

After the Riot: Taking new feminist youth subcultures seriously

By

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This thesis argues that in North America since the late 1980s, young women's interest in feminism has been expressed through participation in feminist music subcultures. The project provides an overview of the studies of culture, musical subculture, and gender and music making, as well as an historical context of feminism and a discussion of the relationship between second and third wave feminism.

The first case study explores Riot Grrrl's roots in the DIY activism of DC hardcore punk, its links to the female-oriented indie music scene of Olympia, Washington, and the subculture's use of alternative media. The second study examines efforts to integrate queer politics into third wave feminism through lesbian punk rock music subculture. The final study of electronic feminist punk rock examines how young feminists use alternative media such as zines, internet message boards, web sites, music making, and performance to educate young women about sexual abuse and homophobia.

Analysis of the Riot Grrrl, lesbian punk rock, and electronic feminist punk rock subcultures demonstrates how young women claim spaces for their own feminist politics, even if they have gone relatively undetected by the mainstream culture.

.....

Cette thèse a pour but d'arguer du fait qu'en Amérique du Nord depuis la fin des années 1980, l'intérêt des jeunes femmes en le féminisme a été exprimé par leur participation en sous-cultures de musique féministe. Le projet fournit une vue d'ensemble des études de cette culture, la sous-culture musicale, les sexes et la musique, ainsi qu'un contexte historique du féminisme et une discussion du rapport entre la deuxième et la troisième vague de féminisme.

La première étude explore les racines de *Riot Grrrl*, dans l'activisme du *punk hardcore DIY* en D.C., ses liens à la scène féminine de musique d'indie d'Olympia à Washington, et de l'utilisation de sous-cultures des médias alternatifs. La deuxième étude examine les efforts d'intégrer la politique gaie dans la troisième vague de féminisme par la sous-culture lesbienne de musique *punk*. L'étude finale du *punk* féministe électronique examine la façon dont les jeunes féministes emploient des médias alternatifs tels que les *zines*, les panneaux de message d'internet, les sites internet, la musique et les concerts pour instruire les jeunes femmes au sujet de l'abus sexuel et l'homophobie.

L'analyse de *Riot Grrrl*, de la musique *punk* lesbienne, et des cultures secondaires féministes de musique *punk* électronique, démontre comment les jeunes femmes réclament l'espace pour leur propre politique féministe, même si cette politique est relativement non détectée par la culture traditionnelle.

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After the Riot: Taking new feminist youth music subcultures seriously

Introduction

As part of my MA course credits at McGill, I undertook an independent reading course on gender and sexuality in popular music. Reading works by popular music scholars such as Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, Sara Cohen, Sheila Whitely and Mavis Bayton, I noticed that many of them failed to move beyond their observation that women musicians are constrained by the conventions of popular music that tend to categorize them with gendered stereotypes like the “angry woman in rock”, the mother figure and the androgynous rocker. The more texts I read, the more determined I became to uncover sites of music making that offer women refuge from those imposed roles. Instead of focussing on how disempowered women are in the music world, I set out to highlight examples of female music making where women are in control, and where they have used networks of communication to carve out places for their musical expression. This intention led me to an investigation of feminist music subcultures, and this project outlines a sort of chronological map of connected strands of the music making and community of Riot Grrrl subculture, lesbian punk rock subculture, and more recent developments in electronic feminist music. Throughout, I will explore how these communities are interconnected through their commitment to feminist politics, and also through their connection to larger music and activist scenes such as leftist Do-it-yourself (DIY) punk subcultures and independent music networks.

Throughout my post-secondary studies, I have also been struck by the despair of many academics that feminism is no longer important to young women. I have certainly encountered this message in the popular media as well, but I was particularly disheartened by subcultural theorist Angela McRobbie's claim in her 2000 revised edition of Feminism and Youth Culture that today's young women have no passion for furthering the feminist cause, they take for granted the advancements of previous generations of feminists, and that they have failed to create a "new organized lobby" to challenge the recent shift of feminism to the right of the political spectrum (212). This is certainly a sobering thought with which to end a text advocating female empowerment through participation in subcultural activities.

In the same edition of her collection of her essays about subculture and feminism, McRobbie reminisces about her early research of young women in punk subculture. She recalls a series of conversations with a group of working-class Birmingham girls of about fifteen who expressed their frustration about "boys and sex and how they so resented the way in which boys saw them and talked about them and treated them" (5). However, as an academic researcher, McRobbie remembers that at times she could sense a "latent anger" at her probing questions, and was subject to their "'wind-ups' and mild insults," so she did not get a complete picture of their lives or follow them through their adolescence. She recounts that four years later, in 1982, when she was a freelance music critic, she attended a party given by the members of the Au Pairs, a politically radical punk band renowned for its strong feminist and leftist politics, and for deliberately challenging gender stereotypes in music making. At the party, she was approached by one of the female musicians in the punk band Fast Relief. The young woman introduced

herself as Michelle, one of the angry young girls that McRobbie had interviewed years earlier. Michelle told McRobbie that she had become interested in feminism and in sexual politics through the punk rock music community and by living in a house with the Au Pairs, whose fascination with works by Kristeva, Lacan, Benjamin, Sontag and Godard meant that “every song [they] wrote bore the mark of this thinking and talking about art and image, sex and politics” (8). McRobbie recalls that though she had taught in many art schools at that time, she had never met any group more “driven by and enthusiastic about the promise of mixing art and politics” (8).

Michelle’s transformation from a young girl frustrated by the way she was treated by boys into an empowered artist involved in and educated by a community committed to questioning the status quo of class, race, gender and sexuality can be compared to the transformation that some young people experience through higher education as they are introduced to political philosophies. Indeed, Michelle, who was once again interviewed by McRobbie in 1999, insists that her discovery of punk was “like instead of going to university, I got all my education [through] reading and talking and being in a band myself and what we learnt at the time” (McRobbie 9). Though she retained a working-class identity through her occupation as a blue collar worker (10-11), McRobbie determines that through her participation in punk subculture, Michelle escaped from a “traditional gendered and class destiny” (10).

The Au Pairs’ and Michelle’s enthusiasm about feminist and leftist politics and the exciting music that they made by injecting punk rock with these sensibilities suggests that subcultural activity taking place away from the scrutiny of the media and in-depth academic analysis can reveal important new directions in political action. McRobbie’s

own assertion that Michelle's story presents a challenge to recent sociological accounts of the disappearance of interest in politics in the low and middle classes is based on the fact that "somebody like Michelle," who was introduced to politics outside of the mainstream and academic networks, "re-invigorates class politics with feminism, lesbianism and anti-racism" (11) to create a new direction in political activism. Most importantly, though, it demonstrates that it is possible for young women to become politically active and involved in feminist movements through underground cultural activity such as leftist punk rock.

Through her research, McRobbie made the argument that it is worthwhile to examine lesser-known subcultural movements because they are often the result of and the reason for innovative forms of resistance. She also demonstrated that punk music subcultures concerned with feminism and sexual politics are vital because they actively challenge gender stereotypes in music. Reading McRobbie's book, I was encouraged by Michelle's story, which showed how it is possible for a relatively disempowered young girl to grow into a creative and politically active woman through her interaction with a subculture. I therefore was especially disappointed to read the scholar's pessimistic claim that, over twenty years later, young women are no longer so engaged in feminist politics. However, I disagree with this assertion, and I will demonstrate in this paper that there still exist feminist punk music subcultures that challenge the conception in the popular media and in academia that young women are apolitical and that feminist activism is dead.

This project will explore feminist punk rock subcultures that have emerged over the past fifteen years through the efforts of young women predominantly in North America, beginning with Riot Grrrl. While there is a lot of scholarship on Riot Grrrl

subculture, I want to follow that tradition up to the present day to demonstrate that the feminist-inspired energy that has motivated young women in the past is still alive and well in the lesbian punk rock and feminist electronic punk subcultures that have gone mostly unnoticed by the mainstream. I will set the scene in chapter one with an overview of important directions in studies of culture, subculture, musical subculture, gender and musical subcultures, music and femininity, and feminism and punk subculture. Chapter two will feature a brief historical context of feminism in North America, with a focus on movements of the late twentieth century. In this chapter, I will also explore the sometimes troubled relationship between young feminist musical subcultures and second and third waves of feminism. My in-depth examination of young feminist subcultures will begin in chapter three when I uncover Riot Grrrl's roots in the DIY activist punk rock subculture of hardcore in the 1980s. In this chapter, I will also explore Riot Grrrl's important links to the female-inclusive independent music scene of Olympia, Washington. In chapter four, I will follow some of Riot Grrrl's most important contributors, Kaia Wilson, Donna Dresch and Kathleen Hanna, in their efforts to integrate queer politics into third wave feminism through lesbian punk rock. Finally, chapter five will demonstrate that even today, this same community of young women educates and supports girls dealing with sexual abuse, discrimination, homophobia, and racism by making electronic feminist punk music, and by participating in the subculture's networks, like independent record labels and fundraising music festivals. My investigation of these interconnected feminist musical subcultures will demonstrate that young women are still actively engaged in carving out spaces for their own exciting feminist politics, even if, like the

underground feminist statements of the Au Pairs, they have gone relatively undetected by the mainstream media and culture.

Chapter One

Points of Departure

Literature Review

In order to examine the extent to which young feminist music communities represent a new voice in feminism and in subcultural activity, it is important to situate the discussion within the larger contexts of subculture, popular music, gender and feminist theory.

Cultural Studies: Culture is Ordinary

The broad field of Cultural Studies has evolved through a series of breaks and divisions within certain methodologies and disciplines, including literary criticism, sociology and Marxism. The discipline is typically divided into two camps—the British cultural studies, with Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at its core, and the more dispersed United States incarnation of cultural studies, which grew out of the study of communications and media. Lawrence Grossberg identifies cultural studies as a site of dispute that brings together various disciplines for the study of the everyday lives of common people:

This link between power/domination and everyday life defines cultural studies’ interest in “the popular,” not as a distinctive sociological or

aesthetic category purporting to differentiate among cultural practices, but as the terrain on which people live and on which political struggle must be carried out (144).

Emerging out of Leftist traditions, British cultural theorists examined the origins and contributions of working class culture to national identity. Raymond Williams was one of the first to challenge the Marxist idea that culture is entirely dictated by the ruling bourgeois class, instead asserting that “culture is ordinary”. In Culture and Society, he argues that culture is:

The essential relation, the true interaction, between patterns learned and created in the mind and patterns communicated and made active in relationships, conventions, and institutions. Culture is our name for this process and its results (72).

This perspective moves away from literary and sociological traditions to an approach more concerned with the social, political and economic implications of culture. Instead of viewing culture purely in Marxist terms as the result of a ruling classes’ influence or, as in the mass society tradition, as a largely one-way communication, the CCCS can be credited with initiating a cultural studies approach viewing culture as manifest in everyday life at all levels of society. Stuart Hall, another founder of cultural studies, advocated a shift from the sender/message/receiver model of communication, to a focus on the production, circulation, distribution, consumption, and reproduction of culture (Hall 128).

By the early 1970s in the United States, the field of mass communications had been infused with scientific and quantitative approaches to culture relying on statistical

and experimentally verifiable data calculated through specific media and message variables. Within mass communications studies, psychological and sociological frameworks informed most studies, and “the normative, theoretical, populist impulses implicit in the study of communication were rendered suspect and invisible (Negus 138). This led to a backlash by certain American scholars who appropriated the British model of cultural studies as:

a countermeasure into this field of struggle [...] aimed primarily against this particular hegemonic paradigm but also against the vulgar political economy which defined the only available alternative at the time (138).

This led to a disciplinary split based on different approaches to how people received media messages and how they exist as individuals and as cultural groups.

Studying Subcultures

Cultural studies attempts to examine relations of culture and power. According to John Fiske, one of its main projects is "to examine critically and to restructure the relationship between dominant and subordinated cultures" (Fiske 164). It is therefore not surprising that the study of subcultures grew out of the Birmingham School. While the CCCS approach focused more on the relation of subcultures to class and larger social formations, at the same time America's Chicago School applied a sociological and ethnographic framework to the groups. Much debate about the nature and meaning of subcultures has occurred across these theoretical lines.

The Birmingham School

John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts were instrumental to the formation of British subcultural theory. In 1975, the CCCS members published "Subcultures, Cultures and Class" an exploration of working-class youth subcultures as subsets of their parent culture, which exist within and coexist with the more inclusive culture from which they spring. The authors examine the "double articulation" of youth subcultures found in their relationship with the dominant culture and with the (parent) working class culture, which is itself in constant negotiation and modification with hegemonic culture (101). Drawing from Antonio Gramsci's concept of dominant and subordinate cultures, they argue that youth subcultures are a generation's attempt to solve the "class problematic" by re-presenting and reasserting the gaps between classes and cultures. While post-war youth borrow from their parent group in their negotiation with dominant culture, the authors maintain, they experience class difference more acutely due to a new "generational consciousness" which emphasizes consumption, leisure and education as keys to upward mobility (107). Symbolic aspects of a subculture cannot be separated from the structure, experiences, activities and outlook of the groups as social formations. The authors contend that subcultures are an important way for youth to negotiate their relationship to larger social institutions.

In 1975, Paul Corrigan and Simon Frith's "The Politics of Youth Culture," called for theorists to understand working class culture as a whole before trying to understand youth culture. The authors criticize the methods of both academic sociologists and active

Marxists who view the working-class as passive recipients of culture and for failing to trace the active process by which a culture is created. They charge analysts like A.K. Cohen and Stanley Cohen with dismissing youth delinquency as simply ideological incorporation gone wrong, and they decry the sociological idea that youth culture is necessarily negative because it represents a failure to integrate into the established culture. Most importantly, Frith and Corrigan argue that the political implications of youth subcultures are left out of these approaches because no attention is paid to the active struggle of young people: their behaviour is commonly explained simply as reaction to the bourgeoisie, and they are left without agency. They argued that while working-class youth cultures are not necessarily political in the sense that they participate directly in a class-conscious struggle against hegemony, they lay the foundation for that struggle by giving the group a sense of identity. Corrigan and Frith marvel at the very existence of working-class subculture, given the pressure and odds against them, and maintain that the question of how that unity may be transformed from resistance to rebellion for social change should be taken up through the study of working-class politics in general. A vital aspect of their study is their assertion that subcultures are empowering and offer the potential for social change.

Similarly, in "Subculture: The Meaning of Style" (1979) Dick Hebdige demonstrates that youth subcultures are powerful and disruptive violations of the authorized codes that organize the social world. Hebdige demonstrates that the emergence of a spectacular subculture—in his case, punk subculture—is accompanied by a wave of hysteria in the press, a violation of cultural taboos and a process of recuperation occurring through the labeling and eventually a widespread re-definition of

what constitutes deviant behaviour (131). Hebdige views subcultural style as an intentional communication of difference in which commodities are used in a specific manner to mark the subculture off from wider cultural formations, but he maintains that it is eventually domesticated, trivialized, exoticized, villified or appropriated by mainstream culture through media outlets, which codify and situate it within the dominant framework of discourse by removing it from its context (133). He concludes that while some members of subcultures are not aware of the semiotic significance of their style, a member must "speak the same language" if the subculture is to offer a means of escape, a detachment from the surrounding culture, or a way to fit back into it (139). In the end, though, Hebdige argues that youth subcultures are an attempt, through ritual and style -- rather than conventional political activity-- to resolve the problems and dilemmas that young people encounter as they struggle with being caught in an inferior class position (McRobbie 2000 40). For this reason, Hebdige argues that subcultures offer alternatives to youth frustrated by the limits of mainstream cultural formations.

Challenging the Birmingham Tradition

The Birmingham School is criticized for its lack of specificity and its tendency to look at all working-class subcultures through the same lens. Theorists have responded by arguing that not all subcultures are identical. The sociological framework of the Chicago School offers what is arguably a more subjective approach through its focus on ethnography. Albert K. Cohen's early work on subcultures, "A General Theory of Subcultures" (1955), articulates the main tenets of the Chicago School. Cohen draws

from his research on American male gangs in the 1950s and presents some important questions to be explored in the development of a general theory of subcultures. He argues that social structure and directly experienced social milieu inform the “creation and selection of a set of solutions,” which allows groups of people with similar problems of social adjustment to interact with one another to create new forms of reference (52). Cohen emphasizes that the presence of problems of adjustment is not sufficient to create a subcultural alternative; there must exist the conditions for proper social interaction, which can be restrained by those in power, by barriers of physical space or by social convention (53). This early text sets up many questions taken up in later subcultural research, and establishes ethnographic problem-solving as a main preoccupation of the field.

American sociologist Brian Roberts states that the Chicago School’s sociological approach to the study of subcultures relies on theories of deviance. In “Naturalistic Research into Subcultures and Deviance: An account of a sociological tendency” (1975), he observes that the study of subcultures through a sociological approach is positivistic, strives for objective completeness, relies on quantification, and adopts an ahistorical approach (247). Sociology centers on the idea that societies are structurally-functioning ‘wholes’ with an established values system with a social and moral codes. Roberts sees it as no surprise, then, that sociologists rely on such a structuralist view and are compelled to study subcultures which represent deviance from the mainstream.

Stanley Cohen’s 1980 essay, “Symbols of Trouble,” calls for a return to sociology in the examination of subcultures, and rejects the Birmingham school’s insistence that subcultures are a reaction to the larger social and cultural structures of class and

capitalism. Cohen denounces structuralist and semiotic approaches to subcultures, characterized by Dick Hebdige's and John Clarke's work, for their failure to consider the way participants understand their own subcultural milieu. Cohen is wary of what he sees as a discrepancy between indigenous and sociological explanations for subcultural phenomena, and he is primarily concerned with reading subculture as a means of coping with every day life (162). Cohen is insistent that subcultures are better suited for ethnographic study because ethnographers can better capture subcultural reality through direct interaction with subjects. He calls for more studies aiming to link history and subjective experience by recognizing that the struggle against subordination is lived out in the daily life of subcultural participants, through rituals of dress, attitude, rules and school life (162).

In "On the Importance of Subcultural Origins" (1985), Jon Stratton criticizes the Birmingham method for being overly structuralist in its view of subcultures as already constituted systems of meaning that provide imaginary resolutions to real contradictions. He argues that this view fosters the notion that all subcultures have the same form, and that it paints all working-class subcultures as incapable of impacting the broader social structure because of their preoccupation with contradictions specific to working-class life, and because they exist outside the bourgeois system (181). He claims that the CCCS analysts see subcultures as the product of a specific --and limited-- spatial and temporal context, and argues that some subcultures, such as American "bikies" and "surfies," are long-lasting, self-containing and self-generating. Stratton differentiates between spectacular subcultures, more concerned with resistance, and commodity-oriented consumerist subcultures, and examines the complex relationship that consumerist

subcultures have with the commodifying processes of the dominant culture (183). He calls for a more careful look at the idiosyncrasies of individual cultures, and for a closer consideration for the cultural context that gives rise to a specific subculture.

Stratton's call for more specificity has become a major preoccupation for more recent subcultural theorists. Sarah Thornton's "The Social Logic of Subcultural Capital." (1995) moves beyond subcultural theorists' typical preoccupation with a subculture's relationship with broader culture, and zooms in to look at issues of status, competition and contention *within* subcultures. Thornton complicates the notion of subculture developed by the Birmingham analysts in her examination of club cultures in Britain as "taste cultures". Drawing from Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "distinction" and the Chicago School's notion of "status," Thornton's conceives of "hipness" or "subcultural capital" as the way young people compete for social power (202). She identifies subcultural capital as accumulative, suggesting that it offers a fantastical and classless alternative to youth's restrictive class status within dominant culture. While youth aspire to a more egalitarian world through their construction of a culture that values not class but specialized knowledge, they attempt to transcend the "classed" dominant culture by setting up their own hierarchies (209). According to Thornton, this paradox is youth's response to the problem of age and the social structure.

Geoff Stahl provides a comprehensive overview of the history of subcultural theory and research, looking at the origins of the CCCS Birmingham and the Chicago traditions and their varying influences. He questions the proficiency of subcultural theory as it has been understood by the CCCS, and he outlines the field's most influential texts and their limitations. "Still 'Winning Space?': Updating Subcultural Theory" (1999) calls

for a closer consideration of the local circumstances and global cultural contexts in which subcultures occur, and Stahl suggests that Bourdieu's notion of 'spaces of possibilities' can help fill in gaps that cripple subcultural theory. He is critical of established paradigms of structuralism and postmodernism, which he sees as failing to capture the nuances of contextual variability that determine where and why social and spatial relations occur where they do. Stahl expands the scope of subcultural analysis by offering a number of terms that fall outside the traditional rhetoric, and by suggesting that cultural and social formations can no longer be seen as limited to physically bounded sites. The study of subcultures must evolve to take into account the globalized cultural networks that transcend geographical sites and redefine notions of community.

In "Re-placing Popular Culture" (1997), Lawrence Grossberg examines the aim of cultural studies to find a critical practice adequate to the challenges of understanding the intersections of popular culture, politics and systemic political and economic structures that dictate inequality and domination. He posits that the line between popular and legitimate culture is political, and complains that cultural studies fails to move beyond the mechanisms that allow this line to be drawn (219). He charges cultural studies with taking a dialectical standpoint, in which all cultural activity is either conducive to existing structures of power or a specific and already-defined form of resistance. Grossberg's main point is that popular culture cannot be limited to practices that a modernist approach locates within the circumscribed areas of culture, but that it must be linked to wider cultural practices by taking into account the "everyday life" distribution of practices across social space (235).

Subculture and music

Dick Hebdige's assertion that young people seek differentiation from wider cultural formations through activities outside of the mainstream is revisited in studies of popular music formations. Popular music theorist Will Straw maintains that:

The drawing and enforcing of boundaries between musical forms, the marking of racial, class-based and gender differences, and the maintenance of lines of communication between dispersed cultural communities are all central to the elaboration of musical meaning and value (372).

In the same vein, subcultural theorist Paul Willis argues that the musical preferences of members of subcultures are "intimately connected to the nature of their lives" (Longhurst 211). This is reflected in many subcultural studies: from Hebdige's analysis of early British punk rock communities to Thornton's examination of British (dance) club culture, subculture is closely linked to music preference or music-making. The link between music and subculture even led Dave Laing to insist that early British punks did not constitute a subculture, but rather that punk was "first and foremost a musical genre" because

rather than subcultures spontaneously generating their own sounds and visual conventions, the emergence of a new music genre can create the conditions *for* subcultural activity (Negus 24).

Laing's insistence that music is significant in providing the preconditions and inspiration for the formation of a subculture leads into a discussion of theories of active audience.

Lawrence Grossberg maintains that the relation between a (musical) text and audience is active, and that aesthetic judgment – rather than a later, more consumer-based mass judgment-- is the initial reason for groups to take up specific texts and practices in the first place to represent their identities. This sensibility is informed, says Grossberg, by an individual's identification as a fan rather than a consumer. While a consumer of a musical formation seeks pleasure, Grossberg says that a fan's relation to music is emotional, and seen in the social context of the teenage culture pegged against the adult world, becoming associated with certain musical genres comes to represent a differentiation from mainstream, consumer culture (Longhurst 230). The emotional affect of the music, then, loaded with cultural connotations, comes to structure the fan's own identity as different from mainstream culture. In effect, music and subculture become one and the same.

Musical subcultures and gender

Angela McRobbie and Simon Frith identify music as playing a crucial role in the way young listeners constitute their sexuality (139). The authors position rock music as an integral part of the youth experience in late 1970s Britain, and contend that male and female teenagers are expected to listen to music differently. McRobbie and Frith demonstrate how rock operates both as a form of sexual expression and as a form of sexual control, and they compare the ways male and female teenagers are encouraged, through cultural norms and marketing, to listen and react to popular music. While males are expected to relate to the rock performer's power and sexual expression, females

listening to pop are meant to repress their sexuality by focusing on romance and relationships (143). The authors argue that this reinforces sexual norms.

Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber point out that the Birmingham School's subcultural studies are male-centered, and they questioned the invisibility and dismissive treatment of girls by the field. In "Girls and Subcultures" (1975), McRobbie and Garber suggest that the representation of girls as awkward and self-conscious is a reflection of the way girls negotiate space in male-dominated cultures because they are commonly assessed based on their sexual attributes and their connection to male members of the subcultures (113). The authors examine the subcultural spaces available to girls in the mid-1970s in Britain using some of the concepts used in the study of male subcultures, such as the importance of class, leisure, family, school and work. Added to the analysis are issues of sex and gender, as well as a more open concept of subculture that includes the "bedroom culture" of girls who are refused entry into more conventional "street" subcultures because of their sex (115). McRobbie and Garber suggest that a less constrained femininity is offered to female members of subcultures as compared to girls in the mainstream culture, a theme that has been taken up in later subcultural studies. The authors present the limitations that girls experience in their efforts to establish a culture of their own, and examine the "teenybopper" fan culture that is more rooted in commercialism than are predominantly male street subcultures. They argue that girls negotiate a different leisure space and different personal spaces than boys, and so their resistance manifests itself in a different manner. The authors posit that tight-knit all-female friendships are vitally important to girls' social development because they offer a safe milieu where girls can work out their anxieties about moving into a sexualized

culture, and deal with social messages they receive that they are somehow inferior to boys (120). McRobbie and Garber conclude that female youth subcultures are sites of the development of feminine identity where girls strive to carve out private, inaccessible space away from parents, teachers and male peers (120).

The female youth subculture as defined by McRobbie and Garber has been further developed by many later scholars, including Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald, whose exploration of Riot Grrrl musical subculture draws from McRobbie's and Garber's assertion that youth cultures of girls have been defined by parameters different from those of boys. Gottlieb and Garber argue that the relationship between girls and music informs and impacts the possibility for it to be used as a political tool of rebellion and of feminism. In Riot Grrrl they identify political strategizing and continually re-rehearsed self-definition through fanzines and music, and suggest that the form has drawn connections between musical subculture and feminist politics (256). The authors posit that by transforming their experiences of girl culture –all-female friendships, secrets, challenges relating to the male-oriented mainstream– into political and social musical interventions, Riot Grrrls introduce a positive mode of public, female self-expression that does not exclude girls' experiences or their specific cultural formations (266).

Popular music scholars like Gottlieb and Wald follow Angela McRobbie's demand for more subcultural analysis of female youth cultures, and they also participate in popular music studies' growing consideration of the roles of gender and sexuality in music-making, music culture, and music listening. In this area, popular music studies have drawn extensively from classical musicologist Susan McClary, who has set out the beginnings of a feminist criticism of music. She maintains that music and its procedures

operate as part of the political arena, to the extent that music can "organize our perceptions of our bodies and our emotions," and "can tell us things about history that are not accessible through any other medium" (McClary 34). Methodologically, she has applied a feminist theoretical analysis first used in literature and art history disciplines to the musical semiotics of gender, sexuality, desire and arousal that she identifies in Western classical musical conventions and codes. McClary argues that deeply ingrained habits in music theory and production create a gendered binary within musical structures that reflects societal attitudes toward gender and sexuality. She has also uncovered tension in the music world based on the historical association of music with femininity, and has argued that male musicians have reacted to this categorization by emphasizing "male" qualities like rationality and universality in their composition, and by marginalizing more progressive musical formations because of their "feminine qualities" (9,10).

McClary laid the foundation for the study of gender and sexuality in music, and her ideas have been applied to popular music studies. Sara Cohen highlights the tension between the Western perception of pop music as feminine and rock music as a male culture, and effectively links McClary's classical musicology and popular music studies. Cohen dismisses the idea that rock music is naturally male and asserts that it is portrayed as masculine through everyday activities that inform the sensual and emotional characteristics of local music scenes. She maintains that while there are many women who participate in music making, most men see their local scene as a retreat from women and a place for male companionship (18). In the Liverpool scene that she studies, Cohen sees reflected the conventional norms of masculinity and gender relations in the larger

community, but musical performance within the scene is also where the men express emotions in a manner discouraged in other public venues. She concludes that on-stage displays of vulnerability and creativity, which have led to the association of music with femininity, ultimately lead to more female exclusion, because the music makers do not want to be seen as overly feminine (30). She connects the concept of a music "scene" to Judith Butler's notion of the performativity of gender roles, suggesting the scene is a site where men act out and physically embody ideas about masculinity, and where they exclude women in order to achieve status, solidarity and control.

Holly Kruse sees the intersection of gender and musical practice as particularly important to the study of independent music subcultures. Independent music claims to exist as much as possible outside the mainstream, but Kruse observes that experiences of women involved demonstrate the degree to which the economic and social workings of mainstream media institutions are reflected in the structures of alternative music. She argues that attitudes towards gender demonstrate that subcultures often reflect the mainstream culture from which they strive to be different. Kruse insists that gender differences were a "particular locus of tension and struggle in systems of independent music production, dissemination, and consumption" (138) in spite of male narrative histories that tell otherwise. She revisits McRobbie's and Garber's "bedroom culture" of young female music consumption, and explores the many other ways that women are involved in indie music, insisting that methodologically, the most effective way to flesh out the involvement of women in music is to collect their personal stories. Kruse grants that many females in indie music scenes do not experience discrimination based on their gender, and that indie scenes do offer a relatively accepting space for women to take on

"non-traditional roles" as musicians, record label owners, disc jockeys, music journalists and entrepreneurs (140). However, because independent music scenes are connected to the mainstream music industry in important ways, the patriarchal structures and practices of the mainstream are often reproduced. Kruse concludes that indie music can never be completely outside the dominant ideology of music production and dissemination as long as it is interconnected with it, and this means that patriarchal relations exist in the "indie" music scenes.

Music and Femininity

Mavis Bayton suggests that in popular music, women have traditionally been portrayed as fans rather than producers of music. In "Women and the Electric Guitar" (1995), she suggests that since there is no physical reason for women not to be electric guitarists, the reasons must be social. Bayton uses Judith Butler's conception of gender as constituted through stylized repetition of acts to argue that young girls playing electric guitar challenge the maintenance of gender both for girls and for young males, who enhance their masculinity through their music-making and often actively exclude girls from music-making subcultures. She identifies the obstacles that prevent young women from playing guitar as the lack of money, space, time, transport and access to equipment (40). Bayton posits that even in adult-run guitar shops, women are intimidated and patronized, and that this results in a technophobia and a lack of confidence and proper equipment in female band performances. However, she believes that the main reason for

the rarity of the female electric guitarist is that the instrument is seen as male, and females playing are seen as breaking the gender code (42).

Norma Coates interprets rock music as a technology of gender that appropriates feminine characteristics into its performance, but excludes actual women. She draws from Teresa de Laurentis' and Michel Foucault's conceptions of gender as a product of social technologies like popular culture and institutional discourses, and from Butler's notion of gender as performative, to examine the physical displays of masculinity in rock performance. Coates reacts to the rise of female rock performers by saying that instead of being dismissed as 'pop' or tomboys like in the past, women are now being labeled "angry young women" or having their femaleness foregrounded in a way that maleness has never been an issue (62). Like Susan McClary, she identifies a cultural association between femininity and excess in music, and suggests that women are still excluded from rock because to maintain control, the excess must remain on the margins. Coates urges music critics to do away with techniques of categorization that present women as marginal, and to avoid measuring female musicians against the "inherent masculinity" of rock (61). Finally, she argues that the term "women in rock" labels females as "guests" who are never completely accepted into the genre, but the term is useful because it designates rock as "contested ground" (62) and highlights the segregation that still takes place. She concludes that the most effective way for women to assert themselves in rock is to appropriate, and therefore undermine, the performative aspects of rock's masculinity.

Such discussions over how and where women should be in rock music are longstanding. In 1980, Greil Marcus observed that

women in rock have never had access to the levels of prosaic reality available to men, whose presence on a stage is not, before it is anything else, a novelty. Women have had to acknowledge this contradiction with a ready-made sexual persona: tough chick, sufferer, dirty mama, etc [sic] (Marcus 112).

Marcus follows this observation, however, with excerpts from his conversation with British punk group The Raincoats, whom he describes as opening up the possibilities of rock music by doing away with roles (113):

There is something wonderfully anonymous about these women and their music: as four women appearing as nothing but themselves, they demystify each other. The Raincoats would not, it is suggested, relate to each other or to other people much differently if they were four carpenters. Because they are on stage, in front of an audience, they are moved to give full play to all the wit, brains, anger, and affection they have in them. They seize the prosaic and fling it back with the intensity of a terrible quarrel, with the satisfaction of a moment in which nothing needs to be said (113).

Mavis Bayton notes that while by no means free of sexism,

punk allowed women to voice their anger and frustration with the sexual status quo, by singing about hate, writing angry songs or specifically anti-romantic lyrics (1998 66).

Similarly, Angela McRobbie and Simon Frith read punk rock as a site that discourages the construction of sexuality as a commodity, also because the musical style features

assertive, insistent, and often shrill female vocals, and it does not rely on love songs.

The powerful potential of such a lack of rock spectacle is also analyzed by Norma Coates, who maintains that women who perform rock with a lack of artifice and frank, often sexually explicit lyrics challenge the category of rock by threatening to expose the artificial gender boundaries erected by the production and marketing institutions of rock music. Time and again, punk music is identified as a potential site for a deeper exploration of gender stereotypes.

Feminism and Punk Subculture

In order to situate my three case studies within the appropriate context, it is also important to make the connection between feminist subcultures and punk music, because as DIY feminist subcultures, they emerged in association with broader activist punk subcultures. Indeed, the explicitly feminist Riot Grrrl subculture raised female voices within the punk rock community, and drove against the sometimes violent male-centered nature of punk rock. Norma Coates credits Riot Grrrl with confounding critics because the style fun-loving embrace of punk rock undermines the stereotypical perception of feminism as pedantic and humourless (55).

Mavis Bayton complains that feminist music has been under examined compared to male-dominated countercultural styles like punk and anarchist bands, and she demonstrates that it has been in some ways more radical than these other politically-motivated forms (1993). Bayton credits punk rock feminist musicians with keeping women on the rock stage by using humour and irony to subvert sexist stereotypes of the

female musician, and she explores the DIY ethic in feminist music. She concludes that despite its inherent contradictions, feminism has “acted as a major route into music-making [sic], providing the opportunity, motivation and material resources for women’s participation” (1993 177).

In Feminism and Youth Culture (2000), Angela McRobbie makes the sobering proclamation that feminism is dead among young women, and that there is no group challenging old feminism order to create something new (212). She complains that

There is certainly no organized lobby. There have been no campaigns or demonstrations by young women, no new magazines, and barely a handful of explicitly feminist books. That passion and energy is certainly gone (212).

While post-feminism and third wave power feminism have made great impressions through mainstream media outlets, and the institutionalized feminist organizations of the second wave are certainly on the decline, Riot Grrrl, lesbian punk, and the emergent electronic feminist music subculture exemplify the new DIY approach to feminism adopted by younger generations. Jane Long and Anita Harris argue that “young women’s feminism is expressed in a cultural space, for example by constructing internet sites, publishing ezines¹, playing in all-women bands” (Bulbeck 1). The new culture of feminism lies in the same terrain as the DIY punk subculture, but reflects a conception of femininity that challenges gendered stereotypes that have plagued popular music studies for decades, including the gendering of rock music and its technologies.

¹self-published internet magazines

Susan McClary asserts that music and its procedures operate as part of the political arena. She insists upon the subversive potential of music, and maintains that “as soon as it transgresses some deep-seated taboo, it can bring boiling to the surface certain antagonisms or alliances that otherwise might not have been so passionately articulated” (27). If we explore feminist subcultural music making with this in mind, recalling that musical subcultures are represented by their musical production and that subcultural activity can uncover important power struggles in and against mainstream culture, then we can be certain that their examination is wholly worthwhile.

Chapter Two

Feminist Texts and Contexts

“[Feminists] are just women who don’t want to be treated like shit”
– SU, interviewed for the anthology, *DIY Feminism*.

To understand the place of feminist music in a contemporary youth subculture, it is important to explore its roots in the feminist politics. C.M. Lont posits that the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s had a great impact on music made in female subcultures, and that the feminist music of that era can be seen as a “as a derivative of various political and cultural movements” associated with feminist politics (Lont 51). It is possible to draw a line from the women’s independent folk tradition of the 1960s and 1970s to the Riot Grrrl punk subculture, lesbian punk subculture, and to more recent developments in electronic punk feminist music subculture.

The origins of second wave feminism

The second wave of feminism in the Western world, which followed decades after the suffragist first wave of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was informed by various elements of post-war life in North America and Western Europe. In part, the modern women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s emerged as a reaction to the increasing pressure for women to conform to domestic ideals after World War II. In 1963, Betty Friedan spoke to women in her own situation as a well-educated, middle

class housewife in the postwar economic boom of America. In The Feminine Mystique she argued that

for more than fifteen years [after World War II] there was no word of the yearning in the millions of words written about women, for women, in all the columns, books and articles by experts telling women their role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers (152).

Betty Friedan has been widely credited with having started the second wave of feminism in North America by “naming the problem” (153) and encouraging middle class women to struggle for their political rights and for their place in society.

Meanwhile, North American women involved in the political movements fighting for civil rights and peace turned their “raised consciousness to their own oppression” when they began to question their peripheral roles as “coffeemakers and sex providers for the New Left male leaders” (Baumgardner and Richards 73). Women in left wing political groups drew parallels between their subordinate position in society and that of the people whose civil rights they fought for. In the fall of 1965, a group of women in the student movement sent a memo to all women in the peace and freedom movements encouraging them to resist the “common-law caste system that operates, sometimes subtly, forcing [women] to work around or outside hierarchical structures of power which may exclude them” (Lont 57), and to challenge what they identified as contradictions in the counterculture. Drawing from the methods of left wing political activism, women formed their own liberation movement.

Earlier feminist movements in France and North America also informed the new energy that women brought to feminist causes in the early 1960s. As the civil rights and

anti-war movements gathered momentum and housewives were inspired by figures like Friedan, women began to insist they be treated with equality, and the fledgling feminist movements gained speed. Madelyn Detloff maintains that women's studies academic programs, drawing from French and American feminist philosophy, are a legacy of second wave feminism (94), as are the many advancements in the social and political rights of many Western women. The full history of the first and second wave of feminism is far too complex to be summarized here, but see, for example, What is Feminism: A re-examination, edited by Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, and No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women, by Estelle B. Freedman for a more comprehensive overview.

As the feminist movement made strides, it broke off into factions according to the concerns of different groups of women. Radical feminist communities, whose focus on the advantages of separatism and sisterhood is based on the notion that historically women are oppressed because of their sex and their essential difference from men, broke away from liberal feminism, which they saw as too soft (Beasley 55). As I will discuss further in chapter four, lesbian separatist feminist communities were established when lesbian-identified women were alienated from liberal feminism in the mid-1960s. Marxist-socialist feminism, which views sexual oppression as a facet of class power giving rise to male dominance (Beasley 60), also broke off from liberal feminism, and was at its most influential in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Third Wave Feminism

Madelyn Detloff defines third wave feminists as those who “grew up after Title IX² was implemented [in the United States] in 1972” (94). These women, who have

experienced the paradoxical social pressures to be thin, ‘beautiful,’ independent, highly educated, and economically successful while conforming to a self-presentation that does not threaten the patriarchal values of dominant U.S. culture (Detloff 94),

struggle to define brands of feminism that correspond to a Western world dramatically different from that of their mothers’ generation. The result has been the further fragmentation of the feminist movements, which has led to such factions as the power feminism of Naomi Wolf and Natasha Walter, which embraces the concept of gender equality, explicitly third wave feminism, which carefully acknowledges its debt to feminist history, and the (post)feminism of young women like Katie Roiphe and Rene Denfeld, who accuse second wave feminists of being “victim feminists” who “encourage women to be resentful of men, to blame patriarchy, and to ‘perform victimhood as an essential identity of being a woman’” (Bulbeck 5, 6).

A groundbreaking faction of the third wave is DIY feminism, an often angry and confrontational strand building upon a combination of punk activist subculture and feminism. DIY feminism uses alternative media such as cyberspace, self-published magazines and music making to foster feminist communities among young women. This

²Title XI of the Education act of Amendments guaranteed a legal basis for equal coeducation in the United States.

paper will investigate three interconnected musical subcultures of young women who identify themselves as DIY feminists, and will demonstrate the ways in which their brand of third wave feminism “claim[s] the girl as more empowering than she might seem” (Driscoll 137) while challenging conventional ideas of behaviours associated with girls, with feminists, and with traditional gender definitions.

Generational Tensions

In Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards provide a comprehensive history of feminism, and discuss the tension between second and third wave feminists. As third wave feminists, they maintain that although reflections about rape, relationships, and reclaiming our sexuality constituted the burgeoning of our feminism, they also revealed important differences between our definition of it and that of the second wave (221).

In 1997, the feminist scholarly journal Hypatia published a special issue dealing with third wave feminisms. The concern raised by many of the issue’s contributors was the generation gap between second and third wave feminists, and the tension existing between them. In the issue, Madelyn Detloff’s essay about intergenerational conflict at the 1995 National Women’s Studies Association conference pinpoints the main conflict between second and third wave feminists. While one second wave feminist complained that “the younger generation of feminists has ‘forgotten’ the multifaceted political

struggles of its second wave foremothers and is swayed to ingratitude by a stilted vision of the second wave as a privileged, homogenized movement,” third wave feminists attendees felt “misrepresented, spoken for and spoken at but not heard” (Detloff 77).

Detloff’s essay, like many in the special Hypatia special issue, presents the grievances of each feminist generation, and it demonstrates that feminists of each generation are making sincere efforts to explore and remedy the generational tensions.

Baumgardner and Richards insist that the greatest conflict between the generations is “a lack of communication, mutual ignorance of each others’ accomplishments, and sometimes suspicion about each others’ motives” (220). Younger feminists feel condescended to, and overlooked in conference and activist planning, when, for example, they are asked to introduce an older feminist speaker for a conference panel instead of contributing their own views on a subject. Baumgardner and Richards describe such treatment as akin to a mother-daughter relationship, and, in some cases, to a misogynist male-female relationship, where “young women get the coffee, make the copies, and wait to be discovered— or, at least, thanked— by their superiors” (222). The authors point out that “subconsciously or not, Second Wavers often deny that they could benefit from younger feminists’ knowledge and experiences” (222). These ill feelings demonstrate that there exists animosity on both sides of the generational divide that are partly due to misconceptions.

The claim that young feminists are resistant to the earlier feminism is not completely untrue: there are, certainly, third wave feminists openly hostile to the feminism of their foremothers. In her examination of the place of theory in third wave

feminism, Deborah L. Siegel observes that third wave feminist writers Kate Roiphe, Naomi Wolf and Rene Denfeld, with their respective works, Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism, Fire With Fire: The New Female Power and How to Use It, and New Victorians: A Young Woman's Challenge to the Old Feminist Order, claimed to speak for their generation when, in the mid-1990s, they denounced the institutionalized feminism of their elders as a “refined instrument of academic feminist fascism” existing independently of the lives of women and of grassroots feminism and causes (Siegel 47). Indeed, some younger feminists, including high-profile feminists Camille Paglia and Christina Hoff Summers, felt alienated from older feminists who were comfortably established in academia, and berated them for having “climbed out on a limb of academic theory that is all but inaccessible to the uninitiated” (Denfeld in Siegel 48). The rejection of intellectual theory that excludes the majority of women is well-intentioned: the desire for the feminist agenda to be widely accessible and democratic reflects their dedication to the feminist cause at all levels of society. However, as Siegel asserts, to claim that the third wave is a “theory-free moment— like the assumption that all theorizing takes place in the academy— [is] epistemologically naive, historically inaccurate, and ultimately misinformed” (Siegel 49).

The call for separation from the what Naomi Wolf has termed “club feminism” (Siegel 47) of the second wave has caused an enormous rift between the generations. While some young feminists believe that theory has no place in their feminist activism, second wavers are often insulted and feel unappreciated for all of the advancement they made. However, many young feminists are not in agreement with Roiphe, Wolf or

Paglia's extreme views, and are frustrated by the second wave's tendency to "conflate third wave criticisms with conservative backlash or false consciousness" (Detloff 77). Indeed, the Riot Grrrl subculture was partly motivated by members' reaction to the media darlings of third wave feminism, whose views were touted by the mainstream press as representative of all young feminists. This prompted young women in cities like Olympia, Washington to form their own feminist groups, as we will see in the next chapter, because they did not agree with the celebrity feminists making the rounds in universities and in the mainstream media.

The perception that all young feminists have rejected feminist theory and that they take for granted the accomplishments of the second wave has caused a major rift between the generations. Given that the majority of young feminists came of age under the guidance of the second wave, many of them maintain that

the seeds of our feminism did grow out of our participation in structures established by the second wave: taking women's studies classes in college, volunteering at a battered women's shelter or at the rape crisis hotline, attending pro-choice events (Baumgardner and Richards 212).

While there are areas of real tension between feminist generations, Madelyn Detloff underlines that fact that the generations cannot be neatly separated according to their political concerns because there is no single agenda for each age group. Therefore, she says, "to suggest that generational tension exists between second and third wavers is not to preclude moments of affinity or affiliation, and the presence of affinity, conversely, does not mean the absence of generational tension" (Detloff 94). Certainly, the DIY

feminist subcultures that I will investigate acknowledge the accomplishments of second wave feminists, even as they challenge some of the central tenets of second wave feminism. The young feminists involved in these musical subcultures struggle to maintain a link to earlier feminisms while integrating their own concerns about race, class, anti-essentialism and queer politics to create a new kind of feminism. Amidst the insistent mainstream message that young women are disrespectful of their foremothers' politics, it is important to remember that the young women I will profile are careful not to turn their backs on the older women who fought for women's rights.

Did the popular media kill feminism?

Generational conflicts have been exacerbated by the fact that women of both age groups tend to see the other as a cohesive group, and by the fact that stereotypes prevail in their characterizations of each other. Indeed, images of second wavers as man-hating, unfeminine and bitter "victim feminists" (Bulbeck 5) that have been offered to young women, along with the common perception that young women are hostile to feminism or are openly critical of older feminists have led to misunderstandings for both age groups. While these generalizations are certainly not wholly constructed by the press, media outlets have played a large role in their perpetuation by focusing on the conflicts and by touting "media maids" Roiphe, Wolf and Denfeld (Bulbeck 5) as the only new direction for feminism.

The much-publicized rejection of academic and second wave feminism by these

prominent third wavers gave many older feminists the impression that feminism was in peril. Media coverage of the “death of feminism” from the late 1980s by popular press such as Newsweek has overshadowed the fact that many young feminists honour their foremothers and openly proclaim that they have much to learn from their battles. Writing in the early 1990s, Angela McRobbie argued that the backlash against 1970s feminist politics had made the women’s movement “almost totally unappealing to young women” (210). She maintained that while the material conditions of young women’s lives “continue to mitigate against them achieving equality and independence, the decline of marginalization of the political discourse of feminism limits the possibility for change” (211). While this is no doubt a credible claim given the mainstream media’s insistent, negative message about the state of feminism throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, the fact that feminism as a whole is portrayed as old and weary has not prevented young women from creating vibrant and important subcultures that move feminist projects in new and exciting directions.

Chapter Three

The Origins and the Legacy of Riot Grrrl Subculture

The Riot Grrrl musical subculture has been examined by many music scholars over the past decade, to the extent that it has become one of the best-known music histories in academia. In fact, the subculture's origin story has taken on a mythical quality to rival that of the birth of the rockabilly music style in the 1950s. As scholars have argued, Riot Grrrl is an important development in popular music and in feminist and gender politics, and it provides the historical and theoretical context for the majority of current feminist bands. In Olympia, Washington and Washington, DC at the beginning of the 1990s, young women speaking out against the male-dominated nature of the punk rock community formed outspoken feminist bands whose music aggressively and intelligently challenged female stereotypes and advocated awareness of gender politics and sexual discrimination, intimidation and assault.

Origins: Riot Grrrl and the punk rock community

Drummer Molly Neuman of Olympia Riot Grrrl band Bratmobile acknowledges that "there's no way any of this could have happened if it wasn't for punk rock" (Nehring 157). Riot Grrrl drew much of its inspiration from the do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic that permeated punk subcultures like those in DC and Olympia beginning in the early 1980s.

The DIY attitude spread the “if you have something to say, pick up a guitar, write a song and say it” (Japenga in Nehring 157) mentality, motivating young people to make politically-charged music and art, and to become involved in grassroots politics. While musical styles are sometimes discussed as though they came into being in a vacuum, their story is inevitably connected to their cultural context. Indeed, the unpolished, earnest quality of the Riot Grrrl musical aesthetic reflects the action-oriented philosophy of the larger punk rock community, and the political and activist atmosphere in the DC and Olympia punk communities is inextricably linked the movement and its music.

Though geographically distant, the close relationship between the twin punk scenes was instrumental in the gradual formation of Riot Grrrl. The cities’ connection was initially helped along by friendships like the one between DC punk legend Ian MacKaye of the band Fugazi and Dischord Records and Olympia’s K-Records’ co-owner, Calvin Johnson, who had lived in DC briefly as a teenager. The pair shared a commitment to the DIY ethic and to the activist community, and though they had drastically differing tastes in music, Johnson booked his label’s bands in DC through MacKaye, and he produced several Fugazi gigs in Olympia (Anderson and Jenkins 308). In the early 1990s, when K Records and Dischord Records collaborated to release the Nation of Ulysses’ first single, the connection between the two communities was strengthened, and this led to many musical exchanges and friendships within Riot Grrrl itself.

The history of the punk subcultures in DC and Olympia differ strikingly. From the early 1980s, DC was home to the hardcore style, a highly aggressive, fast-tempo

distillation of certain punk ideals: exclusivity (music made to exclude), anger, nihilism, paranoia, extreme politics (or extreme apoliticism), and the sense that the world was so doomed that no positive change would occur unless people took action themselves. Like British punk in the late 1970s, hardcore was initially a tight-knit community that evolved into a widespread genre throughout the 1980s. DC, along with Los Angeles, Vancouver, New York City and Boston, was the home of one of the groundbreaking hardcore scenes. Relating to the anger and rebellion of early punk like the Ramones and the Sex Pistols and to the outspoken anarchist politics of English punk collective Crass, North American youth in the late 1970s and into the Reagan era sought a musical style to express their frustration with society. DC surfaced very early on as a “hardcore” capitol, while Boston and LA emerged a few years later, and Vancouver was home to a few groundbreaking bands like DOA. In the late 1970s, New York City was home to more straight-ahead “1977-style” punk bands. In 1979 and 1980, DC distinguished itself by having many hardcore bands rather than one or two. As punk rock became increasingly mainstream in the early 1980s, DC punks were driven to create a more aggressive punk sound that would remain unappealing to the masses. At the roots of this sound in DC was the band Bad Brains, whose lightening-fast tempo inspired Ian MacKaye’s early band, the Teen Idles, and later, his influential band, Minor Threat. The music was captured by Dischord Records, an independent label founded by the members of Minor Threat, which quickly became synonymous with the “harDCore³” sound. Dischord recorded and promoted

A common name for DC hardcore.

local Georgetown punk bands, and was at the centre of the community that introduced the subcultural “straight edge” youth movement, which advocated abstention from drugs, alcohol and promiscuous sex. Such developments, along with the constant criticism of mainstream society through music and activism, made hardcore a true youth subculture.

As the hardcore scene differentiated itself from the broader DC punk community, young women began to feel excluded from live performances because of the audience’s violence: more and more young men were attending shows in order to fight, and were slamdancing in the interim between fights. In the Washington Post, journalist Richard Harrington described the crowd at a 1981 hardcore show: “The pit is ferocious and frightening: Young men’s bodies slam into each other, arms and elbows out, fists flailing, like razor-edged Mexican jumping beans popping madly on the dance floor” (Anderson and Jenkins 92). Calvin Johnson, who as a teenager spent a year in DC just as Minor Threat was at its peak, was dismayed that at live hardcore shows, “some people [were] just using the music as an excuse to wear leather and hit people” (Anderson and Jenkins 73). While a young Henry Rollins of the band seminal DC band SOA⁴ insisted that the “slamming” was “not about hurting anybody, [...] just letting go, just going off” (93), young women who had been heavily involved in the punk scene were increasingly discouraged from participating in and attending shows. Indeed, by late 1981, the crowd violence had “effectively barred women from both the dance floor and the stage” (Anderson and Jenkins 93). Anne Bonafede, who would later form hardcore’s first all-

⁴Rollins later left DC for California to be part of the important hardcore band, Black Flag.

female band, Chalk Circle, expresses the frustration felt by the female members of the community:

I wasn't into slamdancing. [...] it was too male oriented. Around Minor Threat and SOA I started feeling really alienated from the scene. I used to love to go out to shows and dance but by then you couldn't really because you might get hurt seriously (in Anderson and Jenkins 93).

In a feature on DC hardcore for The Washington Tribune in 1982, journalist Alan Keenan observed that “the scene’s extreme masculinity is disturbing...and offers a stark contrast to other forms of new wave which in the last few years has [sic] given women far more and varied roles than any previous form of popular music” (Anderson and Jenkins 141). Calvin Johnson, who was used to the strong female presence in his native Olympia, was dismayed that at a show he attended: “Only one band had a female member and when a girl is dancing, she gets special abuse” (Anderson and Jenkins 74). The future founder of K Records “wished that some of [his] female friends would get involved in the music side of things” (74).

While the original DC punk community in the late 1970s had featured a number of female musicians, by the early 1980s, the hardcore scene was undoubtedly male-dominated. Most of the women involved in the scene were not musicmakers, but worked at Dischord Records or at show promotion. On her first day working at the Dischord office, Amy Pickering was greeted by a “goofy sign” that read “no skirts allowed”(Anderson and Jenkins 140). Though such sentiments were meant to be humorous, in their extensive history of “harDCore,” Mark Anderson and Mark Jenkins

suggest that “the underlying attitudes they suggested clearly had an effect,” because out of the sixteen bands that played four separate concerts at the Wilson Center in 1982, not one band had a single female member (141).

By 1984, the revolutionary hardcore scene was quickly descending into infighting, violence, racism, and rampant drug-abuse. Anderson and Jenkins recall that each performance “seemed increasingly to be providing a soundtrack for mayhem, with crowds breaking windows, smashing bottles, and fighting in the street” (156). The music subculture that had taken punk music in an exciting direction and that had been brimming with plans to change society through activism appeared to be drained of inspiration as violence and drugs threatened the community. Mark Anderson recalls a “rough landing” when he moved to the city in September of 1984:

The glowing reports of Bad Brains, Minor Threat [and] Henry Rollins [...] that had reached me in Montana had not prepared me for the sight of Nazi punk graffiti, much less the violence, drug abuse, conformity and ignorance that seemed rampant at the time (Anderson and Jenkins 159).

On New Year’s Eve of 1984, a badly-organized hardcore show became the violent low point for the community. When Madhouse band member Monica Richards unwittingly caused a riot when she made a joke about female skinheads during her performance (Anderson and Jenkins 171). Richards remembers that “they were throwing lit cigarettes at me and saying things like ‘take off your shirt.’” (172) As the crowd erupted into violence, Richards motioned for the band to play another song: “I said, ‘This song is about rape— which I’ve been through!’” (Anderson and Jenkins 172). In response, recalls

Richards, “These stupid boys, who had just discovered their penises, all said ‘Fuck you!’”(172).

By contrast, folk-punk artist Lois Maffeo, who lived for five years in DC, recalls that “from the moment [she] set foot in Olympia in 1981, it was clear to [her] that girls ruled this town” (Anderson and Jenkins 309). As a young student at Olympia’s Evergreen College, Maffeo found herself in a strong arts community dominated by women. She met Stella Marrs, who had rented a storefront and started a collectively-run art space called Girl City that sold clothing, jewelry and decorative art made by local women, and who later founded Satellite Kitchens, a visual art studio for use by members of the community (Juno 123). While events at DC’s main hardcore venue, Wilson Center, hosted few female performers, Candace Pederson, who frequented Girl City as teenager, recalls that at that Olympia venue’s performances, “more than half the people would be women” (Juno 176).

Maffeo remembers Olympia in the early 1980s as a welcoming place for young woman artists: “women were busy encouraging other young women who were coming to Evergreen: ‘You can do whatever you want!’” (Juno 124). She describes the core group of Evergreen feminist artists as “a kind of precursor to the Riot Grrrl movement,” who were “highly intellectual, very feisty and really tough,” holding feminist consciousness-raising meetings and “rejecting [the] traditional feminism of the time” (Juno 124). At the same time, women in Olympia were writing fanzines and forming female bands who recorded on Calvin Johnson’s fledgling K Records label. Maffeo, who hosted a college

radio program showcasing music by women, was inspired to make her own music by Olympia's creative atmosphere:

there was a woman getting a rock show started with predominantly women, just trying to push that to the forefront [...] It inspired me to play eventually. Just being in Olympia at the time, I was hearing all this music. I was seeing Beat Happening and a lot of people I went to college with who were not musicians, getting up and singing a song or playing bongos. And I thought, well, I could do that ("Lois Maffeo" 2).

Candace Pederson, now co-owner of K Records, agrees that

in Olympia, it's easy to be a 'woman in rock.' I've had the same experiences any woman has, of some guy being a jerk at a show. But in general, no one has ever stopped me from doing what I wanted. I thought every punk community was like Olympia's. Then I discovered this was not so (Juno 176).

Olympia's creative atmosphere was not without its negative aspects, but overall it provided a supportive environment for young women to experiment with music making and to attend live performances.

Meanwhile, in DC, after the virtual dissolution of the hardcore scene leading up to 1985, many in the punk community were determined to revive the activist ethic, and were searching for new musical direction. Amy Pickering of Dischord was well aware of the scene's lack of direction and inner conflict. In the fall of 1984, when anti-apartheid protests began to be held in the capitol city, she realized that she wanted to more actively

contribute to the community: “It was really nice to hang around and goof off ... but then there were the South African protests and I thought, ‘Man, here we are just being lunkheads’”(Anderson and Jenkins 162). In the late spring of 1985, Pickering began sending mock ransom notes reading “Be on your toes. This is REVOLUTION SUMMER” (Anderson and Jenkins 173) to punks who had once been active in the DIY activism. Tomas Squip, who also worked at the Dischord label, recalls that Pickering’s actions were the beginning of a turnaround:

Amy was the “mother of the revolution” [...] The original punk philosophy was “fight bullshit” and “do something real.” The punk scene was doing neither of those things. Revolution summer was about getting back into fighting bullshit again (Anderson and Jenkins 173).

Revolution Summer brought a new energy to the DC punk community, and inspired Mark Anderson and others to found Positive Force DC, an activist collective modeled after the Positive Force⁵ groups in Reno and Las Vegas (172). The collective was meant to bring together various activist groups in the community so that they could work together and be more effective. The Dischord community, encouraged by the renewed focus on activism and charity fund-raising, quickly became a powerful ally. One of the tasks of the coalition was to organize benefit concerts with local bands to raise money for a wide range of community groups and charities.

Revolution Summer drew much of its energy from the new sound pioneered by the bands Rites of Spring, Beefeater, and Ian MacKaye’s new band, Embrace. As

⁵ The first Positive Force activist group emerged in association with the independent record label of the same name formed by Kevin Second of straight edge proto-posi-hardcore (positive hardcore) band 7-Seconds.

hardcore's aggressive style had come to be associated with the violence in the larger punk community, Rites of Spring and the others retained some of the speed of hardcore, but brought a new passionate vocal approach, personal lyrics about real-life experiences and their emotional consequences, and a melody-based song structure. Though none of the bands ever applied the label to themselves, the new style eventually became known as emo-core (shorthand for emotional hardcore), and it ushered in a new era in the DC sound, and reinvigorated the community.

Revolution Summer and Positive Force DC made the city fertile ground for the Riot Grrrl movement. Led by the Dischord scene, the Positive Force group were admittedly a "scene within a scene," (Anderson and Jenkins 185), and were often considered overly exclusive, but their tendency to eschew drugs and alcohol, as well as their eagerness to hold benefits for activist groups, set them apart from the larger hardcore punk scene. While it was not as welcoming a community for women as Olympia, DC's longstanding tradition of questioning and working against the status quo made it possible for Riot Grrrl to develop, though not without resistance from some male punks in the larger community. Most importantly, though, Positive Force put into place the grassroots activist mechanisms and provided a background for the creation within it of a specifically female activist community. In fact, they literally provided the space for the first-ever Riot Grrrl meeting, which took place at the Positive Force headquarters.

Riot Grrrls claim a space for women

The Riot Grrrl movement gained momentum when women who were determined to challenge the male-dominated nature of their punk rock communities started advocating friendly spaces for female performances. In Olympia, Tobi Vail listened to the first single by DC band Nation of Ulysses, and was intrigued about that city's punk-activist scene (Anderson and Jenkins 308). By the summer of 1990, the members of Bikini Kill and Bratmobile had relocated to DC. Vail's fanzine featured a feminist analysis of punk rock that had upset many of its readers in the Olympia community. In it she complained that as a female member of a punk scene, she "felt completely out of the realm of everything that is so important to [her]," and that "this is partly because punk rock is for boys and by boys mostly" (Anderson and Jenkins 308). While punk rock was initially meant to challenge the social and political status quo and even to question the male-dominated nature of society, as its offshoot, hardcore had evolved into a hyper masculine culture, "not only in terms of band composition and lyrical content, but also in live performance where girls [were] often crowded out of the pit— in other words, literally marginalized— by the aggressive jostling of the boys"(Gottlieb and Wald 257). The Riot Grrrl presence initially went largely unnoticed by the larger DC hardcore community, which was still preoccupied with what Anderson and Jenkins call "male bonding hijinks" (313). While many remained unimpressed and by the "girl-punk" of Bikini Kill, who toured with the Nation of Ulysses in May and June of 1990 (313), and Bratmobile, who

were performing to small DC audiences, the female performers encouraged women to reassert their place in the punk community.

As a reaction to the prevalent boys' club attitude, punk women advocated a female-inclusive environment. In effect, their action was similar to that of young women involved in the political activism of the peace and civil rights movements on the 1960s, because they were motivated by a contradiction within the scene, which had been originally built on the ideals of social equality. In Olympia, and later in DC, the members of Bikini Kill handed out flyers at their shows asking taller men to stand at the back of the crowd so that women would have a safe space to dance (Juno 88). An incident at a 1992 concert organized by Positive Force DC to speak out against the Supreme Court's decision to uphold Pennsylvania's restrictive abortion law was a turning point for women in that punk community. During their set, Bikini Kill had encouraged women to advance to the front of the crowd, but as Fugazi began to play, the crowd became more aggressive in spite of Ian Mackaye's pleas for them to "not push on the stage. And boys: please stop jumping on people's heads" (Anderson and Jenkins 336). In typical fashion, women were pushed further from the stage, but Erika Reinstein recalls that they spontaneously refused to give up their space:

We went back, started holding hands and formed this circle... We were like, 'no one's coming in this circle, this is a girls-only space.' It was right in the middle of the 'pit' and all these girls started joining it, and it became this really big circle. It was this really powerful thing where something

that had been really violent and threatening for a lot of us became a safe space and we were protecting each other (Anderson and Jenkins 336).

Though this circle of resistance resulted in skirmishes in the pit which even led Riot Grrrl member Mary Fondriest to punch a male slamdancer in the face, female crowd presence was symbolically asserted (337). The subsequent creation of the Chicks Up Front Posse by a group of longtime female and male punks made the community aware that female audience members wished to be respected and allowed a secure space in the crowd. These initiatives, along with the fact that a week after the abortion rights concert, DC hosted the Riot Grrrl convention, meant that slowly the Riot Grrrl sentiment was felt even in the broader hardcore scene.

The creation of a “feminist public sphere” provided an alternative to what June Crawford, in her study of emotion and gender, remembers from her childhood in the 1960s

There are very few examples where we as girls played to an audience of peers... there was a collectivity of action in many of the young men’s [activities] that was almost completely absent from the women’s (Nehring 156-7).

The safe space for female expression within the male-oriented punk rock community was important to Riot Grrrl’s founders because while they felt part of the larger community, and were active in the music scene as performers, they also regularly witnessed sexual harassment at their own shows: “When I got on stage, my goal was to be really *present*, and pay attention to what was actually happening in the room while we played. Women

were getting sexually harassed at these shows,” says Kathleen Hanna (Juno 89).

Hanna, who worked at a domestic shelter for women and abused teenage girls, “started incorporating some of this experience in [to her] performance,” because she was frustrated with performers’ failure to engage emotionally with their spectators and their refusal to acknowledge sexual harassment in the audience (Juno 89).

Riot Grrrls’ decision to incorporate protest against the sexism and discrimination into their music making activities – including promotion, touring, and audiences - caused a stir in the punk subculture. There are many reports of open hostility toward the Riot Grrrls within the D.C and Olympia scenes. Allison Wolfe of Bratmobile remembers that when she and Bikini Kill started playing shows together in Olympia, “we were always hearing our names dissed around town” (Anderson and Jenkins 312). In spite of the tension and incidents of verbal abuse many male community members, particularly those involved with the Positive Force group, were very receptive to the Riot Grrrl agenda to educate about abuse and to entertain. Mark Anderson of Positive Force DC expresses his enthusiasm about the “girl revolution” in DC, commending the Riot Grrrls for disrupting “longstanding power relations in the scene” (Anderson and Jenkins 316). Indeed, Anderson insists that since his interview with Riot Grrrl pioneers Allison Wolfe, Kathleen Hanna and Molly Neuman, he has “never had a more inspirational conversation,” and in the early meetings that took place at the Positive Force house, he saw the potential to transform the local scene: “beyond a forum for support, what was evolving via the RG meetings was an organized female political force that could wield

power within the scene and insist that long-silenced voices be heard” (Anderson and Jenkins 316).

At the height of Riot Grrrl, DC’s Fugazi performed at the International Pop Underground festival in Olympia, and at their show Kathleen Hanna passed out flyers warning audience members that there was an alleged rapist in the crowd. During their song “Suggestion,” which deals with rape, singer Ian MacKaye invited “anybody who feels that they should be the one to sing this [to] come up and sing whatever they want” (Anderson and Jenkins 322). One young woman emerged from the crowd to sing the lyrics, and, clearly shaken, MacKaye resumed his singing when the woman broke down after a few lines. Fugazi’s and Anderson’s displays of support for the Riot Grrrl objective reflects some members’ of Positive Force dedication to the movement, and clearly situates it within the DC activist community.

Riot Grrrl and Feminism

Riot Grrrl was born in the punk rock scene but it also forged “salient connections between musical subculture and explicitly feminist politics” (Gottlieb and Wald 253). Many of the young women involved were college students who were part of the broader activist community. Challenging the many forms of oppression was in keeping with the punk rock activist mentality, but the young women used what they had learned in women’s studies courses and by working in the community “to infiltrate and transform what had become a macho counterculture” (Baumgardner and Richards 92). In their

fanzine Girl Germs, Allison Wolfe and Molly Neuman welcomed a new punk feminism that was “pro-girl, pro-punk, pro-underground,” and “pro-people without voices, who have consistently been denied their voice” (Anderson and Jenkins 311). Riot Grrrls were inspired to organize when faced with the media message that feminism was no longer necessary in the 1990s, and that young women were not interested in feminist causes. Kathleen Hanna explains that she took part in the formation of a female community within the Olympia punk scene because she “wanted to make it really cool to be feminist, because this was right when Time or Newsweek said that feminism was dead, around '89” (Juno 93). Indeed, Newsweek's 1990 proclamation that feminism was a “failure” inspired the young women in Olympia to organize a network for the discussion of feminist issues. Hanna describes her reaction to that article as a wake-up call:

I felt like I had to go get a bullhorn and tell everyone, because what about all of these fourteen-year-old girls all over the country who believe that it's over? What if they believe that it's already happened? (Baumgardner and Richards 90).

She printed a call-to-arms in Riot Grrrl, another of Wolfson and Neuman's fanzines, that read: "Girls: let's have a meeting about punk rock and feminism! Let's share our skills and put on some rock shows together!" (Juno 99), and the women spread the word about the meeting in the punk community:

We had the first meeting and about twenty 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. [...] And out of

this bands started, fanzines began, we made necklaces and t-shirts to sell so we could have a project fund (Juno 99).

The early Riot Grrrls followed in the footsteps of earlier women's groups in Olympia, but their explicitly feminist agenda and the sheer scope of their ambition set them apart. Kathleen Hanna identifies parallels and a continuity between the activist strategies of Riot Grrrl's formation and the consciousness-raising groups of 1970's feminism:

Mixed in with the practical work associated with making and distributing zines, promoting shows, organizing conventions and doing activism, there was much discussion of women's experiences of sexism, sexual abuse, assault and harassment, body-image, queer identities, and how all of these things intersect with class and race (Le Tigre World).

British female punk band Huggy Bear, who were inspired by Riot Grrrl in North America, see the movement as an inclusive philosophy:

connecting theory with action, connecting feminism with nothing less than the urge to live...The music, the literature, the hanging out-- all reveal this relentless urge, the speed and seriousness of this impuls[e] (Nehring 156).

Riot Grrrl's ambition to combine feminist theory with a wide variety of social concerns stems from its close ties to the broader punk activist community, and it made feminism accessible to many people who had previously been uninterested in its potential for social change.

While they identified adamantly as feminists, Olympia Riot Grrrl was partly a reaction to some developments in the larger feminist community. Sandy Carter describes

Riot Grrrl communities as striving to defy “traditional roles and images open to women while simultaneously slashing through doctrinaire notions of feminism” (Nehring 156). The women drew much of their inspiration from older feminists, but they were also determined to question even the most established theories within feminism. With their band Bikini Kill, Kathleen Hanna and Tobi Vail consciously set out to form “a band that would have a strong feminist punk vision and also be sexy and life-affirming— more Madonna than Andrea Dworkin” (Anderson and Jenkins 310). As a student at Olympia’s Evergreen College, Hanna had felt alienated by newer directions in some feminist theory:

Andrea Dworkin came to our school and tried to severely limit my definition of what feminism was-- basically she told me I didn't fuckin' exist. I had been a sex-trade worker, and to her, feminism and sex-trade work were diametrically-opposed conceptions. [...] She was standing up there in front of all these people basically saying that my reality wasn't even there (Juno 93).

In response, Hanna wrote in the fanzine, Jigsaw: “To be a stripper who is also a feminist, to be an abused child holding a microphone screaming [...] These are contradictions I have lived. They exist, these contradictions cuz [sic] I exist. Every fucking feminist is not the same” (Hanna 1991).

Young women in the punk community were also frustrated by the feminist viewpoints that were receiving media attention in the early 1990s. One young feminist, Kate Roiphe, argued that the crisis of rape on university campuses was exaggerated and called young feminists concerned about sexual harassment a “sisterhood of victims”

(Baumgardner and Richards 236), in spite of FBI evidence that one in four girls – and one in seven boys – is sexually assaulted before the age of eighteen (246). Her book, The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism on Campus, was essentially a controversial critique of the state of feminism that called for young women to strike out on their own and to make their own observations about their place in society instead of relying on second wave feminism. However, the mainstream media embraced Roiphe's suggestion that all young women thought feminist groups were "pity-parties" (Baumgardner and Richards 237), failing to catch the subtle call for female empowerment and the fact that the writer was only speaking for herself. As a result, the media coverage of Roiphe's and other new feminists' writings were sensationalized, and conservative new feminists were touted as the voice of the third wave. The resulting widespread message that feminism had crumbled prompted Riot Grrrls to organize subcultural forums to discuss the future of feminism and to support each other in an open-minded environment.

Many young feminists also felt alienated by the second wave of feminists who came of age in the 1970s. Sarah Dyer, author of Action Girl Newsletter fanzine which came into existence with the advent of Riot Grrrl, explains that her fanzine was meant to broaden the scope of feminism: "Certainly it was the strides that [second wave feminists] made that have made our lives easier, but I think that older feminists don't understand that younger feminists' lives are different than theirs" (Green and Taormino 170). Similarly, Diana Morrow, editor of the Riot Grrrl fanzine Princess, expresses her desire to "open up feminism, to shatter stereotypes, and build new ideas of what feminism is all about, what women's lives are all about" (Green and Taormino 138). The women

considered some of the second wave tenets of feminism to be outdated, and wanted to break down the barriers that prevented many young women from considering themselves feminists. Still, while Riot Grrrl was in many ways a response to the media attention paid to the darlings of third wave feminism and to post-feminism's rise in profile, its members maintained close links to their feminist predecessors, and were careful to place themselves within the context of feminist history. The fact that Riot Grrrl meetings were modeled after the consciousness-raising meetings of the second wave, and that the young women were determined to continue to challenge patriarchal values-- this time in *their* contemporary context-- attests to the movement's desire to follow in the footsteps of earlier feminist communities.

Riot Grrrl as a musical subculture

Angela McRobbie and Simon Frith argued in 1978 that the structure of rock n' roll subcultures discouraged female participation in music making, instead casting young women as consumers of male-produced music. McRobbie and Frith focus on spectatorship, and specifically dancing, as a means of expression for young females in music communities (157). Riot Grrrl's insistence on expressive female performance using controversial lyrics and aggressive music challenges these gender divisions.

Johanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald identify this challenge as a political move:

using performance as a political forum to interrogate issues of gender, sexuality and patriarchal violence, Riot Grrrl performance creates a feminist praxis based on the transformation of the private into the public, consumption in production (Gottlieb and Wald 268).

Riot Grrrl music making offered female voices and performances that were not meant to "be pretty" or to pander to the male gaze. While the inversion of traditionally gendered roles of consumption and production is arguably to be found in all female performance, the subject matter that Riot Grrrl music dealt with is groundbreaking. Gottlieb and Wald observe that unlike previous female punk and post-punk music scenes, "Riot Grrrls draw upon their experiences of girlhood to emphasize difference *in concert* with female equality (266). In addition to songs highlighting rape, sexism and abuse, the music incorporated "paradigms of girl culture" (266) such as menstruation, female friendships, and secrets into its lyrics. Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber express their frustration that female subcultural activities are not taken as seriously as those of males. Meanwhile, Catherine Driscoll maintains that girl culture is often presented as "exemplary of cultural conformity [...] explicitly dependent on the modern gendering and codification of maturity" (Driscoll 269). By singing about girlhood issues dismissed by mainstream culture and male punk subculture, and by challenging gendered stereotypes with their lyrics and performances, Riot Grrrls create a positive model of public female self-expression that "doesn't exclude, repress or delegitimize girls' experiences or their specific cultural formations" (Gottlieb and Wald 267). In this way, Riot Grrrl represents a real shift away from masculine rock n' roll subcultural activity, and a new alternative

to male-dominated music making and performance. The subculture also offers a model of non-conformity for young women, and represents a call for revolution, “girl style.”

Mainstreaming Grrrl Revolution

Riot Grrrls initially used the mainstream media to reach a wider population than the punk and fanzine communities. Frustrated by the Press’ efforts to define the movement as a cohesive community with herself as the lone leader, Kathleen Hanna “lied and said there were Riot Grrrls all over the country” (Juno 99). A year later, there were actual chapters in most of the cities she had mentioned. Says Hanna: “I guess I figured that girls would go looking for it and wouldn’t find it, so because they’d be frustrated, they’d *do* something about it – create it themselves” (Juno 100). As Riot Grrrl workshops, teach-ins and meeting groups sprang up across North America, the mainstream media began to pay more and more attention, and this resulted in a tensions within the young community.

The 1992 Riot Grrrl Convention in DC caused a stir in the media when a hundred young women between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five attended to discuss sexism, racism, homophobia and activism, and to attend a multitude of punk shows. The attention paid to the convention by Newsweek, Sassy and Seventeen magazines alerted young women across the continent about the phenomenon, and inspired them to start their own chapters of the movement, adding their own regional touches to their chapter. However, the media’s efforts to define the Riot Grrrl movement was ill-received by

members, who were proud of the flexible nature of their community and of their range of causes. Hanna maintains that “part of the point was to challenge hierarchies of all kinds. We didn’t have a “statement” we were all willing to agree with, and we didn’t want to do that (Juno 100). The mainstream media’s imposed uniformity was interpreted by some of the women as oppressive because it attempted to as pigeonhole their activism, and tended to be ignorant of the fact that Riot Grrrl was closely connected to broader DIY subcultural political groups. In reality, Riot Grrrls were enthusiastically – and somewhat idealistically – determined to take on a wide variety of social injustices depending on their own experiences, just like the DC’s Positive Force. Hanna remembers that:

When people asked what [Riot Grrrl] was, we couldn’t say what it was because we didn’t know, because it was constantly changing. One week we’d be talking about homophobia, and the next we’d be planning an action” (Juno 100).

The lack of one clearly defined goal inevitably led to misunderstandings in the mainstream media, who tried to portray them as a united group. Riot Grrrls also felt the condescension of the media attention, and an early article in USA Today warned, “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” (Anderson and Jenkins 343). Frustrated by the inaccurate, patronizing, and even ridiculing media coverage, DC’s Riot Grrrl chapter suggested a media blackout, and most chapters across North America agreed. Hanna, in an interview for off our backs, a DC feminist newspaper, explained her own reason for not talking to the mainstream media:

I have no fucking illusions that these people give a shit what I have to say for real. I do think that people want to stare at my tits, want to see me put my foot in my mouth, to see us fuck up. They can control what we're doing by labeling it and ghettoizing it and putting it in some weird box. I won't let that happen (Anderson and Jenkins 344).

Dick Hebdige posits that aspects of any subculture will eventually be absorbed into the mainstream culture, causing them to lose their original political significance and power. The broad exposure of a subculture prompts a process of recuperation that allows the mainstream to re-define what constitutes deviant behaviour based on what occurs in the subculture, eventually placing the subculture on the map of social acceptability (131). According to Hebdige, this occurs through media outlets, which codify and situate it within the dominant framework of discourse by removing it from its context (132). Riot Grrrl's proactive and outspoken feminist message was no exception, and record executives saw a goldmine in one of the movement's slogans, "Revolution, Girl Style Now". Quite quickly, "girl power," the motto which described earnest efforts to incite a feminist social change through music making, came to signify the marketability of young female musicians.

A flurry of girl groups appeared on the pop scene following Riot Grrrl's introduction into mainstream consciousness, including the British super group, the Spice Girls, brandishing the phrase "girl power." The dilution of the feminist message through commercialization saw girls buying products created by "male-owned companies that capture the slogan of feminism, without the power" (Baumgardner and Richards 161).

Kathleen Hanna expressed her fear that young girls would purchase Spice Girls products but would remain ignorant of the real Riot Grrrl movement, but she initially expressed her hope that “people are smarter than that and when they experience girl power in the real form, they’ll get excited and seek out more information” (Baumgardner and Richards 161). Hanna’s own wavering views about the implications of the commodification of “grrrl power” and its media presence is representative of the mixed feelings of Riot Grrrl chapters around North America in the mid-1990s.

In the liner notes of their sophomore album, Bratmobile’s Allison Wolfe asserted the band’s position on the media controversy:

we never set out with a unified agenda about being women/girls making music, although we all agreed that it was cool. We all have different ideas about a lot of things, but because we’ve been represented and misrepresented so many times, the only way we’ve been able to represent ourselves is by putting out records (which also unclearly reflect circumstances of money, time and state of mind) and doing tours whenever we can (Anderson and Jenkins 390).

Bratmobile’s insistence that it was possible to keep the political power in their own hands by continuing to be creative was a popular position in the subculture that some members considered naive. The hope that young women would find a way into the feminist punk community through major recording artists, “girl power” products and mainstream media coverage was eventually overshadowed by the feeling of betrayal at the media’s

appropriation of the earnest call for revolution. The subsequent decision by Riot Grrrls to drop out of the mainstream has been interpreted as destructive to the movement.

Academic studies of Riot Grrrl have tended to hail it as a watershed moment in female music making, to the extent that it has become almost cliché to refer to the movement as revolutionary subcultural production. The prescribed narrative trajectory of the Riot Grrrl story, however, undermines the movement's primary project to raise awareness of feminist issues. The disappearance of the Riot Grrrl style from the mainstream is commonly seen as the end of the girl subculture's narrative: just as scholars fail to follow the movement back to its roots to realize that it emerged out of an established subculture of DIY political activism and independent music making in Olympia and Washington, DC, they tend to overlook the impact that Riot Grrrl has had on subsequent music making and political subcultural activity by dismissing it as a dead movement.

The fact that the decline of the organized Riot Grrrl movement coincided with the perceived death of feminism in the media and thanks to the spread of the post-feminist argument has added to the impression that feminist music has all but vanished. However, if we follow the Riot Grrrl movement past its prime and into its newer and far-reaching incarnations of lesbian punk rock and electronic feminist music, it is possible to see that feminist and gender-aware music has been and continues to be made, in interesting and revolutionary ways. Following the narrative of feminist musical subculture further, we find important and thriving independent music that has picked up where Riot Grrrl left off. This discovery challenges the perception that feminism as a whole has been rejected

by the younger female North American population. By capturing a broader picture of the Riot Grrrl subculture that situates it the context of both feminist history and DIY punk subculture, it is possible to see that the narrative of feminist music did not end when Riot Grrrl removed itself from mainstream media.

Chapter Four

Lesbian Punk Rock as Feminist Youth Subculture

Like Riot Grrrl, lesbian punk rock is a female subculture drawing much of its influence from feminist politics. Commonly known as dykecore, the scene has been less examined by music scholars than Riot Grrrl, and it is a valuable example of a subculture's efforts to build upon connections between feminism and queer politics through music making and community. Dykecore subculture's roots stretch back to the womyn's music scene of the 1970s, and to punk and Riot Grrrl subcultures.

The dykecore music style was pioneered by bands like Sister George, Huggy Bear, Tribe 8 and Team Dresch in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Dykecore has since been carried on in the United States by bands like the Butchies, Le Tigre, The Gossip and The Need in association with independent, queer-positive record labels like Mr.Lady, Kill Rock Stars and Chainsaw Records. The music, while certainly varying from band to band, is primarily punk music with driving rhythms, aggressive guitar solos, and sharp, often angry vocals. The sound also includes softer ballads erupting into faster hardcore tempos. The early dykecore bands developed alongside Riot Grrrl bands, and band members often identified with both subcultures. Both styles revel in the disruption of gendered rock stereotypes that dictate that women naturally play softer music while men are swaggering rock virtuosos. Lesbian punk rock also drew inspiration from the tradition of the lesbian feminist folk music of the 1970s which featured songs with

politically-charged lyrics that criticized and offered visions of alternatives to constraining social structures. Dykecore is an example of a female subculture that presents alternatives to the mainstream messages that girls receive about how to “be” women. Like Riot Grrrl, the community that offers girls a support system and a safe haven for questioning the gender roles that they see defined in popular culture.

Roots: Womyn's Music and Separatist Feminism

Women have always participated in popular music making, but there still exists a duality that casts male as dominant and female as submissive other. Cynthia Lont suggests that the integration of feminism into rock music in the 1970s was threatening to male performers because it urged women to move beyond female musical stereotypes, which cast them as fans and muses, and to assert their place in the industry (91). At the same time, the reluctance of some in the rock industry to accept gender equality drove many women to create their own independent music networks.

Separatist feminism was the driving force behind the “womyn’s” music subculture that came into being in the 1970s, leading to a fairly specialized and isolated industry. Within the women’s movement of the 1960s and early 1970s, and the gay liberation movements of the early 1970s, lesbian women struggled for support and recognition, facing discrimination based on their sexual orientation or their womanhood (Lont 64). Within the early second wave feminist movement, lesbian women were often encouraged to keep their personal lives to themselves, because they were seen as what

Betty Friedan called the “Lavendar Menace” (Lont 63). With all of the “lesbian-baiting” of feminist groups by the popular media, some feminists saw lesbian members as a discredit to the women’s movement (63). As a result, lesbian feminists felt alienated and betrayed by the movement that they had helped to build.

Even in the gay liberation organizations that came into full force after the Stonewall Riots in 1969, lesbian women found that “for the most part activist lesbians had to put much of their energy into fighting a gay liberation battle in women’s liberation, and a women’s liberation battle in gay liberation” (Lont 67), because while gay men and lesbians had common goals, gay men fought for freedom from harassment while radical lesbians also wanted an end to patriarchy (Tobias 164). While lesbian women were included and represented to a certain degree from the beginning of the gay rights and feminist movements, and their voices became more prominent as both movements gained momentum, some radical lesbian activists were inspired to form their own artistic and political separatist communities. These communities drew from the philosophies of the early feminist and gay liberation movements, with a focus on collectivity, separatist politics, and an equation of the personal with the political. The group Radicalesbians formed in New York City, the Furies collective in Washington, D.C., and Gay Women’s Liberation in San Francisco, and all had an agenda that was twofold: to fight heterosexism in the women’s movement and sexism in gay liberation. Separatist feminism, while not strictly lesbian-oriented, was devised around the rejection of male dominance that involved “both a critique of the existing organization of heterosexuality as prioritizing men and a recognition of lesbianism as a challenge to that priority”

(Beasley 54). This led women to build a culture separate from more mainstream feminist groups and from gay liberation groups made up of both men and women.

The womyn's music subculture grew out of the radical lesbian feminist community, and reflects the same political and social priorities. The recording collective Olivia Records was formed in 1973 after a few lesbian albums emerged out of small independent labels in the United States. The politically motivated, non-profit collective produced albums by folk singer-songwriters including Meg Christian, Alix Dobkin and Kay Gardner, while smaller independent labels also produced lesbian artists. Within the subculture, musicians were encouraged to participate in all levels of production, from writing, recording, distribution, promotion, and economically controlling the record labels (Lont 93). The music differed from popular music in important ways. For example, its lyrics were based on the assumption that each person in a relationship is independent and strong, and challenged what Cynthia Lont calls the "'If you leave me, I will surely die,' syndrome" (93) that was prevalent in popular love songs of the era. In a 1981 study of forty lesbian love songs, Mary Hornby found that their lyrics offered women "a space for peculiarly female notions of love and relationships" (Lont 93).

Teresa de Laurentis maintains that female sexuality has been "invariably defined both in contrast to and in relation to the male" (14). Lesbian music provided an alternative to popular music, which predominantly focused on the male experience of love and relationships, and dykecore music continues in this tradition as it explores the complexities of female relationships. Like early lesbian feminist music makers determined to challenge gender stereotypes, dykecore directly challenges the status-quo

of its surrounding punk rock parent subculture with songs like Team Dresch's "Screwing yer courage," and "She's Amazing," about lesbian relationships. With these songs, the band moves beyond the gender binary of male and female, and deals with female relationships outside patriarchal influence. Such songs move past the male gaze and into a space concerned with practical issues of female-female relationships.

"Screwing yer courage" is simply a love song: it contains no reference to homophobia, or to the many obstacles to be overcome by lesbians. The song's lyrics present the lesbian experience as natural and complex. Like early lesbian folk music, Team Dresch and bands like The Gossip, who carry on the dykecore style, are dealing with female love and desire without reference to patriarchy.

Given Team Dresch's outspoken goal to educate young people about the challenges inherent to being lesbian, it cannot be argued that love songs like "Screwing yer courage," simply ignore the difficulties that lesbians face in society. Indeed, Kaia Wilson's liner notes from Team Dresch 1994 album Captain my Captain stress the importance of remembering the struggles that lesbians have faced through time. She writes that:

It [...] sucks that people think it's never been a big deal for a girl to kiss a girl. People have been beaten down in everyway [sic] and killed because they cared about liberation and that's a big [...] deal (Team Dresch 1994).

Team Dresch's songs acknowledge and deliberately move past a preoccupation with lesbian community's relation to patriarchy to open up a new spaces for young women to explore important dimensions of their lives. In the same liner notes, Wilson, who is

currently in the dykecore band the Butchies, explains that the song "I'm illegal" is about how she and her girlfriend were asked to leave bars because of displays of affection. The lines "I'm afraid to walk down the street holding hands with my girlfriend" and "sometimes I even think I'm doing something wrong, make me feel safe" express the struggles of many lesbians. Wilson directly addresses her young female audience and adopts a mentor's role in her communication with them. Through lyrics, message boards and liner notes, Wilson, like many dykecore musicians, sets out to inspire and to comfort her fans. In this way, the lesbian punk rock scene strives to move beyond the patriarchal dialectic that places the female always in relation to the male, while making sure to acknowledge the struggles involved in the history of the lesbian community. At the same time, the musicians have taken on the responsibility of educating young fans about new ideas and discussions about sex and gender. This represents an empowering shift for all women, because it reveals the potential that arises when women challenge traditional gender stereotypes.

Cynthia Lont identifies an important difference between mainstream music and 1970s womyn's music in the subculture's deliberate attempt to include women in all aspects of music making (95). As a female separatist subculture, this meant that the staff of most independent lesbian labels, the technicians and producers used to record albums, and the sound and light technicians at performances, were all female. The independent record label begun in 1996 by dykecore musician Kaia Wilson with feminist scholar Tammy Rae Carland demonstrates that the lesbian punk subculture has also made efforts to offer women the opportunities that they are less likely to encounter with major labels.

Carland and Wilson created the Mr. Lady music label and video distributor in Greencastle, Indiana, and insist that it is a “community service, not just a business” (Grossman 1). The label, which shares fifty per cent of its profits with artists, aims to remedy the fact that there exist few resources in the entertainment industry sensitive to lesbian feminist issues. Carland recalls that:

we [...] decided that we needed a label like this. See, I got involved in the punk scene in the early ‘80s in Boston, and it wasn’t very queer friendly or girl-friendly. For all punk’s liberal meanderings, it was an entirely homophobic space (White 1).

The label has put out releases from the Butchies, Le Tigre, and Vaginal Creme Davis, and has established itself within the feminist and (male) homocore communities through compilations like Calling all Kings and Queens, which featured tracks from Indigo Girl Amy Ray, Sleater-Kinney, the Butchies and queer cabaret artists (White 1). Mr. Lady also sponsors “speak-outs” across the United States to talk about sexual identity, and, according to Carland and Wilson, receives many calls and emails from gay teens looking for advice and support. The label has recently relocated to California, and continues to work on all aspects of music production, from pressing CDs to designing album covers and promoting releases. Like the Olivia Records collective in the 1970s, Mr. Lady brings a lesbian feminist sensibility to current independent music making, and it also provides a valuable network of resources and support for teens. Unlike the separatist lesbian feminist labels, however, Mr. Lady does collaborate with people in the broader punk community through independent labels like Olympia’s Kill Rock Stars and K Records.

An important similarity between early lesbian music and dykecore is the intimate connection between music makers and their audience (94). Intimacy between performer and audience is also common characteristic in independent music and in punk rock subcultures like DC hardcore and Riot Grrrl. Dykecore music and its subculture actively engage its audience, and urge young women to examine issues related to being gay, to negotiate the relationship between the queer experience and society at large, and ultimately to move beyond the scope of patriarchy to a safe place to experience female desire, love and relationships. Bands like Team Dresch, the Butchies, and the Gossip have used music making, message boards, liner notes, fanzines, and web sites to educate and to facilitate the experience of the young lesbian woman in a male-dominated culture. In turn, the bands are supported by a loyal following, and receive letters and critical feedback from young fans. Jessica Ocasio, maintainer of the web site Girlpunk.net, which showcases female-fronted punk bands, says that “the support among [dykecore] bands is probably the strongest in the entire music scene.” (Pike 1). Indeed, Toastacia Boyd of the now-defunct lesbian-identified band the Automaticans recalls that “we had a built-in crowd wherever we went. [...] People would come to our shows without even hearing us first because we were on the Chainsaw label [known for its dykecore acts]” (Pike 1). The reciprocal relationship between bands and their fans, who are often themselves artists and activists within the same community, follows in the footsteps of the earlier lesbian music scene, and also demonstrates that the DIY ethic found in Riot Grrrl is alive and well after the relative decline of that subculture.

Contexts: punk rock, Riot Grrrl, queercore, zine culture

One significant way that dykecore participants communicate with each other is through the creation and independent distribution of self-published fanzines. “Zine” culture has roots that stretch back to the 1930s, but in the 1980s it saw a resurgence throughout different punk rock subcultures in association with the rise of DIY. Stephen Duncombe describes zines as “noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves” (6). They relay messages within subcultural networks about political activism, artistic expression, and dissent toward popular culture. Stephen Duncombe maintains that:

The network of zines, embedded within a larger underground culture, creates a forum through which individuals may become able to construct their identity, formulate their ideals of an authentic life, and build a community of support, without having to identify themselves— either positively or negatively— with mainstream society (43).

Zine making in punk subculture has created important networks of communication across great geographical distances, and zines have been a major motivational force in DIY activist efforts and in music making in the subculture.

Team Dresch’s Kaia Wilson’s description of that band’s sound as “emo-core,” or “Husker Du done the dyke way” (Schade 4) demonstrates the extent to which dykecore situates itself within broader punk rock subculture, and the style forged strong connections to various offshoots of the subculture through zine networks. The queercore

musical movement (also known as homocore), which is considered by some to contain dykecore music, is described by D. Robert DeChaine as “a queer(ed) punk rock,” but also as “queer identity politics with punk rock as its vehicle” (3), and is mainly represented by gay male bands like Pansy Division. The queercore music style is closely associated with the community of young punks who, beginning in the mid 1980s, self-published zines dealing with issues faced by gay men and lesbian women. Donna Dresch of Team Dresch was involved with the fanzine Homocore in the early 1990s, and brought dykecore to a wider audience through the publication. However, while dykecore is closely related to queercore musically, and both subcultures fight for an end to homophobia in punk and in mainstream society, dykecore differentiates itself from queercore through its heavy focus on feminism and, in some cases, separatist feminist politics.

Dykecore subculture’s connection to Riot Grrrl was established through the making of fanzines because the making and circulation of zines by young women, lesbian and straight, in the punk scene enabled them to express their frustrations about the male dominance of punk subculture. Kathleen Hanna met Donna Dresch in the early 1990s when both women were self-publishing zines. As overlapping subcultures that developed within the same DIY punk rock communities, especially in Olympia, zine making was just one of the connections between queer female punks and Riot Grrrls, a fact that is often overlooked by the popular press. In the end, it is virtually impossible to separate the two subcultures of dykecore and Riot Grrrl, since both groups were determined to stimulate discussion about gender and sexuality, as well as homophobia and sexism,

within the punk community. Mary Celeste Kearney suggests that the media's refusal to acknowledge any association between lesbian feminism, dykecore punk and Riot Grrrl represents "somewhat obvious attempts to distance the "radical female youth subculture [of Riot Grrrl] from the taint of homosexuality" (222). For example, an L.A. Weekly article about Riot Grrrl and zines does not address the fact that most Riot Grrrls were also involved in the queer punk community even though Kathleen Hanna insists that she urged the author to also interview fellow zine writer and musician Donna Dresch (Juno 88). The failure to draw the connections between the punk subcultures makes it difficult to gain an understanding of the interconnectedness of the punk scenes and the fact that there exist many overlaps between the communities. As I will discuss in the next chapter, more recent developments in feminist punk music make explicit attempts to defy gender boundaries, and make the connections between feminism and queer politics impossible to overlook.

Dykecore and the popular media

Unlike the Riot Grrrl style which offered a highly marketable and less controversial message of "girl power" that was easily transformed into merchandise, the music emerging from the dykecore scene was more of a challenge to the mainstream. In the mid-1990s, while watered-down versions of the Riot Grrrl message, and, to a lesser extent, the actual music, were being brightly packaged for young girls, a dubious version of lesbianism was addressed in popular culture through the phenomenon that Danae Clark

identifies as “commodity lesbianism” (186). Clark suggests that the “intensified marketing” of lesbian images is “less indicative of a growing acceptance of homosexuality than of capitalism’s appropriation of gay ‘styles’ for mainstream audiences” (Hennessy 721). She recommends that media and advertising texts be analyzed in terms of their “(un)willingness or (in)ability to represent the identity politics of current lesbian communities” (Clark 196). Kaia Wilson directly refers to the fantastical appropriation of “gayness” in the liner notes to the 1996 album, Team Dresch when she asks fans not to “let the media make you think that homosexuality was invented last night just to sell magazine.” Like many in the lesbian and gay communities, Wilson was alarmed by the fact that homosexuality was “in fashion,” while important elements of gay culture were overlooked. Indeed, during this time, the innovative music being made by dykecore bands from the early 1990s remained under the radar of the popular media, even in spite of its close connection – in sound and politics– to Riot Grrrl. In the end, just as commercial interest in Riot Grrrl often did not go beyond the potential for flashy slogans that would appeal to a ripe market of “teenyboppers”, the commercial interest in lesbianism tended to not stretch far beyond the male fantasy ideal. As a result, the subculture of lesbian punk rock did not reach the mainstream, and the queer-positive stance of Riot Grrrl subculture was ignored by the popular media. In this way, important and groundbreaking aspects of two young female music subcultures, namely their inclusivity and their support for queer youth, were overlooked.

In August of 2004, Olympia will host Homo A Go Go, a bi-annual queer music, art, film, spoken word and radical activist festival. Festival organizers maintain that the

event continues the tradition of other Olympia festivals including Ladyfest, Yoyo a Go Go and the International Pop Underground Convention by “providing a venue for underground, DIY and independent artists” (“About HAGG”). While the Homo A Go Go festival situates itself within the broader North American independent music community, and more specifically within the Olympia scene, it puts emphasis on fostering a welcoming community for queer-identified youth outside of popular culture, and organizers express their wish for their “own cultural landscape and community” (“About HAGG”):

The community we hope to create overlaps yet exists outside of the mainstream queer community and the independent music/arts community. We hope to encourage anti-war, anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-sexist [and] anti-classist ideals while providing a venue for non-mainstream queer culture (“About HAGG”).

Events like Homo A Go Go demonstrate conscious efforts within the queer punk rock scene to remain outside of mainstream culture that many see as misrepresenting or overlooking queer subculture. Therefore, while mainstream perceptions of queer youth subcultures may be skewed or even nonexistent, dykecore communities have forged their own connections with other underground subcultures, like indie and punk music communities, creating cultural networks and support systems beneath the surface of popular culture.

Feminism and Dykecore Subculture

While dykecore follows in the tradition of lesbian feminist folk music in many ways, there are some vital differences between the two subcultures that uncover generational tensions between second and third wave feminism. These tensions have become apparent in the controversies that have sprung up surrounding the Michigan Womyn's Festival. The festival, established in 1976 by a radical separatist feminist group, has created a venue for women to discuss the politics of their lives and what it means to be female. Each August, the site for hundreds of workshops, over forty musical performances, a film festival, and the crafts of hundreds of artisans is in a temporary "village" that spans 650 acres in Walhalla, Michigan. Organizers describe the event as "a female generated alternative culture where [women] envision the world [they] want to live in," and as a "radical, chaotic, inspirational, exhausting and magnificent" experience that "provides fertile ground for controversies, transformations, and many amazing personal and community revelations" ("General Festival Info").

The members of San Francisco's all-lesbian band Tribe 8 performed at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in 1994 as the first punk band added to a lineup typically composed of folk, "world beat," and pop acts associated with the womyn's music scene. Like many dykecore bands, Tribe 8 unapologetically and aggressively explores traditionally taboo aspects of female relationships, like S/M and incest, as well as the reality of abusive lesbian relationships. While they come from a strongly feminist perspective, the band members pride themselves on "pushing the boundaries of lesbian

feminist music and politics” (McDonnell 1), writing songs that challenge what it means to be a feminist and that strive to expand the definitions of gender and sexuality. The band faced much apprehension leading up to their performance, with some attendees flying a banner declaring “Tribe 8 promotes violence against women,” (Juno 40); and much discussion about how the crowd of “grey-haired women, Midwestern couples in purple t-shirts, and women’s music pioneer[s] like Alix Dobkin” would react to the band’s mid-performance infamous enactment of castration using a sex toy (McDonnell 1). In the end, their performance was well-received, and they paved the way for more lesbian punk acts at Michigan. However, Tribe 8 and their younger feminist music fans were not surprised by some continuing protest against the band at the festival: they believe that the festival represents idealized and “limited images of feminist behaviour,” (McDonnell 2) and that this is reflected in the musical preferences of the audience, who shy away from punk rock in favour of the softer folk music with lyrics about the idealistic potential of female community and relationships.

Tribe 8's 1994 performance was interpreted by some women at the Michigan Womyn's Festival in as overly aggressive and violent, and disruptive to the safe environment that the festival tries to nurture. Singer Lynn Breedlove maintains that their aggression does not put them into the same category as male performers:

A lot of people say, “You’re just trying to be like men,” or “You are just like men,” or “You’re being just like the patriarchy”[...] I’m a woman, and I feel aggro, and that means that my aggression is not male” (Juno 41).

Tribe 8's difficulty at fitting in to the Michigan Womyn's Festival's softer, less aggressive atmosphere points to a deeper issue: a generational divide between feminisms. At the root of this gap, however, is the dykecore community's criticism of what they see as second wave radical feminism's adherence to the idea that there is a clear cut, historical or natural difference between men and women. Indeed, the essentialist viewpoint of radical second wave feminism has been increasingly challenged with the integration of queer politics into feminism. Lynn Breedlove expresses her frustration at being criticized for demonstrating her power on stage "like a man": "women having power are not being like men. Women having power are *women having power*" (Juno 41).

For over a decade, the Festival has been the focus of another unwelcome controversy involving younger women that has caused a rift within the lesbian punk rock community as well. In 1991, the event's admission policy was altered to include a "womyn-born women only" clause after attendee Nancy Burkholder and a friend were forcibly evicted from the site when, during a workshop, Burkholder identified herself as trans gendered (Van Gelder and Brandt 1). The Festival's trans-exclusionary policy maintains that as a designated women's space, attendees must have lived their lives as women "both physically and psychologically" (1). For example, a man who has identified as a woman for his entire life but has not had a sex-change procedure is barred from the festival, as is a woman-born transsexual identifying as a male. In a 1997 interview, festival co-creator Lisa Vogel said that transsexuals would be welcome on festival grounds "over [her] dead womyn-born body" (1). She declared that the festival staff would not become "gender police" by demanding gender checks, but that they

would operate on a “don’t ask, don’t tell” basis (1). In other words, transsexual women may attend so long as they are not vocal about their identities. Since the first expulsion, groups calling themselves “gender activists” have camped on public property across from the festival grounds to hold “Camp Trans,” an annual cooperative effort to educate the Michigan Festival’s attendees about what they call the “inconsistent application of a discriminatory policy” (“Eight Young Attendees” 1). In 2000, eight Michigan Festival attendees identifying themselves as females-to-males and male-to-female were ejected from the festival after they disclosed their biological identities to staff. The Michigan festival’s decision to ban all transsexual women reflects what Lisa Vogel calls her “political and personal feeling of spirit that femaleness is not something that’s particularly ambiguous -- or created” (Van Gelder and Brandt 1). If Vogel argues that femaleness is not created, and that men who identify as woman can never truly be women, she contests the view that gender is socially constructed.

Teresa de Laurentis characterizes the writings and cultural practices of 1960s and 1970s feminist thinking as viewing gender in terms of sexual difference (de Laurentis 1). She maintains that this tendency was an important step in the rereading of cultural images and narratives, and the questioning of theories of subjectivity, spectatorship and textuality (1). However, de Laurentis argues that the notion of gender as sexual difference has eventually come to limit the scope of feminist thought, because it relies on clear cut dichotomies that cannot capture women's experience across race, class and ethnicity (2). By constructing their policies with the sex-gender equation in mind, the Michigan

Womyn's Music Festival adheres to the brand of feminism limited by dichotomies and has difficulty addressing the transsexual experience.

The festival's trans-exclusionary policy has become a major point of contention in the dykecore community. Lynn Breedlove of Tribe 8 has pledged for support for trans-inclusion, stating while on stage that the infighting between women was counterproductive:

Whether we're dykes or not, S/M or not, incest survivors or not, been beaten or not, we've all been oppressed by the same system. That's the enemy, not each other. As long as we keep being distracted by that bullshit, which is what *they* have created— they've created the divisions among us— then we're going to be controlled by them (Juno 39).

In 1999 Kaia Wilson spoke out in support of the transgender ban. The musician's record label, Mr.Lady, has released many bands who play at the festival, and she herself has played the event in recent years with the Butchies. The implications of such a legendary figure's support for the policy were enormous: given Wilson's high profile and her outspoken activism, many were outraged that she aligned herself with a policy that many in the community consider trans-phobic. The fact that the pro-Womyn-only space comment came from a woman who described her song "The Council" in the liner notes of Captain my Captain as being "about feeling unfairly judged within a community where we hope for and encourage solidarity and communication" did not temper the response within the scene. However, Wilson maintained that while she supported trans-inclusion in the queer community at large, she did not think that women's space need include

transsexual women. This controversy highlights the fact that the lesbian punk rock community is by no means homogeneous, and that are networks in place to foster debate within the scene.

In April of 2003, an online community that was extremely critical of the Mr.Lady Records bands for supporting the Michigan Womyn's Festival, reported that Kaia Wilson's band, along with label-mates Le Tigre, had pulled out of their commitment to play the festival that summer (Van Gelder and Brandt 1). This development demonstrates how the lesbian punk rock landscape is in constant flux, and that artists are continually re-positioning themselves in the gender debate. Such controversies within the subculture need not be seen in a completely negative light. The constant working-out of issues signals a refusal to commit to what Sandra Harding calls a feminist empiricist or "scientific" view of social structure (Harding 240). Instead, the scene makes use of "standpoint theory" as it takes into account various points of view about the forces at work within and on queer communities (240). The very fact that there exist public venues for such a debate, accessible by all young women with internet access or ties to the community, means that girls are being exposed to complex and important issues through their involvement in punk rock.

Whereas the feminist standpoint represented by Michigan Womyn's Music Festival organizers tends to equate sex with gender and does not take the transsexual predicament to a deeper level of analysis, the lesbian feminist punk rock community has acknowledged the shortcomings of binary view of gender, and has tried to move beyond it. While the staunch supporters of womyn-born women only policies see gender

identities as clear cut, many in the lesbian punk rock community take a less rigid approach to identity that is reflected in their gender politics. The continuing debate within that scene represents a working-out of what it means to be a woman, as well as a self-reflexivity as far as gender politics are concerned, and girls are along for the ride. Kaia Wilson's on-going negotiation with the transsexual's place within the community exemplifies these endeavors, as do the artistic endeavors of more recent bands such as Le Tigre, who blur boundaries both through their multimedia performances and through their overtly feminist lyrics and political activism. Young fans of the bands involved in such controversies are, through message boards and web sites, able to take part in debates that they would not otherwise have witnessed.

Queer Politics in Dykecore Subculture

Judith Butler maintains that the evolution of 'queer' is not concerned with "definition, fixity or stasis, but is transitive, multiple and anti-assimilationist" (Salih 8). While gender studies and radical second wave feminist theory may assume the existence of an objective subject, queer theory undertakes an investigation and a deconstruction of these categories, and affirms the indeterminacy and instability of all sexed and gendered identities (Salih 8). Teresa de Laurentis posits that queer theory can provide a place where "we would be willing to examine, make explicit, compare or confront the respective histories, assumptions, and conceptual frameworks" (de Laurentis 4) that have characterized different communities of gay men and lesbian women across all social

boundaries. Similarly, Ki Namaste argues that sociological queer theory's stress on the "multiplicity of identity expands contemporary sexual politics beyond a stagnant hetero/homo opposition" (Namaste 206). She suggests that a queer theory framework provides people with more choices in how they define themselves, and insists on the diversity within communities of the sexually marginalized. By unsettling much of the lesbian and gay response to heterosexism, and by suggesting that many non-heterosexual positions are available, such activism focuses its attention on *displacing* heterosexuality, homosexuality, and the relations between the two (206).

The ongoing redefinition and discussion of gender within the lesbian punk rock community, and even the controversies and contradictions within that scene, provide vital examples of what it means to consider various subjectivities in the gradual exploration of a dynamic beyond the binaries of male and female, and heterosexual and homosexual.

In the end, lesbian punk rock subculture is fertile ground for some of the main projects of queer theory, which involve

not just the questioning of the content of collective identities, but the *questioning of the unity, stability, viability and political utility of sexual identities*— even as they are used and assumed (Gamson 404).

Lesbian punk rock is an example of a subculture that works against the dichotomy of gender while it offers an alternative representation of the female in music. By looking past and challenging socially constructed notions of gender, and by doing so within the traditionally male-centered punk rock subculture, dykecore transforms a stereotypically

masculine genre into a site of female agency. The subculture strives to move past what Esther Leslie describes as the “dialectical imagery” of male/female interaction (Leslie 116) toward a nuanced perspective that includes various subjectivities: what Haraway refers to as “situated knowledges” (Haraway 253).

After the Riot

In 1996, Candace Pederson of K Records predicted that the empowering spirit that drove the Riot Grrrl subculture would not vanish. She suggested that:

what happens *after* a riot is what’s most important to look at, because a riot blows everything up– but who’s there picking up all the pieces? I don’t see that any of those women have abandoned the concept of picking up the pieces and carrying them forward (Juno 181).

The dykecore community is still going strong, and was conceived by women who are passionate about their own rights and the rights of those who are discriminated against. Like Riot Grrrl, dykecore and the larger genre of homocore was seen by the popular media as a fleeting trend, and in the late 1990s was “very quickly regarded as passé” (White 2). However, Tammy Rae Carland challenges that assertion, and in a 2001 interview, she maintained that within the subculture, “[they] weren’t necessarily feeling that anything was over. We were just getting started” (White 2). Certainly, the fact that for Homo A Go Go 2004, dykecore pioneers Team Dresch will reunite for a single performance to benefit the Olympia-based Gender Variant Health Project, a non-profit

organization “devoted to health issues and healthcare needs of [people whose] gender identity differs from the gender assigned to [them] based on [their] biological sex” (“About HAGG” 1), demonstrates that the new spirit of feminist subculture is alive and well, and that indeed the “riot” continues.

Continuing in the spirit of Riot Grrrl, lesbian punk rock community sets an example for young girls by claiming a traditionally male-centered style of music for women. It presents lyrics that can discuss and provide support for young women dealing with issues related to their sexuality, can negotiate the relationship between the queer experience and the and society at large, or that can even move entirely beyond the scope of patriarchy to a space for female desire, love and relationships. Through lyrics, liner notes, fanzines, local activism and internet message boards, this community of twenty-something women establishes a support network for girls while encouraging them to relate to a variety of subjectivities, and to constantly re-examine their beliefs about gender, sex, culture, media and ideology. The dykecore community counters what Angela McRobbie has called a dispassionate generation of women who are not interested in furthering feminism. Quite to the contrary, these women in their twenties and thirties, directly associated with Riot Grrrl, are making efforts to advise and to inspire younger girls by fostering a community that challenges the image of the eroticized and submissive female that we see in the pop music world today.

Chapter Five

Electronic Feminist Punk Music as Youth Subculture

“I’ve got the new sincerity. I’ve got a secret vocabulary.”

The New York-based trio Le Tigre calls itself an electronic feminist punk band. Such a hybrid term effectively articulates their evolution and their efforts to further integrate feminist and queer politics into electronic music by infusing the style with the DIY ethic prevalent in punk rock youth subculture. Le Tigre’s style is a combination of samples of their own scrubby punk rock guitar riffs, looping drum-machine beats, keyboards, quirky sound effects, and clips from sources as diverse as video games, 1970s feminist stand-up comedy, spoken word poetry, and crowd sounds from a lesbian pride march. Current band members Johanna Fateman, Kathleen Hanna, JD Samson alternate duties with samplers, keyboards, drum machines, and bass and electric guitars. All of these sounds are melded together with the distinctive vocals of all three band members, whose feminist and politically-charged lyrics command attention and energize young audiences. Le Tigre is at the forefront of a new young feminist subculture that has been evolving since 1998 that emerged directly out of the Riot Grrrl and dykecore communities. The band’s determination to bring about a “revolution you can dance to” (Frey 2), by mixing feminist and queer-positive music and politics with electronic dance music, makes them an important case study in my examination of the musical subcultures

of young women.

Subcultural Roots: Riot Grrrl and dykecore

Le Tigre maintain that they are proud to be identified as a “deconstructive, performance-art, electronic pop off-shoot” of the “grassroots punk feminist organizing and cultural production of the nineties” (Le Tigre World). As intimately connected to Riot Grrrl, the band brings to electronic music what Neil Nehring identified in Riot Grrrl as a feminist “confidence in the educative power of emotion,” and an “explicit repudiation of postmodern cynicism” (Nehring 2003 61). All three of the founding members of the band were active in the underground network of activists that sprung up around Riot Grrrl, and they met through their participation in that subculture. On their web site, the band credits Riot Grrrl with putting into place the cultural resources that make it possible for Le Tigre to exist because it “created a lasting international network of feminist promoters, labels, writers, dj’s, journalists, musicians, artists and fans” (Le Tigre World)

Le Tigre has been gaining momentum since the band formed shortly after the 1998 release of the album by Kathleen Hanna’s musical alter-ego, Julie Ruin. Hanna’s solo project maintained the strongly feminist message of Bikini Kill, but with Julie Ruin, she delved into the electronic music style with the help of second-hand equipment: “I was interested in electronic music when I was still in Bikini Kill, but it wasn’t until I was working on the Julie Ruin record that I got a sampler” (“From camp to pop” 1). In order

to tour with all of her equipment and complicated layers of sampling, Hanna sought the help of friends video artist Sadie Benning and zine writer Johanna Fateman. While Fateman and Hann re-shaped the Julie Ruiiri material into a viable live show, they wrote new songs together. After sending a home-recorded cassette of the material to Benning, the three began working on a new project that would ultimately become the first Le Tigre album (Le Tigre World). The fledgling band wanted to have a visual component to their stage performance, so they created a slide show that had to be manually controlled, and recruited JD Samson to run the slide projector. Samson became a full member of the band when Benning left to concentrate on her film making, but she was an important member of the group even before she was on stage.

As an electronic post-Riot Grrrl band, Le Tigre express an interest “celebrating the radical aspirations of nineties DIY, feminist, punk art rather than romanticizing its achievements or clinging to its style” (“Le Tigre” 1). Their lyrics are as aggressively feminist as those of Hanna’s former punk band, but they are easier to decipher than Bikini Kill’s lyrics, which were often screamed. Hanna explains that she was surprised to hear that young people were getting interested in Le Tigre through the music, and were receiving the political message as a bonus:

With Bikini Kill, I was so used to people saying, ‘it’s not really my kind of music, but I like what you stand for.’ I’ve heard it so many times that its refreshing to have people say, ‘Oh, I didn’t realize it was interesting or feminist, I just thought it sounded good” (Huffa 2).

Being musically appealing as well as politically charged has given Le Tigre a wider

audience, and their insistence on fun as well as education has made them popular with young female and queer-identified audiences. One journalist has compared their live performances to “hanging out with your worldly, *informed* older sister who, while letting you party with her and her friends, insists that you learn something in the bargain” (Carlson 4). This has meant that a large number of young women are turned on to gender politics, and are subsequently exposed to networks of support that have been established through Riot Grrrl and dykecore communities.

Musical Roots: Electroclash: “dance music for rock people”

Le Tigre’s music is sometimes associated with the electroclash musical style due to its heavy use of electronic music. Electroclash is a broad musical style that combines the electronic new wave and punk-inspired sounds of the early 1980s with a distinctively twenty-first century preoccupation with “fashion, art, irony, and sex—lots and lots of sex” (Durbin 1). The electroclash sound is characterized by sample beats from early 1980s artists like Kraftwerk, Visage, New Order, Human League and Gary Numan. It features one-octave bass lines, beats inspired by early 1980s Italo disco, fuzzy vocals, and keyboards. One article about electroclash provides a “short checklist of handy buzzwords” associated with electroclash lyrics:

cocaine, glamour, glitz, jetset, sex, lipstick, sunglasses, champagne, night life, disco, 1982, space invaders, Pac-Man, trash, romantic, Euro, “electronique”, lifestyle, robots, computer, sleaze, auto, plaza, dancer,

fashion, style, human, cars, magazine, TV, seduction, silver screen,
 plastic, passion, android, leatherette, suicide, porno, telephone, neon,
 futuristic, robots, robots and robots (“Great Electroclash Swindle” 1).

The term “electroclash” was coined by Larry Tee, a 45 year-old New York disc jockey and club promoter who in 2002 founded the America-wide Electroclash Festival tour featuring acts like Chicks on Speed, Tracy and the Plastics, Fischerspooner, Ladytron and Canadian-born Peaches. While the label “electroclash” applies to diverse artists, it captures the clash of “many different styles of performers and performances congregating to perform electronic music” (Ischloe 2), which is often concerned with challenging societal conventions, especially those concerned with gender roles and sexuality. Larry Tee maintains that “electroclash doesn’t [care] if you’re gay or straight, male or female, black or white,” and “might be the first genre where sexuality isn’t an issue” (Durbin 2). However, in the original electroclash tour lineup in 2001, all of the performers, with the exception of Tee, were female (Durbin 2).

Le Tigre’s electronic feminist punk rock sound is similar to electroclash. In fact, the band credits electroclash phenomenon Peaches, whose music and performance strive to break down gender role stereotypes, with inspiring them to compose their sexually-charged song, “Well, Well, Well.” Like some other electroclash artists, Peaches, a Toronto native residing in Berlin, aggressively rips apart gender stereotypes with her sexually explicit performances. However, Le Tigre’s clear political agenda and earnestness are in stark contrast with the ironic self-reflexivity which characterizes most electroclash acts. Larry Tee explains that electroclash “makes fun of things that are

wrong, celebrates celebrity excess while making fun of it” (Durbin 2). The focus on mockery challenges societal norms and cultural taboos, but the underlying ironic tone of the style tends to undermine any challenge to convention. Richard Moroder Juzwiak asserts that electroclash is more concerned with fashion and drug culture than actually making a coherent statement about any issue. He claims that the music scene:

consumes styles like a person who’s just on the verge of an eating disorder consumes food. It takes the 80s idea that disco should be injected with rock to give it an edge, and goes overboard, gorging itself on the past 25 years of dance music. What was once futuristic has become irony-packed retro-futurism (Juzwiak 3).

Moreover, Juzwiak argues that the electroclash community is elitist to the extent that “for everyone else who doesn’t know Larry Tee personally, the scene is just as intimidating, superficial, ridiculous and sceney as any” (4). He maintains that “electroclash is not about hugging and feeling the music deep in your [drug]-enhanced soul. It’s about having something playing in the background that will make you look cool as you strut and snap-dance” (5). This description brings to mind Jon Stratton’s identification of two sorts of subcultures: spectacular subcultures concerned with social resistance, and consumerist subcultures based on commodity consumption that offer an alternative to the mainstream but do not work expressly for social change (184). Stratton’s comparison is a useful way of differentiating between electroclash, whose association with fashion and drug consumption makes it difficult to establish a supportive community within the scene, and the political subculture of electronic feminist punk, which makes use of interpersonal

networks of social resistance established by Riot Grrrl and dykecore. While it is likely not the intention of electroclash acts to create a community in any case, it stands in contrast to the outspokenly feminist and DIY-inspired electronic punk music subculture that Le Tigre and other acts have been creating.

Richard Moroder Juzwiak calls electroclash a “self-aware hodgepodge” that “has all the makings of the first postmodern dance genre” (3). Indeed, the sensationalism of electroclash is a combination of spectacle and a sort of superficial subversion that turns convention onto its head but ultimately represents little more than that subversion itself. Neil Nehring maintains that a postmodern reading of culture does not represent a real shift away from modernist or even romantic aesthetics because its insistence upon meaninglessness and irony suggests that any spectacle undertaken cannot come to any real political change. He compares such deliberately postmodern music making with Nietzsche’s idea of “*ressentiment*,” which holds that “momentary escapes from consciousness through wild emotion” (Nehring 38) have hindered people’s urge to participate in mechanisms for real political and societal change. While it expresses some degree of challenge to societal norms, especially regarding gender roles, electroclash appears to lack the important motivating element of sincerity. Electroclash may open eyes to the diversity and potential of unabashed expression, but its ironic stance offers little potential to create support networks among young audiences similar to those provided by youth subcultures Riot Grrrl and dykecore. In the end, electroclash audiences fit into what Lawrence Grossberg has characterized as musical consumption rather than fandom, because listeners seek pleasure, rather than emotional involvement,

from the music.

Conversely, Le Tigre's feminist and queer politics are earnest and explicit, and the band demands emotional engagement with its fervent rejection of postmodern cynicism. Kathleen Hanna explains their disdain for the irony and contradiction prevalent in the art world is a major motivation for the band:

the notion of "community" had been so problematised by postmodern theory and identity politics gone haywire, that it was easier to retreat to irony or purely oppositional self-definitions. Instead we wanted to be sincere and take risks (Le Tigre World).

In response to their observation that, at least in their own art scene, self-definitions and cynicism meant that all art making became "a joke, or ironic," the members of Le Tigre decided to approach music making and performance with "open hearts" (Kahn 2), and to make all of their political positions explicit and sincere. On their web site, Le Tigre explain the connection that they see between music and politics:

We don't think that art or music can replace political activism, but we think it can be an important part of a culture of resistance so that social change feels positive. We want to make great music that radical people can recognize their values in, because that's what we ourselves crave (Le Tigre World).

Le Tigre follow through with their agenda to promote tolerance for difference and to foster supportive networks within their community in a variety of ways. Through internet and live performances, they help promote meaningful dialogue between generations of

feminists and queer political activists. In so doing, they have continued in the tradition of Riot Grrrl and dykecore by creating a venue for important discussion through their art.

Feminist Politics

A comparison between the music of Bikini Kill and Le Tigre gives the impression that Kathleen Hanna is less angry than she once was. Le Tigre's music is less aggressive and more aesthetically approachable, and the lyrics have a positive slant. However, Hanna insists that her feminism hasn't softened as she has gotten older, but, she says, "If anything, it's gotten more militant" ("From camp to pop" 1). On their web site, Le Tigre proudly assert that they are feminists, but they are careful to remind fans that there is no single definition of feminism: "Obviously we can't represent all kinds of feminists or come up with a definition that can be universally applied, but yes, of course we proudly identify as feminists" (Le Tigre World). However, true to their Riot Grrrl origins, they maintain that "the kind of feminism [they] are most interested in is the kind that not only challenges misogyny but also stands against racism, homophobia, class-ism, imperialism etc [sic]," (Le Tigre World) and they provide an extensive list of feminist books by authors including Susan Brownmiller, Elaine Brown, Angela Davis, Dorothy Allison, Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam, and Barbara Smith. The fact that the band members recommend books by both second and third wave feminists demonstrates their commitment to maintaining a clear and well-informed link to past and present feminists, even as they advocate a wider definition of feminism that includes consideration of race,

class, and transgender issues.

In effect, Le Tigre's feminism is exemplary of third wave DIY feminism. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake define the third wave as a "movement that contains elements of second wave critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures" while working to create a feminism that integrates elements of "such disparate bodies of thought as equality feminism, women-of-colour feminism, and pro-sex feminism" (Harris 276). Through alternative media such as fanzines, internet communities, and music lyrics, the subcultural networks established from the height of Riot Grrrl through the rise of dykecore have allowed young women to share their diverse stories and to draw from a variety of feminist standpoints. While there is a widespread perception that third wave feminism is characterized by a "break with the past" that "displac[es] the pioneers of second wave feminism into history, as no longer active or changing", to collapse an entire generation of feminists into a single "wave" is to flatten away class, ethnicity, and sexual identity (Bulbeck 2). Indeed, one of the strengths of many young feminists like the members of Le Tigre is their refusal of a "singular liberal-humanist subjectivity" and their insistence upon multiplicity (Bulbeck 3). Le Tigre are aware that they address a diverse audience, and, as a band made up of an abuse survivor and ex-sex worker, a lesbian who strives to challenge gender boundaries, and a feminist writer, they embody this diversity.

Chilla Bulbeck maintains that third wave feminists "write and sing and act within the context of a history produced by second wave academic feminists" (8). Le Tigre's song lyrics reflect their commitment to acknowledging and situating their own political

activism firmly within this feminist history. The lyrics of their 1999 song, “Hot Topic,” demonstrate the continuity that the band sees between second and third wave feminist movements. The song, which is structured as a musical “shout out” recognizing influential feminists, begins by addressing older feminists Carolee Schneeman, Carol Rama, Eleanor Antin and Yoko Ono: “You’re getting old, that’s what they say but don’t give a damn, I’m listening anyway”. The lyrics feature the names of over fifty artists, activists, musicians and writers, both male and female, who have been instrumental to the feminist cause since the 1970s. The refrain, “don’t stop. I can’t live if you stop,” makes it clear that the band members see feminist activists from all eras as essential. Contrary to the popular media’s declaration that feminism is dead, Le Tigre see their peers in the band Sleater-Kinney, at Mr.Lady Records, and spoken word artist Vaginal Creme Davis as furthering the feminist activism established by second wave legends like Gertrude Stein and Angela Davis. Indeed, at live performances, “Hot Topic” is accompanied by a slide show showing images of influential feminists including first wave feminist Susan B. Anthony. The powerful feminist message is emphasized by the high energy light show, choreographed dancing by the band, and upbeat electronic dance music.

Kathleen Hanna is adamant about the importance of acknowledging the efforts of second wave feminists, and while she admits that as a young woman she often felt rejected by some older feminists who were critical of her pro-sex feminism and her refusal to adhere to second wave conventions, she believes it is important to “share information with people [interested in feminism] so they don’t have to re-invent the wheel” every generation (Juno 102). With its lyrics, the band firmly establishes itself

along the feminist continuum, and demonstrates that young women are interested in the past, present and future of the feminist cause. The song “FYR” is inspired by radical second wave feminist Shulamith Firestone’s text, The Dialectic of Sex. Hanna explains that like the Firestone’s book, FYR is “about how for every 10 years or so of feminist activity or when there’s a wave of political change, it’s followed by 50 years of ridicule. Feminists are seen as old-fashioned and Fred Durst is seen as radical” (Huffa 3). The fact that the members of Le Tigre can hold their own in an academic debate about feminism and that they write songs based on radical second wave feminist texts demonstrates their investment in the feminist music that they make and the community that springs up around it. Their message that feminism can be fun is, in the song “FYR,” combined with a warning not to let feminist movements fade away, and to continue in the footsteps of second wave feminists. The song’s refrain, “feminists we’re calling you, please report to the front desk. Let’s name this phenomenon, it’s too dumb to bring us down,” is a rallying cry for young women that rises out of energetic and trendy electronic dance music (Le Tigre 2001). Meanwhile, the lyrics,

You’ve really come a long way baby. It’s you, not the world, that’s totally crazy. Cuz we really rocked the fuckin’ vote with election fraud in poor zip codes. Celebrate gay marriage in Vermont by enforcing those old sodomy laws (Le Tigre 2001),

point to the band’s third wave feminist preoccupation with a broad range of social challenges, including class and queer issues. The songs “FYR” and “Hot Topic” have become feminist anthems sung by young audiences at Le Tigre concerts, and they

highlight the band's determination to bridge the feminist generational gap while contributing their own, well-informed opinions to the feminist cause.

The question of why third wave feminism is not thriving in the popular media is a complicated one. The fact that Le Tigre, for all of its enthusiasm and inspirational feminist music, is relatively unknown, is due in part to the fact that they have released their albums on a Mr. Lady, the small, women-run independent label begun by dykecore pioneers Tammy Rae Carland and Kaia Wilson. Anita Harris, in her discussion of third wave feminism, points out that the use of new technologies such as [internet maga]zines, message boards and web sites by young feminists reflects "new spaces and practices for feminist politics" (Bulbeck 4). Chilla Bulbeck posits that the fact that young women in these communities often "understand and resist the commodification of their feminism," which "drives their activism underground" (4). Just as the Riot Grrrl media blackout did not cause the young feminist community to completely disintegrate, the fact that third wave DIY feminism is virtually invisible to the popular media –and to many second wave feminists– does not mean that it fails to provide many young women with a network of support. To the contrary, women who are exposed to Le Tigre's feminist message are bombarded with information about the past, present and future of feminism. In fact, the underground feminist networks have actually broadened the definition of feminism by integrating queer politics into the third wave.

Le Tigre and Queer Politics

Le Tigre has made strides in the punk rock world towards the inclusion of queer-identified people in the subculture. The Riot Grrrl and dykecore communities worked to make people aware of the challenges faced by young gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual people by creating spaces for discussion and by providing a variety of opinions on issues like trans inclusion. As discussed in the previous chapter, the controversy surrounding the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival's ban on transsexual attendance inspired many young people to explore queer politics. By creating a dialogue about this issue, musicians like Kaia Wilson of the Butchies brought queer politics to the forefront of feminist musical subculture. Le Tigre's JD Samson, along with the other band members, has inspired even more young feminist fans to explore queer politics with her frank discussion of androgyny, transsexuality and lesbian feminism in interviews, on the band's website, in lyrics, and through her choreography for Le Tigre's live performances. As an film student Samson was frustrated by the separate theory of each artistic medium that she studied, and she was determined to challenge media boundaries by creating "wall films" that she says broke down the "'inherent boundaries' of the film medium by forcing the film out of the projector and onto the walls" ("JD Samson" 2). The wall films, composed of a variety of media including pencil, charcoal, ink, xerox transfer and paint, are what Samson sees as "queer art," because they challenge the traditional media boundaries in art: "I think of it terms of breaking the boundaries that one artistic medium can be constrained by" ("JD Samson" 2). Samson brings her

concept of “queering art” to Le Tigre, and sees a parallel between blurring the boundaries of artistic media and challenging the traditional gender binary of male and female through the band’s music and politics

On their web site, JD Samson and Kathleen Hanna draw deliberate parallels between “coming out” as queer and as a survivor of abuse. The section of their web site entitled “Keep on Living” provides their fans with information and links to resources that will help young people who are “coming out of the closet as a sexual abuse survivor and as queer” (Le Tigre World). The web site brings issues of feminism and queer politics together. While it offers support for young women struggling to come to grips with their sexuality, it also gives young heterosexual women a way of understanding the challenges that young queer-identified people face. Le Tigre’s song, “Fake French,” also articulates the band’s commitment to challenging gender stereotypes, and expresses their inclusive attitude towards feminism. The lines, “I’ve got a deviant scene,” and “I’ve got post-binary gender chores,” (Le Tigre 2001) demonstrate the band’s awareness of issues related to gender definitions, while the lines, “I’ve got extensive bibliographies,” and “I’ve got multiple alliances” express their dedication to an inclusive feminism. The major efforts of Le Tigre to give young lesbian, gay, transsexual and bisexual people, as well as abuse survivors, a stronger voice can be seen on their web site, in their lyrics, and in their blurring of boundaries of artistic expression and feminist and queer politics.

Le Tigre and New Media Technology

Le Tigre uses complex technologies not only to make politically-charged music, but also to forge connections with young women through their live performances and in cyberspace. Their web site is an art project for which the band members have collaborated with friend and artist Brian Ackley. It contains sections called "Keep on Living," "Gear n' Stuff," "Just the Facts, Ma'am" "Our Favorite Things," and "Family and Friends," that provide fans with information about the band members, their influences, and people whom they see as important to the advancement of feminism and queer politics. Brightly coloured graphics and Flash animation also link fans to resources about suicide prevention, lesbian, gay, queer, transsexual and bisexual support groups, and sexual abuse hotlines, as well as lists of essential feminist texts, and how to go about booking a Le Tigre show. JD Samson explains that Le Tigre put so much effort into the web site because they realize that young fans look to them for support:

we really wanted to respond to the letters that we have gotten in the mail which usually are composed of questions regarding our equipment and/or [sic] feelings about physical abuse and sexual abuse ("JD Samson" 1).

The wealth of information on Le Tigre's web site demonstrates that the band members see themselves as powerful role models for young people, particularly girls. The band uses its notoriety to help young fans become more informed about sexual abuse, feminism and queer issues while presenting them with tools to help them through their difficult teen years.

While they associate themselves with the Riot Grrrl community from which they emerged, the members of Le Tigre are creating new sounds meant to challenge the labels imposed on female musicians. Kathleen Hanna emphasizes that with Le Tigre, she is determined to undermine the stereotypes that plague women music makers: "I am interested in expanding notions of what it is to be a political artist rather than playing into 'women-in-rock' stereotypes of feminist rage" (Le Tigre World). The band uses technologically complex equipment to create layered music and spectacular multi-media performances, and they also encourage young women to make their own music, providing step-by-step instructions on how to get started. On their web site, the "Gear n' Stuff" section provides extensive information about each piece of equipment the band uses in their music making. Paragraphs entitled "Sampling and Making Beats," "Songwriting and Recording," and "Playing Live," feature technical and instructional write-ups by each band member about the strengths and weaknesses of different brands of slide and video projectors, drum pads, samplers, on-stage monitoring systems, effects boxes, sequencers, keyboards and music editing software programs. While it is technically complex advice from women who have produced numerous albums and performed on over eight tours with the equipment, a conversational tone makes the instructions clear to even the most "technophobic" fan. For example, JD's description of Reason, a music editing software program, is infused with humour and a personal touch:

Once you have made something you like in Reason, you can export a loop (as an AIFF or WAVE file) directly into Protools (or whatever recording software you use) and then you can sing or play other instruments over it!

You can also use Reason to trigger a different sound from an outside source using MIDI, or use the sounds in Reason triggered by another trigger. This I haven't tried, but I have heard the easiest way to try this is using a tiny (DI box style) gadget called the "midiman," but I prefer "midiwoman" (yeah, right). (Le Tigre World).

Le Tigre's equipment advice is specifically aimed at young women, and while it is complicated, the band is insistent that young women can use the equipment with success. Indeed, the section ends with a challenge to young women: "Ok, now that you know all of our secrets, start your own feminist electronic punk band and come kick our asses!!!" (Le Tigre World).

Mavis Bayton has observed that since there are no physical reasons for women not to play the electric guitar, the reasons for the shortage of female guitarists must be social. She identifies a lack of money, time, practice space, transportation and access to equipment as obstacles to female participation in music making (40). Bayton maintains that the lack of formal settings for women to learn to play instruments, along with the fact that young women often feel unwelcome in male music making settings, accounts for the small number of young women who are learning to play electric musical instruments (40). Bayton also blames the competitive atmosphere at music equipment stores for intimidating female musicians, and the use of highly technical language for discouraging young women from gaining confidence in music making (42). Music veteran Kathleen Hanna acknowledges that music equipment stores can be intimidating for young women, and even she admits that she dreads trying out equipment in stores because "there is

always some guy in the ‘try-out’ room at the guitar store playing Iron Butterfly songs really really loud and I honestly would rather have one of my arms broken that have to walk in there” (Le Tigre World). In contrast, Le Tigre’s information about technical equipment is written in a disarmingly humorous manner, and it is an appealing alternative to the intimidating atmosphere that prevents some young women from learning to play music. For this reason, Le Tigre’s “Gear n’ Stuff” web page provides a valuable resource to young women interested in making music. While following in the tradition of dykecore zine writers like Donna Dresch, who wrote an equipment advice column for young female musicians in the late 1980s (Juno 88), Le Tigre’s web site is also an example of how young feminists are using new media technology to reach out to their peers.

“For the ladies and the fags, yeah”: Le Tigre on stage

Le Tigre follow the DIY subcultural tradition of maintaining intimate connections with their fans. This intimacy is nowhere more powerfully evident than at their live performances. A description by Michaela Bancud of the Portland Tribune begins to capture the high energy at a Le Tigre’s stage show, which features “videos, singalongs and jokey, Devo-like dance steps”: “Imagine ‘80’s minimalist electro, a ‘50’s-era band like the Shirelles and sampled beats. Le Tigre hopscotches between rock and electronica with abandon” (1). The show is choreographed by JD Samson, who takes pleasure in integrating “boy-band-derivative moves” (Greene 1), Motown-inspired coordinated dance

steps, and punk rock guitar solos into the band members' performances, which are accented by their version of matching girl-group-style outfits. Rachel Greene of Artforum describes a Le Tigre performance as more than just entertainment, but as an experience that:

reopens questions about community, fandom, feminism, queerness, and their conjunctions and differences, by drawing on staged spectacle, audience, exuberance, and punk-derived dance tunes with sneaky samples and make-your-heart-swell lyrics (Greene 1).

Le Tigre begin their set with the upbeat and anthemic "LT Tour Theme," that calls the audience to the dancefloor. The song acknowledges that it is difficult to have an impact on each audience member, because "when the club is really crowded [...] there's no way we can do every song that's shouted," but the lyrics reveal the band's determination to "push you towards abandon" (Le Tigre 2001). The refrain, "for the ladies, and the fags yeah, we're the one with the rollerskate jams" highlights Le Tigre's playfulness, and it also shows that the band is addressing its audience with a feminist and queer-positive stance. "LT Tour Theme" also articulates that the band's reason for touring is to reach out to young women and not to gain media attention: "Yeah, you know the guys with the digi cameras, push to the front and then they just stand there? But then we see the girls walking towards the dancefloor and we remember why we go on tour" (Le Tigre 2001). All of the elements of a Le Tigre live performance, from gender-bending choreography, feminist video presentations and continuous instrument swapping, to fiercely political and playful lyrics and audience interaction combine to make it the

culmination of the band's political and social philosophy that piques audiences' curiosity about feminism and queer politics in a fun and positive environment.

"The new sincerity"

Le Tigre's decision in the spring of 2004 to sign to a subsidiary of a major record label was met with some criticism in the feminist and queer DIY subculture. In 2001, Kathleen Hanna insisted that Le Tigre had made the decision to stay with Mr.Lady, a label committed to producing queer-positive and feminist artwork, because they wanted to demonstrate that it was possible to avoid compromising "integrity or artistic vision or visions [...] to get your music out into the world":

We're on an independent label run by two women from their house, and we earn a living. That's really positive and we want other women to know that's possible, that you don't have to cater to major labels" (Kahn 6).

The band's decision to release their 2004 album with a major label will give the band wider exposure, and, Hanna hopes, mean that their feminist and queer-positive message will reach a larger young audience. Hanna still insists that her feminist stance "hasn't gotten any softer": "If anything, it's gotten more militant, and I want to reach as many people as possible" ("From punk to pop" 1).

Le Tigre has demonstrated its commitment to educating young people through alternative and new media, frank discussion, lyrics, and fun-filled performances about the importance of feminism and queer politics. They have continued, in the footsteps of Riot

Grrl and dykecore communities, to challenge the widespread idea that young people are uninterested in feminism, and, by further integrating queer politics, have helped to transform the very definition of feminism. By participating in the Bands Against Bush punk rock tours of 2003 and 2004, they have also exposed young fans to issues of class, race and United States foreign policy. The band has also, through detailed instructions, encouraged young women to challenge traditional barriers in popular music and become musicians themselves. In short, Le Tigre has become a major motivational force within a feminist musical subculture.

Dick Hebdige maintains that youth subcultures have the potential to be powerful and disruptive violations of the authorized codes that organize the social world. He demonstrates that the emergence of elements of a subculture into the popular culture can lead to widespread re-definition of what constitutes deviant behaviour (131). While Hebdige concludes that a subculture is eventually domesticated, trivialized, exoticized, villified or appropriated by mainstream culture through media outlets which codify and situate it within the dominant framework of discourse by removing it from its original context (133), Le Tigre maintain their hope that by reaching a mainstream audience with their feminist and queer-positive message, they will be able to transform the lives of more young people in the process. Even if it does not change the way that most young people see the world, perhaps the emergence of Le Tigre's politically-charged music into popular consciousness will convince older feminists that feminism is still thriving for young people in musical subcultures. In the meantime, the bands that have sprung up with the encouragement of Le Tigre, such as Montreal's Lesbians On Ecstasy, who

perform playful electronic covers of lesbian anthems such as Melissa Ethridge's

"Like the Way I Do," will continue to re-energize feminism within the young feminist musical subculture, and will perhaps reach a wider audience on their own terms as young, intelligent feminists savvy of the power of alternative and mainstream media.

Conclusion

Deborah L. Siegel has observed that contrary to the popular perception, within the past two decades there has been a “remarkable resurgence of grassroots student activism, young feminist conferences, and a host of new or newly revitalized social action organizations and networks led largely by young women” (Siegel 51). The young women involved in Riot Grrrl, dykecore, and electronic feminist punk subculture are vital examples of this resurgence of feminist activism. However, in a shift away from the second wave form of consciousness raising which commonly relied on institutionalized theories of feminism, young women in the feminist subcultures have relied on personal narrative as a form of theorizing. Using alternative media like fanzines, web pages, message boards and song lyrics, young women in these subcultures have forged new directions in their own feminist groups by building into their discussions of gender and sexuality their own diverse stories of their interactions with mainstream culture, punk subcultures, misogyny, sexual abuse, homophobia, and queer identities. Young feminists’ use of alternative media is partly a reaction to what Anita Harris identifies as their suspicion of popular culture’s “distortion of their projects and ideas” (Bulbeck 2). Angela McRobbie has argued that if critics and scholars would leave behind their insistence that the fate of successful subcultural capital is for it to be absorbed into the mainstream, they would find young people in a great variety of subcultures, “learning and sharing skills, practicing them, [and] making a small amount of money” (McRobbie 1993 412), while creating alternative and empowering ways of living. Indeed, because of their

reluctance to cooperate with conventional media outlets and their commitment to underground community interaction, young feminist subcultures have gone largely unnoticed by mainstream culture and by some second wave feminists, but they have nonetheless introduced important networks of support to many young women.

According to Neil Nehring, “new female rockers” have tried “to open up a new way of living for hordes of young women,” because they have “refused to be a victim of gender categorization as feminists have long sought, while breaking with their elders’ intellectual-literary bent by making self-creation a more exciting and attractive matter than studiously absorbing feminist tracts” (2003 61). In late 1980s, young feminists drew inspiration from the grassroots activism of their punk communities, and from the female-inclusive atmosphere of Olympia’s independent music community to create a punk subculture specifically aimed at furthering the feminist cause. Within that subculture, young artists identifying as lesbians brought queer issues to the forefront with the support of their Riot Grrrl communities, and followed in the tradition of 1970s womyn’s music to make punk rock music that celebrating the lesbian experience. More recently, Le Tigre has laid the groundwork for a feminist subculture that challenges stereotypes of feminist art by creating fun-filled and informed music that defies gender boundaries and traditional boundaries of art and media forms. Most importantly, though, with Riot Grrrl’s emergence from the DIY punk tradition, and its gradual transformation into dykecore and electronic feminist punk music, the feminist musical subculture has made an important contribution to feminist thought by integrating queer issues to create a distinctively third wave brand of feminism. All of this may have happened under the

radar of popular culture and media, but the fact remains that many young people have been inspired and helped by the support systems that musical subcultures have set up through internet, discussion groups, music making and performances. In the end, DIY feminist punk subcultures challenge the assertion that young women are no longer committed to feminist causes. Quite to the contrary, these young women are interested in a new, dynamic feminism that embraces queer politics as well as issues of race and class to create an inclusive atmosphere with great potential to bring about social change.

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Appendix One

Hot Topic

Lyrics by Le Tigre

Hot topic is that way that we rhyme
 Hot topic is that way that we rhyme
 One step behind the drum style
 One step behind the drum style

Carol Rama and Eleanor Antin
 Yoko Ono and Carolee Schneeman
 You're getting old that's what they say, but
 Don't give a damn I'm listening anyway

CHORUS:

Stop. Don't you stop.
 I can't live if you stop.
 Don't you stop.

Gretchen Philips and Cibo Matto
 Leslie Feinberg and Faith Ringglog
 Mr. Lady, Laura Cunningham
 Mab Segrest and the Butchies, man

So many roads and so much opinion
 So much shit to give and give in to
 So many rules and so much opinion
 So much bullshit be we won't give in

Tammy Rae Carland and Sleater-Kinney
 Vivienne Dick and Lorraine O'Grady
 Gayatri Spivak and Angela Davis
 Laurie Weeks and Dorothy Allison

Gertrude Stein, Marlon Riggs, Billie Jean King, Ut, DJ Cuttin Candy, David
 Wojnarowicz, Melissa York, Nina Simone, Ann Peebles, Tammy Hart, The Slits, Hanin
 Elias, Hazel Dickens, Cathy Sissier, Shirley Muldowney, Urvashi Vaid, Valie Export,
 Cathy Opie, James Baldwin, Diane Dimassa, Aretha Franklin, Joan Jett, Mia X, Krystal
 Wakem, Kara Walker, Justin Bond, Bridger Irish, Juliana Lueking, Cecelia Dougherty,
 Ariel Skrag, The Need, Vaginal Creme Davis, Alice Gerard, Billy Tipton, Julie Doucet,
 Yakoi Kusama, Eileen Myles.

Appendix Two**FYR**

lyrics by Le Tigre

Ten short years of progressive change. Fifty fuckin years of calling us names.
Can we trade title nine for an end to hate crime? RU-486 if we suck your fuckin dick?
One step forward, five steps back. One cool record in the year of rock-rap.

CHORUS:

Yeah we got all the power getting stabbed in the shower
and we got equal rights on ladies nite.
Feminists we're calling you. Please report to the front desk.
Let's name this phenomenon. It's too dumb to bring us down.
F.Y.R. Fifty years of ridicule.
F.Y.R. Take another picture....

Mrs. Doubtfire on mother's day. On-the-job stalker for equal pay.
Toss us a few new AIDS drugs as national health care bites the dust.
While you were on vacation black people didn't get reparations.
You know these days no one's exploited.
Sorry dude can't hear ya with my head in the toilet.

CHORUS

You've really come a long way, baby.
It's you, not the world, that's totally crazy.
Cuz we really rocked the fuckin vote with election fraud in poor zip codes.
Celebrate gay marriage in Vermont by enforcing those old sodomy laws.
One step forward. Five steps back. We tell the truth they turn up the laugh track.

Appendix ThreeLT Tour Theme

lyrics by Le Tigre

Yeah it's weird when the club is really crowded and there's no way we can do every song that's shouted, but we'll still try to push you towards abandon.

Yeah every night is something that we can't plan on.

Won't you dance some more?

For the ladies and the fags yeah, we're the ones with the rollerskate jams

Yeah you know the guys with the digi cameras, push to the front and then they just stand there?

But when we see the girls walking towards the dancefloor we remember why we go on tour.

Won't you dance some more?

Appendix FourKeep on Livin'

lyrics by Le Tigre

You hide inside so not okay (keep on keep on livin')
What if you remember more today? (keep on keep on livin')
The phone rings but there's too much to say (keep on keep on livin')
You tell them to go when you wish they would stay (keep on keep on livin')

You gotta keep on (keep on keep on livin')

Disproportionate reactions just won't fade (keep on keep on livin')
Every dude you see puts you in a rage (keep on keep on livin')
Your friends are worried, you won't tell them why (keep on keep on livin')

You gotta keep on (keep on keep on livin')

Look up to the sky sky sky
Take back your own tonight
You'll find more than you see.
It's time now now get ready.

So you can taste that sweet sweet cake and feel the warm water in a lake (y'know)
What about that nice cool breeze? And hear the buzzing of the bumble bees.
Just live beyond those neighborhood lives and go past that yard outside
and push through their greatest fears and live past your memories tears
cuz you don't need to scratch inside.
Just please hold onto your pride and...
don't let them bring you down and don't let them fuck you around
cuz those are your arms. That is your heart and no no they can't tear you apart.
They can't take it away, no!
This is your time this is your life.... (keep on keep on livin!)