-making practices provided girls and young women with a critical medium to disrupt masculine authorities that threatened to limit their (sub)cultural production. Furthermore, within contemporary queer feminist music (sub)culture, the tit-tape ritual and DIY ‘creative fraud’<sup>46</sup> strategy in the music practices of Jean Genet demonstrated how performers and audiences collaboratively used music to rework dominant feminisms and open up space for queer genders and sexualities.

Despite a dominant tendency to undermine the wider and long-term impacts of riot grrrl within British society, closer attention to the evaluative criteria of social movements has revealed a bias towards a ‘contentious politics’ model and a historical rejection of cultural subversions from feminist activist histories. Therefore, one key contribution of this thesis has been to explore the enduring impacts that riot grrrl has had upon the character of British society as well as assess the place of music (sub)culture in political activism. Riot grrrl had long-term effects on the lives of its participants whose experiences enabled them to shape radical life-courses and creative roles that otherwise would not have been accessible. Riot grrrl enabled political outsiders to access political ideas, to become politicised individuals who could use radical ideas to inform their involvement in the workplace, social movements and formalised feminist organisations. Riot grrrl can indirectly be related to the agitation of a new ‘collective consciousness’ amongst girls and young women who take girl-positive sentiments for granted in their adolescent development. The presence of Ladyfests and local queer feminist (sub)cultural

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<sup>46</sup> The practice of ‘creative fraud’ is not specific to queer feminist music-makers, but can be understood as a well-worn feature of various genres within the history of popular music, including hip hop (see Rose 1994; Chang 2006).

collectives confirm the influence that riot grrrl had on younger generations who have rehabilitated and reconstructed riot grrrl within a new set of socio-political, historical and technological possibilities. These emergent contemporary (sub)cultures and communities seized upon spatial, sonic and visual tactics, to transform feminism into a queer feminist agenda that struggled against the (re)production of heterosexism within everyday life. In this manner, both riot grrrl and queer feminist (sub)cultures can be linked to a wider contemporary shift in the social organisation of care and intimacy, in which the heterosexual couple and logic of the family is being gradually displaced by the importance of other social bonds. Therefore DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance represent important possibilities for the creation of diverse meaningful relationships, identities and radical life-courses.

However, life within DIY queer feminist (sub)cultural resistance comes with many weaknesses. The personal costs of participation can be devastating. For example, within riot grrrl, physical assaults on feminist performers, the (re)deployment of sexual harassment by men, and the bitter struggle over meaning and representation with the dominant media industries, all hint at the reasons why many participants chose to distance themselves from riot grrrl and refused to revisit this period of their lives. In relation to the problematic ways of working in small-groups and collectives I have argued that moments of crisis, despite personal costs, produce critical moments for the transformation of social movements. For instance, a crisis over queer visibility in the Manifesta collective eventually led to the development of a queer feminist agenda that enabled discussion of the intersections of gender and sexual oppressions. The redeployment of power relations of 'race', class and gender at work within contemporary DIY queer feminist collectives represent other potential moments of crisis within grassroots British feminism, which offer the potential for future positive transformations of feminist and queer politics.

It is time for a broader recognition of the critical activities of grassroots (sub)cultural communities. By expanding the dominant definitions of protest and activism beyond state-centred public protests and formalised feminist organisations, future research can elucidate the widespread negotiations of genders, sexualities and feminisms that are happening within everyday life across divisions of 'race', class and generation. If we can learn one lesson from the study of radical queer feminist (sub)cultural life, it would be to question the dominant notions of what being a girl, a queer, an activist or feminist is in a particular culture; and go beyond the spectacular and established institutions of feminism, to engage with the resistant practices of girls, young women and queers within everyday life.

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## Appendix 1: Interview schedules and volunteer information sheets

### Interview Schedule: Riot Grrrl oral histories

#### *Beginnings of Riot Grrrl*

How did you first hear about riot grrrl?

Why were you drawn towards riot grrrl?

What were you doing before riot grrrl came into your life?

What, for you, were the main ideas that you gained from your involvement in riot grrrl?

Were you involved in any other forms of activism before riot grrrl? (How did riot grrrl compare to these experiences)

How/why did your chapter get together?

What were your initial meetings like?

Did you have any good or bad experiences?

What did your involvement with riot grrrl mean to you at this time?

How did your experiences of riot grrrl impacted on other parts of your life/ creativity/political identity at that time?

How did your experiences impact on your ideas of feminism/activism/politics/gender/sexuality?

#### *Doing Riot Grrrl – managing riot grrrl chapters/events, media attention*

What projects were you involved in organising and attending? (bands, zines, record labels, events, workshops, distros etc.)

Can you tell me a bit about .... (project)?

How did your involvement in these projects affect you? (confidence, politics, emotions, creativity...)

Are there any particular moments in your riot grrrl experience which stick out as particularly memorable? (can you tell me a bit about that, why was that significant to you)

How did you get other people involved in your riot grrrl chapter?

Did you ever have to develop ways to control your representation, create a pro-girl atmosphere at gigs, build up women-only spaces? (how, experience...)

Did you ever come up against any resistance from other underground communities? If so, in what ways, how did you deal with this resistance?

Did you ever experience other riot grrrl chapters? How did your riot grrrl chapter differ from other chapters in the UK?

Did you have any communication with/ inspiration from the US movement? How was this dialogue maintained?

As your collective evolved did you anticipate the level of media attention you'd receive?

How did you feel about the coverage riot grrrl and women musicians received in this period?

How did you deal with this media attention?

In retrospect how would you deal with this now?

Do you see any continuities/ disjunctures of riot grrrl with other music cultures, like women in 1970s punk, post-punk, womyns music, anarcha-punk?

How was riot grrrl distinct, significant, and important to you and others at that time?

*The 'decline' of Riot Grrrl chapters/ activity*

What led to the end of your riot grrrl involvement?

How did your chapter split up/ end/ separate? (What events/pressures/tensions led up to the split?)

Are you still in touch with other riot grrrl chapter members? (What are they up to now?)

Have your riot grrrl experiences had an effect on what you are currently involved with now? (If so, how, in what ways, can you tell me more about...)

Have you attended any Ladyfests? (What did you think about them?)

Do you feel that riot grrrl really died?

How do you feel about new collectives using and valuing 1990s terms, images and zines?

What do you think about the commercialisation of riot grrrl slogans and ideas, for instance the Spice Girls use of girl power?

How did you feel/ react to the increasing amount of academic attention to riot grrrl?

Have you read any histories of riot grrrl? (What did you think about them?)

Do you think riot grrrl has had an effect on women's positions within the music industry?

What do you think about the term 'post-riot grrrl', often associated with bands like Sleater-Kinney and Le Tigre?

Do you think there is still a need for riot grrrl in the UK?

**Volunteer Information Sheet: UK Riot Grrrl Oral Histories**

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I am a researcher in the Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies at the University of Leeds, drummer, and co-founder of Manifesta, a DIY not for profit feminist/queer collective based in Leeds.

This research is subject to ethical guidelines set out by the British Sociological Association. These guidelines include principles such as obtaining your informed consent before research starts, notifying you of your right to withdraw, and protection of your anonymity. This sheet will hopefully provide you with enough information about the oral histories project to allow you to make an informed decision about participation. However, if you have any questions or would like to discuss anything with me please let me know.

I am approaching you as a potential research participant due to your past active role and identification with riot grrrl. I am interested in exploring your past experiences of riot grrrl culture in the UK as well as how your experience has impacted upon other areas of your life. The inspiration for this project came from a lack of existing work that took UK riot grrrl histories and voices seriously. In embarking on a wider project on contemporary manifestations of riot grrrl culture in the UK, I feel it necessary to hear the voices from people involved in past riot grrrl activity. I decided that an oral history of UK riot grrrl is well overdue and offers the valuable opportunity to learn about feminist and queer cultural resistance in other times and places. This would entail interviewing you in an informal relaxed setting. I have prepared some questions, however the interview will place your concerns and experiences as central and

questions will be used more as prompts. I would love to encourage you to bring along any artifacts you have kept from your riot grrrl days like fanzines, photos, flyers, records etc. I would anticipate the interview lasting at least an hour. However, as long as you are happy, the interview could last much longer. As we talk, we may discuss many issues relevant to your experience as a member of riot grrrl. As a researcher I fully encourage such a process.

I will need to audio-tape the interview in order to study the information you give me. The audio-tape will be typed-up into a transcript to help me do this. You may choose to remain anonymous and change your name as well as locations and other bits of information that may allow readers to identify you. I might want to use extracts from the transcript in a report of the research. As part of my PhD thesis possible viewers of the transcripts include my supervisors and other secondary markers. However, again, if you choose to remain anonymous, no-one should be able to identify you from these extracts and at no point will your identity be divulged.

### **Interview Schedule: DIY Queer Feminist (Sub)cultural Community**

Have you ever been involved in or attended a Ladyfest or Queeruption? (If so, please describe your involvement and attendance)

What was your experience of these events like?

How did you translate this experience into your current/past projects and/or your everyday life?

Could you give a brief history of how [name of collective] came about?

What other projects have you been involved in and how did they evolve?

What inspired you to get involved in [name of collective] and your other projects?

In [name of collective], were you trying to address any particular situations or issues? (if so, what were those issues, how did you attempt to address them, how did you aim to challenge the status quo)

How did you go about practically setting up [name of collective]?

What was important to you about functioning within a DIY ethic and not-for-profit economics?

How did you find your co-organisers/ contributors?

What was it like when you did the first event?

So far, what have you been involved in organising and attending in relation to [name of collective]?

How has your involvement in [name of collective] affected you in other areas of your life?

What has your experience of organising collectively been like?

How would you define what you do to someone who's never heard of [name of collective] before?

Have there been any unexpected or unanticipated outcomes of [name of collective]?

How have you negotiated doing underground DIY culture within an increasingly mainstream-ed

cultural arena? (e.g. where some aspects of queer culture have moved overground e.g. beth ditto and impact this can have in the mainstream)

How has [name of collective] been received by other people? (have you had any feedback, any resistance)

How and why did [your collective] end? (if appropriate)

Do you think you've managed to address the issue that initially motivated/mobilised [your collective]? (caused any change, created a supportive community/network etc.)

What does feminism mean to you?

What is your definition of queer?

How do you think [name of collective] engaged with feminist and/or queer ideas?

Has your involvement in [name of collective] affected the ways in which you think about queerness, feminism and activism, (If so, how have your ideas changed?)

Do you think [name of collective] had an effect on local and/or national culture? (If so, how do you think you've changed it?)

Has your involvement inspired you to do anything new or change the way you do things? (If so, please describe)

Would you say there has been a change in the DIY queer feminist community now than say five years ago? (If so, in what ways is it different now? How and why do you think this has happened?)

Do you relate what you do to riot grrrl and/or queercore? (If yes or no, how and why is what you do similar/ different?)

### **Volunteer Information Sheet: DIY Queer Feminist (Sub)cultural Community**

Researcher: Julia Downes

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I am a PhD student in the Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies at the University of Leeds, drummer for Fake Tan, and co-founder of Manifesta, a DIY not-for-profit queer feminist collective based in Leeds.

I am approaching you as a potential research participant due to your past and/or current activities within queer feminist DIY culture and community in the UK. I am interested in understanding, archiving and documenting the continuation of DIY tactics in queer feminist cultural and political resistance today. The inspiration for this project came from a lack of existing work that takes contemporary queer feminist UK DIY culture, histories and voices seriously. Last summer I embarked on a series of oral histories of Riot Grrrl in the UK to learn

about feminist cultural resistance in other times, contexts and situations. The next stage of my PhD seeks to engage with contemporary manifestations of queer feminist DIY cultural resistance. As a feminist, I feel it is necessary to foreground the voices, experiences and concerns from people actually involved in this culture, as well as to reflexively interrogate my position between and within both academic and cultural activist spaces. I decided that an ethnographic interview-based engagement with UK DIY queer feminist culture is well overdue. This would entail interviewing you in an informal relaxed setting and, when possible, helping you out at your event(s). I am visiting different locations around the UK this summer (July – September) and would be really interested in planning to spend some time with you whenever it is convenient.

This research is subject to ethical guidelines set out by the British Sociological Association. These guidelines include principles such as getting your informed consent before research starts, letting you know of your right to withdraw your involvement at any time, and protection of your anonymity. This sheet will hopefully provide you with enough information about my project to allow you to make an informed decision about taking part. However, if you have any questions or would like to discuss anything with me please let me know.

I want to encourage you to collaborate with me in deciding on the best ways to represent your activities. This may include collecting interviews, documentation (flyers, posters, zines), oral histories and ethnographies (taking part in events and meetings). I'll keep a journal of any ethnographic research, scan or photocopy any documentation and audio-tape any interviews and oral histories I do in order to study the information you give me. The audio-tape(s) will be typed-up into a transcript to help me do this. You may choose to remain anonymous and change your name as well as locations and other bits of information that may allow readers to identify you. I might want to use extracts from the transcript in a report or book chapter of the research, if so I'll contact you to seek your permission. As part of my PhD thesis possible viewers of the transcripts include my supervisors and other secondary markers. However, again, if you choose to remain anonymous, no-one should be able to identify you from these extracts and at no point will your identity be divulged.

### **Volunteer Information Sheet: Band Case Studies**

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I am a PhD student in the Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies at the University of Leeds, drummer, and co-founder of Manifesta, a DIY not-for-profit feminist/queer collective based in Leeds.

My research is subject to ethical guidelines set out by the British Sociological Association. These guidelines include principles such as obtaining your informed consent before research starts, notifying you of your right to withdraw, and protection of your anonymity. This sheet will hopefully provide you with enough information about the band case studies part of my research to allow you to make an informed decision about participation. However, if you have any questions or would like to discuss anything with me please let me know.

I'm focussing my PhD on UK feminist/queer music subcultures and one major component of my research is looking at queer and/or feminist queer music production. I am drawn to thinking about how bands and performers who are actively involved in UK DIY feminist/queer music communities create, use and perform music. I'm interested in how musical sounds themselves can be used by those who identify as feminist and/or queer to carve out a cultural space for feminist/queer expression and identification.

Through my initial reading of this area these are issues which haven't been adequately addressed across a number of disciplines (e.g. musicology, women's studies, gender studies, sociology, cultural studies). It is my aim in this research to challenge the silence and marginalisation of UK feminist/queer DIY music cultures and to open up new ideas, dialogues and ways of thinking about music, politics and activism.

I'm approaching you as a potential case study for this part of my PhD due to your involvement and music-making activities in our feminist/queer UK music culture. This would involve us collaborating on ways in which to document your creative process. I imagine that this can be done in a number of possible ways depending on your own preferences as well as other practicalities. One way is for me to come along and sit in on your band rehearsals although where this isn't possible (because of distance etc) it might be more practical for me to send you a camcorder for you to record band practices on and for you to periodically send me these tapes. Or it might be better for you to send me audio recordings of band practices, songs in progress and copies of any notes you make. Alongside this documentation I would also like to interview you about your music-making practices and go to see you play live as much as possible. I'd want to start the documentation process as soon as possible over roughly six months and do the interviews in March 2007.

If you don't wish to use your names you may choose to remain anonymous and change your name as well as locations and other bits of information that may allow readers to identify you. I might want to use extracts from the interview transcripts, audio and visual recordings in reports and PhD thesis as well as conference presentations of the research. I will inform you and ask for your consent for each possible presentation and report. As part of my PhD thesis possible viewers and listeners of this information include my supervisors and other secondary markers. However, again, if you choose to remain anonymous, no-one should be able to identify you from these extracts and at no point will your identity be divulged.

## Appendix 2: Samples of datasets

### Example of British riot grrrl oral history interview transcript

*Amelia Fletcher, 5 January 2007*

J: Well really like how did you first hear about riot grrrl because a lot of people have said that they first heard about it from you so

A: Well that's really funny well I (.) I first heard about it from the originators of it which is erm Molly Neuman and Allison Wolfe and Erin well they were the two originators and then Erin erm (.) what's his name Erin Smith who was also in Bratmobile erm because they'd invented the term hadn't they because they started this fanzine and they just called it riot grrrl and what happened is really erm Heavenly went on tour to the US and we were on K Records which is based in Washington erm Washington state Olympia (.) erm which is where all those girls were living where Bratmobile was based and it just happened to be that we went there to tour I think we were touring with Lois I think possibly possibly one of Calvin's bands possibly Beat Happening I can't remember exactly the timing but because we toured we went over like every year basically but that year everyone was kind of talking about this thing riot grrrl that these girls had kind of (.) I think I was never quite clear if they invented it or if they kind of put the name on something that was kind of happening anyway but I got really excited about it and up till then Heavenly had been very influenced by sixties girl groups which I still absolutely love so it was all kind of boy meets girl boy loves girl sometimes boy leaves girl but it was all kind of heartbreak and you know there was never any kind of argh fuck you (laughter) aspect of it which there clearly was in riot grrrl erm and I (.) I just thought it was really exciting and really inspiring and I thought what for me was really exciting about it is (.) I (.) in England I think maybe it was different in the US but in England at that time there was this word feminism erm but I think that we all felt that we were girls not women and there was a lot of stuff about this word women but we felt that we were girls and we felt really not interested in lots of the battles that women were fighting which were in the workplace and to do with various rights and (.) actually I remember I was asked in an interview about erm why these kind of women that Private Eye used to spell kind of feminist women W-I-M-M-I-N and they had this kind of really bad image of kind of which I imagine and now Germaine Greer always seemed so cool but then she's the archetype and she it it there were just all these (.) it just didn't have a good image basically (laughter) it wasn't a punk rock image and it wasn't an indie image and me and I think lots of other females even thought we were feminist and we were doing our own thing and wouldn't take any rubbish from boys we didn't really think of ourselves as feminists and we didn't really sit and feel comfortable with that tag erm and then suddenly what there was was riot grrrl which really seemed to be speaking to like the issues that we had which were in a way if you talk to people that were trying to struggling to get good childcare and good erm rights and the original people who were trying to get women the vote and things like that they seemed absolutely pathetic I suppose but to us (laughter) they seemed really much more important and real and I really liked some of the diy nature of it I really liked the things which in a way it's quite catty but the thing that apparently some of the loos in Olympia the ladies loos they actually set them up as bulletin boards so if there were men particular boys acting as wankers they could write their names and then other people could write (laughter) nowadays it's being done on a secret bit of the Internet but it was done in the loo and girls would all write like their comments on these various boys so everyone had a good idea and then they'd know not to go out with them and that kind of (laughter) so I just thought well things like that were just kind of really great and also just all the real encouragement to get girls in bands like the influence of having lots of girls in bands and girls really shouting out in bands and being spirited and erm

rather than just kind of singing in bands erm so anyway I thought it was really exciting and I thought the girls from Bratmobile were really brilliant and interesting and they were a really interesting set of people anyway they were really hugely different from each other so Erin was really sweet really indie actually a really kind of sweet twee she actually she didn't write a riot grrrl fanzine she wrote a fanzine about 60's TV stars I mean classic kind of indie thing Allison was kind of (.) pretty much in her own world but really huge amounts of energy and really kind of mildly insane but really entertaining and erm very good at high-kicks (laughter) erm and erm Molly was (.) she's gone on to be really kind of successful she manages The Donnass and she's done really well at kind of managing them and she works for Lookout records she's just really cool but she was actually really intelligent and really smart and she sort of drew all these mad ideas together and kind of held it all together in a really brilliant way and I just thought they were very very impressive people and they were really young at that time erm and so I just thought (.) I remember English music at that time was all the Sarah stuff that we were involved in just was all these kind of (.) being sad and it all used to drive us a bit mad erm and even the girl stuff that was around was kind of pretty I mean us included not particularly spirited or talking I guess talking as personally the sixties girl group things I was talking about personal things but I think I was dressing them up in kind of a particular kind of girl group structures or pop song structures whereas there was a real kind of viscerality about all that stuff that you know you could just say what you meant erm and so what happens is that I got really excited about it came back to the UK and immediately wrote a letter to Rachel actually to say "have you heard about this it's absolutely brilliant you've got to get doing something" well she sent one back saying no I have heard about it erm and yes we really do need to get some stuff going and then I can't remember what I can't remember is quite how Huggy Bear got involved in it but basically my brother Matthew who was in Heavenly was the original drummer of Huggy Bear and they were really good friends of ours in fact Ethna from Tallulah Gosh went out with Chris from Huggy Bear for a really long time as well and they'd got the same tattoo on their arm which actually made her really pissed off because by the time he was in Huggy Bear they'd split up and she used to go along to gigs and people would go "ahhh wow you've got the same tattoo as Chris you really must love Huggy Bear" and like "no we had it done when we were going out" but anyway erm erm I mean Huggy Bear were at that time were really good friends of ours so I don't I think they probably I don't know whether we kind of told them about it or whether they kind of found out about it at the same time because they kind of knew the same people in Olympia as well erm (.) but I remember they were writing these really nice little pop songs and I remember going to see them the first time they played and I Niki was really shouting and the result was not much volume was coming out because you had to learn how to shout as you've probably discovered the first time you shout it actually just doesn't come out that well and I said to her "you know maybe you should sing a bit more" and she kind of was very sweet to me and said "oh yeah okay maybe I will" and then the next time she'd actually learnt to shout properly (laughter) erm and that was what she wanted to do she really clearly knew what she wanted to do and she'd been really influenced I mean I guess (.) it was Bratmobile but actually they were much more influenced by erm Bikini Kill and kind of much more well I guess both but yeah kind of I think erm erm (.) yeah so she'd I think maybe when they very first started they were going to be a bit more indie and they had cute little songs about t-shirts I don't know if they recorded t-shirt tucked in and things like that it was just like t-shirts tucked in very un-cool

J: Yeah I heard that when they started they were very much a twee pop sort of band and then

A: Yeah then got faster I've got a tape somewhere of them being of their very first demo which has my brother playing on it and it was done in my parents house (laughter) and it was really nice and they were a bit shouty but basically really cute incredibly short songs erm but just very

nicely done erm of that sort of thing maybe there was kind of almost more naive like more Daniel Johnston or something like that then then (.) riot grrrl but then over a really short period of time they discovered about riot grrrl I think it must have been I can't remember the times but they must have got really into all the same stuff at the same time as us and as I say I have no idea whether they got it from us or directly erm (.) and they just changed and but they were really good at it and really good fun and what they had (.) what all of the riot grrrl bands actually had the really good ones had Linus actually didn't particularly have it but erm Huggy Bear Bikini Kill and Bratmobile all had was an amazing sense of humour and so you'd have these kind of visceral yell kind of rahrahh and then they'd just would be really charming and funny in between songs Allison Woolfe used to just talk you know for five minutes hysterically between songs I can't even remember what she sued to talk about but it was really funny and likewise Kathleen Hanna but also Chris particularly but also Niki erm (.) erm it's actually quite funny because it was a band of two boys of three girls but they became the riot grrrl band.

### **Example of queer feminist producer-fan interview transcript**

*Rosie Hadrill and Michal William, 16 September 2007*

J: So what was it like organising Ladyfest Bristol?

R: It was insane and it hasn't really stopped going since (laughter)

M: Yeah

J: Because it kind of started a chain of things for you both

R: Yeah it totally changed both of our lives

M: Yeah

R: I think yeah, I don't know I was doing a social work degree before Ladyfest, well I think Physics first and then I started a social work degree and then stopped that half way through because of Ladyfest and

M: I was working in a warehouse and I had to quit that because

J: Wow

R: Yeah it was crazy I mean it was amazing but it was like way more full on then any of us had ever thought it would be like it just completely took over everything we were doing and thinking

M: It was really a big snowball we kept building and like with the arts side of it we'd never set out to have the biggest exhibition ever in the world of female comic book art but somehow we got that and we had this huge gallery Spike Island and like all that kind of stuff, we never thought we could take over a shop and have a shop and gallery as well that just all happened by accident there was so much

R: It was never a really, that whole Gossip tour was never really planned it's just that we wanted the Gossip to play at Ladyfest Bristol and they couldn't come over for one show because it wasn't worth it so we ended up booking a tour for them, we were like okay you can't come over for one show well we'll set up you know a whole tour for you and then we kind of said this stupid thing and ended up having to do it and

M: Yeah it was kind of one thing led to another thing so it kind of, and there was so much kind of momentum behind it and it was really it was like it was like, pretty much everybody who was involved like the core only 6 people or something it was really like that was all that was on our mind all the time because it was Ladyfest it was all we talked about dreamed about and you know everybody while they were at work were just using any spare time they got to like check messages and doing all this stuff so it was, I think because working close with one thing it felt really special to be a part of it, and I sort of remember thinking like when I think back about it now it just seems like a huge blur but I do remember thinking I was a part of something that was really kind of special and I didn't think it would have such an effect either on us or on Bristol that it has but I just really remember thinking at the time there was such an amazing feeling to kind of be in this group of people all working for this one thing and the fact that it was, it had a feminist agenda really felt for me that's kind of what felt really special and even though sort of like everything sort of done really since then I've become more aware of riot grrrl and feminism

like DIY stuff just everything I've been involved in has always had a feminist agenda to it and to have something so focussed really felt like, I don't know being a part of something, this sounds sort of corny but when you think of sort of different times in the history of feminism it's like there's certain things that stand out, for me anyway I sort of think, like the suffragette movement is like sort of you know with riot grrrl, and it felt like, I think at the time I didn't really feel like this I was part of this, Ladyfest it felt like a continuation of something but it felt really like a continuation of riot grrrl and more sort of, I hadn't really been part of it like I felt I just missed out on riot grrrl and kind of, and even though that I felt I was part of the DIY community kind of in the UK and sort of worldwide it felt like kind of not quite a real community everyone I knew, like I knew a lot of people and I was really good friends with a lot of people who I would write to who did zines and who did record labels and, you know and, me Lisa and George we spent one year just driving round loads of places and going to all the Slampt festivals and meeting all these people and just you know, you know met Slampt people and Layla Gibbon and people in America and brought Gravy Train!!!! out and all these people who were doing the exact same things that we were doing but we would never actually meet up, or you know they'd meet up but wouldn't, it wasn't like a, they were all dotted all over the world and this was kind of first time that it really felt like these people were all around me and it was the first time I ever felt like there was a real feminist DIY community where I was living and especially now when I think of DIY communities post my involvement in Ladyfest and before that it feels a lot more solid it's not so much of an imaginary community it really does feel like an actual community with people who are friends and probably would have met because of Ladyfest or because of, and the links that it's a real strong community I feel really like these are not just acquaintance they're not just friends but these are all people who completely understand what we're all working towards and we're all kind of working the same thing even if it's not kind of even talked about a lot like you know you talk to people and not have to talk about queer theory or feminism or anything you're just hanging out but it's kind of this unspoken feeling and kind of knowing that everybody is on the same page and will also think, sort of politically in like feminist wise queer wise or gender wise or sexuality wise you don't have to explain anything to anyone like it is, I mean like I got a real strong sense of in the last few years or the years when we were working with full time Local Kid stuff all of our time was basically spent working on this and creating this community and just supporting this community but I'm not necessarily saying it's a great thing to have done this

J: What do you mean by that?

M: I mean like I guess in the sense of the mainstream world and this community which I mean, when I say this community I know exactly what I'm talking about but maybe it's not that, like I feel maybe you know what I'm talking about

J: Yeah but I know but I have to play a bit of devils advocate in these interviews

M: Yeah I mean I guess I mean

R: I think that's just like I mean we've talked about this a lot not now but in the past but Local Kid was very much about it was really idealistic you know and it was very much about doing things exactly how we wanted to do them and what being, I don't think Ladyfest was like this [M: No] but Bring Yourself Fest and Local Kid were very much about trying to create our ideal you know not being manipulated by mainstream, and I say mainstream like yeah mainstream society, it was yeah kind of trying to do something that was completely outside of that completely on our own terms and you know be away from money and you know just to create this little bubble world but I think kind of because that was what we wanted at the time you know that was what was important to us and it felt like we were trying to create a space from which people could gain strength and inspiration and then kind of go out into the wider world and do their own you know activism or whatever but I mean like at the time I thought that was important to us and I don't think that's the only way to do things and I think with cafe Kino now we're doing a very different kind of thing because cafe Kino is much more about entering, like doing things on our own terms and in a way kind of ethical way but also being a part of mainstream society and I see cafe Kino as like a stepping stone in like anyone can come into it and hopefully be a bit inspired or learn things from it or you know like pick up on the co-op side of it and you know its more reaching out to people who might not encounter like alternative viewpoints otherwise, well I don't know it's that and it's about a safe space you know it's for people on both sides from everywhere like

M: I think when we were first starting to talk about doing the cafe there was kind of like we wanted to be more a social space and kind of like more political but we were also we were like we wanted from the start to do it in a mainstream way like we wanted to set up premises we didn't want it to be a squat you know and we wanted to do it professionally I guess not as in making money but as in

R: Well we needed money we wanted it to be a long term thing which was yeah, and I guess like that the way that Michal and Lisa in particular made it look it looks very much like well it is like you know a proper cafe and like people, I mean I think squatted spaces and things are amazing and their own kind of merits and it wasn't a "we don't want to do that" (in a faux-outraged tone) it's just that we were trying to do something different so that yeah people anyone, well I mean it's impossible to make a space that anyone can go to but the aim is that anyone can come in and not feel kind of alienated by it or not feel like "oh I'm not punk enough to be here" or

M: Yeah that was definitely kind of yeah we were thinking, we really wanted to be like not a neutral space but not a alienating space at the same time so I mean yeah definitely happy with a lot more

R: We do subvert it like we have queer exhibitions and put on events and stuff in this space

M: Yeah but what I meant, well I suppose Rosie has said it really like I mean the difference between when we started as a Ladyfest, Ladyfest was I think more about reaching out and spreading this feminist message, which I mean a lot of the politics behind Ladyfest that we had inherited from previous Ladyfests we had a very strong sense of living up to previous Ladyfests and also with, and that was more about like interacting with mainstream "get the message out there" kind of as much as possible, I think Bring Yourself Fest was very much a reaction against that

R: Yeah when we decided to do Bring Yourself Fest it was a reaction to Ladyfest, whilst Ladyfest had been a particularly amazing experience and really kind of inspiring and positive we'd also been, like I was speaking to Michal afterwards we really felt like we'd been a bit sucked into that world of agents, we booked some bands through agents and we hired these big venues (dog barks) sorry we hired relatively big venues where we had we had just a lot of costs to cover and stuff and like during the festival we were like oh god are we going to make enough money to cover our costs you know it was really like, like that at time and, thinking about it I can't remember now, we just felt like although our ethics and politics had laid our vision we had been slightly sucked into this world that we didn't want to be part of so Bring Yourself Fest was it like we were I don't know but like when you say them and us it seems a bit antagonistic it wasn't like arghhh fight the mainstream it was like we just want to create something

### **Example of queer feminist music-maker interview**

*Len, Jean Genet, 31 January 2008, email interview*

*How did you make musical decisions together? (E.g. How do you develop song topics, riffs, ideas, styles, rhythms and words as well as choose instruments, types of singing, performance actions and outfits?)*

Well, I'm not so up on the musical side of things. If we use guitar riffs, bob writes them. Keyboard demos, one of us will pick whatever sounds good or we'll do it together and just try stuff out. Drum beats, again we'll just fuck around in our practices and press stuff till it sounds passable. Bob said, and I agree with this, our songwriting is just a matter of throwing shit against the wall and seeing what sticks.

Lyrically, we usually write the lyrics first and try to fit the song round them. What happens with lyrics could be one of several things. Either, one of us will write a complete set of lyrics and bring them to our rehearsal and we'll try and find a song to fit, or one of us will come up with a few lyrics and we work on them together, or we come up with a concept for a song or a chorus and then we'll get together and work out together how the rest of the song will go from there by throwing ideas around. Writing lyrics is really great fun and I think we have a very similar

sense of humour so it's easy to do this together, although sometimes when one of us has a very very specific idea in mind it's easier to do all or most of it ourselves and then see what the other one thinks later.

*By watching your practices you seemed to have a lo fi approach to music by using a keyboard demo/beat or guitar riff and using that in order to write lyrics together, but you also seemed very aware of 'the rules' of creating music ( e.g. concerns with rhyme, rhythm, chorus/verse) and an awareness of when things are working or not. What is important to you in writing a song in this way?*

Because it's easy! Working from a very specific songwriting formula is much easier than being really musically experimental. I think it's great to experiment if that's your thing, but we weren't trying to be very musical so we just went with the easiest option. Also, we wanted to be catchy and immediate.

*Where did your sense of visual style come from, e.g. the tit tape, make-up and routines? How did your visual display interact with your music in performance?*

I'm not sure we'd have gotten anywhere without our costumes or lack thereof. They came about kind of long before JG did. Well, a bit before. One hungover day when we were still students, or I was skiving, I don't remember which, we decided to go shopping for pound shop d.i.y fetish wear as we were planning on going to the fetish night Lash in Manchester. We also made it an article for 'chic alors', Bob's very awesome zine. I don't know who was the first to apply electrical tape to their nipples but yeah, for some reason it seemed like a good idea. The stripe was Bob's idea and I believe was inspired by scream club/bladerunner. The hotpants thing was kind of another charity shop fetishwear tip, Bob found some kids sports shorts for about 50p and some horrible football socks and he was going to fulfill some sort of sports fetish I think. They were very tight. We still haven't been to Lash!

Bob and Emily were both really into dressing up, but when JG first played tit tape was not 'the look', they played their first gig on Halloween and dressed up as zombies and they looked amazing I gotta say. Then they got dressed up as different things subsequently, I can't remember what. When I joined, our first gig together was a queer squatted event and Bob was really pushing the tit tape. I really had this feeling that I'd be very judged if I wore it seeing as I have breasts and all. I'm really not bothered what people think now, but I remember at the first gig I really was, so I wore a leather jacket and unzipped it to reveal my tit tape. As a joke, one of our friends shouted, 'put em away Helena!' Which is actually quite funny but at the time I was like, 'oh god, I'm such an idiot' and sure enough, I put them away. It wasn't till a couple of gigs later when we played another queer event and Bob and I worked the bar before our set that I went topless again. What we did was hand out (and administer, if people gave consent!) tit tape to everyone coming to the bar who'd take it. So then when I stripped off so did loadsa queers and it was a really awesome, empowering gig. I now find it really liberating to go onstage like that and if someone has a problem with me doing it then I just say, well why shouldn't I be able to dress the same as Bob? And if they say, 'you've got tits' then they're just sexist aren't they? but yeah, I think the nudity is definitely a good thing. And I don't actually care if people say the only reason you get anywhere is you get your kit off. I'm fine with that, it's an integral part of the show. I love that it pisses people off at times. We aren't trying to be some serious talented group, we're sweaty, queer, shoddy trash.

I think it definitely provokes people to feel something when we come onstage, whether that is a good or bad thing doesn't always matter. It's fun to shock and surprise people. Again, the dance routines are about being d.i.y. I can't really dance properly so we had a few really simple, stupid moves, but they were quite effective I reckon and showed that anyone could do it.

We also used water pistols and glitter cannons and party poppers because we wanted our gigs to

be fun. Again, it's a whole not taking yourself very seriously and being interactive with people. I don't want people to be stroking their chins, I want them to be interacting. Who did you anticipate the audience for your band to be? Were you conscious of an expected listener when you made music?

I don't think we ever needed to be very conscious of who our audience were. We played most of our gigs as part of queer/feminist/diy music scenes with the occasional trendy cheekbones fashionable night thrown in (usually pretty gay too) and that's the kind of scene the band was born out of, so I don't think we ever even thought about it. Sometimes we'd tailor our sets according to where we played.

We played in Wroclaw in Poland and decided it'd probably be inappropriate to do 'Gay Marriage' there as it was a song mocking gay marriage, and it was kind of like mocking these liberties that people there didn't have, combined with all the active state oppression of queer people and all the right-wing homophobia of course. A tongue in cheek song about getting civilised did not seem apt. Retrospectively I wonder if this was a bit patronising of us, especially as after we played, a few people requested it.

If we play in a trashy gay bar then we're far more likely to do a dancier set, whereas if we do a queer squat then we might do rockier ones that are more about queer lyrics. If we're playing for the millionth time to the same group of people, then needless to say we'll be far more likely and desperate to take risks, ie play brand new songs, throw in some new stupid gimmicks, just to hold people's interest.

*You described yourself as "a queer girl/boy duo who wrote tasteless sordid songs by playing keyboard demos, drum beats and karaoke tracks with the odd badly played guitar riff. We attempted to distract audiences from our lack of talent by dressing cheap and covering our nipples in tit tape, throwing things at them, dancing and pissing on each other." Jean Genet have always reminded me of other bands like Gravy Train!!!!, Lesbians on Ecstasy, and Scream Club who use lo-fi simple keyboard/beats/guitar/voices to express a DIY queer aesthetic that deconstructs the idea of virtuosity and talent. How do you view your aesthetic choices in relation to these bands and queer aesthetic?*

I think Lesbians on Ecstasy are extremely talented musicians, who are actually quite experimental in what they do. Having toured with them, I really don't think I'd describe them as lo fi. Sometimes it felt weird being their support band cos they were like this proper band, but at the same time incredibly fun and putting on these totally electrifying live shows, whereas we were not really about being a band at all. I don't reckon we could do half the stuff they did, but that doesn't really matter because it's not what we were trying to do. But I suppose there is a similar idea of recycling past songs and ideas and putting them in a totally new context. And also an emphasis on performance and interaction.

I think Scream Club are pretty lo-fi in what they do though I've not seen their entire songwriting process. I think we owe a lot to scream club and I kind of see a lot more similarities to us in what they do to what we do. It sounds like I'm saying scream club aren't a proper band now. That's not what I'm saying, honest. I think they're amazing. I also think they're not so shoddy as us. We kind of embraced our shoddiness, that was part of the act, being a bit crap. Perhaps that's quite an English thing. I don't think you can say the same for scream club. But yeah, I certainly think we're similar in the sense of really being firmly of the queer d.i.y community and writing lyrics and stuff that are directly to do with who we are as queers and that other queers will hopefully relate too.

### Appendix 3: Selected British Riot Grrrl Archives

#### Zines (Place, Year, Author(s) if known)

- Ablaze!* #10 (Leeds, 1992, Karren Ablaze e.d.)  
*Admission* #1 #2 #3 #4 (unknown location, 1995/ 1996, Angel Rebel)  
*AHT* (London , 1993, Tammy and Jennifer Denitto)  
*Angel* #3 (Lincolnshire, 1994, Erica)  
*Asking for It* #2 (High Wycombe, 1993, 'Topper' and Sarah)  
*BM Nancee Riot Grrrl London newsletter* (London, 1993, Jen and Tammy Denitto)  
*Charity Shopper* #1 (unknown location, 1995, KD)  
*Clitoris* #1 (London, 1993, unknown author)  
*Come as You Please* #1, #2 (London, 1995, 'Miss Lollygirl')  
*Crumpet Frenzy* #1 (Surrey, 1993, Ruth McNeil)  
*D-Generate (Huggy Nation is dead)* (Brighton, 1994, Huggy Bear)  
*Dipper* #1 (London, 1993, Dale Shaw)  
*Doll-face* #1 (unknown location, April 1993 'Martha Honey')  
*DNR* (Newcastle, unknown date, Julie)  
*Drop Babies* #3, #4, #6 ½ (London, 1993, Layla Gibbon)  
*Dyke Dreams* #1, #2 (Lincolnshire, 1993-1994, Erica)  
*Ears Disease* #2: *Heart Disease*; #3: *Do the Right Thing* (Newcastle- UK, 1996- 1997, Rachel K Rocket a.k.a. Rachel Holborow)  
*Fast Connection* #2, #3, #5 (Newcastle, 2001, Rachel Holborow and Pete Dale e.d.)  
*Freak* #1 (Winchester, 1995, Amy and Joe )  
*Furball* #1 (Brighton, 1992, "Mal-fille" Huggy Bear)  
*Galactic* #2, #4 (York, 1996 + 1999, Kate Wack Cat)  
*Girl Frenzy* #2 - #6 ½ & Millennial (Brighton, 1991- 2000, Erica Smith)  
*Girls Annual* (London, unknown date, Hannah)  
*Girly* #14 (London, 1999, Mona)  
*Golden Starlet* (Middlesborough, 1999, Golden Starlet)  
*Grrrl Pride* #3 (London, 1993, Bidisha)  
*Grrls World* (Manchester, unknown date , Lucy, Jessica and Ruth)  
*Gusset* #1 (Birmingham, 1993, Charlotte and Dawn)  
*Hard-bop* #1 (Middlesex, 1995, L & K)  
*Hate and Hope* (Newcastle , 1992, Rachel K Rocket)  
*Head Shaved Smooth: A slamptcore fanzine* (Newcastle, 1993, Pete Dale)  
*Heavy Flow* (Edinburgh, 1995, Saskia)  
*Hormone Frenzy* (Cambridge, unknown date, Mark Connorton)  
*Huggy Bear Interview fanzine* (Brighton, 1992, Everett True)  
*Huggy Nation "Our time is now"* #4 (Brighton, 92-93, Huggy Bear)  
*K newsletter* #19 "Riot Grrrl" (Olympia WA, 1992, Calvin Johnson)  
*Kitten Frenzy* #3 (Glasgow, 1995, Graham Kemp)  
*Kitten Militant* (Portsmouth, 1993, unknown author)  
*Melting Vinyl – giveaway fanzine* #14 (Brighton, 1998, Stephen Drennen)  
*My Little Fanzin e*#1 - #10 (Loughton , 1993 - 1995, Natasha)  
*Parlez-vous code fucker* (Brighton, 1993, Huggy Bear)  
*Pocket Yr Pal* (Newcastle, unknown date, Rachel K Rocket)  
*Pointless* (Surrey, 1995, Sara)  
*Poppy/ Violet* (Glasgow, 1993, Lucy McKenzie)  
*Prick Tease* (Brighton, 1993, Gabby Lionheart – Huggy Bear)  
*Promoting Queercore* (London, 1994, Sister George)  
*Reggae Chicken* (1992, London/Brighton, Huggy Bear)  
*Riot Grrrl* #1 (London – UK, 1992, Sally Margaret Joy e.d.)  
*Riot Grrrl Leeds-Bradford* fast-zine compilation (Leeds-Bradford, 1992-3, RG Leeds-Bradford)  
*Sawtooth* #1 (Leeds , 1993?, Simone Ivatts e.d.)  
*Scars and Bruises* #1, #2 (Lincolnshire, 1994, Erica)  
*Shag Stamp* #8 (UK/Copenhagen, Denmark, 2000, Jane Graham)

*Skinswing Feel* (Newcastle, July 1993, Rachel K Rocket)  
*Slampt aesthetic and notion* (Newcastle, 1994, Pete Dale)  
*Slampt newsletter* (Newcastle, 1998, Pete Dale)  
*Starlet* (London, 1995, Angel)  
*Soul Bullet Teen* #1 "I think I want to die" (Brighton, 1993, Huggy Bear)  
*Sugar Rocket* (Newcastle, 1994, Rachel K Rocket)  
*Up-Slut/ Come-up-ance* split fanzine (unknown location, date and author)  
*Utopia* #1 (Leicester, unknown date, Michelle)  
*Vulvic Froth* #1 (Birmingham, unknown date and author)  
*We tip over apple carts with the pounding of our hearts* (Newcastle, 1993, Rachel K Rocket)  
*X-Ray* (Oxford, 1995, Andy Roberts)

### **British riot grrrl and queercore bands: location, line-up and discographies (if known)**

**Avocado, Baby!** (Newcastle): Rachel Holborow and Pete Dale  
*A Million and nine* cassette (Slampt, 1992)  
 'Queen Boy and the King Girl' 7" (Slampt, 1993)  
*Sex and Gum* cassette (Slampt, 1994)  
*A Million and Nine and Sex and Gum and Stuff* LP (Slampt, 1995)

**Blood Sausage** (London): Jo Johnson, Niki Elliot and Dale Shaw  
*Happy Little Bullshit Boy* 10" EP (Wiiija, 1993)  
 'Touching you in ways that don't feel comfortable' 7" (Wiiija, 1993)  
 'Denis Lavant' 7" (K Records)

**Children's Hour** (London): Robert (vocals), Emma (guitar), Seth (drums)

**Coping Saw** (Leeds): Karren Ablaze (vocals), Simone Ivatts (bass), Matthew Robson (drums, guitar) and David Lazonby (casiotone, saxophone)  
 'Slamina' 7" (Mook Records, 1995)  
*Outside Now* CD (House of Dubois, 1997)

#### **Delicate Vomit**

'Little Bird' 7" (Underware records)  
 'Mr Potato Head' On 4 Track 4 Track 7" (Slampt, 1996)

**Element of Crime** (London): Chris Rawley (vocals), Layla Gibbon (vocals), Jo Johnson and Dale Shaw/Bonnot Gang (bass), Daryl (drums), Andrew Roberts (guitar)  
 'The things you do for love.' 7" (Soul Static Sound, 1994).

**Frantic Spiders:** Cathy (vocals, guitar) Charley (guitar, vocals), Bomber (bass) Caroline (drums)

#### **Golden Starlet** (Newcastle)

*Scarlet Harlot* cassette (Slampt, 1994)  
 'Cheap Tartlet' 7" (Slampt, 1994)  
 'Corps of the Hard' (Slampt, 1995)

**Hissyfit** (London): Becky (vocals, guitar), Ruth (guitar), Bethan (bass), Suzie (drums)

**Huggy Bear** (London/Brighton): Jon Slade (guitar), Chris Rawley ("Morbius" vocals, piano, trumpet), Jo Johnson ("Gabby Lionheart" guitar, vocals), Niki Eliot ("St. Felony" vocals, bass), Karen Hill ("Kray" drums, piano) Also Matthew Fletcher (drums - died in 1996)  
*Early demo tapes* (self-released, 1991)  
*We Bitched* cassette (Wiiija, 1992)  
*Huggy Nation - Kisser Boy Kisser Girl* compilation cassette (self-released, 1992)  
 'Rubbing the Impossible to Burst,' 7" (Wiiija, 1992)

'Kiss Curl for the Kid's Lib Guerrillas' 7" (Wiiiija, 1992)  
 'Shimmies in the Super 8,' double 7" (Duophonic, 1993)  
 'Herjazz', 7" (Catcall/Wiiiija, 1993)  
 'February 14<sup>th</sup> 7"', (self-released, 1993)  
*Our Troubled Youth/ Yeah Yeah Yeah Yeah* (Catcall, 1993)  
 'Don't Die' 7" (Wiiiija, 1993)  
*Taking the Rough with the Smooch* 10"/LP/CD (Kill Rock Stars, 1993)  
 'Long Distance Lovers' 7" (Gravity, 1993)  
*Main Squeeze* CD EP (Fellaheen Records, 1994)  
*For Every Wolf That Roams* cassette (Live At Harlow Square 3/22/94) (Famous Monsters of Filmland/ self-released, 1994)  
*Weaponry Listens to Love*, LP/CD (Wiiiija, 1994)

**International Strikeforce** (Newcastle)

*Love is...* LP/CD (Slampt, 1996)  
 'Souer' 7" (Slampt, 1997)  
 'Treat Yourself' 7" (Slampt, 2000)

**Linus** (London): Tammy Denitto (vocals) Andrew Roberts (guitar, vocals, bass), Jen Denitto (bass, vocals, guitar), Peter (drums)

'Linus' 7" EP (Bone records, 1993)  
 'Born Again/ Trivia/ Woe' *Some hearts paid to lie* double 7" EP (Wiiiija, 1993)  
 'Super Golgotha Crucifixion Scene' 7" EP/CD single (Elemental Records, 1994)  
*Yougli* LP (Elemental Records, 1994)  
 'Don't Forget' EP (Mole in the Ground, 1998)  
*Good Listener* EP (Mole in the Ground, 2000)  
 'Homocrime mini-cd' (Homocrime, 2004)  
 'P.E.' EP (Mole in the Ground, 2004)  
*Andy Roberts 4-track Demos* CD (Mole in the Ground, 2006)  
*The Course of True Linus Never Did Run Smooth* CD (Mole in the Ground, 2006)

**Lung Leg** (Glasgow): Jane McKeown (Jane Egypt), Amanda Doorbar ('Jade Green'), Annie Spandex and Maureen Quinn ('Mo Mo')

'The Negative Delinquent Autopsy' 7" EP (PIAO!, 1994)  
 'Shagg the Tiger' 7" EP (PIAO!, 1995)  
*Made to Minx* LP/CD (Vesuvius, 1997)  
 'Right Now Baby' 7" (Vesuvius, 1997)  
 'Hello Sir' CD/10" EP (Kill Rock Stars, 1996)  
 'Theme Park/ Chop Chop' 7" (Guided Missile, 1997)  
 'Krayola' split 7" w/ The Make Up (Vesuvius/ Southern Records, 1998)  
 'Made to Mix/Juanita' 7" (Southern Records, 1999)

**Mambo Taxi** (London): Andrea (organ, vocals), Lenie (bass, vocals), Karin (drums), Delia (guitar, organ, vocals) Anjali (previous drummer)

'Prom Queen' 7" (Clawfist, 1993)  
 'Poems on the Underground' 7" (Clawfist, 1993)  
*In Love With...* LP/CD (Clawfist, 1994)

**Mouthfull** (London): Andy (vocals, guitar), Mike (bass), Lea (drums)

*Mouthfull by Mouthfull* (alternative title *Bring Balloons*) LP available as free download  
 <<http://www.last.fm/music/Mouthfull/Mouthfull>> [accessed on 27 September 2009]

**Petty Crime** (London): Layla Gibbon (guitar, vocals), Helen White (bass, vocals), Pete Rojas (drums)

'Lovership' 7" (Slampt, 1998)

**Phantom Pregnancies** (London): Karen (vocals), Delia  
*Assassination City* LP (Damaged Goods)  
 'Bostic Surgery' 7" (Incognito Records)  
 'Special Child' 7" (Troubleman Unlimited)

**Pussycat Trash** (Newcastle): Rachel Holborow (vocals), Rosie/Rosamund M. Lewis  
 (guitar/bass), Simon J Coxall (drums) Peter Dale (drums, guitar, vocals)  
 'Plink Plonk Pink Punk' 7" EP (Chocolate Narcotic, 1992)  
 'La La Ovular' 7" (Slampt, 1994)  
*Non-Stop Hip-Action* LP/CD (Slampt, 1994)  
 'Amore' 7" (Kill Rock Stars, 1995)  
*The Brat Years: 1992-1995 Complete Discography* CD (Troubleman Unlimited, 2001)

**Red Monkey**(Newcastle): Rachel Holborow (vocals/bass), Peter Dale (vocals, guitar) and Marc  
 Walker (drums)  
 'Do What You Feel (Feel What You Do)' 7" (Slampt, 1997)  
*Make The Moment* LP/CD (Slampt, 1997)  
*Difficult is Easy* LP, (Slampt, 1998)  
 'Make a Mess' 7" (Kill Rock Stars, Mailorder Freaks Singles Club March 1998)  
 'Get Uncivilised' 7" (Troubleman Unlimited, 2000)  
*Gunpowder, Treason and Plot* LP/CD (Troubleman Unlimited, 2001)  
 'Red Monkey and Erase Errata' split 7" (Gringo Records, Gringo Singles Club, 2004)

**Sally Skull** (Edinburgh): Saskia (bass,vocals) Claire (guitar, vocals), Katrina (drums)  
 'Fractious' 7" (Slampt, 1997)

**Skinned Teen** (London): Layla Gibbon, Flossy White, Esme Young  
*Total Tiger Beat* cassette (Spazoom, 1993)  
 'Karate Hairdresser' 7" (Soul Static Sound, 1993)  
 'Skinned teen anthem', 'secrets', 'shiny shoes', 'cinderella' and 'swimsuit blonde' 'Some hearts  
 paid to lie' double 7" (Wiiija, 1993)  
 Bazooka Smooth split 12" LP/CD (Wiiija/Lookout, 1994)

**Sister George** (London): Ellyott Dragon (vocals, guitar), Lyndon (guitar, vocals), Lisa (bass),  
 Darryl (drums)  
*Drag King* CD (Catcall UK/ Outpunk US, 1994)

**Small Black Pig** (Newcastle): Catherine (aka Ms. C.)  
 'Songs about blood' split cassette (Slampt, 1996)  
 'Jolly Grim' 7" (Slampt, 1996)

**Spy 51** (London): Lea (vocals, bass), Jenny (guitar), Nick (guitar), Toby (drums)

**Voodoo Queens** (London): Anjali Bhatia (guitar, vocals), Ella Drauglis (guitar, vocals),  
 Steffi/Sunny (drums), Anjula Bhasker (bass) and Rajni Bhatia (keyboard)  
 'Supermodel Superficial' 7" (Too Pure, 1993)  
 'Kenuwee Head' 7" (Too Pure, 1993)  
 'F is For Fame' 7" (Too Pure, 1994)  
*Chocolate Revenge* LP/CD (Too Pure, 1993)  
*Peel Sessions* CD (Strange Fruit, 1994)  
 'Eat the Germs' 7" (Voodoo records, 1995)

**Witch Knot** (Bradford):Lianne Hall (guitar, vocals), Sally (vocals), Kes (bass) Marion (violin),  
 Gaynor (cello), Sarah Bag (drums/bin lid)  
 'Suck' 7" EP (Flat Earth records, 1994)  
*Squawk* LP (Flat Earth records, 1996)

## Appendix 4: British DIY Queer Feminist (Sub)cultural Archives

### British DIY Queer Feminist Bands

**Candy Panic Attack** (London): Mina Candy (vocals/guitar), K\* Starr (vocals/bass), Phillippa (drums)

'Fruit is Nature's Candy' 7" (Cherryade records, 2007)

**Chaps** (Oxford/Exeter/Brighton): Isabelle Brooks (vocals), Flo Brooks (drums), James Reynolds (guitar)

*We're so Skatebored* cassette (Milk records, 2009)

**Corey Orbison** (Bristol/London): Michal William (vocals/guitar), Lisa Cupcake (drums/vocals), Irene Revell (bass/vocals)

*Corey Orbison* cassette (Local Kid/irrk some records, 2005)

'Your Name is Poison' 7" (Everard records, 2008)

**Fake Tan** (Leeds): Rosemary Hill (guitar/vocals); Claire Adams (bass/vocals); Julia Downes (drums)

'Red Riding Hood' CD-R (self-released, 2007)

**Flamingo 50** (Liverpool): Louise Hanman (vocals/guitar), Morgan Brown (drums) and Karen /Will Fitzpatrick (bass)

'Go Betsy Go!' 7" (No Concession records)

'First in Line' 7" (Keith records)

*My Reason* CD (Keith records, 2004)

*Flamingo 50 Tear it Up* CD (Ernest Jenning Recording Company, 2006)

**Headfall** (Bristol): George, Lisa Cupcake and Michal William (various instruments)

*Stars don't shine to noise* LP (Spazoom/Little Waves, 2004)

**(hooker)** (Manchester): Zoe McVeigh (vocals/guitar), Steph Angel (bass), Danny Sharman (drums)

album 1 (self-released, 2003)

album 2 (self-released, 2005)

**Hotpants Romance** (Manchester): Laura Skilbeck (guitar/vocals), Lowri Evans (bass/vocals), Kate Armitage (drums/vocals)

*The Greatest Hits* cassette (Soft Presents, 2005)

'Lucky 6' 7" (self-released)

*It's a Heatwave* CD album (Big Print, 2008)

**Humosexual** (Berlin/London): Victor & Boitel

split 7" with Lesbo Pig (irrk, 2004)

*tahini beach party* CD-R (irrk/toowee, 2004)

**Husbands** (London): Patrick Staff (vocals/keyboards), Russell (vocals/drums)

split 7" with Drunk Granny (Local Kid/ f.a.g. club records)

*Patty Waters* CD-R (self-release)

**Lake Me** (Newcastle): Lucy Hammond (drums), Nathalie Stern (guitar/vocals)

*Solace* CD (self-released)

**Lesbo Pig** (Stockholm, Madrid, London): Irene Revell (vocals), Ros Murray (guitar/vocals), Anna Dahlov (violin & percussion)

*At Home With Lesbo Pig 3*" CD-R & cassette tape (Trailerpark records/ youthclubtapeclub)

**Robin Osterley** (Leeds/London): Swithun Cooper (guitar/vocals), Emily Jane Graves (keyboards/vocals), Rosie Parsons (guitar/vocals)

**Roseanne Barr** (London): Patrick Staff (bass & vocals), Sophie Brown (drums & vocals)  
*Dumb Broad* cassette (Hex Out Tapes, 2009)

**Sad Shields** (London/Portsmouth): Aaron Batley (guitar/vocals), Laura Wolf (keyboards & vocals), Vicki Butler (drums)  
*Sad Shields* CD-R (self-released, 2008)

**Sailor Tongue** (Leeds): Heather Crabtree (drums), Trent (guitar/vocals), John Ferguson (guitar), Hywel Lewis (bass)  
*Sailor Tongue* CD-R (self-released, 2006)  
*Vulpes Vulpes* CD-R (self-released, 2007)

**Scragfight** (Glasgow): Ruth (guitar/vocals), Olivia (bass), Kate (drums)

**Ste McCabe** (Manchester): Ste McCabe (guitar/drum machine/vocals)  
'Pink Bomb' CD-EP (Cherryade records, 2008)  
*Hate Mail* CD (Cherryade records, 2008)  
*Murder Music* CD (Cherryade records, 2009)

**The Battys** (London): Romaine Candelle (Ros Murray); Ann Drodgyn (Anna Dahlov); Truly Kaput (Joan Jones)  
*We are the Battys* cassette (self-released)  
*Exhibit a The Battys* mini-CD-R (Homocrime, 2003)

**The Jelas** (Bristol): Aled (drums/vocals), Natalie (bass/vocals), Colin (guitar/vocals)  
'Blood Smash' EP (Ingue records)

**The Rayographs** (formerly known as the Monday Club) (London) Amy Hurst (drums,) Astrud Steehouder (guitar/vocals), Jessamine Tierney (bass/vocals)  
'Hidden Doors' 7" (Everyone We Know, 2008)  
'Francis' 7" (Everyone We Know, 2009)

**Trash kit** (London): Rachel Aggs (guitar /vocals), Rachel Marie Horwood (drums/vocals), Ros Murray (bass)  
*Trash kit* CD-R (self-released, 2009)

**Truly Kaput** (Swansea) Joan Jones (ukulele/vocals)

**Valerie** (Manchester) Jo (vocals) Vicky Tse (guitar) & Elvis (drums)  
'All My Heros Hate Me' 7" (Switchflicker)  
'Disco Punk' 7" (Switchflicker)

**Vile Vile Creatures** (Manchester/Leeds): Jenny Howe (guitar & vocals), Sian Williams (bass & vocals), Julia Downes (drums & vocals)  
'Wilderness/ Faux Feminism' 7" (AARBR records, 2006)  
'Cabin Tapes' CD-R (self-released, 2007)  
'Girl Gang' CD-R (self-released, 2008)

**Wet Dog** (London): Billy Easter (bass), Rivka Gillieron (guitar & vocals), Sarah Datblygu (drums & vocals)  
*Wet Dog* CD-R (self-released, 2005)  
'Alibi' 7" (Angular, 2008)  
*Enterprise Reversal* LP (Angular, 2008)

### **Selected British DIY Queer Feminist Fanzines**

*Activity Girl* #1 (Wragby, 2003, various contributors)

- Amp* #0, #1, #2, #6, #9, #12, #14, postcard (London, 1998- 2002, Miss Amp)  
*Anecdotal Evidence* (Leeds, Emily Jane Graves)  
*Angel Food* #3 (Dewsbury, 2000, Holly Callaghan)  
*Assess Your Weapons* (Leeds, 2002-2004, Manifesta collective)  
*Bitter Strawberries* #1 #3 (London, 1999-2000, Angel)  
*Chic Alors* #15, #16 (UK, 2004-2006, Bob Henderson)  
*Chronicles of a Cheating Heart* #1, #2, #3 (London, 2005-6, Kitty Chronic)  
*Colouring Outside the Lines* #1 - #5 (Leeds, 2005-2009, Melanie Maddison)  
*Dynamite Diaries* (Manchester, 2006, Marion Dawson)  
*Electra* #1 #2 #3 (Wales, 2000/2001 Jane Collins)  
*Euro Tourist* (Stockport, 2002, Cazz Blasé)  
*Firefly* #3, #4 (Essex, 2001, Vicki)  
*Friends of Polly* (Manchester/London, 2008, Len & Humey)  
*Footsteps in the Dark* (Brighton/Leeds, Rachel Kaye, 2009)  
*Girly* #14 (London, 1999, Mona)  
*Hello Trouble* #1 (London, 2004, Terese)  
*Homo-spective* (London 2006, Homocrime collective)  
*Kitten Scratches* #1, #2 (unknown location, 1999, Rachael)  
*Ladyfest programmes* (Olympia 2000, Glasgow 2001, London 2002, Los Angeles 2002, Manchester 2003, Brighton 2005, Chicago 2007)  
*Ladyfest London (2002) Art and Film Programme*  
*Ladyfest Manchester: The Zine* (Manchester, 2004, Ladyfest Manchester collective)  
*Lowdown on Ladyfest London* (UK, 2002, various contributors)  
*Pamzine* #7 and *Pamnibus* (London, 2003-2004, Rachel White)  
*Paper Doll Cuts* (Sherburn, 2001, Shelley)  
*Popgirls* #1, #2 (Glasgow, 1997/2000, Manda-rin)  
*Race Revolt* #1 - #4 (Manchester, 2006 - 2009, Humey Saeed)  
*Radium Dial* #8 (London, 2001, Ilona Jasiewicz)  
*Re-assess Your Weapons* (Leeds, 2005-2009, Manifesta collective)  
*Ricochet! Ricochet!* #3, #5 (Glasgow & London, 2006/2007, Colly + Paffy)  
*Riot Girl London* #1, #2 (London, 2001, RG London collective)  
*Sista Yes!* (Kent - UK, 1999, Sophy)  
*Slampt Farewell Festival Programme* (Newcastle - UK, 2000, Pete Dale & Rachel K Rocket)  
*Spilt Milkshake* #1 (Essex, 2002, Bec/Miss Anthrope)  
*Starlette* #2, #3 (Essex, 2001/ 2002, Bec and Anna)  
*Synthesis* #4, #5 (London, 2000, Laura Wirtz)  
*The Nerve* #1 (Birmingham, 2001, Riot Grrrl Central collective)  
*The World's a Mess and Yr My Only Cure* (Leeds, 2008, Emma Ledger)  
*These Words Could Kill* (Leeds, 2007-2009, Trent)  
*Things that girls do that is good* (London, 2001, Blue Minkies)  
*Twinkle Eye Fizzy* #1, #2 (London, 2001 + 2002, 'Miss Rainy')  
*UK Ladyfest Art Zine* (Leeds, 2007, Melanie Maddison and Heather Crabtree e.d.)  
*V Files* #30 (London, 2000, Club V organisers e.d.)  
*Vaginal Teeth* (Leeds/Bradford, 1998, RG Leeds-Bradford)  
*Varla's Passed Out Again* #4 (Essex, 2002, Red Chidgey)  
*Who's That Bitch?* (Wigan, 2001, Marion Dawson)  
*With Arms Outstretched* (Leeds, 2007, Melanie Maddison)

SECTION  
#5

# MIND

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## RIOT GRRRL: THE LEGACY AND CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE OF DIY FEMINIST CULTURAL ACTIVISM

JULIA DOWNES

to go to art college.  
she'd lived with her  
Livingstone, near

When I was growing up I  
the London was really t

red!!  
PRAY  
LES



I know what we wanted to start, and I know we started something, but I don't really know what happened. And I don't think anyone can really tell you.<sup>1</sup>

A spectre of mystery haunts those interested in documenting and writing about riot grrrl. It feels like an unwarranted invasion into the safe spaces of female youth, like reading that hidden diary, decoding a secret myth, or eavesdropping on a slumber party. Writing about riot grrrl is risky. Girls keep secrets for a reason. Writing can destroy and distort meanings, intentions and experiences by twisting them into an uncomfortable order: confinement in language and linearity. Accounts of riot grrrl produced by dominant culture have easily fallen into these traps. Riot grrrl has been understood as a fashion, a phase, as punk, as dead, as violent, as man-hate, and ultimately, as a failure. The effect of which produces a set of meanings that reaffirm cultural power in masculine hands. Riot grrrls have had their messages and slogans co-opted, diluted and sold back in the form of girl-powered commodities and all-girl pop groups. Those involved in its creation have been excluded from profiting from this mainstreaming of the movement, left unable or unwilling to churn out another grrrl story or manifesto, and refusing to align themselves or conceptualise their youth within terms that have become alien from their own experiences. The opportunity to write a history of riot grrrl is like walking a tight rope, blindfolded, over hot coals with a bad sense of balance. But this might be a symptom of how much the movement means to me. How much these women and their ideas have personally inspired me and keep encouraging new generations of girls and women to explore their own creativity, political identity and expression. Nonetheless, I felt a need to keep as close as I possibly could to riot grrrl words, stories and meanings. Therefore, in writing this history I resisted relying upon mainstream media representations, to instead favour the voices of riot grrrl in their own words, as expressed in oral histories and panel discussions I've recently been involved with, as well as those conducted by the Experience Music Project (EMP) in Seattle, Washington. Instead of reproducing a music, American or fashion-centred history, I wanted to re-situate riot grrrl as a radical political movement, philosophy and cultural catalyst which continues to provide girls and women with vital inspiration and encouragement worldwide. By resisting the traditional depictions of girlhood, feminism and consumer culture, riot grrrl enabled the proliferation of new generations of cultural creators and activists. Women and girls found their own voices and power in music, art, literary and political discourses. Riot grrrls began to rewrite and figure out for themselves what it means to be a girl, a feminist, an activist,

a musician or an artist. It opened up the possibility to share our experiences, tell our own stories and create our own language. A riot grrrl history is an insight into a provocative moment in modern day feminism, youth resistance and popular culture. Like girl germs, it's infectious.

## PRECURSORS: DIY AND THE LEGACY OF CULTURAL SUBVERSION

People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and positive about the refusal of constraints, have corpses in their mouths.<sup>2</sup>

The 'Do it Yourself' (DIY) ethic of counter-cultural production was initially developed by the Situationist International (SI) who formed in 1957. The SI was a collective of avant garde artists who operated throughout Europe, the most well known of whom was Guy Debord who was based in France. Dissatisfied with the conditions of modern society the SI revolted against the dominant discourses, images and ideas of capitalist consumer culture, known as the *Spectacle*, and sought to incite a revolution by employing cultural tactics that exposed contradiction and openly critiqued society. Employing the tactic of *détournement*, the SI took quotes, symbols and representations from mainstream society and produced counter-cultural artefacts (journals, graffiti slogans, posters, cartoon strips) to subvert intended meanings. This opened up a space in which the viewer could resist dominant cultural representations and gain access to a consciousness critical of the mainstream. Crucially, the SI also encouraged others to express their frustrations through doing their own forms of cultural subversion in their everyday lives, "a revolutionary organisation must always remember that its objective is not getting people to listen to speeches by expert leaders, but getting them to speak for themselves".<sup>3</sup>

These disruptive tactics of everyday DIY cultural subversion were taken up within various 1960s and 70s political and radical social movements inspired by the New Left, civil rights and anti-war movements. Particularly relevant precursors for riot grrrl were social movements and subcultures that used youth-orientated, theatrical, artistic and stylistic tactics of resistance such as the Mods, Punks, Fluxus, Hippies, Yippies and The Diggers. For instance, The Diggers, a group based in San Francisco, combined spontaneous street theatre and anarchistic action with political art happenings, providing free music events, food, medical care, transport and temporary housing. Feminist, women's liberation and lesbian gay bisexual transgendered and queer (LGBTQ) movements also drew upon this legacy of DIY cultural subversions to resist and establish control over the negative representations of women, feminism and LGBTQ individuals and concerns in popular culture. Since the 'second wave' of feminism in the 1970s there has been a strong legacy of producing and distributing independent media. Publications such as *Ms in America* and *Spare Rib* and *Shocking Pink* in Britain thrived in this new environment and feminist bookstores, such as the Amazon Book Store Cooperative, provided crucial cultural spaces for the feminist community.

Feminist and lesbian collectives created their own separatist music community, known as womyn's music, which encompassed all women-run record labels, distribution networks, and women's music festivals. The sound that came out of this culture was amongst the first musical narratives of lesbian experience created by lesbians themselves. In the 1980s and 90s social movements like the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACTUP), Guerrilla Girls, Queer Nation and Lesbian Avengers disrupted and drew attention to the contradictions and inequalities that still endured in a so-called free and democratic society.

For instance, as a response to homophobia, violence and lack of queer visibility, Queer Nation began a series of visibility actions including holding 'Queer Nights Out' in straight-

identified bars and areas to protest against the restriction of queer affection and socialising to gay bars. This legacy of reclaiming cultural space can be seen in contemporary queer dance actions such as Dykes Can Dance in New York City. The Guerrilla Girls are a long-running collective of anonymous women set up in 1985 who use the pseudonyms of dead artists, gorilla masks and humour to produce posters, actions, billboards, plays, performances and projects which expose and protest against sexism, racism and social injustice in art, culture and politics. Riot grrrl sought to build upon this rich legacy of politicised DIY cultural subversion to expose and resist the contradictory and marginalised experiences of modern-day girlhood.

## OLYMPIA AND WASHINGTON, DC: GIRL TOWN AND BOY CITY

I've always felt Olympia is a female town. Olympia is a 'she' and DC is a 'he'.<sup>4</sup>

From the moment I set foot in Olympia in 1981, it was clear to me that girls ruled this town.<sup>5</sup>

We really looked to the scene in Olympia as inspiration and for networking, and just to connect with other girls, because it seemed like Olympia had a history of strong women doing cool things and being creative.<sup>6</sup>

The story of riot grrrl kicks off in the small, picturesque American town of Olympia in Washington State. On the edges lies the liberal Evergreen College, known for its artistic, alternative and radical freethinking individuals. Historically, Olympia has benefited from an enduring gender-balanced music scene, support for independent means of producing

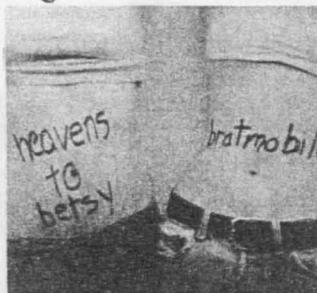


RIOT GRRRL: THE LEGACY AND CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE OF DIY FEMINIST CULTURAL ACTIVISM



News Number 19

Some Velvet Sidewalk  
Snuff  
Heavenly  
International Pop Underground Convention



X Front cover of *Riot Grrrl*, no 15, featuring the K Records logo, International Pop Underground convention and DIY advertisements for Heavens to Betsy and Bratmobile. Image courtesy of Susan Corrigan.

Opposite: Queer Nation Demonstrations drew attention to the inequalities faced by LGBTQ groups in North America and Europe.

art and music as well as a strong feminist artistic and cultural legacy. For instance, in the early 1980s Olympia was the home of a collectively owned store called Girl City in which artists such as Stella Marris, Dana Squires and Julie Fay created art and performances. Stella Marris also later founded Satellite Kitchens, a visual arts studio open to the local community. Lois Maffeo hosted an influential women-centred rock radio show on KAOS, Olympia's community radio station whose policy dictated that 80 per cent of music broadcast had to be independent. The Olympia-based independent K Records label was set up in 1982 by Calvin Johnson, who also hosted the 'Boy Meets Girl' KAOS radio show and later formed Beat Happening with Heather Lewis, Laura Carter, and Bret Lunsford. Candice Peterson, who interned at K Records in 1986 as part of her Evergreen programme, became the co-owner of the label in 1987.

K Records initially focussed on documenting bands based in Olympia, releasing cassettes before moving onto a series of 7" vinyl releases in 1987, known as the International Pop Underground. This was in contrast to nearby Seattle with its focus on bar venues and drug culture, which therefore restricted the experience of live music to those who were 21 and over. A special atmosphere, spirit and attitude was created within the Olympian music scene, fostering upbeat all-ages community shows.

The Olympia music scene, anytime anybody tried to do a bar show it would always be a flop. Like the only thing that would fly here was all-ages shows... people still danced at shows in Olympia, and everybody knew each other... The energy here is really different.... I can think of very few bands from Olympia who don't really look at punk rock from the DIY angle. Like punk rock isn't a sound, punk rock isn't a look, punk rock is about what your intent is for making your music... punk rock is all about believing that you can do it yourself. You don't need a big record label, you don't need a manager, you don't need worldwide appreciation or acceptance. You're just doing it because it's the right thing to do, or it's an important thing to do... Olympia's really a stronghold for that... we kind of exist in a different world.<sup>7</sup>

Beat Happening, inspired by bohemian ideals, created lo-fi twee-pop music and revelled in a celebration of amateurship, cuteness and innocence, a set of ideas that was later mockingly termed 'love rock'. One key element of Johnson's aesthetic was the return to youth, childhood and adolescence and accompanied celebrations of the pastimes of a bygone era. As Bruce Pavitt explained, "it's small town, baking pies, slumber parties, fetishising this romantic, old world, small-town 1950s culture."<sup>8</sup> Beat Happening encouraged its audiences to build supportive non-competitive communities, creating an atmosphere and message that opened up creative opportunities and possibilities for many women and girls who were later involved in riot grrrl.

I got into a band called Beat Happening. And that was in 1987. Not only did I see women could play music, but I could see that just... you can do it yourself—DIY—that's the first time I liked a punk band, and just saw that anybody could play an instrument. And you didn't have to be perfect. I could never be Andy Taylor. I could never be a guitar player in Duran-Duran. And I realised that was okay. I could still be good. And Heather Lewis was a woman playing guitar in that band, playing drums. They all switched instruments. To me, hearing that just opened up my mind. Opened all kind of doors for me.<sup>9</sup>

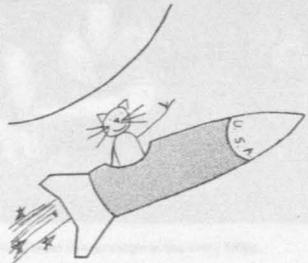
[Allison Wolfe] was from Olympia and she liked Beat Happening tapes and things like that, and I was like, I had just never heard anything like it. And it was just so like... liberating in this way, because it was so straightforward and it was so good, and it was still 'poppy' but it was... it was just so unique I was kind of like instantly like captivated by it. And also, you know, just kind of like meeting her and knowing there was all this other stuff happening. I just kind of realised that there weren't as many barriers to doing... making music or whatever as I had thought there were.<sup>10</sup>

Calvin Johnson, K Records and Beat Happening proved that anyone could make punk rock happen in their town, even in a small town like Olympia. In contrast, the independent punk scene in Washington, DC, was invested in a more aggressive fast-paced aesthetic, which championed technical ability: DC hardcore. Subsequently DC was dominated by a plethora of all-male hardcore punk outfits like Bad Brains, Scream and Minor Threat.

The independent record label Dischord—founded by Ian MacKaye and Jeff Nelson of Minor Threat alongside Nathan Strejcek in 1980—became the key outlet for music by local hardcore punk bands. Many involved in DC's hardcore punk scene advocated a straightedge ideology, which encouraged punks to abstain from the societal vices of drink, drugs and promiscuous sex. This often culminated in boys-only spaces, as the 'no girls allowed' signs visible in the Dischord house in the punk documentary *Another State of Mind* suggest. The culture of slam dancing at shows solidified a growing feeling and experience that in DC women remained on the sidelines as photographers, girlfriends or zine writers.

Despite the crucial involvement of women in the punk community and presence of all-female punk bands Chalk Circle and Fire Party, few women managed to occupy and command DC's elite punk platforms. A prescriptive hardcore sound evolved in DC which emphasised instrumental virtuosity and speed which, unlike independent punk culture in Olympia, troubled the meanings and values of punk and DIY and produced more gendered experiences of the punk scene. Experiences of gender discrimination, like being told that her guitar playing was 'good

## BEAT HAPPENING



Front cover of self-titled Beat Happening Album.

Image courtesy of Cazz Blase.

Opposite: Riot grrrls at the Supreme Court in April

1992. © Pat Graham Photography

[www.patgraham.org](http://www.patgraham.org)



for a girl', led Sharon Cheslow to philosophise about the underlying meanings of punk circulating in the DC punk scene;

I thought, no, no, no, that's not right. I should be good because I like what I'm doing. And it doesn't even matter if I'm good, because that's not what punk's about! It's about the ideas behind it and the passion behind it and the energy behind it.<sup>11</sup>

In response to the growing media representations of the punk scene as irrational and violent, the development of Positive Force DC enabled Washington, DC, to evolve into a highly politicised youth punk Mecca.

This long-standing activist organisation, founded in 'Revolution Summer' of 1985 by members of the punk community, is still active today and aims to empower youth and fight for social change by collectively organising benefits, protests and skill-sharing within their local community. It was from within this politicised punk community that women began to voice their contradictory experiences of feeling disenfranchised from their own alternative communities. Sharon Cheslow, member of Chalk Circle and DC punk photographer, explained;

One of the reasons that riot grrrl developed is because a lot of the women and girls involved in the punk scene started to notice all these different ways that the punk scene was paralleling mainstream society. So we had all these ideas of how we were going to change society, and yet they were showing up right at our backdoor. And we all, in this community... we all felt that the personal was political. And so in order to really change things you had to look at what was going on right at your backdoor, and to address it.<sup>12</sup>

In 1988, Sharon Cheslow, Cynthia Connelly, Amy Pickering and Lydia Ely organised some group discussions that focussed on gender difference and sexism within the DC punk community for the June issue of the political punk fanzine *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll*. This experience laid the groundwork for the issues that became the agenda of riot grrrl.

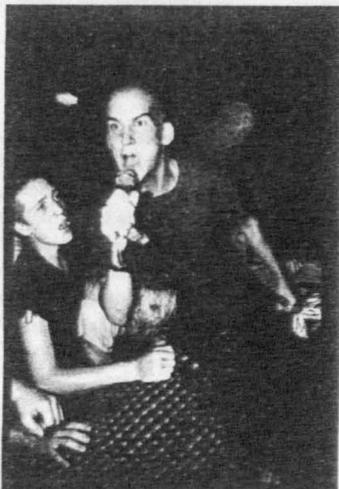
That was a really important experience. And it really opened up the men for the first time to these issues of sexism and gender difference. They thought "Oh no! We're not sexist!" And they had to take a look, because so many of us women were saying there's something wrong here, we're noticing these differences. We are not getting the encouragement and support that we need. And how can we change things on this bigger level if we can't change things right here in our community.<sup>13</sup>

Despite women's involvement in the inception of punk and its potential in allowing women to challenge norms and ideas of the feminine while producing music, art and culture on their own terms, this potential never came to fruition in the everyday situations of women in punk underground scenes. Women involved in these alternative communities in Olympia and Washington, DC, began to put their feelings, frustrations and anger into words, creating a fanzine culture of what would later be dubbed 'angry grrrl zines'. These fanzines (or zines: self-published photocopied magazines) became a key site for women and girls to discuss, examine and resist the cultural devaluation of women with each other in a safe space.

A really important thing about riot grrrl is that we were all really inspired by punk rock and the idea that punk rock was all about like getting the access to the means of production and doing things your own way and doing it yourself.... But it seemed like even though people were doing all these creative things, there weren't enough women doing bands and fanzines and getting into positions of power, even in that scene.... There were a lot of shows that were all these guy-bands.... I felt really alienated from that, and that's why I think we were gravitating towards each other.<sup>15</sup>

In Olympia, Tobi Vail's punk feminist zine *Jigsaw* and Donna Dresch's queer-girl zine *Chainsaw* began in 1988 alongside Laura McDougell's *Sister Nobody*. The intentions behind starting a zine were simple for Tobi. "To try and meet other girls [and] express some kind of feminism. To try and put it out there. I felt like there was a void of females expressing themselves about music."<sup>16</sup> Fanzines soon became regular dreaming spaces and love letters exchanged between girls and women who yearned for an underground punk revolution they could call their own.

Right now, maybe CHAINSAW is about frustration. Frustration in music. Frustration in living, in being a girl, in being a homo, in being a misfit of any sort. In being a dork, you know, the last kid to get picked for the stupid kickball team in grade school. Which is where this whole punk rock thing came from in the first place. NOT from the Sex Pistols or LA But from the GEEKS who decided or realised (or something) to 'turn the tables' so to speak, and take control of their (our) lives and form a real underground. Which is



Minor Threat live on stage in the early 1990s.

Image courtesy of John W Stuart.

Opposite: Allison Wolfe performing live with Bratmobile, one of the most important riot grrrl bands

to come out of America. Image courtesy of John W Stuart.



ALSO where the whole heart of CHAINSAW comes from.<sup>17</sup>

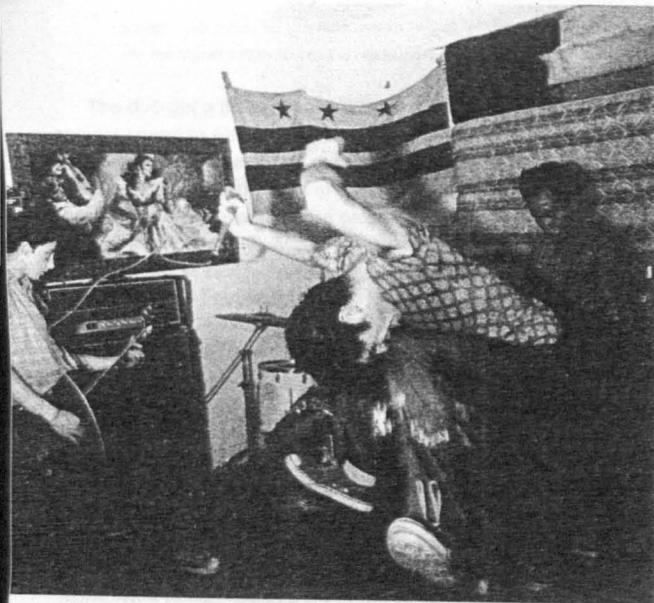
I feel completely out of the realm of everything that is so important to me. And I know this is partly because punk rock is for and by boys mostly and partly because punk rock of this generation is coming of age in a time of mindless career goals.<sup>18</sup>

In a world before the internet, the main means of communicating and networking across America was through exchanging zines and writing letters. Erin Smith who wrote the kitsch-teen-pop-culture *Teenage Gang Debs* zine reflected on the unique character of this emerging network.

It is cool to find like-minded people, but [there] was something special about having this pen-pal and then kind of calling on the phone, and then hearing about this other person, and then reading their zine, and then mailing your zine out to people and just hoping somebody's going to understand it. There's something special and it's really sweet about the whole way it started up.<sup>19</sup>

This intimacy allowed for special connections, ideas and friendships to develop amongst girls and women, which would later prove crucial in the inception of riot grrrl. Through *Jigsaw*, Tobi Vail attracted the attention of Kathi Wilcox and Kathleen Hanna who would be her future band mates in Bikini Kill.

I used to read her fanzine *Jigsaw* and was really impressed with her approach—she was the first person I met who unapologetically focused her attention on girls in bands, specifically. And made it an issue. Like in interviews she would ask girls how it felt to be a girl in a band etcetera. It struck me as really unique because everyone in my college seminars was like, "You know, people are people, it's all the same. It doesn't matter if you're a boy or a girl." And she was acknowledging that there was a difference, especially if you are the girl in question.<sup>20</sup> I hooked up with Tobi Vail, our drummer, because she did a fanzine called *Jigsaw*, which contained some of the most important writing I've ever encountered.... She takes huge risks in what she says, because she's actually living in a scene—she's not living miles away from everybody. She's writing about what happens directly around her in terms of going to a show, and what it feels like to be a woman at a show.<sup>21</sup>



Previous page: Bikini Kill, performing live at the Rock for Choice concert at the Sanctuary Theatre, Washington, DC, 14 April 1992. © Erica Echenberg/Redfers [www.musicpictures.com](http://www.musicpictures.com).

Left: Ian Svenonius and the NOU, playing live at The Embassy, Washington, DC, Fall 1992. © Pat Graham photography [www.patgraham.org](http://www.patgraham.org).

Alongside Beat Happening another band opened up the potential of youth, music and style to rework cultural space and instigate social change. The Nation of Ulysses (NOU) was a band based in Washington DC whose members James Canty, Ian Svenonius, Tim Green, Steve Gamboa and Steve Kroner played together between 1988 and 1992. NOU advocated an aesthetic that focussed upon revolution of the adult-centred world and the creation of a radical youth-centred community through style, language and music. Churning out manifestos, provocative shows and punk music, NOU asserted their intent to radicalise the world by destroying the past 'parent-culture' in favour of the revolutionary teenage 'zero generation'.

Ulysses explains: "The idea was to have a completely rotten attitude towards the whole adult world, meaning, in the long run, the whole established status structure, the whole system of people organising their lives around a job, fitting into the social structure, embracing the whole community. The idea in NOU (ROTTEN) was to drop out of conventional status competition into the smaller netherworld of ROTTEN teenagers and start one's own league." In the NOU, the core values of the straight world—sobriety, conformity, dullness, etc—are replaced by their opposites: hedonism, defiance of authority, and the quest for 'kicks'. These values we reflect in our language, our dress, noise—our entire new aesthetic.<sup>22</sup>

Tobi Vail first encountered information about NOU in Sharon Cheslow's fanzine *Interrobang?! #1* in 1989 and was instantly enamoured by their self-styled aesthetic and pseudo-political agendas and was inspired to create a band and youth movement which combined feminist politics, punk and style to resist the stale male-dominated punk underground culture of which she had become famously critical. The band was Bikini Kill, the movement was riot grrrl and the ideology was for Revolution Girl Style Now!

## BEGINNINGS: REVOLUTION GIRL STYLE NOW!

Bikini Kill and Bratmobile (and our friends) had this idea we called the Revolution Girl Style Now! It was: "let's get all these girls to learn how to play instruments and change everything" and riot grrrl came out of that.<sup>23</sup>

Bikini Kill is more than just a band or a zine or an idea, it's part of the revolution. The revolution is about going to the playground with your best girlfriends. You are hanging upside down on the bars and all the blood is rushing to your head. It's a euphoric feeling. The boys can see our underwear and we don't really care. I'm so sure that lots of girls are also into revolution and we want to find them.<sup>24</sup>

Riot grrrl can be traced back to Tobi Vail, Allison Wolfe, Molly Neuman and Kathleen Hanna's joint conspiracy and vision for a 'Revolution Girl Style Now!' Acting as the philosophical bedrock for the bands Bikini Kill and Bratmobile, which became a reality around Olympia in 1990, these girls created a radical philosophy centred around encouraging girls and women across the country to subvert the stagnant male-dominated underground by creating their own music, art, writing and scenes.

We had been reading other people's fanzines and we knew that Bikini Kill had just started, and there was Calamity Jane and some other girl bands. And we were inspired by what they were doing and started networking with people in Olympia... we really just wanted to kind of start creating our own scene... we weren't really satisfied with what we were being handed as far as bands, the scene whatever... we were bored. So just trying to create our own fun, create our own scene. And it was pretty much girl-based.<sup>25</sup>

Originally based in Portland, Oregon, Kathleen Hanna moved to Olympia to attend Evergreen College, Kathleen's previous experience of music-making in bands like Amy Carter and Viva Knieval grew out of her involvement in setting up benefit shows whilst co-running the collective women's art gallery Reko Muse. Although initially interested in anti-racism activism, Kathleen spent a couple of years busy figuring out and working through issues around sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy and stigmatisation from her personal experiences, as well as from the women she counselled when volunteering at the domestic violence shelter Safe Space.

Heavily inspired by spoken word artist Kathy Acker and performance artist Karen Finlay, Kathleen sought out Tobi Vail to start the band Bikini Kill alongside Billy Karren and Kathi Wilcox, creating songs about "how to undo centuries of white-skin privilege, songs about the connections between class and gender, songs about being sexual that didn't cast me as a babe in a tight ZZ Top dress".<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile in nearby Eugene during the fall of 1989, Allison Wolfe and Molly Neuman discovered that they were next-door neighbours at the University of Oregon and became fast friends. Inspired and encouraged by the angry grrrl zine scene and bands like Beat Happening they began their own punk feminist fanzine, *Girl Germs*, and plotted to start a band.

Starting out as irreverent and spontaneous *capella* intrusions at parties and shows around Eugene, Molly and Allison made outrageous random appearances in order to make their own entertainment. As Allison explains;

Eugene was the type of place where there's not much of a scene. You really have to create your own fun. So that's what we did. We really created our own scene. We started kind of singing songs—mostly other people's songs. Beat Happening songs. Lois songs, Go Team, whatever. And we would go around to different parties, usually hippie, beer-drinking parties. And when the band would take a beer break we would jump up to the mic and sing these silly

songs we would bring a tape usually of Salt 'n' Pepa stick it into the stereo and try to turn the hippie party into a dance party.<sup>27</sup>

The duo got a little more organised during one of their regular jaunts to Allison's home-town of Olympia, when Calvin Johnson asked them to play a Valentine's Day gig at the Surf Club. With the help of a friend who provided the pair with practice space and advice on song writing (which they subsequently rejected), Molly and Allison managed to play their first gig as Bratmobile with Bikini Kill and Some Velvet Sidewalk on 14 February 1991. Having been made aware of Washington DC-based guitarist Erin Smith, DC scene and NOU in late 1990, Molly and Allison decided to spend Spring break in Molly's DC home. The duo stayed at the home of NOU, a group house known as the Embassy, and met many women involved in the DC punk scene. Another line-up of Bratmobile, known as Bratmobile DC emerged in The Embassy involving Molly and Erin on guitar, Christina Billotte on drums, and Allison and Jen Smith singing. Expectations ran high as it turned out that the instigators of Revolution Girl Style Now, members of Bikini Kill and Bratmobile as well as the writers of the angry grrrl zine scene were to converge on DC in the summer of 1991.

Riot grrrl is

BECAUSE us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US, that WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways

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

BECAUSE we don't want to assimilate to someone else's (Boy) standards of what is or isn't 'good' music or punk rock or 'good' writing AND THUS need to create forums where we can recreate, destroy and define our own visions

BECAUSE we know that life is much more than physical survival and are patently aware that the punk rock "you can do anything" idea is crucial to the coming angry grrrl rock revolution which seeks to save the psychic and cultural lives of girls and women everywhere, according to their own terms, not ours

BECAUSE doing/reading/seeing/hearing cool things that validate and challenge us can help us gain the strength and sense of community that we need in order to figure out how bullshit like racism, able-bodism, ageism, speciesism, classism, thinism, sexism, anti-Semitism and heterosexism figures in our own lives

BECAUSE we are angry at a society that tells us Girl = Dumb, Girl = Bad, Girl = Weak

BECAUSE I believe with my wholeheartmindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will, change the world for real.<sup>28</sup>



Front cover of *Bikini Kill* no 1, "A Colour and Activity Book". Image courtesy of Julia Downes

There was this definite feeling of movement forward, and we all had the same ideas and there was this confluence of energy. And it was this feeling of being compelled and a sense of urgency there was this feeling that you could do things on a community level to change what was going on in society.<sup>29</sup>

It was in May 1991 that race riots erupted in Mount Pleasant. An African-American policewoman had shot a Latino man, however contradictory stories circulated about whether the man had lunged at her with a knife or whether he was actually shot whilst handcuffed. This incident sparked three days of intense civil unrest as hundreds of youth fought police in the streets and looted the neighbourhood requiring massive police mobilisation and the use of tear gas to defuse the situation. That same month the Supreme Court upheld the Bush administration's gag rule, which prevented federally-funded clinics from offering abortion counselling, threatening the Roe v Wade landmark decision that had made abortion legal in America. This turn of events created a social situation of urgency and frustration amongst the politicised punk underground in DC, it was within this emerging energy that led DC-based Jen Smith to write a letter to Allison.

We had this friend of ours, Jen Smith, who had written Allison a letter like in the Spring... there had been riots in Mt Pleasant where everybody lived at the time. So she wrote Allison a letter that said... "We're going to have a girl riot this summer" Kind of like a call to arms... it was just a little like cute phrase that she had said in her letter as you would write to someone and be lyrical or whatever we like thought that was cool.<sup>30</sup>

The terms 'girl riot' and 'grrrl' re-emerged in Molly's dad's office as Molly and Allison were trying to come up with a catchy name for a new weekly zine they had made one evening. This is where the term riot grrrl was born:

It was just me and Allison one night were like "let's make a zine tonight" And we were just going to have it be one page folded. And so we were at my dad's office and we were like... what are we going to call it? What are we going to call it? We just made like one square each. And we were like, let's just do one of these every week for the summer... let's just call it *Riot Grrrl*. I mean, I'm pretty sure that's how it started. We just wanted to call this zine something that was like catchy... we handed it out at shows because it was so cheap to make and so easy. And for some reason it was just like so perfect. Those two words were just like really good together at that time. Tobi coined the phrase "grrrl" like as a kind of joke in her fanzine. Like she had called the newest issue of *Jigsaw* an angry grrrl zine and spelled it with three r's so we were like, oh that's cool too. So it's kind of like, you know, rip everybody off and put this thing together. I think at that time we were interested in being inclusive and reaching out to people and connecting and sharing information... we didn't feel like access and inspiration and encouragement were available to other girls.<sup>31</sup>

The weekly zine ritual in Molly's dad's office began attracting the involvement of their friends who were around DC that summer, including Erin Smith, Tobi Vail, Jen Smith, Erika Reinstein and Kathleen Hanna. The need and desire to reach out to more women and get together in the same space became more and more urgent, and the call for a riot grrrl (women-only) meeting was voiced in *Riot Grrrl* #3. The girls handed out *Riot Grrrl* zines, made announcements at gigs around DC and compiled lists of interested girls' phone numbers and addresses and many women involved in the DC punk scene responded. The first riot grrrl meeting, of what would become Riot Grrrl DC, was held at Jenny Toomey's house and weekly meetings continued to be held at various locations around the area including the Positive Force house. The meetings became crucial safe spaces, similar to

1970s feminist consciousness-raising groups, within which girls discussed and politicised their own individual experiences. Girls connected with, encouraged and supported each other, paving the way for collective action and a new feminist sub-cultural movement.

We had the first meeting and about 20 women showed up. A lot of them had never been in a room with only women before, and were blown away by what it felt like. Everybody had so much to say. That felt like an overwhelming response.<sup>32</sup>

As we began thinking individually about how we experienced oppression on the basis of gender, we also started making connections with each other. We critiqued both popular culture and the underground culture in which we had participated. Girls began drawing parallels between different experiences: shame at being fat and bitterness at caring so much about our looks, secret competitiveness with other girls, coupled with self-dislike for being jealous, the unsettling feeling that we could not communicate with a boy without flirting, the sudden, engulfing shock of remembering being molested by a father or stepfather when we were too small to form words for such a thing. Straight and bi girls talked about having to give anatomy lessons every time we had sex with a boy. Queer and questioning girls talked about isolation and about mothers bursting into tears when they learned their daughters were gay. Girls who wanted to play music talked about not knowing how to play a guitar because they had never gotten one for Christmas like the boys did. Girls who played music complained that they were treated like idiots by condescending male employees when they went to buy guitar strings or drum parts. We began to see the world around us with a new vision, a revelation that was both painful and filled with possibility.<sup>33</sup>

Riot grrrl rewrote feminism and activism into a punk rock rebellion and youth-centred voice that was felt to be missing from forms of feminism available in the 1990s. Feminism was seen to be addressing the concerns of older, middle-class, heterosexual and educated women and riot grrrl was seen to be a re-working of feminism to work through the needs, desires and issues in the situations specific to young girls and women in 1990s America;

[Riot grrrl] focused on what the isms were to be a creative counter to be young and to be creative. Whereas I think previous feminisms dealt with more 'academic' issues: what was it like to be out in the world, and not earning as much or what was it like to have children and not have daycare. Well none of us had children and even though we all had jobs and had maybe dealt with sexism on the job, our main focus was being writers and musicians and filmmakers and artists, and how that impacted our lives. And for us I



An early flyer for Riot Grrrl Press. Image courtesy of Julia Downes.

think that's how it was different, it was reclaiming feminism for our lives.

The whole point of riot grrrl is that we were able to re-write feminism for the twenty-first century. For teenagers there wasn't any real access to feminism. It was written in a language that was very academic that was inaccessible to young women. And we took those ideas and rewrote them in our own vernacular.<sup>34</sup>

For me what riot grrrl meant was a way of making punk rock more feminist because really alternative music is like this boys club for the most part. But also a way of making a gender in feminism more punk rock or more DIY. A lot of it with riot grrrl too was a reclamation of taking imagery or things that were considered not feminist but trying to reclaim those and say that actually girly can be feminist, lipstick and make-up people can be feminist, we can wear skirts and still be feminists. We can be cutesy and girly and whatever we want but we still should have rights and we still should be taken seriously.<sup>35</sup>

Riot grrrl also proposed a different way of conceptualising feminist activism, to move away from traditional state-focused protests like marches, rallies and petitions, towards an idea of cultural activism which incorporated everyday cultural subversions like creating art, film, zines, music and communities as a part of feminist activism.

I consider myself a cultural activist, rather than a political activist because I don't organise politics. I think that having women in positions of cultural power is really important for young girls and I can see that we inspire young girls and I can see that we inspire young women at our shows.<sup>37</sup>

We had all these images of protesting and we were able to do the double meanings in our own lives of the kind of violence that we live with in our own domestic lives that mirrored these kind of acts of aggression that the United States would perpetuate on people. I think that's one of the things that was great about people involved because they were so good at creating those images and those ideas that would catch on with people. It was a cultural activism. The kind of lyrics that people would write in songs. It was a really great rewriting of feminism, I think, by taking kind of ideas that were really in academic institutions and putting them into really simple song lyrics.<sup>38</sup>

This ethos of re-writing and re-working politicised ideas also applied to riot grrrl itself which was intended to remain a loose philosophy, made in such a way so people could take it on for their own identity and kind of change it by fleshing it out with their own ideas. Riot grrrl manifestos were added to, rewritten and re-worked to encompass a range of different issues and identities.

Riot grrrl gave people the tools and the language to maybe create new worlds and talk with each other about what's really important. How do we create the new worlds? How do we do it? Our bliss?<sup>40</sup>

The point is that it means different things, that the term riot grrrl has been able to be taken on in many different women's experiences or building on what that title meant. It's not really and fantasy. It's not of it. The fact that it was a counter to what was done before is important. The fact of being inspired by or just simply living with the ideas or ratified their ideas by being inspired by other women.<sup>41</sup>

Many women involved in the inception of riot grrrl chose not to be involved in these meetings. Erin Smith didn't go to any meetings and Tobi Vail, Christina Billotte and Jenny

# KAOS 89.3 FM OLYMPIA'S COMMUNITY RADIO STATION

BROADCASTING REPORTS  
ON THE INTERNATIONAL  
POP UNDERGROUND  
CONVENTION AT 9:20 AM,  
1:00 PM AND 7:00 PM  
**TUES.-SAT.**



KAOS FM programme for the K Records Pop Underground Convention, 1991.

Toomey didn't return after the initial meetings. Kathleen Hanna became the only member of Bikini Kill to attend and a younger cohort of girls became involved in Riot Grrrl DC, including Erika Reinstein, May Summer, Mary Fondriest, Sarah Stolfa, Jasmine Kerns, Laura Soltaire, Tiffany Fabian, Amanda LaVita, and Claudia Von Vacano.

### INTERNATIONAL POP UNDERGROUND: GIRLS NITE

The intensity of riot grrrl's Revolution Summer was solidified back in Olympia with K Records International Pop Underground (IPU) Convention held between 20 and 25 August 1991. The IPU opened with 'girl's nite', emphasising women performers and bands including Bikini Kill, Mecca Normal, Bratmobile, Heavens to Betsy, Lois Maffeo and 7 Year Bitch. The IPU is remembered as a watershed moment, producing intense emotional recollections from those involved as performers and audience members.

Girl's nite will always be precious to me because, believe it or not, it was the first time I saw women stand on a stage as though they truly belonged there. The first time I had ever heard the voice of a sister proudly singing the rage so shamefully locked in my own heart. Until girl's nite, I never knew that punk rock was anything but a phallic extension of the white middle class male's frustrations.<sup>42</sup>

It was just this kind of feeling of discovery and a sort of spark of this new kind of idealism and talent that was coming out that everyone was really taken by.<sup>43</sup>

The International Pop Underground Convention in August of 1991, that was a huge deal because of the Girl Day. That was just nothing like.... I had never seen anything like that happen. And I just had the chills the whole day.<sup>44</sup>

It felt... to be part of an all-girl bill... it felt really monumental and really special.<sup>45</sup>

Riot Grrrl Olympia was established from the energy of the IPU and meetings were held around Olympia including Allison Wolfe, Julie Lary, Nomi Lamm, Madigan Shive and Corin Tucker. 1991 was a critical year for those involved in riot grrrl as Allison Wolfe explained, "it felt like everything was changing... girls were taking over the whole punk rock scene of Olympia".<sup>46</sup> Riot grrrl bands, zines and chapters proliferated in Los Angeles, New York, Olympia and DC. Within Riot Grrrl DC the first convention was organised in summer 1992, benefit shows for Rape Crisis were organised, and Riot Grrrl Press was set up to help zine writers distribute their work.

Riot grrrl seemed to be defying limits, inspiring girls and rewriting feminism in a youth vernacular. As the Revolution (Summer) Girl Style Now wound down, expectations ran high of what riot grrrl could become next.

Riot grrrl is so much. It will end up being so much more I am sure. Right now it isn't anything concrete, it's not a fanzine or a group or anything specific, although it is also all of those things. As of now, it has been a mini fanzine, and there have been some girls who met once a week calling themselves riot grrrls, talking about issues in and outside of punk rock that are important to us. But I know, and I'm sure some of you know that it is gonna be something BIG.... There's no copyright on the name so if you are sitting there reading this and you feel like you might be a riot grrrl then you probably are, so call yourself one.<sup>47</sup>

RIOT GRRRL DRAMA

Girls traditionally, like girls who are socialised as girls, as feminine girls, I think have this really private thing about themselves like diaries, your room, that sort of thing, that is really isolated and you don't share it with anybody else. It was like all of a sudden all of the girls were in the same room, but somebody was trying to like take the room away from us.<sup>48</sup>

In July 1992 the first mainstream coverage of riot grrrl was printed in *LA Weekly*. This initial spark led to a media frenzy, forcing the radical underground community into the public eye, sparking multiple controversies. Publications including *Sassy*, *Off Our Backs*, *Newsweek*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, *LA Times*, and even *Playboy* covered riot grrrl, as the dominant culture became curious about this new girl-orientated movement. This media coverage was initially crucial as riot grrrl found a wider audience of girls and women and inspired the creation of riot grrrl chapters across America. However, the coverage also removed and/or ridiculed the radical and political aspects of riot grrrl, sensationalising it as an aggressive anti-men subculture or commodifying the movement into a genre of (bad) music or (anti-)fashion style.

A scrawny boy stands by, watching the group and the bouncing sea of mohawked female fans in Pucci-print minis. They sport hairy legs, army boots and tattoos. Finally he yells "Punk rock is just an excuse for ugly girls to get on stage!" In seconds, he's surrounded by an angry mob of girls, hopping and slam-dancing in a frenzy. He bolts to safety, chased by their jeers.<sup>49</sup>

Five assumptions about riot grrrls

- 1 They can't play
- 2 They hate men
- 3 They're fakers
- 4 They're elitist
- 5 They aren't really a movement<sup>50</sup>



Front Cover of *LA Weekly* from 10-12 July, 1992, one of the first mainstream media attempts at covering the riot grrrl movement.

Connections to lesbian and queer sub-cultural producers such as Outpunk, Chainsaw and Candyass records were ignored as (male) readers were reassured of the heterosexual character of riot grrrl, "most riot grrrls still find boys for the usual teenaged thing" asserted *Newsweek*.<sup>51</sup> Attention was drawn to the sexualised bodies of riot grrrl, Tobi Vail was reported to be, "wearing only jeans and a bra" whilst audience members were, "taking off their clothes" and "rushing the stage".<sup>52</sup> A sense of astonishment is felt in *Newsweek's* commentary that focuses on how, "grrrls marked their bodies with blunt five-inch high letters reading RAPE or SLUT" and struggled to comprehend how wearing "vintage little-girl dresses that barely make it past her hips" were "all the better to sing songs about rape

and exploitation".<sup>53</sup> Feminist philosophy was trivialised within statements such as, "riot grrrl is feminism with a loud happy face dotting the i"<sup>54</sup> and "better watch out, boys. From hundreds of once pink frilly bedrooms comes the young feminist revolution. And it's not pretty. But it doesn't want to be. So there!"<sup>55</sup> Riot grrrl was condemned as an individualistic apolitical outlet for a privileged elite of girls, as participants of the 1992 DC Riot Grrrl convention were described as, "mostly white, mostly middle-class, well-educated girls" and "serious and sombre and self absorbed".<sup>56</sup> In a move antithetical to the non-hierarchical model of riot grrrl, the media constructed its leaders of the movement, focusing on Kathleen Hanna, Bikini Kill and Bratmobile, as well as women musicians who were unrelated to and often openly critical of riot grrrl: Courtney Love of Hole and Kat Bjelland of Babes in Toyland. The coverage strove to portray Kathleen Hanna as pathological by constantly highlighting her 'history' of abuse and occupation as a stripper, going as far as printing false incest claims. For example *Newsweek* reported, "a former stripper who sings and writes about being a victim of rape and child abuse, Hanna represents the extreme edge of the grrrls' rage".<sup>57</sup> In order to curtail the misrepresentation of riot grrrl and reclaim power, a media blackout was called in 1992, those associated with riot grrrl were encouraged not to cooperate with the press. Nonetheless journalists continued to write about riot grrrl and those involved in the movement had conflicting opinions and experiences about the media attention.

You have to look at what the media is doing, because they have a lot of power. And because we had all been talking about how power is manifested in society, well if we want to change that, then how can we take some of that power back? So one of the ways that we decided to take power back, and I think it was Kathleen's idea. Was to put a ban on the media. So by the time 1992 came around and all this media attention was happening, we were all prepared. We knew it was going to happen. It wasn't that big of a surprise.<sup>58</sup>

I was resented by certain people because I was getting attention that they weren't getting and even though I didn't ask for it and I never talked to the press, it was still happening. At the time it was really hard because the kind of attention I was getting was really negative. It was like feminist visibility in one way but it was really insulting like constantly calling me an abuse survivor and making out like I'd had all these crazy fucked up things happen to me and that's why I was a feminist.<sup>59</sup>

None of us had any experience of the media, none of us ever expected that it would be something that would get, I mean we noticed that it was getting a lot of attention, but we thought of it in terms of people we knew and just group excitement. You didn't really think of it in terms of the media and how you'd be represented and having your image thrown back at you. It was overwhelming to see your friends all of a sudden in magazines and to see the whole world looking basically at the northwest people coming in and trying to characterise everything and they ended up making caricatures out of everyone.<sup>60</sup>

Most of those involved in riot grrrl were shocked by the media attention in terms of its negativity, misinformation and journalistic attempts to discredit the ideas and actions of the people involved. As Corin Tucker argued, "there was never a serious article written about riot grrrl. I felt like it was outrageous the way that they just completely trivialised the entire movement as being a fashion statement and they never got the serious issue that young women have a lot to deal with in society and that we were serious feminists... it was deliberate that we were made to look like we were just ridiculous girls parading around in our underwear."<sup>61</sup> The positive effects of the blackout were highlighted, to encourage girls to find out about riot grrrl on their own terms, "it was kind of a good thing in this way, because it sort of let riot grrrl become whatever each girl who heard about it wanted it to be for them. And finding whatever power message they could find in it, that then they could

use without it really being a media like 'this is what riot grrrl is about and you should buy it. It's for sale right now.'<sup>62</sup> However, unequal financial gains were created as journalists profited from the documentation of riot grrrl producers, leaving them penniless, 'they were making money off of our image. None of us had a single thing to show for it. None of us were making any money; I could barely pay rent. It was the industry of it all, the journalists were getting paid, the photographers were getting paid, we never were.'<sup>63</sup> It became increasingly clear that those in bands had more to gain from media attention, as Allison Wolfe notes 'it did help to sell more records and to have more people come to our shows. I mean Bratmobile and Heavens to Betsy toured in the summer of 1992 across the country... and people came to our shows and it went just fine, we didn't lose money. Which was probably due to the riot grrrl media attention.'<sup>64</sup> A minority had no qualms with accruing media attention, 'I was cool with it. I was into people covering our band. I was into people talking about me, about what I was doing, because I thought it was really validating.... It made my parents understand what I was doing.'<sup>65</sup>

The turbulent relationship between the media and riot grrrl caused fragmentation within the movement, as Corin Tucker explained, 'it was a really hard thing to go through because I think it really tore apart a kind of community feeling that riot grrrl had'.<sup>66</sup> Internal inconsistencies and issues of privilege were brought to a national level, highlighting tensions already arising from within riot grrrl, 'it was a really amazing thing and [the media] took it and like all the things about it that were maybe not quite right, or that were just goals trying to figure shit out, got really highlighted'.<sup>67</sup> Inadequately-voiced issues of racial and class privilege, which permeated the riot grrrl community as well as the DIY punk communities from which it emerged, created internal conflict and feelings of frustration and anger at the common realisation that girl power was the exclusive realm for white middle class girls as Dasha, writer of *Gunk* zine, experienced.<sup>68</sup>

I started oggling like a year into it, like started feeling funny about it just in terms of my whole position with punk rock and riot grrrl, because you know it was an odd position to be in too many times be the only person of colour there, and feeling like no one gave a shit. This was an empowering movement for them which was only relative to a white middle class punk girl. It just became depressing and really hurtful to see that it would only go so far and that there was a total crazy powerful feeling about the whole environment and it was exciting. But it was also really sad in a way that like this is only what it is and its only for certain people and it was extremely frustrating to start realising that and start being like these aren't my people.<sup>69</sup>

The power implicit in the media's role in defining riot grrrl is that the media version has become the dominant history, which stands in contradiction to the experiences of those involved. Allison Wolfe examines this position, 'it's sad because you'll look and [the media] is [taken as] fact, but it wasn't really what happened, but it's written this way, it's history'.<sup>70</sup> Although the media allowed riot grrrl ideas to reach audiences globally, a sense of disillusionment was felt about what these audiences could take away from the media distortions of the movement, 'it's really confusing, because I'm not sure what they really learned. What they really saw riot grrrl as'.<sup>71</sup> Those involved felt the need to distance themselves and their activities from a term the meaning of which was no longer under the control of their communities, becoming more and more international.

**TRANSATLANTIC SHIFTS**

Young women and girls from across the world were also hungry to create girl-centred communities from which to revolutionise their music scenes, everyday lives and engage

with feminist ideas in art, music, writing and culture. Riot grrrl migrated across the Atlantic as girls willed it into existence in the underground music scenes in Britain, Europe and Australia.

Britain has a strong legacy of punk, protest and youth politicisation, providing a fertile ground for DIY feminist cultural subversions. The production of radical feminist magazines like *Shocking Pink* and *Spare Rib*, allowed for the emergence of a discourse, aesthetic and means of production, from which to conceptualise issues around gender and sexuality. Women's involvement in punk during the late 1970s, in bands such as The Slits, Siouxsie and the Banshees, the Adverts and X Ray Spex, saw women benefit from new opportunities available in punk DIY amateur aesthetics.

However, issues of gender and sexuality were suppressed during this period and punk was experienced as an asexual space.<sup>72</sup> This situation offered women cooperation as 'one of the boys' or as 'sexless', which subsequently prevented a confrontational exploration of resistant femininities and sexualities within punk. The 1970s also brought the publication of influential British feminist texts such as Germaine Greer's *Female Eunuch* and feminist consciousness-raising groups radicalised women around the country. Moving into the 1980s post-punk era, the effects of British feminism had trickled down to inform bands like the Au Pairs, The Raincoats, Marine Girls, Delta 5 and Ludus.

However, the mainstream became dominated by the sound of new pop with synth-driven bands such as Duran Duran, The Human League, Altered Images and Strawberry Switchblade gaining in popularity and DIY post-punk fell out of the media's favour. Out of the spotlight, the DIY aesthetic and independent means of production proliferated in the newly burgeoning indie-pop scene, as Nicky Wire described, 'people were doing everything themselves; making their own records, doing the artwork, gluing the sleeves together, releasing them, sending them out, writing fanzines because the music press lost interest really quickly'.<sup>74</sup> Fanzine culture proliferated with zines like *Hungry Beat* by Kevin Pearce, *Juniper Beri-Beri* by Aggi and Stephen of the Pastels, *The Legend!* by Everett True, *Are You Scared to Get Happy* by Matt Haynes and *Kvatch* by Clare Wadd. A collective of fanzine writers of the era also collaborated producing a series of zines with flexi-discs of many seminal indie-pop bands under the name Sha-la-la. Labels such as Creation, Postcard Records and The Subway Organisation released music by many notable bands of this era like The Pastels, Orange Juice, Jesus and Mary Chain, The Mighty Lemon Drops, The Shop Assistants, The Flatmates, The Soup Dragons, The Chesterfields and Razorcuts. In 1987, Clare Wadd and Matt Haynes set up the socialist and feminist inspired Sarah Records in Bristol, producing fanzines and releasing music by bands such as Tallulah Gosh and Heavenly. Although opinions surrounding the political intent and female involvement of the indie-pop music scene vary, Gregory Webster of Razorcuts argues that:

It was political in the same way that punk was. It was rejecting the mainstream music scene at the time and going back to basics. In the environment with bands like Simple Minds dominating the charts playing three minute pop songs like the Ramones, it felt like a very, political statement of intent.<sup>75</sup>

However, shifts in the meaning of 'indie' in Britain began to emerge as bands like The Smiths broke through to the mainstream. As opposed to signifying a DIY mode of production, indie was reworked to refer to an increasingly popular sound, genre and style characterised as counter-cultural. British indie music cultures became dominated by music and culture produced by white men. Whereas punk, post-punk, and indie-pop allowed for the marginal involvement of women, this shift in the meaning of 'indie' as a popular commodity and genre led to a rigid reconstitution of a normative gender order in the public.<sup>76</sup> Teetering on the brink of the emerging Britpop scene and dissatisfied with the available indie scenes, British girls found themselves on the sidelines wanting more.

# IN-GRRRL-LAND, SCATTERLAND & WAILS.

- KEY**
- ♥ GRRRL LOVE!!
  - ✉ GRRRL LETTERS
  - 🌐 GRRRL NETWORKING
  - 📀 GRRRL RECORD LABEL
  - 🎧 DANCING GRRRL
  - 🖌️ GRRRL SPRAYPAINTING
  - 📺 GRRRL BOARDER
  - ☠️ WEEDKILLER GRAFFITI (OR GRRRL PIKATES)
  - 📧 GRRRL FLYPOSTING
  - 🌿 GRRRL/WE
  - 🍷 GRRRL PICNIC
  - 👥 HATCHING GANG
  - 📺 GRRRL EXHIBITION
  - 🎸 GRRRL BAND
  - 📻 GRRRL RADIO
  - 🎆 GRRRL GAGS/DISCOS
  - 🏠 GRRRL WORKSHOPS
  - 👯 GRRRLS!!!



Scale: 'Enormous' Bigger than you could ever guess...

"...as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world."  
 Virginia Woolf,  
*Three Guineas.*

This map includes only those grrrls I know of from my work with the Riot Grrrls of Leeds and Bradford - hence the Northern bias. There are so many more grrrls I can't know about, so it's up to you to fill in the gaps...

**PUT YERSELF ON THE MAP!!**

I [had] mostly been going out to indie pop type things and they were quite small. A lot of it was quite twee and there weren't many girls on stage for starters and there weren't any girls doing fanzines or anything like that and girls were people's girlfriends that were going along. It was always noticeable to me.<sup>77</sup>

## RIOT GRRRL RUMOURS

News of this new American phenomenon called riot grrrl began to be transmitted across the Atlantic through K Records newsletters, mainstream press articles, underground press like *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll*, American bands on tour like NOU, letter-writing and paraphernalia brought back by Everett True who was busy covering the upcoming grunge scene in America for the *Melody Maker*. His house-mates Jon Slade and Jo Johnson were inspired by the music and fanzines that Everett would bring back. Amelia Fletcher, who was over in America during 1991 (as her band Heavenly were signed to K Records) learned about riot grrrl first hand and recognised the need for a similar scene in the United Kingdom.

I first heard about [riot grrrl] from the originators of it, Molly Neuman and Allison Wolfe they'd invented the term they started this fanzine and they just called it *Riot Grrrl*. That year everyone was kind of talking about this thing riot grrrl. I think we had lost a little bit of impetus and inspiration doing what we were doing [in the United Kingdom] and I think we'd become a bit tired so really [riot grrrl] invigorated us and got us all excited again.<sup>78</sup>

The character that British riot grrrl would take, however, was to be dictated and shaped by dominant cultural industries whose mainstream concept of indie, pub-centred music venue circuit and nationalised music media restricted, distracted and hindered an underground independent riot grrrl community to be developed and expressed in the same ways as was possible in across the Atlantic. Unlike America, with its DIY legacy of K Records, SST and Dischord enabling independent punk production, Britain lacked a coherent DIY punk infrastructure. British riot grrrl had to start from scratch, with a whole girl-orientated network and infrastructure to build.

Our situation was different to the one the American riot grrrls were responding to. The underground in London had deteriorated totally, there wasn't much of an alternative 'indie' just became an abstract term for a style of music, not ideas or values, 'cause they were all selling out to major labels. The notion of selling out wasn't important. Punk rock wasn't important. Fanzines were seen as a sad joke, so we had to explain stuff that might have been obvious to American kids but was alien to young British kids. The reasons for being independent were snorted at.<sup>79</sup>

The way America is structured [into] urban and suburban environments [so] if you grew up in like a small town or suburb somewhere, you're more likely to be exposed to things like punk and hardcore which is where riot grrrl stemmed from whereas in England, that doesn't really exist, there isn't that kind of suburban, like white boy angst rock in a DIY sense. We didn't have Black Flag and Fugazi building [it] up there already existed a fanzine culture and a band culture for girls to kind of slot into, whereas in England we had to create it. It didn't exist. Punk didn't really exist in England so the whole riot grrrl thing was kind of like, alright, we have to build this whole culture, it's not just the thing of building another facet

British riot grrrl map drawn by Karren Ablaze for the *Bad Girls* exhibition at the ICA, 1993.

of culture. We have to find venues so we can put on shows where like 14-year-olds can go to them. And we have to write fanzines and write to each other and create a network.<sup>80</sup>

News of American riot grrrl also ignited the imagination of music journalists Everett True and Sally Margaret Joy who both wrote for the music weekly *Melody Maker*. They kept their ears close to the ground for the reverberations of British riot grrrl. Unknown to Everett, his own house-mates would create the band that would act as the heartbeat of the British riot grrrl scene: Huggy Bear.

#### HUGGY BEAR: THIS IS HAPPENING WITHOUT YOUR PERMISSION

Huggy Bear was originally a project conceived by Jon Slade and Chris Rowley in which Jon created music on a 4-track and Chris would overdub his vocals. At the time Chris was going out with Niki Elliot and she began adding her vocals to Jon's tapes as well. Jon wasn't expecting Niki's involvement and decided that if Chris was going to get his girlfriend involved in their band then he would get his girlfriend, Jo Johnson, involved as well. The four collaborated together producing various demo tapes throughout 1991, which drew upon DIY 4-track productions, indie-pop aesthetics, and various samples. Mathew Fletcher, the original drummer, left due to their refusal to practice a song more than once and Karen Hill, an old school friend of Jo's, began drumming in Huggy Bear when the time came to play live gigs. Huggy Bear played just two gigs in 1991, the first in September with Heavenly at a hotel in Oxford and the second at the Heavenly Christmas party in December 1991. Chris and Niki were frequent customers of the Rough Trade shop in Covent Garden, and subsequently became interested in K Records, *Beat Happening* and American zines like *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll*. It was from talking to Gary Walker, who worked in Rough Trade as well as being a gig promoter and founder of Wiiiija records, which he ran from the Rough Trade shop, that the Huggies found out that Gary was bringing over a band called the Action Swingers. They had heard that Julie Cafritz, former guitarist for Pussy Galore, was in the band and they became ever more excited about the new group. They wanted to impress Gary with a demo tape that would ensure that they get the support slot for the Action Swingers London gig. Huggy Bear set about consciously making a tape that was more in keeping with the punk sound of the Action Swingers. Unfortunately, they ended up not getting the gig, but it marked a significant shift in the musical style of Huggy Bear and the evolution of what British riot grrrl would look and sound like. This tape, highlights of which were released by Wiiiija as the *We Bitched* demo tape, became the critical link between Huggy Bear and American riot grrrl culture. Huggy Bear decided to give Everett some tapes to



Top: The Raincoats performing live in the 1980s.

Image courtesy of Shirley O'Loughlin.

Bottom: Huggy Bear performing at Subterania in the

1990s. © Erica Echenberg/Redferns

www.musicpictures.com.

hand out to the people he met in the American punk underground, and the reaction was more than the Huggies expected.

The third Huggy Bear gig in the Spring of 1992 saw the new punk direction in sound really take off; gigs that year started small in the Bull and Gate, Rough Trade shop and the Dome. Jon finally persuaded the initially reluctant Everett True to check out his band and although he was impressed, he didn't feel it was appropriate to write about Huggy Bear himself and enlisted Sally Margaret Joy to write a gig review. This review didn't make it into the published version of *Melody Maker*. In the summer of 1992, Everett and Sally interviewed Huggy Bear and they began to put their own spin on riot grrrl: Huggy Nation. Drawing on their own working class backgrounds, past British youth subcultures and Chris' youth work experience, a decentralised youth network of girl/boy resistance bent on cultural agitation was proposed.

We want new playgrounds for the kids. New places where they can write, new places where they can hang out, nice new music they can listen to... what Huggy Nation want aren't martyrs, but prime movers—people who can be seen, but aren't standing for everybody else. Prime movers can be any one of the five of us—the seven of us. It can be people who we meet, who paint, or write or smash up bank windows. Prime movers doesn't imply hierarchy. It's people going out to do stuff and networking and letting us know about it. We have this big wide net of like, unrest.<sup>81</sup>

Huggy Bear began playing larger venues in London supporting bands like Stereolab, Tindersticks, and Pavement. Wiiiija released their first single "Rubbing the Impossible to Burst" in September and immediately sold out, John Peel invited them to do a session in October, and a second single "Kiss Curl for the Kids Liberation" emerged around Christmas to coincide with their support slot with Sonic Youth and Pavement at Brixton Academy. Huggy Bear became the central resource for information about British riot grrrl, producing the zines *Reggae Chicken*, *Huggy Nation* and various bullet-teens, putting on their own gigs and events and fostering connections between isolated girls, as Layla Gibbon described, "in England I just remember like everyone would write to Huggy Bear, and Huggy Bear would kind of match people up. Like they gave me the address of this girl who lived in a small village in Wales, to write to when I first wrote to them".<sup>82</sup> Spurred on by what available information there was on riot grrrl, a girl-orientated DIY culture began to emerge. 1992 and 1993 saw the development of tape labels like Slampt Underground Organisation in Newcastle and Spazoom in Cardiff; zines like Natasha's *My Little Fanzine*, Layla Gibbon's *Drop Babies*, and Bidisha's *Girl Pride*; bands like Linus, Pussycat Trash, Skinned Teen, Mambo Taxi, Delicate Vomit and Coping Saw; riot grrrl meetings began to gather across Britain in Leeds, Bradford, Portsmouth and London. Girl positive manifestos began to emerge as riot grrrl was applied to the situations and lives of British girls and young women.

My interpretation of RIOT GRRRL

\* It's about AUTONOMY: gaining more and more control over my life. Creating the stuff, music, porn, writing. I want to hear and read instead of waiting and consuming and being bored and unsatisfied. Girl autonomy means we need our own fanzines/ magazines/ music/ films/ books/ venues... the things boys can take for granted.

\* it's about the UNDERGROUND: a community of people sharing their art, challenging and encouraging each other through their network of fanzines, letters, meetings, shows, etc.

\* it's PUNK ROCK: Pissing everyone off. Being a loud mouth. Noise. Ugly aesthetic. Looking for the bullshit in even the most respected works of feminism, etc. duh. No heroes. Fuck the rules. Yeah a stripper can be a feminist.

\* it's about feminism: girls talking to each other about how their lives are different to boys' lives. Why is that? What can we do to change it?  
 \* it's about GIRL-LOVE: valuing friendships with girls, loving girls, supporting each other through shit and encouraging each other to get on and do stuff.<sup>83</sup>

Here lies in your hands the first fanzine from riot grrrl. Read it and scream with joy girl, this is the start of the New Feminism, we've got lots to say about this 'man's world' we live in, and bet you do to! This belongs to all us girls, a way to say what you feel without editing, without censorship. Get together with some friends and write your own fanzine, get your thoughts down on paper and spread the word GIRL POWER REVOLUTION. You are strong girl, you are bad and beautiful, you can do anything you want to do. And you can do it now. THE FUTURE BELONGS TO US GO FORTH AND RIOT GRRRL!!<sup>84</sup>

Remember: right now is the most important time in the history of the world, right now is the most exciting time of anyone's life. So why are you worrying about tomorrow? Why were you standing still at that gig when you desperately wanted to dance? Pusycat Trash, our first local girlpunk explosion, kicking out distorted pop over primal drums, fuzz guitar and minimalistic songs... this is punk pop! Who says your friends can't be your heroines and heroes? I'm sick of having to buy imported records from The States to hear good music, let's create our own scenes! Punk is happening in pub backrooms all over the country, so why are you waiting for the London music press to tell you what to like? Form your own band, release your own cassettes and records, DO IT YOURSELF. It's easy, a lot easier than you probably think.... All you need is imagination, passion and honesty, and a sense of belief in what you're doing.<sup>85</sup>



RIOT GRRRL: THE LEGACY AND CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE OF DIY FEMINIST CULTURAL ACTIVISM



Top: Flyer for early American Huggy Bear gig in St Paul, Minnesota.  
 Opposite: Huggy Bear Guitar Mania Nation Poster. Image courtesy of Susan Corrigan.

On Friday 12 February 1993, Huggy Bear appeared on *The Word* and performed "Her Jazz" live. The performance ended without a hitch, but eager to disrupt the live TV show, members of Huggy Bear and Riot Grrrl London began protesting at the Barbie Girls feature aired immediately after Huggy Bear's performance. *The Word* was taken off the air as the protesters were ejected from the building. This event rocketed Huggy Bear's notoriety and forced riot grrrl into the mainstream gaze. Huggy Bear hit the cover of *Melody Maker* on the 27 February with an insiders report by Sally Margaret Joy.

**MEDIA HEAT**

Networks of encouragement and support started to spread across Britain, however the nationalised media attention became the main focus and threatened to distract the vital network building required to build this new girl DIY infrastructure. The involvement of Sally Margaret Joy in Riot Grrrl London particularly became controversial. As Karren Ablaze! commented on the London riot grrrl scene, "I think that a lot of their energies went into fending off media interference, due to people coming in just because they wanted to document it as part of some media related work."<sup>86</sup> Although there was no blanket media blackout, those involved with riot grrrl and Huggy Bear began to distance themselves from any involvement or association with the media. Subsequently it didn't take long for a media backlash to hit the British riot grrrl scene. The movement regularly found its way into the pages of the *Daily Mail*, *NME*, *Melody Maker*, *Evening Standard*, *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Every Woman*, and *Daily Star*. The tabloid's moral panic rhetoric cast riot grrrl as an anarchic girl gang bent on inflicting revenge against men;

They screech, they spit, they snarl, they swear. Every word they scream through the microphone is a prayer against men. When their music stops, you are left with a pounding head, buzzing eardrums and no doubt that men are 'the enemy'. Meet the riot grrrls, the latest, the nastiest phenomenon to enter the British music scene.<sup>87</sup>

They are the toughest, meanest group of feminists since women began burning their bras back in the swinging sixties. The so-called riot girls play rough 'n' ready rock music and they list MAN-HATING among their favourite hobbies.... And so a scorching Saturday evening finds me outside the Dome, a premier London rock venue.... To steady my nerves, I have an ice-cold beer in the bar next door.... A gang of teenage girl bruisers has followed me into the pub. A shiver goes down my spine as an incredibly scruffy girl spits: "Oh no! It's the Daily Star".... I scurry away in a cab. The chilling

# punk rock feminism

By Interpretation of RIOT GRRRL:

It's about AUTONOMY: gaining more and more control over my life. Creating the stuff, music, perms, writing, I want to hear and read instead of waiting and consuming and being bored and unsatisfied. Girl autonomy means we need our own fanzines/magazines/music/film/books/venues...the things boys can take for granted.



It's about the UNDERGROUND: a community of people sharing their art, challenging and encouraging each other through their network of fanzines, letters, meetings, shows, etc.,



It's PUNK ROCK: Pissing everyone off. Being a loud mouth. Noise. Ugly aesthetic. Looking for the bullshit in even the most respected works of feminism, etc., duh. No heroes. Fuck the rules. Yeah a stripper can be a feminist.



It's about feminism: girls talking to each other about how their lives are different to boys' lives. Why is that? What can we do to change it?



It's about GIRL-LOVE: valuing friendships with girls, loving girls, supporting each other through shit and encouraging each other to get on and do stuff.



screams are ringing in my ears and I'm just thankful I wasn't stripped naked and hung from the nearest lamp-post.<sup>88</sup>

Music critics began picking apart Huggy Bear and riot grrrl, "your Skinned Teens and your Huggy Bears and yeah the whole damn lot of you are as rigid and formulaic as the boy noise that you so right(eous)ly criticise"<sup>89</sup>, scolded Sarra Manning in *Melody Maker*. Huggy Bear were attacked for manipulating the media and riot grrrl was characterised as elitist and contrived, even guilty for creating the problem of gender inequality in music culture;

We'd almost won the battle. A year ago we'd almost reached the stage where it wasn't an issue whether a musician had a penis or a clitoris.... Suddenly it's an issue again. We're back to square one. Thanks to riot grrrl, female musicians are, once again, a novelty.... I smell a secret fear of actually connecting with anyone outside their elitist fanzine culture (This is an elite. Most of you don't get to share flats with ET or Nation of Ulysses... Or get invited to the riot grrrl "cabinet meetings").<sup>90</sup>

This put the task of building a riot grrrl underground infrastructure under significant strain. One national project was realised at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London on 4 December 1993. The Grrrlstyle Revolution Day was coordinated by Riot Grrrl London and incorporated a day of discussion, poster art, zine-making and art installations. Huggy Bear went on to tour America and Japan and the British DIY girl underground struggled to maintain zines, record and tape labels, bands, gigs and events now fledgling outside of the public eye.

## LEGACY

Society hasn't really changed that drastically for women in the last ten years... the thing that's really tired is that misogyny is constantly recycled as the new hip product and what's cutting edge. I happen to think that resistance is really cutting edge.<sup>91</sup>

Talking about waves of feminism is weird for me... I understand that there are pushes and times where it gets more prominent at least in the mainstream. But to me it just seems that as long as sexism exists so must feminism.<sup>92</sup>

Riot grrrl experienced its own 'false feminist death syndrome' as the media declared riot grrrl a political failure, a genre of bad music and a simplistic reinvention of (male) punk.<sup>93</sup> Ironically the American youth markets became flooded with girl-powered commodities whilst a new generation of angry yet acceptable singer songwriters like Fiona Apple, Lisa Loeb and Alanis Morissette became the new faces of 'women in rock'.<sup>94</sup> In Britain, acts like Shampoo and the Spice Girls epitomised the cleaned up major-label friendly version of riot grrrl.

1996 saw the single "Wannabe" from the new all-girl group Spice Girls debut at number one. Signed to Virgin records, the group embraced merchandising and marketed products to young girls and women under the slogan 'girl power'. This form of girl power, however, rewarded young girls for providing the financial support that ensured the Spice Girls success. Instead of directly encouraging girls to create their own art, music, writing and culture, the Spice Girls rhetoric ensured that Spice-mania would be the focus of their adoration. 'Personalised' messages on products such as, "The Spice Girls say: 'Thank you for making us the number one act in the world. And thanks for buying this officially licensed product. Girl Power forever!'"<sup>95</sup> indicate the consumerist terms and conditions within which

the Spice Girls version of girl power operated.

The mid to late 1990s also witnessed a massive shift in the independent music scene as punk and grunge moved overground and male indie, rock and punk bands like Blur, Oasis, Nirvana, REM and Green Day achieved commercial success and mainstream popularity. To those involved in the movement during this era it felt like, "there had been a roll-back, a regression".<sup>96</sup> Many key riot grrrl bands broke-up during the decade: starting with Huggy Bear, Pussycat Trash, Bratmobile, Heavens to Betsy and eventually, Bikini Kill disbanded in 1998. Internal conflicts raged in riot grrrl communities, energy and spirit declined, and the need to change terms became evident as Slim Moon argued, "the media has changed what riot grrrl means, so they have to find a new name for their ideas".<sup>97</sup> Feminist cultural activism burned away within new terms and projects, to embrace race, class, sexualities, size, queer and trans issues and communities to produce a more sophisticated politicised cultural assault on gender binaries and boundaries.

An example of this is the *Free to Fight!* project which was set up by Anna Lo Bianco, Staci Cotler and Jody Blyele. Based in Portland, Oregon, the group of self-defence trainers created a record and workbook, which was distributed through Blyele's Candyass independent record label.<sup>98</sup> Incorporating survival stories, spoken word, self-defence instruction, and music. The project, which later expanded into a tour with Team Dresch and self-defence demonstrator Alice Stagg, introduced the possibilities and opportunities for women to incorporate self-defence into their everyday lives.

In 1995, Ed Varga began putting on queer community building shows under the name Homocore Minneapolis, which eventually morphed into a series of large-scale festivals in Olympia called Homo-a-go-go held in 2002, 2004 and 2006. The DIY queer festival Queeruption began in South London in 1998 and has since been held annually at various locations worldwide, for instance in New York City, Tel Aviv, Barcelona and Vancouver.<sup>99</sup> In other areas the first Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls was founded in 2000 as a summer day camp in Portland, providing young girls with access, inspiration and technical training to express themselves through music. Frustrated film-maker Miranda July set up the Big Miss Moviola video-letter project to provide other women filmmakers with opportunities for networking and having their work screened. New bands like Le Tigre, Sleater Kinney, The Gossip and The Butchies emerged and records labels like Mr Lady, Candyass, Kill Rock Stars, Slamp!, Spazoom and Chainsaw continued to support music created by women and queers. The availability of new technologies of music production and expansion of musical styles enabled bands like Le Tigre, Scream Club and Chicks on Speed to explore the possibilities of feminist music crossing over hip hop and electro boundaries. Post-punk and hip hop women of colour bands like The New Bloods, Yo Majesty and Siren's Echo are questioning and challenging the boundaries of sexuality and gender.

#### LADYFEST AND CONTEMPORARY DIY FEMINIST CULTURAL ACTIVISM

In 1999 the EMP in Seattle was looking for music scenes to document for its exhibitions and contacted Allison Wolfe to gather people together for a retrospective on riot grrrl.<sup>100</sup> It had been the first time that these women had come together to reflect on riot grrrl since its decline, the chemistry between these women was still present and the encounter inevitably enabled a new idea to be realised;

It was kind of cool, it was really touching, and I think it was really emotional for a lot of us too. It was really cool to all be together again and realise that we were all still musicians or artists and doing things but kind of really, separately, and in a way we missed that sense

Programme for the ICA's *Bad Girls* exhibition, 1993.

# ICA EDUCATION

## BAD GIRLS

Institute of  
Contemporary Arts  
The Mall  
London SW1Y 5AH

For further details  
please contact Kim  
Sweet, ICA Education  
Officer

Tel: 071 930 0493  
Fax: 071 873 0051

September - December 1993

After the backlash the whiplash. *Bad Girls* is a programme of film, performance, exhibitions and talks in which women artists move beyond the political to create personal and often fiercely explicit art.

Grrrlstyle Revolution at the ICA  
4 December 1993

Comprising of writers, musicians, artists and performers, *Riot Grrrl* takes a feminist message to younger women and teenaged girls. With origins in the US and UK new punk rock underground, *Riot Grrrl* began as an imperative for young women to control their own lives using creativity and self-expression.

12.00 - 01.00 hrs

#### *Fly Grrrl Posters and Polar Opposites*

Installation in public areas of the ICA with poster art depicting Grrrls and their own corresponding artwork, twinned with two pincushion poles depicting Heroines and Queen Bees. Nominate your own goddesses or stick it to the enemy within!

14.00 hrs

#### *Incen - diaries*

*Riot Grrrl* answer the media using the media. Discussion relating to punk rock feminism, the way music feeds into the Grrrls representation and screening of Grrrls video diaries. Open to men, women, girls and boys.

16.00 hrs

#### *Girl Love and Girl Action*

Feminism and activism: Putting priorities in order. Discussion open to women and girls only.

16.30 hrs

#### *Something for the Weekend*

Participate in the creation of a women and Grrrls only quick-zine magazine. Written, spoken and drawn contributions welcome.

ICA Bar and Cafe

*Its a dirty job, but someone's got to do it*  
Waitress service with a difference.

Admission to all *Riot Grrrl* events is free with ICA day membership, £1.50, £1.00 concs.

of community and networking. In the aftermath of that or during that I had been talking to Corin [Tucker] and Sharon Cheslow just being like what do you think if we did something? My original idea was a Lollapalooza girl tour but it seemed like way too much work so then it eventually it became like why don't we do this single event, a festival, year 2000, bring in the new millennium and just re-announce that there's something politicised and feminist and girl-orientated that's still here . . . Also I'd been frustrated with the state of music, all these macho boy music festivals that were so corporate and mainstream at that point. Kids paying 50 bucks to get in to some stupid festival where girls get told to take their shirts off or they get grabbed or even raped . . . The purpose of Ladyfest was to be like "NO we need to take back our alternative culture, we need to all be responsible for being creators and participants in our communities and in our culture don't just let it happen to you, make it happen."<sup>101</sup>

In 2000, the first Ladyfest was held in Olympia, described as, "a non-profit, community-based event designed by and for women to showcase, celebrate and encourage the artistic, organisational and political work and talents of women". The idea of Ladyfest was a deliberate and conscious move away from the pitfalls associated with an identity-centred movement like riot grrrl, towards a more action-orientated form of feminist activism. As Tobi Vail explained:

Ladyfest was deliberately created . . . with strategy in mind. Reflecting on riot grrrl, which was so immersed in identity, we wanted to come up with something that was action based... it became clear that we should try to create something that could be reproduced by women in their own communities, hoping that we wouldn't be imposing a universal idea of what feminism is. We tried to develop a method that would foster localism. This was in response to what I saw as some of the failures of riot grrrl, and a means to prevent us from repeating those mistakes. Hoping that we wouldn't just be inspiring girls to copy a certain haircut or feel they weren't feminists if they didn't dress or talk like 'us', we were hoping to develop a decentralised means of organisation that would enable women to create an event that reflected their particular needs and desires.

The initial four-day event encompassed workshops, discussions, bands, art and film and attracted 2,000 attendees from around the world and managed to raise \$30,000 for local women's charities. In a move that strongly echoed riot grrrl, the term 'Ladyfest' sought to reclaim and politicise the culturally disparaged term 'lady' and positioned Ladyfest as an idea without copyright, which was encouraged to be taken away by other women and applied to their own communities.

The Ladyfest ethos took off, since 2000 over a hundred Ladyfests have been held across the world.<sup>102</sup> Ladyfest represents an important facet of contemporary action-orientated feminist cultural resistance, open to multiple interpretations and change. Allison Wolfe gives her take on the strengths of Ladyfest, "I love that people are taking it to their own communities and own towns and making it what makes sense to them in their scenes and their communities."<sup>103</sup> The feminist politicised possibilities and experiences that Ladyfest created sparked off a new era of feminist cultural activism.

The beginning of this decade really felt like the start of something. I guess with the whole riot grrrl thing, it just felt like, it was our turn now to do something new and continue on this tradition of feminism and punk rock and it just happened at the right time in our lives.<sup>104</sup>

Since the first Ladyfest in Glasgow in 2001, alongside Queerupton and Queer Mutiny

*Bikini Kill no 2*, produced by Bikini Kill members  
Tobi Vail, Kathi Wilcox and Kathleen Hanna.  
Image courtesy of Julia Downes.

#2

BIKINI  
KILL  
no  
2



GirlPower

events, a new feminist and queer politicised DIY punk underground community began re-emerging as collectives began networking and organising across Britain including Local Kid (Bristol), FAG club (Cardiff), Homocrime (London), Manifesta (Leeds), Female Trouble (Manchester); Lola and the Cartwheels (Sheffield), The Bakery (London), Kaffequeeria (Manchester), Magical Girl (Dublin). Bands like Party Weirdo, Drunk Granny, the Corey O's, the Battys, Valerie, Vile Vile Creatures, Lesbo Pig, Peepholes, Jean Genet and Hooker infuse punk sounds and performances with feminist and queer politics. Club nights and gigs seek to provide safe and friendly spaces for, as FAG club describes QUAGS (Queers Of All Genders and Sexualities), that is, people who feel marginalised or outside of the norm. On the fringes of commercial culture, these spaces embrace the legacy of cultural resistance created by women, feminists and queers. The feminist-orientated DIY punk underground heart beats on. As Tobi Vail concluded her EMP interview in 1999, "Bikini Kill started something, but it isn't finished yet."<sup>105</sup>



Flyer for the Free to Fight project, set up by La Bianca, Staci Cutler and Jody Biyela.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### 'LET ME HEAR YOU DEPOLITICISE MY RHYME'<sup>1</sup>: QUEER FEMINIST CULTURAL ACTIVISMS AND DISRUPTIONS OF CONVENTIONAL PROTEST

JULIA DOWNES

#### Introduction

In contemporary British society it has become increasingly difficult to locate an active feminist consciousness. We are told that feminism is dead, it has failed to address the outlooks and interests of contemporary young women, and in many cases it seems to have dropped off the public radar altogether. In his summary of the British women's movement, Paul Byrne asserts that in the contemporary British landscape 'the autonomous women's movement has largely disappeared' (1997: 127). Similarly, Ruth Lister draws attention to what she terms the 'lack today of a collective, big 'F' feminist movement', constructing contemporary feminists as isolated and deprived from collective support (2005: 457). This belief is not restricted to intellectual opinion as repeated assertions of the 'death of feminism' are a regular feature in the mass media (Hawkesworth, 2004). This has led to a surge of soul searching and anxiety amongst women's movement participants, often leading to the question 'what happened to the women's movement?' (Epstein, 2001; Staggenborg & Taylor, 2005). In this chapter, I wish to draw attention to the potentially problematic tenets upon which claims for an active feminist movement are made. I argue that 'bounded' conventional conceptions of what constitutes 'legitimate' activisms and feminisms are (re)produced within these

<sup>1</sup> Lyric from 'Deceptacon' by Le Tigre from their eponymous debut album released by Mr Lady Records, November 30th 1999.

accounts. In particular, reliance upon the 'contentious politics' approach within social movement studies (McAdam & Tilly, 2001; Tilly, 2004) tends to privilege social movement strategies that are public, national, and state-focused. The perpetuation of these conceptualisations of conventional protest tactics and targets silences the contemporary presence and legacy of 'un-bounded' unconventional activist tactics within feminism, which push for social change beyond currently visible locations.

Speaking from a position engaged with queer feminist cultural activism in the UK, this chapter offers a challenge to the existing conceptualisations of feminism, protest and activism circulating within feminist academia, to assert loudly the importance and presence of contemporary queer feminist activism. For instance, in the UK and US, feminist activists are engaging in cultural production strategies and grassroots organisation to expose and resist the cultural invalidation of women in art and film worlds (see, for instance, Guerilla Girls, Big Miss Moviola, Birds Eye View) and music culture (Riot Grrrl, Ladyfest, Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls). This chapter, which draws upon my ongoing postgraduate ethnographic fieldwork within the contemporary UK queer feminist cultural activist community, joins the call for a recognition of queer feminist protest (Roseneil, 2000). Queer feminist activism holds potential in producing new theorisations of protest, to incorporate challenges to multiple authorities through an engagement with a plethora of cultural, discursive and performative forms of resistance. I argue that research on contemporary feminist activism needs to broaden its definitions of activism and protest, to attend to the shifting targets and tactics of feminist activism. In addition, I want to re-situate contemporary feminist activism as an 'un-bound' dynamic praxis which responds to changes in social, cultural, political and technological climates (Staggenborg & Taylor, 2005).

This chapter also interjects in the various causes, conflicts and contexts in which claims for the death of a contemporary feminist movement are perpetuated. Within this contemporary western media-driven 'democratic' context, tactics of 'soft repression' are deployed to disarm feminist identification and dismiss the threat of feminist activism (Ferree, 2004). The issues feminism gives voice to run the risk of becoming incorporated, and some would say neutralised, in governmental committees, academic feminism, popular culture and organisations. This creates a situation wherein it is possible to talk about and gain empowerment from feminist issues, albeit in a depoliticised manner, often minimising explicit references to and involvement with feminist politics and activism altogether. This cultural shift is accompanied by a crisis within the

contemporary feminist milieu, within which the impact of post-structuralism, queer theory and post-modernism has fragmented the feminist movement. It has become increasingly difficult to identify a stable feminist subject or feminist activist agenda. This dilemma in feminist subjectivities has led to a critical reconstitution of feminism, often associated with the 'third wave', that questions what it means to be a feminist, what issues are feminist issues, and what feminist activism should look and sound like. In this contemporary location the boundaries of feminist activism have become critical sites for the continuous discipline and negotiation of feminisms. In particular, I interrogate the constructions of 'authentic' feminist subjectivities within 'generational' debates and tensions between so-called 'second wave' and 'third wave' feminisms, drawing upon my own (and others) experiences as a 'third wave' feminist cultural activist in the UK. In order to achieve a fuller recognition of feminist activism, the benefits of dialogue and 'radical openness' (Purvis, 2004) will be briefly explored. Generational divisions can be challenged through re-situating 'third wave' strategies within a historical feminist legacy. Therefore forms of social protests that engage decentralised targets of social and cultural experience to resist hegemonic genders and sexualities, often termed as 'third wave', can be reconceived as a continuation and defence of radical feminist possibilities in a contemporary UK context.

### Towards Theorising the Multiplicities of Feminist Activisms

Excellent research into 'first wave' feminism and the suffrage movement (Liddington, 2006) has been established, however, there has been relatively little attention to contemporary feminist activism within social movement studies and sociology (Bagguley, 2002). The dominant frameworks available to researchers interested in social movements like feminism tend to be based upon understandings of collective action as motivated by material interests, political representation and economic distribution (Williams, 2004). This 'contentious politics' perspective conceptualises social movements as a series of interactions between marginalised collectives who organise around shared interests and purposes to struggle for formal representation from those with political power, including elites and authorities (McAdam & Tilly, 2001). Therefore, the interactions considered representative of a *strong* social movement are public protest actions engineered to focus on political targets; marches, demonstrations, rallies, public meetings and conferences,

petitions, and strikes. These tactics are still an important part of the contemporary feminist movement. In the US, feminist organisations managed to mobilise over a million women in Washington DC for the March for Women's Rights in April 2004. Within the UK, feminist organisations have mobilised women to take part in annual "Reclaim the Night" marches as well as participating in "Feminist Fightback" and "Fem07" national feminist conferences. However, it is imperative to recognise how feminism is done in a multitude of ways. More sensitive analyses of contemporary feminist activism require researchers to broaden the forms, tactics and targets of feminist activism as components of a wide-scale dynamic feminist project.

The bias towards a public state-focused protest repertoire embedded within social movement theory depoliticises feminist activism which engages in cultural tactics and targets. Within social movements cultural tactics are often positioned as an ephemeral go-between strategy, to be engaged in within periods of abeyance (Bagguley, 2002; Taylor & Whittier, 1997) or as 'submerged networks' to hold movements together between collective action episodes (Melucci, 1989). Cultural activities are thought to produce personal satisfaction and empowerment for its participants and organisers and to support their political activities. However, cultural tactics aren't regarded as politically subversive in their own right. In fact, cultural engagement has been criticised for weakening and killing feminism, by diverting valuable time, resources and energy away from political targets (Echols, 1989). Suzanne Staggenborg neatly summarises this position: 'where the movement once sought radical political transformation, its radical wing has retreated into a "cultural feminism" that is concerned with building internal community and changing individuals rather than political and social institutions' (2001: 507). Such assertions are replicated in contemporary contexts; for instance, Natasha Walter argues that 'to believe that feminism's rightful place is in the cultural and personal arena [removes] feminism's teeth as a strong political movement' (1999: 9). Therefore, the perpetuation of conventional conceptions of what constitutes 'legitimate' activism can lead to the silencing of the legacy of unconventional feminist activist tactics.

Thankfully, the dominant frameworks of theorising social movements have been heavily criticised for excluding social movements that do not centre on public interactions with state powers (Ferree, 2004; Staggenborg, 2001; Staggenborg & Taylor, 2005). Sophisticated post-structural readings of power and conflict within society have challenged the model of power embedded within these approaches. Power is no

longer assumed to emanate from an identifiable dominant group, but is diffused throughout society in complex and subtle ways. As Michel Foucault argued: 'power is exercised from innumerable points. Power is employed and exercised through a netlike organisation [and] individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in a position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power. They are not only its inert or consenting targets; they are also elements of its articulation' (1988: 54-5). Therefore, if articulations of power are threaded throughout our individual and collective experiences, it follows that the tactics and targets of resistance and protest will need to engage with these interwoven contexts. Or to restate a well-known 'second wave' feminist slogan, the personal is political.

Accordingly, emerging perspectives within new social movement studies are broadening the boundaries and strategies of social movements to include cultural activism. This shift allows for discussion of social movements as motivated by change within 'cultural understandings, norms and identities rather than material interests and economic distribution' (Williams, 2004: 92). In these formulations, political praxis can extend to cultural targets, as 'collective efforts for social change occur within the realm of culture, identity and everyday life as well as in direct engagement with the state' (Taylor & Whittier, 1995: 166). Feminist scholars have already established the role culture plays in perpetuating social norms of genders and sexualities, as well as examining how these discourses and norms are (re)produced within everyday relational situations - for example, in exploring the deployment of normative femininities in women's magazines (McRobbie, 1978, 1997) and the everyday discipline of adolescent feminine (hetero)sexualities within schools (Lees, 1993). Therefore, the potential for progressive social change needs to be understood as part of our everyday cultural and social realms of experience. As Melanie Maddison argues: 'the cultural turn does affect "things" (dominant structures and women's lives) and how "things" (activisms against dominant structures and codes) are a part of culture' (2004: 22). Furthermore, a comprehensive feminist praxis needs to include a multiplicity of tactics including the cultural, the performative and the discursive. This opens up a conceptualisation of feminist protest which engages with cultural productions and representations in the formation and maintenance of a feminist praxis. In theorising what feminist activism may look and sound like today, feminist scholars, activists and participants need to 'recognize the ever more heterogeneous and unexpected fronts of organised protest and dissenting consciousness in today's world' (Fox & Starn, 1997: 10). This may take a radically different form to what some

established feminist scholars, cultural commentators and women's movement participants may currently expect.

Feminist activism needs to be acknowledged as a dynamic praxis which is constantly shifting, mutating and organising around issues and identities in relation to historically specific technological, cultural, social and political contexts. However this 'false feminist death syndrome' (see Pozner, 2003) also has other antecedents. The following focuses upon how contemporary queer feminist cultural activist visibility is minimised within wider society through tactics of 'soft repression' (Ferree, 2004). I wish to confront here, how the incorporation of feminism into institutions, the state and popular culture troubles feminist visibility in a contemporary context.

### **Feminism Incorporated: Hiding the Legacies of Feminist Cultural Activism**

Within the UK the massive public shift in consciousness that earlier 'waves' of feminism achieved led to the incorporation of feminist concerns within traditional vestiges of power. Women's equality commissions within local authorities were founded to create and deploy policies to promote gender equality throughout the UK (Byrne, 1997). For instance, predominantly within Labour constituencies, women's committees were established starting with the Greater London Council Women's Committee in 1982. Strategies were launched to try and rectify the gender inequalities in parliamentary representation and in 1997 120 women, 101 of whom were known as 'Blair's Babes', won seats as Members of Parliament in Labour's landmark victory. However, it is important to acknowledge that such initiatives and progress amongst political parties tend to reflect changes in public opinion, rather than adding any extra pressure for social change. For instance, Gillian Howie and Ashley Tauchert argue that 'modern social structures [...] manage to include women within the political order, in such a way that formal demands for equal treatment [can] be seen to be met, without producing the more substantial transformation of social structures' (Howie, 2004: 39). Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski (2001) carried out an analysis of the progress of 'Blair's babes' to find that British women MPs tended to avoid taking on controversial issues and legislative reforms. The mere entry and symbolic presence of more women in Westminster was not enough to instigate a radical revision of the predominant political culture. Similarly, Myra Marx Ferree argues that state responses to the needs voiced by social movements tend to occur late in the process of social

change, typically acting to co-opt them through the development of subsidies, policies and services (2004: 86). Following suit, feminists have critiqued the rise of this 'municipal feminism' (Howie, 2004: 42) highlighting the de-radicalisation that institutionalisation has effected upon feminism, limiting the potential for the kind of social transformation which a feminist agenda seeks. For some, the radical edge of feminist activism is undermined through constituencies and equality units who develop policies to improve the situations of women using neutral terminology, eschewing explicit references to feminism (Hewitt, 2004).

However, attention has been drawn to the enduring global systematic disadvantages faced by women in public and private spheres (Epstein, 2001; Lister, 2005). In the UK, despite feminist pressure for the development of legislation to combat inequalities, including the Sex Discrimination Act and Equal Opportunities Commission, inequalities remain at intolerable levels. For example, The Equalities Review (2007) recently reported that at the current rate of social change, it would take until 2085 to close the gender pay gap. This questions the potential that a state-centred approach to social change can achieve. One feminist foothold has been the development of academic feminism within British Universities. However, concerns have also been raised over the limits of academic feminism. Radical feminist agendas can be overturned through pressure to conform to pre-existing structures, norms and values of the university which include conforming to a hierarchical competitive career ladder and research funding priorities (Epstein, 2001; Howie, 2004). Therefore, if feminist radicalism is troubled by its incorporation into pre-existing cultures within institutions, could feminisms transgressive potential lie elsewhere? As Gavin Brown argued recently in his paper on queer autonomous spaces; 'many of the most vibrant forms of contemporary radicalism are beginning to move beyond purely oppositional politics and are attempting to reconstruct society around a different set of norms' (2006: 2). However, feminism has long invested in strategies that move beyond state-centred challenges, 'women's movements are, and have been for generations, the very epitome of movements focused on making change in (and experiencing resistance from) civil society' (Ferree, 2004: 87). I wish to highlight the long standing feminist legacies of autonomous cultural activism in the UK, often mistakenly assumed to encompass a specifically 'third wave' set of strategies.

There are many commonalities between 'third wave' and earlier 'waves' of feminist activist tactics, targets and strategies. 'Third wave' feminist tactics focus upon pressuring for social change within everyday

social, technological and cultural possibilities (see Garrison, 2000). For instance, within *Riot Grrrl* and *Queercore* movements, the creation of autonomous music subcultures has enabled consciousness of gender, class, sexuality and race issues amongst young women and girls to be raised. *Riot Grrrl* is commonly associated with the punk bands Bikini Kill, Bratmobile and Heavens to Betsy, along with a network of fanzines including *Girl Germs*, *Jigsaw*, *Riot Grrrl*, and *Bikini Kill* and a series of consciousness-raising meetings and events which emerged within the early 1990s US punk underground in Olympia Washington and Washington DC. Contemporary manifestations of *Riot Grrrl* include the organisation of *Ladyfests*, which have been held globally since its inception in Olympia Washington in 2000, and are described as 'non-profit, community-based events designed by and for women to showcase, celebrate and encourage the artistic, organisational and political work and talents of women' (Zobl, 2004: 446). *Ladyfests* are politicised spaces which encompass workshops, discussions, bands, art exhibitions and film screenings, raising money for local women's charities. *Ladyfests* have in turn inspired and revitalised the creation of an underground contemporary queer feminist community and network, with collectives emerging across the UK including Manifesta, Local Kid, Homocrime, F.A.G. Club, Female Trouble and Kaffequeeria<sup>2</sup>. These subcultures provide vital spaces for the (re)articulation of feminist resistance and queer politics within cultural productions, including music, fanzines, film and art, as well as producing safe pro-feminist pro-queer sites.

However, it is important to note that these tactics are not new. Feminism and the women's movement have a strong legacy of creating unconventional (non-state focused) protests and autonomous women-centred communities (Hogeland, 2001; Staggenborg & Taylor, 2005). Forms of decentralised feminist resistance have long included building alternative institutions like women's refuges, rape crisis centres and health groups (Taylor, 1996). This is especially relevant to understanding feminist activism in Britain. Unlike the US, with its National Organisation for Women (NOW), Britain lacked a national feminist organisation, leaving the women's movement to take on a less conventional character. The focus shifted to the setting up of autonomous groups, alternative publications (Spare Rib), organisations (refuges and rape crisis centres),

<sup>2</sup> Manifesta is based in Leeds [www.manifesta.co.uk](http://www.manifesta.co.uk), Local Kid is based in Bristol [www.localkid.co.uk](http://www.localkid.co.uk), Homocrime was based in London and active between 2003-2006 [www.homocrime.org](http://www.homocrime.org), F.A.G Club is based in Cardiff [www.fagclub.net](http://www.fagclub.net), Female Trouble and Kaffequeeria are both based in Manchester [www.kaffequeeria.org.uk](http://www.kaffequeeria.org.uk), [www.myspace.com/femaletroublemanchester](http://www.myspace.com/femaletroublemanchester)

health and self-help groups, with few nationally organised state-focused protests (Byrne, 1997). The best-known example of women's unconventional autonomous protest within the UK is the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp (Roseneil, 1995, 2000). As others have argued (Halberstam, 2006; Kearney, 1997) the roots of *Riot Grrrl*, *Queercore* and *Ladyfest*, which relate to 'third wave' feminism, need to be linked to the legacy of lesbian and queer cultural publics found in womyn's music communities, record labels, performers, events and festivals within the UK (Bayton, 1998) as well as the US (Peraino, 2006; Staggenborg, Eder, & Sudderth, 1995). These autonomous cultural activities allow women to politicise their personal situations and experiences, create a supportive network, and struggle for social change on both national and local scales. However, this legacy and contemporary presence of feminist and queer networks, communities and cultures is rarely acknowledged within wider society. Furthermore, this invisibility of contemporary queer feminist cultural activism is connected to subtle processes of ridicule, silence and discipline which diminish the threat of an active feminist movement, the processes of which I shall now discuss.

### 'Soft Repression': Ridiculing, Silencing and Disciplining Contemporary Queer Feminisms

As well as arguing for an expansion of protest forms beyond the resistance of institutions, social movement scholars have also argued against the concept of state-centred repression, in which a single authority can be held responsible for quashing the radical potential of a rebellion like feminism. Instead, Ferree (2004) argues for a broadening of conceptions of repression to incorporate what she terms 'soft repression'. This formulation focuses on the decentralised operations in which civil society acts to silence and eradicate oppositional ideas and identities. This operates on various levels, including the micro-level ridicule of non-conformist identities within everyday face-to-face interactions - for example, the policing of defiant genders and sexualities in the everyday use of the terms 'fag', 'slut' and 'queer' as insults. A Meso-level stigma addresses the multiple means by which civil society represses the formation of a positive collective identity, reducing the chances of a social movement mobilising. Feminist-identified commentators and those involved in the women's movement have attributed this reluctance to the rise of a feminist backlash culture, describing the current social, political and cultural context as 'post-feminist' (Epstein, 2001; Faludi, 1992; McRobbie, 2004). In this paradigm, post-feminism refers to a society, in

which equality between men and women has been achieved, thereby construing feminism as an outmoded and useless sentiment for the articulation of women's experiences in contemporary western contexts. The backlash thesis argues that the neo-conservative discursive deployment of anti-feminist myths and stories within society has led to the widely held assumption that feminist identification and struggle actually disadvantages women (Faludi, 1992). The impact of stigmatisation, backlash and construction of a post-feminist society reduces the likelihood that experiences of gender inequalities and feminist identities are voiced and provide a platform for mobilisation in contemporary society. This can be seen in the widespread reluctance of young women to identify as feminists and get involved in overt feminist activism (Aronson, 2003). Finally, macro-level silencing involves institutionalised media practices which silence and exclude voices from a public arena. The lack of, or condescending tone of, media coverage can defuse a social movement and as a result the production of independent feminist publications has been a long-standing tradition within feminism. Therefore, the invisibility of a contemporary British feminist movement can be understood to be perpetuated at various levels of civil society, to dissuade involvement in and identification with feminist activism. However, feminism as a social, cultural and political paradigm is not immune from the internal deployment of repressive tactics, the most damaging of which, for the emergence of a contemporary queer feminist consciousness, are manifested in 'generational' struggles over what constitutes an 'authentic' feminist identity, issue and form of resistance.

In contemporary feminist theorising, much has been made of generational conflicts and differences between 'second-wave', 'third-wave' and 'post' feminisms (Kinsler, 2004; Purvis, 2004; Shugart, Waggoner, & Hallstein O'Brien, 2001). As Jennifer Purvis (2004) argues, a series of 'straw feminisms' has been constructed which close down dialogue, acting to disrupt and limit the potential for a large-scale emancipatory feminist project. 'Third-wave' feminism has been inaccurately constructed and undermined as, (i) concerned with personal transformation and fulfilment of individualistic desires, instead of collective political action and organisation, (ii) operating outside of academia, thus lacking in an educated appreciation of feminist history and legacy, and (iii) unable to critique adequately the normalisation of pornography and sex industries, therefore representing a feminist 'free-for-all'. In contrast, the 'second-wave' is constructed as a monolithic, rigid movement which exclusively reflects the narrow interests of middle-class, educated, white, heterosexual women and is therefore guilty of ignoring

differences between women which encompass age, race, class, ethnicity, sexualities, religion, and ability, as well as of excluding the input of transgendered, male and queer identified individuals. 'Second-wave' feminism has also been held responsible for the perpetuation of negative stereotypes of feminism and subsequent failure to attract a new generation of feminists (Byrne 1997).

The effects of such cross-generational divides has led to new generations of feminists feeling silenced and marginalised (Thompson, 2000; Withers, 2007) and a plethora of texts identifying as 'third-wave' have taken a distinctly defensive tone, determined to define a new feminism that is distinct from previous feminisms (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Findlen, 1995; Heywood & Drake, 1997; Walker, 1995). In attempting to achieve a coherent feminist consciousness in a social and cultural context hostile to claims for a feminist identity and activist strategies, internal conflicts which cast aside 'new' challenging ideas and activist strategies for progressive change can only add to the reluctance for feminist identification and struggle. This situation is amplified when power differentials between more established 'second-wave' and the often new 'third-wave' feminists are taken into account. The means through which feminism is given a voice in parts of society, such as -academia, publishers and organisations, tend to rest in the hands of established feminists who can resist new feminist ideas that contradict or challenge their agenda. Narratives from queer feminist cultural activists' and oral history accounts tend to detail an arduous struggle and negotiation with a perceived feminist doctrine. Charlotte Cooper, co-organiser of the *Homocrime* queer music event collective and queer zine writer, details her struggle to publish her book through a reputable feminist publisher;

I had a really rough ride with feminism. I published this book called *Fat and Proud* by the Women's Press, I had great feminist credentials but they censored my book in quite a heavy way. They didn't want me to say that I was queer for example, you had to be either lesbian or bisexual but not queer and I couldn't mention *Fat Girl* because they have images of pornography in their fanzine. I couldn't mention transgendered people because the Women's Press had taken a stance at that point against transgendered people, so I had real bad struggles with them getting my book published. So that made me think "oh do I really identify with these feminist people?" It was a very difficult time and I sort of look upon those times, well I wouldn't say fondly but, it kind of almost nostalgically, but at the same time it was a very difficult time for me and my identity as a young queer person.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Oral History with Charlotte Cooper September 2006

At Ladyfest Leeds 2007, the inclusion of a pro-porn perspective within a workshop debating feminism, censorship and pornography amongst over a hundred events, led to a plethora of angry responses from the feminist organisation "Object" and anti-porn advocates. As aforementioned, *Ladyfests* are grassroot not-for-profit feminist events held globally to showcase and celebrate women's art, music and culture as well as hold discussions and workshops to encourage open debate and skill-sharing (see Zobl 2004). *Ladyfest Leeds* was publicly branded a Pornfest, falsely described as funded by pole-dancing benefit events and an inaccurate press release was commissioned encouraging the boycott of *Ladyfests*<sup>4</sup>.

Jennifer Purvis (2004) warns against the perpetuation of a generational metaphor within 'second-wave' and 'third-wave' feminisms. Purvis notes that wave and generational metaphors are embedded within heteronormative familial narratives and masculinist conceptions of social change. The very last thing feminism should expect is 'dutiful daughters' (Purvis, 2004: 108) to maintain a predetermined feminist doctrine out of respect for a maternal legacy. Instead, feminism needs to be reconceived as 'a process of becoming, multiplying, negotiating change and mediating difference that is open to debate and to new methods and strategies, where expressions of difference do not stagnate in disagreement and unity' (Purvis 2004: 119). Feminisms need to remain relevant and responsive to the shifting lives, situations and experiences of those who seek to resist, rework and disrupt hegemonic norms, identities and cultural representations of genders and sexualities. This could include a wide-scale coalition of a multiplicity of alliances and connections between those who self-identify as feminist, transgendered, male, female, bi-sexual, a grrrl, AIDS activist, anti-racist activist, queer, transsexual, lesbian, squatter, gay, anti-capitalist, a women's movement participant, anti-globalisation activist and many more. The final section of this chapter elaborates on the concept of queer feminism and debates its possibilities for future investigations of contemporary feminist cultural activism in the UK.

## Queer Feminism: Contemporary UK Feminist Cultural Activism

Contemporary feminist cultural activism has to contend with and negotiate a complex terrain typical of late modern capitalism. Through engaging with cultural tactics radical groups have seen their visions, identities and ideas co-opted and reproduced in ways amenable to a hegemonic consumer-centred youth market. For instance, Marcos Bequer and Jose Gatti (1997) have highlighted the co-optation of gay voguing in Madonna's 1990 hit single 'Vogue' and Kristin Schilt (2003b) has questioned the dilution of riot grrrl philosophy in the mass marketing of more acceptable, read depoliticised, femininities in singer-songwriters like Alanis Morissette and Fiona Apple, and pop groups like the Spice Girls. This unequal relationship between 'dominant cultural scavengers' and subcultural producers (see Halberstam, 2006: 7), signifies a need for feminist cultural activism to break with capitalist logic, media industries, academia and other forms of external validation which tend to threaten and co-opt their radical agenda and aesthetic for commercial gains<sup>5</sup>. Queer feminist cultural activists aim to resist the incorporation of queer and feminist identities and ideas in mainstream society. Instead, a queer feminist agenda celebrates and defends the multiplicities and diversities of counter-hegemonic genders and sexualities, to expand the range of meanings and cultural locations of genders and sexualities. As Ann Cvetkovich (2003) argues, lesbian public cultures provide crucial places and creative tactics for seizing control over, and resisting the pathologisation of, traumatic experiences threaded through everyday experience. Queer feminist cultural activism can be understood as a praxis which invests in the creation of cultural spaces, communities and representations in order to survive wider societal denigration of a range of deviant identities and experiences. Queer feminist spaces and representations can allow participants to transgress the dominant ways of being, resisting and experiencing genders and sexualities. In her analysis of Greenham Common, Sasha Roseneil elaborates on the concept of a queer feminism as a cultural politics:

Much less acknowledged and documented than feminism's straighter tendencies, these are feminisms anarchic, unruly elements, which seek not to enter the corridors of power but to relocate power. They ridicule and

<sup>4</sup> "Object"'s press release can be accessed on: [http://www.object.org.uk/downloads/LadyFest\\_Porn\\_PressRelease.doc](http://www.object.org.uk/downloads/LadyFest_Porn_PressRelease.doc). For details on the interaction and response from Ladyfest Leeds, see the Statement from Ladyfest Leeds concerning the 'Feminism, Censorship and Pornography' Workshop accessible from <http://www.ladyfestleeds.co.uk/?q=view/news>

<sup>5</sup> I do not mean here to discredit or undermine the many academics who frequently cross the boundaries between activism and academia, but wish to point out the complexities of the power dynamics inherent within these positions.

laugh at patriarchal, military and state powers and those who wield them in order to undermine and disarm them. Feminisms queer tendencies are loud and rude. They embrace emotion, passion and erotics as the wellspring of their politics and revel in spontaneity and disorderliness. In contrast to straighter feminism, they are less concerned with achieving rights for women but more concerned with the *cultural politics of opening up and reconfiguring what it means to be a woman, in expanding the possibilities of different ways of being in the world beyond modes which are currently available*. They queer gender, un-structuring, de-patterning and disorganising it. (2000: 4, my emphasis)

The practices and locations of contemporary UK queer feminist resistance can be located in a variety of contemporary, often ephemeral, engagements with do-it-yourself (DIY) culture (see , 2005). The creation of queer autonomous spaces like *Queeruption* and *Queer Mutiny* stem from a reaction against the commercialisation of gay pride events. Relying on DIY not-for-profit economics and non-hierarchical collective organisation models, they enable a cultural space for the celebration of counter-hegemonic genders and sexualities. To create new ways of being, experiencing and thinking about genders and sexualities that disrupt heteronormativity and homonormativity, as well as patriarchy and capitalism. Queer feminist identified music event collectives across the UK including the recently dissipated *Homocrime* as well as the currently active *Manifesta*, *Female Trouble*, *Local Kid* and *F.A.G. Club* create DIY autonomous events on the fringes of commercial culture, to provide regular localised communities, (inter)national networks, and safe spaces to celebrate music, art and culture created by women, feminists and queers. Club nights like *Club Motherfucker* (London), *Unskinny Bop* (London), *Club Wotever* (London), *Suck My Left One* (Leeds), *Killing Fantasy* (Manchester) provide platforms for feminist and queer music to be explored.

Internationally held feminist cultural events like *Ladyfest* allow a group of volunteers to work together to create a festival over a period of 3 to 5 days which encompasses workshops, discussions, and opportunities to showcase marginalised art, music, film and culture (see Zobl, 2004). Feminists and queers also produce their own cultural representations and forms of media. For instance Margaritte Knezek and Elliat Graney-Saucke are the creators of *Travel Queeries*, an international film project that documents queer urban subcultural producers and identities. Similarly, the independent fanzine *Colouring Outside the Lines*, produced by Melanie Maddison profiles a wide range of feminist and queer identified visual artists. Feminist and queer music production and performance offer an additional medium for the proliferation of queer feminist consciousness,

resistance and identification. UK bands and performers such as Huggy Bear, Jean Genet, Drunk Granny, and Husbands convey(ed) a cultural politics that loudly disrupts conventional norms of genders and sexualities. Fanzines, self-published magazines, like *Reassess Your Weapons*, *Ricochet Ricochet* and *Chic Alors*, e-zines like *The F-Word* and blogs are valid sites for feminist resistance, experiences and alternative theorisations (Bell, 2002; Schilt, 2003a). Networks of not for profit distribution sites, or distros, operate in the UK to circulate feminist and queer fanzines, music, and crafts in an alternative economy (see Piano, 2003).

A crucial dimension of queer feminist cultural activism is the emphasis placed upon active participation, collaboration and direct experience in the creation of spaces and representations, and subsequent disruption of consumer-centred norms of alternative cultures. Recognising the complexities of contemporary queer feminist modes of resistance prevents perpetuating inaccurate representations of a depoliticised generation. Individuals and collectives are actively engaging with their situations to produce politicised forms of radical queer feminist protest that are conscious of the technological, cultural and social peculiarities of a late modern capitalist media-driven era.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the tenets upon which claims for an active and legitimate feminist movement have been made in recent years. In alliance with shifts in social movement studies, a move away from state-centred public protest strategies has been advocated to acknowledge cultural and performative forms of resistance that target multiple authorities inherent in the textures of everyday life. I have sought to reclaim the agency, visibility and legacy of queer feminist cultural activists by challenging the 'wave' and 'generation' metaphors used to divide feminists from each other. 'Third wave' queer feminist targets and tactics of resistance can be connected to a rich legacy and continuum of unconventional feminist activisms. Contemporary queer feminist cultural activisms encounter complex negotiations within wider social contexts which threaten to co-opt radical agendas within institutions, political parties, popular culture and academia. The analysis of queer feminist cultural activism has the potential to challenge conventional knowledge and concepts in social movement studies, feminist theory and beyond. Following Judith Halberstam (2005) this chapter has sought to queer urban subcultures and to disrupt many facets of subcultural theory that privileged a young, masculine, white and heterosexual focus. The diversities of contemporary

queer feminist, cultural activism offer crucial opportunities for new exciting theorisations and intersections of feminism, activism and politics.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my participants for being welcoming and engaging in many inspirational conversations across the UK. As well as those closer to home in Manifesta and Ladyfest Leeds who have been particularly supportive, especially Amy Brachi and Melanie Maddison. I would also like to thank the ESRC as my research would not be possible without their financial support. Finally, I would like to thank my supervisors Brendan Gough and Rachel Cowgill whose guidance and encouragement has been invaluable.

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

### TRANSGRESSIVE BODIES: TEXTUAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE NEW INDIAN WOMAN

SHARI DAYA

This chapter explores the discursively constructed subject position of the new Indian woman. In the rapidly changing social context of urban, middle-class India, women's roles, behaviour and aspirations have changed dramatically over the last two decades. These changes are most strikingly crystallized around the body, with styles of hair and clothing, women's occupation of public and professional spaces, and particularly manifestations of sexuality, becoming central to the identification of Indian women as modern. Public discourse in its multiple forms both produces and reflects the characteristics of the embodied new Indian woman. Through two culturally prominent sources of such discourse, the newsweekly magazine *India Today* and contemporary English-language novels by Indian women, I examine the public construction of the new Indian woman insofar as "she" is determined by her transgressive sexuality. I argue that the representations of the new woman's transgressive sexuality in these discourses work to redefine certain taken-for-granted and academically dominant conceptual and social boundaries around modernity. In this way the discursively constructed new Indian woman opens up new ways of thinking about what it means to be modern in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is by now a truism to say that India has changed dramatically in recent years. Heralded as an emerging economic superpower for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the country's middle classes, however measured, have burgeoned in the last decade or two and its urban landscapes have been altered accordingly, filled with air-conditioned shopping malls, coffee shops, IT complexes, call-centres and increased traffic. While recognising that it is by no means representative of the nation as a whole, this image provides

## The Expansion of Punk Rock: Riot grrrl challenges to gender power relations in British indie music subcultures

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### Abstract

Punk rock opened up possibilities for women's subcultural resistance to hegemonic gender and sexual structures. This article examines the legacy of punk women before engaging in a discussion of how the 1990s riot grrrl movement attempted to transform punk and produce an explicit punk-feminist subculture. In particular, attention is paid to the strategies employed within gig spaces throughout the 1993 Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill UK tour. Performers and audiences attempted to disrupt the spatial and sonic norms of the conventional indie gig in order to incite feminist community and instigate social change.

### Introduction

In Britain, punk culture introduced the DIY (do it yourself) ethic to a generation of young people who seized the impetus to create subversive art, music, and culture. In particular, women used this moment to open up (sub)cultural space for the transgression of gender and sexual hegemony. However, the political importance of women's contribution to punk culture has been undermined in retrospective accounts of British punk that focus on male performers and entrepreneurs (Myers 2004; Savage 2002, Marcus 2001; Lydon et al 2003; Adams 2008). In the 1990s riot grrrl responded to the cultural and political marginalisation of young women and girls. An American import, riot grrrl used punk sounds, sights, and productions to challenge and resist the gender power relations of music subcultures. In this sense riot grrrl has been described as 'an expansion of punk rock'<sup>1</sup> in its explicit intention to disrupt gender power relations and encourage the politicised participation of girls and young women in independent punk music culture. Riot grrrl created a series of sonic moments to

create punk-feminist community and provoke young women and girls' subcultural resistance and exploration of radical political identities. In this article I draw on my doctoral research on British riot grrrl which encompassed the analysis of 17 oral histories and 5 interviews with riot grrrl participants alongside 18 secondary interviews, 5 taped interviews, 3 films, personal involvement in 3 panel discussions and an extensive archive of fanzines, records and media articles<sup>2</sup>. In particular this article explores the strategies employed in the live music gigs of riot grrrl associated bands Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill, to discuss how these young women attempted to disrupt the spatial and sonic norms of the indie gig to incite feminist community and provoke change in their subcultural situations. However, to set the scene a contextual understanding of British riot grrrl requires an examination of the legacy of punk women.

### 1. "Women just got squeezed out": The (re)production of the gender order of punk rock

Punk rock and feminism have both opened up cultural space for the proliferation of women's (sub)cultural resistance. Empowered by DIY punk ethics in 1976, women took up punk music-making across Britain in bands like Siouxsie and the Banshees, Delta 5, the Catholic Girls, the Mo-Dettes, Ludus, the Raincoats, Crass, Rip Rig and Panic, X-Ray Spex, the Adverts, the Bodysnatchers, the Au Pairs and the Slits. Outside of music-making, women were crucial to other areas of punk culture. For instance, Lucy Toothpaste self-published the feminist *Jolt* fanzine and co-organised Rock Against Racism and Rock Against Sexism; Ludus' vocalist Linder Sterling produced punk feminist visual art – including the cover for the Buzzcocks single 'Orgasm Addict' – in her fanzine *Secret Public* co-authored with Jon Savage. Alongside Cath Carroll, Liz Naylor co-authored *City Fun* fanzine and managed Ludus, whilst fashion guru Vivienne Westwood was responsible for creating the notorious visual styles of British punk, and Westwood's model Jordan played the lead role in Derek Jarman's (1977) influential punk film *Jubilee* and managed Adam and the Ants.

For Karen O'Brien, punk subcultures 'gave women permission to explore gender boundaries, to investigate their own power, anger, aggression – even nastiness' (1995, p. 65), whilst Lucy O'Brien flags up an innovative performance by Ludus at the Hacienda in Manchester to demonstrate women's

feminist punk resistance. Infuriated by the implicit sexism of popular culture – in particular the skirt-ripping ritual in Bucks Fizz's winning performance at the 1981 Eurovision Song Contest alongside the uncritical use of soft pornography in the Hacienda – Linder Sterling incorporated meat wrapped in pornography, entrails, and a large dildo into her final performance with Ludus. Sterling dressed in meat and entrails and mimicked the Bucks Fizz manoeuvre, ripping off her skirt to reveal a huge black dildo, an act that unsettled even the most radical thinkers in the punk audience. Punk women were visibly threatening to wider society, as Liz Naylor recalled: 'You were seen as deviant. There was a lot of anger and self-mutilation. In a symbolic sense, women were cutting and destroying the established image of femininity, aggressively tearing it down' (cited in O'Brien 1999, p. 193). Therefore, women were critical to the formation of visual, sonic, organisational and stylistic aspects of punk and frequently used punk culture to construct subversive critiques of middle-class heterosexual femininities and challenge sexism in British popular culture.

However, under the surface, critics have contested the character of gender equality in punk culture (Roman 1988; O'Brien 1999; Leblanc 1999; Reddington 2007). The fragmentation of British punk in the late 1970s saw punk rock separate into factions across class lines. For instance, a middle-class art school milieu gave rise to a post-punk genre, whilst attempts to reclaim punk for working class identities were manifested in oi punk (Laing 1985). This separation was accompanied by a re-gendering of punk, the liberal political slant in post punk allowed women to assert prominent productive positions, however, oi punk offered little cultural space for women and struggled with the threat of co-optation by white supremacist national parties. In the 1980s crust and anarcho punk, a genre pioneered by Crass who included influential vocalists Eve Libertine and Joy De Vivre, reproduced a masculinist music culture as feminist content and women's participation became displaced by nihilistic and bleak sonic assaults that focussed on issues of anti-capitalism, animal rights, and nuclear disarmament (see Glasper 2006). Simultaneously, the inception of hardcore punk in southern California and Washington D.C., constructed a masculinist music community whose violent slam dance practices, sonic machismo, straightedge philosophy and misogynistic lyrics marginalised women's participation. As Jennifer Miro of The Nuns recalled, 'it became this whole

macho anti-women thing. Then women didn't go to see punk bands because they were afraid of getting killed. I didn't even go because it was so violent and so macho that it was repulsive. Women just got squeezed out' (cited in Coulombe 1999 p. 256).

Punk music and culture are not essentially male but are socially (re)produced as masculine within a set of contested gendered spaces, discourses, and practices. Punk corporeal practices and sounds became vital sites for the construction, exploration, and consolidation of heterosexual masculinities. For instance, although the New York Dolls' gender experimentation and cross-dressing practices did not manage to trouble their heterosexual and masculine privilege (Bock 2008, p. 41), women were not afforded the same degree of freedom for experimentation with gender and sexuality. Women's gender and sexual transgressions were effectively policed by the fear of, and actual incidents of, violence and sexual assault (see Reddington 2007, p. 59-65). Despite women's attraction to punk as a counter-cultural site for the construction of resistant femininities, dominant ideas of hetero-femininity and middle-class respectability were also (re)produced in punk subcultures, as Lucy O'Brien argued, 'punk was not an easy place to be if you were a woman. Though much has been made since of its liberatory force, men were unreconstructed when it came to girlfriends, expecting women to be seen and not heard' (2002, p. 136). The gendered double standard of sexual activity was also found to operate in the punk communities studied by Lauraine Leblanc (1999); punk girls had to negotiate their sexual activity in relation to being labelled a "slag" or a "drag", whereas, the sexual exploits of punk men did not interfere with their punk status.

Women had to carefully negotiate their identity within the limited positions available to them in punk subcultures: the tomboy or the sex object (Gottlieb & Wald 1994). In her comprehensive study of punk, femininity and sexuality, Leblanc (1999) argued that punk women constructed their identities by drawing upon the available discourses of punk masculinity and conventional femininity. To gain full participatory rights, punk women were required to embody a role as 'one of the boys' through the adoption of masculine behaviour, dress, and rejection of women as peers. Women were able to carve out a powerful role within punk, albeit on the condition that women collude with the

symbolic repression of the feminine deemed necessary for the constitution of punk subcultures.

However, these identifications carried high costs. the rejection of conventional femininity effectively alienated women from each other and perpetuated a patriarchal devaluation of the feminine. The other option, the sex object, saw women access power through appeal to masculine heterosexual desire.

Women could claim a powerful position within punk subcultures through enactments of heterosexual femininity: as a girlfriend, wife, fan or groupie (des Barres 2002). Despite the provocative parodies of female sexuality enacted through women punk's hypersexual visual styles – for instance in Siouxsie Sioux's use of leather, rubber bondage gear and peek-a-boo bras – it was often unclear whether these satirical displays could challenge the dominant cultural view that equated women as sex objects.

Punk women's embodied critiques could be accommodated by wider society, as Dave Laing commented, 'an attempt to parody "sexiness" may simply miss its mark and be read by the omnivorous male gaze as the "real thing"' (1985, p. 94).

To summarise, despite women's contributions and legacy in punk culture, the body of research discussed above has highlighted how punk women's resistance was constrained by hegemonic gender relations that leaked into punk subcultures. The continued marginalisation of women from dominant narratives of punk that centre on male performers and entrepreneurs reinforces the inferior status of women in punk. Being a woman and being a punk seem to constitute two mutually exclusive identities; a sentiment famously epitomised by Mark Perry, the editor of *Sniffin'* *Glue* fanzine, 'punks are not girls, if it comes to the crunch we'll have no option but to fight back' (cited in Reynolds & Press 1995, p. 323). Punk, as a facet of popular culture, is a site in which dominant gendered and sexual categories are socially constructed, (re)produced, and circulated. Punk introduced vital strategies for resisting, reordering and reworking these dominant codes of gender and sexuality. It was not until the inception of riot grrrl in the 1990s, however, that the implicit feminist potential of women's punk subcultural resistance could be made explicit, as Liz Naylor argued:

What I identified with Bikini Kill, that I really loved, was what I always wanted punk to be [ ... ] This idea of women playing punk music that was what connected me [to riot grrrl]. It wasn't feminist music in a nice polite acoustic sense, I really liked its sense of punk [ ... ] They were very explicit in encouraging other bands and other girl musicians.

It wasn't just a case of "we're in this cool band and that's it"; it seemed to go way beyond that into a politics. It was a politics that to me never came to fruition in punk; it was always a possibility that never quite happened<sup>3</sup>.

In the early 1990s, riot grrrl offered a direct critique of the gender power relations within punk subcultures. Riot grrrl opened up possibilities for women to access and assert power without resorting to a simplistic repression of the feminine and valorisation of the masculine. Employing punk sounds, spaces, and strategies, riot grrrl articulated a punk-feminist subculture that sought to rehabilitate feminine signifiers, encourage young women's cultural productivity, and facilitate connection between young women and girls involved in alternative cultures.

## 2. *Riot grrrl*

### (i) *"Revolution Girl Style Now": US Roots of Riot Grrrl*

Many studies have situated the riot grrrl movement as a brief era in the 1990s in which a collective of young white women, involved in the punk subcultures of Olympia, Washington and Washington D.C., constructed a punk-feminist subculture comprised of a handful of amateur punk bands, fanzines and discussion groups (see Gottlieb & Wald 1994; Home 1995; Kaltefleiter 1995; Cateforis & Humphreys 1997; Kearney 1997, 1998, 2006; Rosenberg & Garofalo 1998; Starr 1999; Coulombe 1999; Turner 2001; Andersen & Jenkins 2001; Schilt 2004, 2005; Wilson 2004; Belzer 2004; Gamboa 2000; Leonard 2007; Downes 2007; Zobl & Schilt 2008; Bock 2008). Whilst located in Washington D.C. in the summer of 1991, Bratmobile members, Allison Wolfe and Molly Neuman, started a fanzine appropriating the phrase 'girl riot' from a letter written by Jen Smith, along with the term '*grrrl*' from the expression 'angry grrrl zines' coined by Tobi Vail, and created the term 'riot grrrl' (Downes 2007). Previously, whilst based in Olympia, Vail and Kathleen Hanna had invented the slogan 'Revolution Girl Style Now' to refer to their vision of a punk-feminist subculture, which featured heavily in their music-making practices in Bikini Kill and fanzines. Other friends and members of Bikini Kill joined in the weekly DC-based riot grrrl fanzine-production sessions until eventually the idea of weekly women-only meetings developed. These meetings became crucial in facilitating young women's experience, disclosure and discussion of sexual and physical abuse, sexual

orientation, homophobia, racism, classism, capitalism and sexism (see Klein 1997). The discussions spilled over into DIY (sub)cultural activism: young women and girls intervened in their surrounding subcultures to create politicised girl-centric conventions, music, fanzines, art, and gigs. In riot grrrl attempts were made to confront conventional standards of hetero-femininity, including challenges to beauty standards, competition for male approval, whiteness, heteronormativity, sexual double standards, and consumerism<sup>4</sup>.

Riot grrrl disrupted the conventional ordering of gender difference in punk subcultures: to provoke, politicise, and resist hetero-feminine girlhood. Riot grrrl refused to denigrate the feminine and instead created a visual and sonic spectrum of politicised girl signifiers within a subcultural punk context. For instance, in her oral history Allison Wolfe recalled how riot grrrl aimed to create a space for feminism within punk rock and engage in a radical reclamation of conventional feminine signifiers from adult-defined feminist institutions:

For me what riot grrrl meant was a way of making punk rock more feminist, because really it was like this boys club for the most part. But [riot grrrl was] also a way of making academic feminism more punk rock or more DIY [...] a lot of it with riot grrrl too was a reclamation of taboo imagery or things that were considered not feminist, but trying to reclaim those and say well actually girly can be feminist, lipstick and make-up people can be feminists, we can wear skirts and still be feminists. We can be cutesy and girly and whatever we want but we still should have rights and we still should be taken seriously<sup>5</sup>.

The riot grrrl network proved to be a catalyst, sparking the subcultural production of punk-feminist fanzines, music, meetings and events across North America and Europe. The construction of riot grrrl culture in Britain facilitated young women and girls' collective interventions in music subcultures, to claim cultural autonomy and contest gender power relations.

(ii) *"The Arrival of a New Renegade Girl Boy Hyper Nation"<sup>6</sup>: British Riot Grrrl*

In Britain, riot grrrl tended to draw more influence and inspiration from indie-pop music culture associated with the independent labels Postcard Recordings, The Subway Organization, K Records and Sarah Records. Bands – such as The Pastels, The Shop Assistants and Talulah Gosh – typically infused optimistic 1960s pop elements into a fun colourful and childish aesthetic. Indie-pop

audiences and bands tended to be more gender-balanced in relation to crust and anarcho punk music culture. Low key knowledge of riot grrrl circulated within these indie-pop communities and inspired young men and women to disrupt the everyday constitution of gender and sexuality in their immediate subcultural contexts<sup>7</sup>. Riot grrrl radicalised and informed existing indie-pop (sub)cultural practices, as Amelia Fletcher, an British indie-pop protagonist, described in her narrative:

[Riot grrrl] related to what we were doing already and just spoke to us because it did make you want to change your behaviour. It gave you ideas for what you could be doing, ways of communicating and having all these forums. There were lots of things that came out of it that weren't anything we'd never thought of doing, setting up your own gigs we'd done but we hadn't done all-girl gigs, doing fanzines we had kind of done but it [was] different subject matter<sup>8</sup>.

Riot grrrl influenced the music-making practices of indie-pop bands, introducing punk aesthetics and explicit feminist content to indie-pop music culture. For instance although Huggy Bear had already formed prior to the introduction of riot grrrl, the influence of Bikini Kill and Nation of Ulysses' fanzines and music radically changed the bands direction from indie-pop to punk<sup>9</sup>. As Everett True, then assistant editor of *Melody Maker* and housemate of Jon Slade and Jo Johnson, recalled:

Jon and Jo had moved in with me in Brighton, start of 92 – me and Jo were having all-night conversations about feminist language and doctrine and behaviour. Before Huggy Bear discovered Bikini Kill I think they were out-and-out cutie. It would have made sense they were, knowing my friends' musical preferences. Encountering Tobi, Kathi and Kathleen's writing and songs politicized them<sup>10</sup>.

Punk aesthetics became critical to the formation of British riot grrrl music culture; punk opened up the possibilities for girls and young women to produce forceful and assertive sonic displays, perform songs about personal and taboo subjects in public space, and produce a critical way of thinking about music's role in wider networks of power. Crucially, the formation of riot grrrl culture enabled the realisation of a sonic community; riot grrrl produced a series of interactive moments and spaces for the realisation of feminist, radical, and queer actions amongst young people in Britain.

(iii) *Riot grrrl music and the construction of feminist punk community*

In her article, 'Performing the (Sound)world', Susan J. Smith asserts that music is 'a performance of power (enacted by music-makers and listeners) that is creative: that brings spaces, peoples, places "into form"' (2000, p. 618). Similarly Martin Stokes argues that music 'evokes and organises collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity' (1994, p. 3). In Britain, the regular performance of riot grrrl music facilitated the co-creation of DIY punk-feminist community. Music performances, or gigs, featuring key riot grrrl identified bands like Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill, operated as catalysts to engage the audience, forge community and agitate social change. Producers of riot grrrl music were aware of this distinctive power music holds in producing community and social change, as Bikini Kill singer Kathleen Hanna explained:

I like that music engages people's bodies and can be simultaneously intellectually and physically stimulating. I also like that concerts create an immediate sense of community. I've found that the only way change occurs is if we taste it for moments and then seek to make it a part of our every day. I guess that's one reason I like working in the performing arts, to be able to create community instantly while exploring the power of the moment to go from horrible to glorious and back again depending on the performance, locale and will of the crowd<sup>11</sup>.

These sonic qualities of riot grrrl have not been adequately acknowledged by the academy. Sociology, women's studies, and cultural studies have tended to focus on the textual elements of riot grrrl, often concentrating on fanzines, media articles, and written interviews (Schilt 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2005; Bell 2002; Belzer 2004; Collins 1999; Comstock 2001; Driscoll 1999; Starr 1999; Gamboa 2000; Home 1995; Kearney 2006; Leonard 1998, 2007; Piano 2002, 2003; Triggs 1998, 2004; White 2000). Analyses of the sounds and spaces of riot grrrl subculture remain absent. Tia DeNora has acknowledged an absence of sound in the sociology of music: 'sociologists have mostly avoided analysis of musical works (whether as scores or performances)' (2004, p. 213). Musicology, the discipline that places the perception of musical sounds at its disciplinary centre, has at best been silent, and at its worst highly judgmental of riot grrrl sounds; 'the mass of poor oppressed people would surely not want to buy any Riot Grrrl singles, and for one very blunt reason. They sound *awful*' (Griffiths 1999, p. 411). Even popular music studies, which is defined as more open to the serious consideration of subcultural musics and social issues, has denied the importance of sound in riot grrrl:

What about the music?, you might well ask. Despite their 'pro-girl' ethos, Riot Grrrl hasn't questioned the gender-orientation of music qua music, and there's been only lipservice acknowledgement of bands like the Raincoats or Throwing Muses who've attempted to interrogate the phallogocentric forms of rock itself [...] most Riot Grrrl bands seem to be engaged in a reinvention of the wheel: they sound like very traditional hardcore or late 70's punk bands. They may criticise tomboy rockers, but musically they sound like tomboys, throwing straightforward punky tantrums [...] this music sounds simplistic and retrograde [...] It's a kind of musical anorexia, a deliberate arresting of development in order to preserve innocence and stave off the professionalism that's associated with the corrupt music biz [...] the spirit is wild but the musical flesh is puny (Reynolds & Press 1995, p. 327-9)

This dismissal of riot grrrl music as derivative of a more authentic punk past perpetuates an understanding of punk as masculine and reproduces the inferior status of women in punk. Women's bands, the Raincoats and Throwing Muses, are constructed as exceptional, aligned with rock and set up in competition with riot grrrl. Furthermore, the metaphors of anorexia used to describe the lo-fi production and aesthetic of riot grrrl music produces a distinctly gendered picture. Whilst lo-fi simplicity and DIY production has been applauded as authentic in music created by men (see Azerrad 2001), here women's use of DIY punk aesthetics are considered derivative, inadequate, and immature. These interpretations consolidate gendered discourses in music; women are considered to lack the cognitive and physical capacities for innovative music-making and, therefore, are forced to imitate masculine ancestors as 'tom boys'. The results of such imitation are judged to be inadequate: not worthy enough to be considered music.

Riot grrrl posits important questions concerning the social construction of the boundaries that constitute music. What, and more importantly who, defines the place of music? If music can be understood to occupy a position 'between the myth of silence and the threat of noise' (Smith 2000, p. 616), then music inhabits an unstable and contested position, dependent on contingent practices that (re)define which sounds are valued as music and which sounds are othered as noise. Instead of understanding value as inherent to the essential quality of particular sounds, critical musicologists have argued for the recognition of the social and cultural contingency of musical value (Leppert & McClary 1987; McClary 1991; Clayton et al 2003; Scott 2000). Feminist musicologists have explored how the sounds and sound cultures associated with other bodies (feminine, queer and non-white) are marginalised by white western masculinist frameworks and values that operate within culturally privileged sites of knowledge production (McClary 1991; Cook & Tsou 1994; Cusick 1999). Following the words of Jacques Attali, we can start to comprehend the threat riot grrrl

music represents and elucidate the dominant impulse to ignore riot grrrl sounds; 'it is necessary to ban subversive noise because it betokens demands for cultural autonomy, support for differences and marginality' (1985, p. 7). Riot grrrl music offers different frameworks for conceptualising difference in music, society, and culture. Music can offer subversive feminist potential as 'the act of appropriating and controlling noise (the act of making sounds into music, through composition, performance, and/or listening practices) is, in short, an expression of power' (Smith 2000, p. 616). Forging communities inflected with a critique of white masculine dominance of (sub)cultural production, riot grrrl turned socially dangerous queer-feminine noise into meaningful music cultures. Marginalised music counterpublics like riot grrrl can act as a site for the transformation of society: 'all music, any organisation of sounds is then a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community [...] equivalent to the articulation of a space, it indicates the limits of a territory and the way to make oneself heard within it' (Attali 1985, p. 6).

The construction of riot grrrl music and music culture enabled young women and girls to collectively create emotionally charged music counterpublics in which to claim cultural autonomy and contest power. Riot grrrl music facilitated young women and girls' production of public spectacles of anger—an emotion considered to be particularly socially dangerous, threatening, and intolerable for women to display (Gibbs 2001). Riot grrrl used punk aesthetics to create new politicised spaces in which participants could collectively challenge the gender power relations reproduced in 1990s British indie music culture. Riot grrrl gigs became essential sonic sites for the production of catalytic moments that subverted the normative gender order and opened up possibilities for everyday cultural activism. To explore the subversive aspects of gig spaces in British riot grrrl I now want to focus on the punk strategies mobilised in the 1993 UK tour of Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear.

### 3. *Riot Grrrl: Grassroots challenges to gender power relations in music culture*

#### (i) *'Do You Believe in the Power of Now?': Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear 1993 UK Tour*

The joint tour of Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill was organised by Liz Naylor with the assistance of Noel Kilbride, who Naylor was put in touch with by Paul Smith – Naylor's key Blast First indie

music industry contact, friend and mentor. Two other 'riot grrrl' tours also took place later in 1993 organised by Amelia Fletcher: Heavenly and Lois, Bratmobile and Huggy Bear. However, I chose to focus on the Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear tour that took place in March and April 1993 as it emerged as a key memorable moment in the majority of oral history narratives. Furthermore, instead of focussing on just one particular geographical area, the tour managed to create sonic sites of riot grrrl culture across the breadth of the UK.

The tour was by anticipated by a rise in national daily tabloid and broadsheet press interest in riot grrrl. On 12 February 1993, Huggy Bear appeared on *The Word*: an eclectic youth-orientated late night culture television programme broadcast on channel four. In riot grrrl recollections Huggy Bear's performance of Herjazz on *The Word* emerged as a key controversial event that propelled riot grrrl into the British popular consciousness. The band's performance was followed by a pre-recorded feature of the Barbie Twins which proved to be the last straw for Huggy Bear and their entourage, who proceeded to protest the feature live on air. The feature ended and the programme returned back to the live studio feed where a nervous looking Terry Christian was being confronted and humiliated by an outspoken and disruptive group of hecklers, including Huggy Bear members Jo Johnson, Niki Eliot and Chris Rawley alongside music journalist Sally Margaret Joy and Liz Naylor. *The Word* took the programme off the air as the hecklers were forcibly ejected from the studio. The next issue of *Melody Maker*, published on 27 February 1993, was dominated by the 'riot' on *The Word*; Sally Margaret Joy produced an exclusive eye-witness report feature which drew comparisons to the infamous Sex Pistols television appearance with Bill Grundy.

*The Word* 'riot' was also picked up by tabloid and broadsheet newspapers as demand for coverage about riot grrrl culture intensified<sup>11</sup>. National dailies sensationalised riot grrrl as a violent, man-hating and dangerous feminist youth subculture (Barrowclough 1993; Matthewman 1993; Sullivan 1993). Riot grrrl quickly became synonymous with violent girl gangs who terrorised innocent men as column space was filled with confessions of man-hate and anger, spectacles of threatening girl gang behaviour, and descriptions of physical attacks on men (Poole 1993). Journalists

attacked and undermined the credibility of feminist intentions, tactics and strategies within riot grrrl culture often mistakenly heralding riot grrrl critic Courtney Love as a riot grrrl leader (Barrowclough 1993; Poole 1993). Reminiscent of the moral panic that the early stages of Punk incited in the British media (Hebdige 1979), tabloid and broadsheet coverage constructed riot grrrl as a one-dimensional passing phase in British music culture that was musically, morally, and socially distasteful.

As a result of this media coverage Huggy Bear became a high-profile band in Britain whilst Bikini Kill, on their first trip to the UK, remained relatively unknown. The tour was also accompanied by the release of a split Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill LP by Liz Naylor's newly formed Catcall record label on International Women's Day 8 March 1993. The controversy and media hype meant that the tour was well attended, the majority of the gigs sold out. The British indie music industry links Liz Naylor had at her disposal to organise the tour led the majority of gigs to be situated in conventional indie music venues; licensed bars and clubs including Sheffield University, the Boardwalk in Manchester, TJ's in Newport and the Cathouse in Glasgow<sup>14</sup>. The tour also offered crucial spaces for the introduction of strategies to resist and reorder power relations within British indie music culture.

#### (ii) *Spatial hegemony of the British gig*

In *Empire of Dirt* Wendy Fonorow describes the typical gig as 'indie's preeminent participatory event. The gig converts the indie community from one of discourse to one of interaction [...] The gig, occurring regularly and bringing together large numbers of indie fans, is the key event for face-to-face interaction' (2006, p. 79). Due to the reliance of British indie music culture on utilising space within licensed venues with age (18+) and late time constraints (11pm finish), gigs often excluded the participation of young people. In particular, as girls experience greater restrictions on their leisure time; poorer finances, restricted mobility, domestic duties and parental expectations further curtail girls' ability to attend gigs (Bayton 1998).

The spatial organisation of the indie gig tends to be structured around the consolidation of indie masculinities. For instance, live music performance at the indie gig is a key site for the performance of

authenticity: a chance for fans to assess whether a band can 'really play' or not (see Thornton 1990). Indie gigs are also dependent on particular spatial and aural distinctions being made between the performer and audience; the band is elevated on a lit stage and amplified, to command the sonic dimensions of the gig space, whereas the audience are excluded from the stage and observe the performers from the floor. Typically, little interaction occurs amongst audience members and performers between live sets, as the audience tends to congregate in small friendship groups and performers retreat to a backstage area. During live band performances the spatial organisation of the audience privileges 'the mosh pit', a densely populated area located immediately in front of the stage, in which audience members engage in physical and forceful dancing known as 'slam-dancing' or 'moshing' and occasional 'crowdsurfing' and 'stagediving' (see Fonorow 2006, p. 79-121; Tsitsos 1999). Researchers have noted that this particular space is highly gendered. The 'mosh-pit' is vital to the social production of gender in gig spaces; men tend to dominate the pit and engage in homosocial strategies of moshing and stagediving that effectively marginalise the full participation of women through fear of physical and/or sexual assault (Krenske & McKay 2000; Roman 1988). A couple of strategies have been observed in which young women negotiate access to the pit; the creation of 'safe pockets' in which girls collectively assert space at the periphery of the pit (Roman 1988); and, the identification and full immersion in masculinist ideologies of toughness to enable participation as 'one of the boys' (Krenske & McKay 2000). However, women involved in alternative music scenes have stressed a lack of bodily confidence when discussing their decision to restrict participation in moshing practices (Krenske & McKay 2000).

The spatial hegemony of indie gigs in Britain, as described by Fonorow (2006), tends to restrict the participation of girls and young women. Gigs frequently take place in the evening within licensed venues of major cities throughout the week. These locations curtail the participation of girls who have to negotiate their gig attendance with age restrictions, lack of transport, education and domestic responsibilities. The corporeal practices of slam dancing, moshing and stagediving can leave girls and young women on the sidelines. Attending a gig alone is more difficult in this context, as gig attendees tend to socialise in small pre-formed friendship groups and distance between the performer and audience is maintained. Riot grrrl music performances attempted to disrupt these gendered power relations within

music culture, to encourage the participation of young women and girls and facilitate connection and creativity. As Huggy Bear member Niki Eliot argued:

Our shows would make explicit our need and identification to point out the high female input potential at our shows. Also importantly, we absolutely wanted women to be right at the front. In the foyer with their literature. They were not peripheral to the event. We encourage this, and this should not be forgotten (cited in Raphael 1995, p. 156).

*(iii) Unconventional locations and times*

One way in which riot grrrl could challenge the production of gender power relations was to shift the location and time of the gig; to use unconventional gig venues and daytime hours. For instance, the opening gig of the tour took place in Conway Hall, a community centre in the Holborn area of London, and was held in the daytime on a Saturday; creating an all-ages alcohol free space. Conway Hall was an unconventional venue for an indie gig as the space lacked a PA; an inexperienced Liz Naylor was forced to beg and borrow the equipment needed for the bands to perform. In withholding information about the exact nature of the event from the manager of Conway Hall, Naylor managed to co-create a situation in which other community hall users, including weightwatcher members and the manager, were forced to confront the sights and sounds of riot grrrl. Conway Hall wasn't equipped as regular site for gigs and the stripped back and stark performance space enabled the construction of a riot grrrl gig space as less contrived and more honest than conventional indie gig spaces. In her narrative Naylor stressed her inexperience and poor planning skills, a discursive tool Naylor used to emphasise how her genuine passion and enthusiasm, not business sense, motivated her riot grrrl involvement:

[Conway Hall] was my first show, it was a nice venue, nobody had ever used it for a gig and the Conway Hall's a secular humanist thing and I really liked the idea of putting it there. I had to lie about what it was because obviously they'd never had a gig before and I went to meet the manager at the Conway Hall and went "yes I'm kind of putting on a sort of feminist event thing, I'll hire the big room how much is it?" And he was like "urrrr it's 150 quid" and I was like "okay fine". I didn't tell him that it was going to be loud music and on that day. It was just wonderful, it was a great day, that that was the first date of the tour. I kind of remember arriving and I didn't know what the fuck I was doing I was completely like urrrr how do you put on a gig erm and I can remember we kind of had to hire some gear and we had to beg ride cymbals, I think they were Pete Shelley's ride cymbals which were sort of quickly destroyed [...] I was both like "oh god this is great" and also like trying to avoid the manager from the Conway Hall so I was kind of running around a bit kind of like I'm not here. What was

really really great was there was a weight watchers meeting going on at the same time and they complained of course because it's loud fucking punk and there were all these women with these really huge kind of badges going "ask me about losing weight" and they were roaming around going "what is this" kind of madness. Another friend of mine who'd been a tour manager, again a man, kind of told me things like "oh you need a float of change" and it hadn't even occurred to me that people would kind of arriving with five quid notes or whatever so my planning of it was absolutely atrocious. I had no idea. We managed it by the skin of our teeth. It was a great gig, the hall had no lighting, I really liked the way there was no rock 'n' roll lighting, there was nothing there, it was pretty nakedly presented, it's like here's a band on stage, the PA's a bit shit, I think we borrowed it off somebody, there's no groovy lighting and there's no smoke machines, but here's a band and it's daytime and it's full of kids and it was wonderful, and above it is a sort of motto above the stage 'to thine self be true' which was just great, really framed it beautifully<sup>15</sup>.

*(iv) Disrupting performer and audience distinctions*

The conventional relationship between the performer and audience was critiqued and broken down to provide opportunities for girls' involvement. Girls and young women were actively invited to contribute to the performance: to come up on the stage to dance, sing, and speak. Band members made attempts to include the audience and encourage their projects and participation. Riot grrrl performers commonly relocated their performance space; bands often dismissed the stage and chose to play on the floor or crossed over between the stage and floor, thereby animating a space traditionally associated with the audience and passivity. Other attempts were made to trouble the distinction between the audience and performer: band and audience members frequently handed out flyers and fanzines, and performers made an explicit attempt to be available to the audience, often rejecting the privacy of backstage areas to socialise within public venue spaces. For instance, Rachel Holborow, who set up the pro-girl tape label Slampt Underground Organisation and the band Pussycat Trash, highlighted how riot grrrl practices on the Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill tour attempted to change the dynamic of the typical gig space to ensure that girls felt involved and included:

The Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill tour was something amazing and Pussycat Trash played at a couple of things with that, and I think what it was, was that it was really different to going to a gig because we were, you were involved and the girls were invited to come up on stage and sing along [...] That was part of the thing that was different, it was about including everybody, including your friends or people that you hardly know, people who did fanzines and "come along to this". Whereas bands now, it's the band's space it's not about including people and you know all these little things like handing out flyers and being around to talk to, trying to play on the floor and trying

to change the dynamics<sup>16</sup>.

In this inclusive context it was possible for girls and young women to come along to gigs alone, meet others and become part of a girl-centric community, as Bidisha, who was then fourteen years old, remembered, 'I turned up at [Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear ULU gig] and began handing the fanzine [*Grrrl Pride*] out and met people naturally through that. It was very very organic and it was very very easy to do'<sup>17</sup>.

The participatory moments that riot grrrl gigs constructed, inspired girls to produce their own punk-feminist culture and supportive networks. For instance, on witnessing Bikini Kill perform live, the teenager Layla Gibbon was compelled to start her own band, *Skinned Teen* and fanzine *Drop Babies*. On informing Kathleen Hanna about her then non-existent band, Hanna offered Gibbon *Skinned Teens*' first gig. In Layla Gibbon's recollections she highlighted how the riot grrrl critique of the performer and audience dichotomy was a key influence in her decision to become a (sub)cultural producer, 'The thing that was most important to me about the discovery of the DIY underground was the idea that I could be on stage or in the audience, there was nothing separating me from 'them': we were all just as important'<sup>18</sup>. A special sense of intimacy sprung up within riot grrrl, as more established subcultural producers and organisers used their own opportunities to encourage and support newly burgeoning performers. For instance Delia Barnard, an established bassist in *Mambo Taxi* and *Rough Trade* employee, recalled a special connection with *Skinned Teen* and emphasised how the identity label 'riot grrrl' fails to capture the more tacit elements involved in constructing a girl-centric underground support network:

When I first saw [*Skinned Teen*], when they were just starting off, they used to have these songs and they used to try really hard and seeing them trying so hard was more entertaining. You'd be kind of like "come on come on you can make it to the end come on you can all finish at the same time". You'd get really involved in their world. It was really nice to encourage them, these three little girls with their recorders and xylophones. [ ] I mean the thing is people wouldn't have ever really said that they were riot grrrls anyway, people never said "I'm a riot grrrl are you a riot grrrl?", people were just sort of organising things and putting on gigs and [if] somebody would ask *Mambo Taxi* to do a gig we'd say "yeah if *Skinned Teen* can support", people were just looking out for each other<sup>19</sup>.

Therefore, instead of experiencing isolation common in punk subculture, girls and women were encouraged to collaborate and support each other.

Passing the microphone around the audience was also a common practice that troubled the distinction between the audience and performer, passing the microphone offered the audience powerful opportunities to sonically contribute and shape the performance. This practice encouraged participants to speak out about everyday issues that had affected them. However, the involvement of men often became a point of contention in riot grrrl space. Young women and girls often questioned men's naive use of the microphone to voice their feelings about women's rights and speak for women. These dilemmas, as described by Pete Dale – drummer in *Pussycat Trash* and co-organiser of *Slampt* – successfully disrupted and contested the powerful reproduction of wider hegemonic gender relations in the aural and spatial boundaries of indie gig contexts:

The microphone [was] passed around at riot grrrl gigs sometimes, such as the first Bikini Kill gig in London at the Conway Hall which we [*Pussycat Trash*] went on first [...] When the mic[rophone] was being passed around this guy grabbed it and jumped on stage and started going on a big rant about abortion rights, and some girl shouted out "who are you to talk about women's rights", or some comment along those lines, and the guy went "I'm talking, you shut up while I'm talking, keep quiet" so I think a guy like him was all ready to shout for women's rights but when it came to a deeper level of actually thinking about the use of space and the real space of a gig. [Riot grrrl] was [about] people being challenged on many levels, even people who thought they were feminist orientated were having to admit that they had inherited some of the structures of society, of sexism, and you can't just wave a magic wand and say 'I don't like sexism' and therefore suddenly become devoid of what society's always putting you into, it challenged me definitely, it made me think 'oh wait a minute I am a hypocrite'<sup>20</sup>.

#### (v) *Women at the front: Policing audiences*

Riot grrrl protagonists actively resisted the spatial norms of conventional indie gigs that forced women to occupy peripheral spaces at gigs (see Fonorow 2006, p. 93–4). The construction of girl-centred 'safe pockets' on the sidelines or reversion to a role as 'one of the boys' in order to access the mosh-pit were not adequate solutions for young women involved in riot grrrl, instead attempts were made to radically reorder the gendered arrangement of gig spaces. Riot grrrl protagonists would actively encourage young women and girls to congregate en masse at the front, near the stage, in the

space conventionally predominated by men. Men were encouraged to support this practice, thereby expected to relinquish the spatial privilege previously taken for granted in indie music subcultures. On the tour Bikini Kill and Huggy Bear handed out flyers (see figure one) at their gigs that called for girls to congregate at the front of the stage to (i) critique the masculinist conventions of moshing and stagediving at punk gigs; (ii) provide opportunities to collectively challenge threats of physical and sexual assault experienced by girls at concerts; and (iii) to construct a performance that involved and included girls and young women as the target audience.

However, it is unclear whether the 'women at the front' strategy was entirely appropriate within British riot grrrl, considering its indie-pop legacy. The strategy often did not translate easily to a British context, as Amelia Fletcher expanded:

The girls from the US came from a more punk [background] whereas the people who were riot grrrls in the UK came from more indie backgrounds including Rachel [Holborow] and Pete [Dale], including most of the people you've talked to. In the US I think it did come from more of a punk background, so they came from gigs where people were moshing each other and it was quite dangerous at the front, so the girls at the front thing made a lot of sense. In Britain I'd always been at the front, it was a bit weird, but it was a statement and it felt important<sup>21</sup>.

Some spectators chose to distance themselves from riot grrrl specifically due to its dominant American identity and a perceived insensitivity to the particularities of British identities and situations. For instance, in Charlotte Cooper's explanation of her dis-identification with riot grrrl, Cooper highlighted her need to situate her cultural activism within a specifically British identity and location:

I always thought riot grrrl was American and I'm not American and I'm quite critical of the way British people take on American culture as their own [...] it's also part of American cultural dominance in that Americans would assume that everyone is like them, even though I'm not a patriot and I'm not a sort of flag waving England type person but I do think it's important for me to separate myself from America in quite a big way [...] [and to assert that] the action I do is with people based in this space<sup>22</sup>.

**Figure 1:** 'Girls/Women at Front' flyer handed out to audiences (Author: Kathleen Hanna)

At this show We ask that  
girls/women stand near the  
front, by the stage.

Please allow/encourage this  
to happen

WHY????? ★ (GIRL) ★ (GIRL)

Because I am a female performer who has been verbally and physically assaulted while being on stage and it's really scary when men are taking up the first few rows, to me, I mean.

And also: A lot of times several girls/women will have trouble with the same guy or group of guys BUT cuz the girls dont know each other and are scattered about, we can't warn each other about said jerks presence OR protect each other effectively. If we are in a big gang we are less isolated from each other and more likely to start talking and dancing together and having some FUN

I mean if yr a guy could you just realise for a minute that us girls have no way of knowing if you are a "good boy" or a "bad boy" (as if these distinctions REALLY exist)

And, like, it is not cool or "punk rock" in anyways for guys to smash into us or rub against us while we are trying to watch a show. You know? I am sick of going to shows where I feel completely unwelcomed and banished to the back cuz I just get grossed out by moshing, harassment, etc...

**IT IS NOT SUBVERSIVE TO ACT LIKE YR UNGLE**

And also, I really wanna look at female faces while I perform. I want HER to know that she is included in this show, that what we are doing is for her to CRITICIZE/LAUGH AT/BE INSPIRED BY/HATE/WHATEVER... Her opinion is more important to me than some guy from Melody Maker and so I (along with my friends) are gonna make the effort to let her know this.

Because this is our fucking show: the GIRLS the QUEERS, the WIMPS, the OUTCASTS.....

And the kids who wanna act like their PARENTS are the ones who arent welcome. DIG.

In addition to using the 'women at the front' strategy, both bands were also known to actively police audience behaviour within their performances. Any audience complaint, allegation or observed discriminatory behaviour led the band to halt the performance so that the offender could be disciplined by the performer(s) and audience. Accused audience members were publicly shamed before being ejected from the venue. As Jon Slade, guitarist for Huggy Bear explained, it was a practice that escalated between the two bands throughout the tour:

We were taking turns to headline, and Bikini Kill had played already and there was this guy that was, heckling or dancing too wild and he'd got sent to the back or Kathleen had put the spotlight on and got the bouncers to get him out. That happened quite often that kind of thing and I think there was competition between the two bands to see who could find the most troublemakers and sort them out, they had to be dealt with harshly<sup>21</sup>.

This threat of disciplinary action produced an atmosphere which offered a supportive channel and strategy for young women and girls to speak out against and challenge the abuse they experienced in their immediate environments whilst simultaneously spelling out to other audience members that discriminatory behaviour would not be tolerated. The onus was therefore shared between the performers and audience, to co-produce a space that acknowledged and challenged the violence and abuse that women experience in the immediate gig situation and wider social order, as Kathleen Hanna explained in Lucy Thane's documentary of the British Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill tour *It Changed My Life* (1993):

I want girls to be able to go to shows and have a good time, it's not going to happen all by itself, like we have to recreate the environment that we're having these shows in, like actively recreate it by doing flyers that say women up front these are the reasons why, or by saying it before shows, and if any violence erupts like stopping shows and dealing with it right off instead of just pretending it's not happening because that's what my parents always did, pretend nothing was happening and just let it get worse.

However, these acts of audience policing and assertions of power within gigs also brought discrimination and conflict into play within riot grrrl spaces. In particular, Pete Dale described a situation in which his friend and Yummy Fur drummer Lawrence Worthington was wrongfully ejected from a Bikini Kill gig in Glasgow:

I think there was a lack of analysis perhaps of some of the problems that the approach of Bikini Kill in particular have taken which is singling out men in the audience [ . . . ] Lawrence actually got booted out of Bikini Kill's Glasgow gig because there was some tussling going on, some guy stood next to Lawrence pushed a girl she turned round and started having a go at Lawrence mistakenly having thought it was him and now there's no way it could have been him, just because I know Lawrence and there's no way he would ever push a girl in any context he'd just you know, Lawrence described this to me in great detail, this girl had accidentally got the wrong guy, understandable that she was annoyed but unfortunately the band stopped the song and said "what's going on down there?" and this girl's like "this guy just pushed me, bouncers get him out" so the bouncers roughed up Lawrence up outside the venue booted him out<sup>24</sup>.

It is possible that numerous incidents of mistaken identity and confusion occurred during the tour.

Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill gigs acted as lightning rods for struggle over the gender power relations in British indie music subculture. Gigs would often attract people with a vested investment in a hegemonic gender order who sought to disrupt the transformations riot grrrl proposed. In particular, men often felt excluded from riot grrrl space and responded with outrage. Therefore, riot grrrl gigs were also sites for the reproduction of sexism as men attempted to reassert masculine dominance within gigs, as Rachel Holborow recalled; 'Although sometimes nobody would say that, I feel there was also an atmosphere of conflict a lot of the time because the boys would be like "why aren't we being included it's just not fair" so in some ways things like being groped were more likely to happen'.<sup>25</sup> Riot grrrl gigs were intense interactive spaces in which gender power relations were physically fought out and won at a grassroots level, a scenario epitomised in Pete Dale's neat summary of the riot grrrl period, 'It was a very intense time, there was a lot of confrontation at gigs, people standing around and arguing with each other, people pushing each other around at the front, usually one guy pushing one girl and then fourteen girls wading in and pushing him out, which was really exciting'.<sup>26</sup>

Despite opening a valuable space for punk-feminist community, riot grrrl was also experienced as a space of physical danger, humiliation, and assault. Oral history narratives constructed riot grrrl experiences as embedded in conflict, fear, paranoia, violence and aggression. From the onset of the tour, life within Huggy Bear was fraught with anxiety as Jon Slade recalled:

At that point in time March 1993 I think really we thought everyone was against us, everybody was our enemy at that point, especially our audience paying punters, not the girls but the guys that would come to our show, we just really hated them, well they hated us, some people in the band thought that everybody who came to the show that paid five pounds to come and see us just came to shout abuse or just to watch us and not like us [...] there was a feeling that Huggy Bear had was that everyone was against us.

Oral histories demonstrated that at least one major physical assault on riot grrrl performers occurred during the tour. In her work on British punk culture, Helen Reddington (2007) argued that the hostile physical, verbal and sexual assaults experienced by women punk musicians signalled young men's attempts to aggressively exclude women from punk music culture and enforce rigid standards of (white middle-class) feminine respectability. In the US, Bikini Kill were often subjected to physical assaults by male audience members (Hanna 2003; Juno 1996) Huggy Bear, the reluctant national icons for British riot grrrl, became prime targets for misogynistic threats, taunts, and violence from those who sought to re-establish a hegemonic gender order to indie music culture. For instance, at the Derby gig, Jo Johnson was physical assaulted by a male audience member. In recollections of the incident, Huggy Bear member, Jon Slade described the assault:

Yeah I think there was this one guy, supposedly been taken out by the bouncers but Jo passed him on inside the club and he was laughing with one of the bouncers about you know "feminist blah blah blah" other ridiculous things. So Jo started having a go at him, I think his girlfriend was there or something and it turned into a big brawl and she got hit in the head and the ear. It was very upsetting and a horrible thing to happen to anyone for any reason, and then we had to play the show<sup>27</sup>.

Huggy Bear, visibly shaken from the attack, played a shortened set consisting of 'Into the Mission' and quickly abandoned the stage. The crowd, unsatisfied with the performance became incensed and demanded a refund. Tour manager Liz Naylor interpreted the physical fallout surrounding Jo's assault as evidence of the authentic challenge riot grrrl represented to the social order in enabling punk-feminism to confront the 'wrong' audiences and places:

One of my favourite gigs was Derby which was really horrible and there were loads of pissed up lads from Mansfield and Derby [...] So the wrong people are at the gig, it's full of blokes. Right so Huggy Bear got on stage and they're just really kind of annoying and baiting the crowd and then sort of a riot breaks out and I kind of liked those moments in a way because I think they're more challenging [...] I remember being at the front, I had the money belt from the t-shirt stall, and I was at the front kind of fighting, thinking I hope they don't nick me money, it was really hands on physical

fighting. But it's like, welcome to England this is what it's actually like outside of London, and I quite liked some of that confrontation.<sup>28</sup>

(vi) *Women-only gigs*

Another strategy available in riot grrrl culture used to minimise the ramifications of producing a girl-centric subculture in a traditionally masculine culture, was to exclude the presence of men from the audience altogether. Media accounts have tended to overstate the scale of women-only events in British riot grrrl. In contrast to 1980s women's music culture, previously studied by Mavis Bayton (1998), strictly women-only events were rare occurrences and often proved practically impossible. Instead women-only gigs referred to an effort to ensure a women-only audience, as many key riot grrrl bands had men within their line-ups, for instance Andy Roberts played guitar in Linus, Billy Karren played guitar in Bikini Kill, and Chris Rawley and Jon Slade were active in Huggy Bear. This meant that men were an inevitable feature of riot grrrl (sub)cultural life, Andy Roberts challenged the dominant media construction of riot grrrl as harmful sites for men and boys: 'Contrary to the ignorant stereotypes portrayed in the press, I never got shit from anyone for going to riot grrrl events; the atmosphere was almost always open and fun, even though riot grrrls themselves took a lot of shit from men (and some women)<sup>29</sup>. The only joint women-only gig<sup>30</sup> on the tour, which featured Huggy Bear, Bikini Kill and Linus, was organised by The Sausage Machine at the White Horse in Hampstead. The organisers of The Sausage Machine, which included Paul Cox who later went on to form Too Pure records, supported the concept of a women-only gig and, if somewhat begrudgingly, removed themselves from the event to allow women to visibly dominate the space:

When the Riot Grrrl scene happened (and kind of replicated the US Olympia scene) we were more than happy to do things like gigs on International Women's day or Women Only gigs. [...] On those nights we made sure there was a female sound engineer, bar staff and person on the door. No men at all. We stayed upstairs just in case something went wrong or happened.<sup>31</sup>

However the 'check your gender on the door' policy caused problems for Delia, who was asked by The Sausage Machine organisers to ensure a women-only audience. Delia found herself enforcing an essentialist model of gender that discriminated against queer gender presentations, as she recalled:

One unfortunate by-product of that particular evening was that I kept on trying to turn away girls that looked quite masculine because I wasn't very good at noticing the difference and I remember some boys came dressed in dresses and skirts and were going "oh we're showing solidarity" and I got on my high horse and said I can't go to things where only boys are allowed by dressing as a boy, so why should you be able to come in here just because you're dressed as a girl?<sup>32</sup>

To summarise, riot grrrl enabled audiences and performers to challenge the gender power relations in indie gigs. Tactics – including shifting the time and location of gigs, traversing audience and performer distinctions, inverting the gendered spatial arrangements of audiences, policing audience conduct, and producing women-only gigs – disturbed the reproduction of masculine privilege and encouraged the participation of girls and young women in indie music subcultures. However, these strategies were also problematic as young women's subcultural resistance introduced conflict into riot grrrl space; riot grrrl performers and audiences experienced an increase in gender-based discrimination and anti-feminist violence. Nonetheless, in Britain riot grrrl opened up the possibilities for the boundaries of gender hegemony in culture to be exposed, disrupted, and redrawn.

*Conclusion*

In the footsteps of women's punk rock subcultural resistance, British riot grrrl created an explicit punk-feminist critique within indie music subcultures of 1990s Britain. There is a tendency to situate riot grrrl as the ultimate realisation of the political potential of punk (Home 1995). Whilst this conclusion is tempting, signs of contemporary feminist and queer subcultural resistance in Britain signal an ongoing struggle between punk, indie-pop, feminism, and queer discourses in the negotiation of gender and sexual power relations in music subcultures. The realisation of a range of autonomous and quasi-autonomous DIY spaces and sounds continues. The late 1990s and early 2000s have seen the creation of global DIY feminist and queer cultural festivals like Queeruption and Ladyfest (Zobl 2004; Schilt & Zobl 2008; Brown 2007). On a local grassroots level, collectives of young people continue to organise club nights and gigs for queer and/or feminist performers and audiences<sup>33</sup>. It is within these unacknowledged contemporary manifestations of punk and riot grrrl that the relationships between British music culture, queer, and feminism are being forged.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Karen Ablaze 31<sup>st</sup> May 2006

<sup>2</sup> A full appendix is included in my PhD thesis. The data included the riot grrrl experiences of Karen Ablaze, Sarah Bag, Delia Barnard, Bidisha, James Canty, Rachel Carns, Sharon Cheslow, Charlotte Cooper, Suzy Corrigan, Paul Cox, Pete Dale, Jennifer Denitto, Tammy Denitto, Niki Eliot, Amelia Fletcher, Sue Fox, Layla Gibbon, Lianne Hall, Kathleen Hanna, Karen Hill, Rachel Holborow, Jo Johnson, Michelle Mae, Nikki McClure, Slim Moon, Liz Naylor, Molly Neuman, Andy Roberts, Jon Slade, Erica Smith, Erin Smith, Jean Smith, Ian Svenonious, Lucy Thane, Everett True, Corin Tucker, Tobi Vail, Gary Walker and Allison Wolfe.

<sup>3</sup> Oral history interview with Liz Naylor 27<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

<sup>4</sup> I have used the word attempt here to emphasise the difficulties inherent in riot grrrl challenges to racism in underground punk cultures. Various critiques of race circulated in riot grrrl, some more adequate than others, for a detailed analysis see Kristen Schult (2005) "'The Punk White Privilege Scene': Riot Grrrl, White Privilege and Zines'. Additionally the erasure of queer and lesbian women in riot grrrl is problematic. Although many riot grrrl protagonists were ostensibly heterosexual, explicit links between riot grrrl, queercore and lesbian culture tend to be glossed over in accounts of riot grrrl, see Mary Celeste Kearney (1997) 'The Missing Links: Riot Grrrl - Feminism - Lesbian Culture'. The importance of these alliances and identities for riot grrrl performers and audiences cannot be underestimated.

<sup>5</sup> Oral history interview with Allison Wolfe 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Lyric taken from 'Herjazz' by Huggy Bear.

<sup>7</sup> British riot grrrl culture was entwined with the support of two music journalists: Everett True and Sally Margaret Joy. Everett True was a long-term friend and housemate of Huggy Bear members Jo Johnson and Jon Slade. True and Joy produced the early supportive music press of riot grrrl in the *Melody Maker* that enabled riot grrrl ideas to be accessed by young people across the nation. However, journalistic conventions and resources meant that coverage reduced riot grrrl to an identity, demonstrated by particular bands, fanzines, behaviours and fashions, a process which troubled the construction of riot grrrl infrastructure in Britain. This aspect of British riot grrrl discussed further in my PhD thesis.

<sup>8</sup> Oral history interview with Amelia Fletcher 5<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Although another reason for Huggy Bear's move to a punk aesthetic was offered by Jon Slade, guitarist of Huggy Bear 1991-1993. In a bid to impress Gary Walker to give Huggy Bear a support slot with the Action Swingers, Huggy Bear constructed a demo tape drawing on raw punk sounds. In any case the tape did not secure the support slot but interest in their new sound grew.

<sup>10</sup> Email interview with Everett True 4<sup>th</sup> July 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Email interview with Kathleen Hanna 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2008.

<sup>12</sup> This has been reported by Lucy Thane to be a slogan used by Kathleen Hanna to open a Bikini Kill performance at Sheffield University in her oral history interview 13<sup>th</sup> June 2008.

<sup>13</sup> For more discussion on British media accounts attempts to contain and undermine the political threat riot grrrl represented see Rachel White (2000) 'This is Happening Without Your Permission: Riot Grrrl and the Resignification of Discourse' MA Thesis; Marion Leonard (2007) *Gender and the Music Industry*; and Stewart Home (1995) 'Suck My Left One - Riot Grrrl as the Penultimate Transformation of Punk Rock.'

<sup>14</sup> List of Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill 1993 tour dates: 3<sup>rd</sup> March with Pussycat Trash at Holborn Conway Hall, London; 5<sup>th</sup> March Sheffield University; 7<sup>th</sup> March Boardwalk, Manchester; 8<sup>th</sup> March TJs, Newport, Wales; 9<sup>th</sup> March Riverside, Newcastle; 10<sup>th</sup> March, Edinburgh; 11<sup>th</sup> March, Cathouse, Glasgow; 13<sup>th</sup> March The Duchess of York, Leeds; 14<sup>th</sup> March ULU, London; 15<sup>th</sup> March Warehouse, Derby; 16<sup>th</sup> March Edwards No.8, Birmingham; 17<sup>th</sup> March 1 in 12 Club, Bradford; 18<sup>th</sup> March with Linus Pavilion Theatre, Brighton; 20<sup>th</sup> March Women-only show with Linus at the White Horse, Hampstead, London; 24<sup>th</sup> March Hole & Huggy Bear Women-only show at the Subterania, London; 31<sup>st</sup> March, Jericho Tavern, London, 3<sup>rd</sup> April with Blood Sausage and Linus at the Bull & Gate, Kentish Town, London.

<sup>15</sup> Oral history interview with Liz Naylor 27<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Oral history interview with Rachel Holborow 24<sup>th</sup> June 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Oral history interview with Bidisha 30<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Email interview with Layla Gibbon 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Oral history interview with Delia Barnard 30<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Oral history interview with Pete Dale 24<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Oral history interview with Amelia Fletcher 5<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Oral history interview with Charlotte Cooper 7<sup>th</sup> August 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Oral history interview with Jon Slade 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Oral history interview with Pete Dale 24<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Oral history interview with Rachel Holborow 24<sup>th</sup> June 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Oral history interview with Pete Dale 24<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Oral history interview with Jon Slade 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Oral history interview with Liz Naylor 27<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Written interview with Andy Roberts in 1998 by Cazz Blase.

<sup>30</sup> Huggy Bear also played a women-only gig with Hole at the Subterania in London on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1993 organised by Liz Naylor and to some extent hi-jacked by Dave Philips; although oral history testimony constructs this gig as untypical of riot grrrl spaces produced on tour with Bikini Kill. For instance, in her performance Courtney Love openly criticised a Daily Star reporter Linda Duff by denigrating her weight and appearance, Mambo Taxi pulled out of the gig as Courtney Love wanted to change their stage times to produce a more democratic roster whilst paradoxically ensuring that Hole kept their headlining slot. Sources have suggested that the animosity between Courtney Love and Bikini Kill is sparked by jealousy.

<sup>31</sup> Email interview with Paul Cox 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Oral history interview with Delia Barnard 30<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

<sup>33</sup> A snapshot of such queer and/or feminist identified DIY music collectives that have operated or are still active in Britain would include Queer Union, The Bakery, Club V, Local Kid, Manifesta, Female Trouble, Lola and the Cartwheels, FAG Club, the Cailleach collective, FYR, Homocrime, Kaffequeeria, Get Bent, Unskinny Bop.

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