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QUEER AS PUNK: QUEERCORE AND THE PRODUCTION OF AN ANTI-NORMATIVE MEDIA SUBCULTURE

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by

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QUEER AS PUNK: QUEERCORE AND THE PRODUCTION OF AN ANTI-NORMATIVE MEDIA SUBCULTURE

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This dissertation examines the historical contexts, major themes, and archival practices of queercore, an anti-normative queer and punk subculture comprised of music, zines, film, art, literature and new media that was instigated in 1985 by Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones in Toronto, Ontario. Via their fanzine *J.D.s.*, LaBruce and Jones declared "civil war" on the punk and gay and lesbian mainstreams and conjured queercore as a multimedia subculture situated in pointed opposition to the homophobia of mainline punk and the lifeless sexual politics and assimilationist tendencies of dominant gay and lesbian society. In the pages that follow, I engage wider histories of radical queer politics and punk aesthetics and values to reveal the generative and long-standing symbiosis between these two energies – a symbiosis that informs queercore, but that also extends beyond its temporal and material boundaries. Through close analysis of queercore films (e.g. *No Skin Off My Ass*, *The Lollipop Generation*, *The Living End, By Hook or By Crook*), music (e.g., Pansy Division, Tribe 8, Beth Ditto/The Gossip, Nomy Lamm) and zines (e.g., *J.D.s*, *SCAB*, *Bimbox*, *Bamboo Girl*, *i'm so fucking beautiful*), I establish queercore's primary themes: explicit sexuality (the use of risky, erotic queer punk images and

performances to undermine heteronormativity and confront accepted notions of gay and punk identity); imagined violence (the deployment of a threatened, as opposed to actualized, violence in the hopes of frightening and, thus, destabilizing powerful white, bourgeois, heterosexual masculinity); and bodily difference (the circulation of affirmative representations of marginalized queer bodies, and specifically those that are fat, disabled and/or gender non-normative). Finally, I conclude with an exploration of the institutions and individuals currently involved in queercore archival efforts, thus placing my project within a crucial lineage of subcultural preservation. Taken as a whole, this study asserts that queercore articulates and disseminates a set of alternative identities, aesthetics, politics and representations for queer folks to occupy and engage within social space, providing a dynamic anti-normative, anti-corporate, D.I.Y. (do-it-yourself) alternative to a consumer-capitalist hetero- and homo-normative mainstream.

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Introduction

"We're here, we're queer, we're going to fuck your children. Get used to it. So ends "Queer Disco Anthem," an irreverent demand for queer power and visibility recorded by underground punk band God Is My Co-Pilot on their 1996 album, *The Best of God Is My Co-Pilot*.[1] Formed in New York City in 1990 by openly bisexual wife and husband duo Sharon Topper, vocals, and Craig Flanigan, guitar, God Is My Co-Pilot is a band with a purpose. As they assert in their song "We Signify": "We're co-opting rock, the language of sexism, to address gender identity on its own terms of complexity. We're here to instruct, not to distract. We won't take your attention without giving some back." On songs such as the playfully erotic "Butch Flip" and the queer call to arms "Behave," the band labors to achieve this goal of queering the hetero-masculine world of punk rock. God is My Co-Pilot is an exceptional band, but they are not alone in their efforts to annex rock in order to tackle thorny issues of sexuality and gender. They are, in fact, part of an entire punk-based social movement, partially centered on music, but that also encompasses fanzines (commonly known as "zines"), writing, visual art, new media and film, the mission of which is to claim an anti-normative cultural space for queers and to effectively challenge the sexual and gender status quo. This underground movement is known as "homocore" or, more recently, "queercore" to indicate that it is a movement by and for not only gay men and lesbians, but also bisexuals, transgender and intersex

[1] As the title suggests, *The Best of God Is My Co-Pilot* consists primarily of audience favorites from their previous albums. However, *The Best of God Is My Co-Pilot* is the only album on which "Queer Disco Anthem" appears. It was originally recorded for the compilation *Outpunk Dance Party* but, for reasons unknown, did not actually appear on this album.

individuals, and all those whose gender and/or sexual identities fall outside the narrow categories of male, female and heterosexual.[2]

Fifth Column guitarist G.B. Jones and filmmaker-to-be Bruce La Bruce coined the term "homocore"[3] in a 1986 edition of their Toronto-based zine *JDs* to designate a self-determined subculture of queer punks opposed to the growing consumerist and assimilationist tendencies of the mainstream lesbian and gay community as well as the misogyny and homophobia of mainline punk. The word "homocore" is itself a queer reworking of "hardcore," the predominant form of punk in the 1980s. Queercore started as a small community of friends (La Bruce jokes that in the beginning, "there was only two dykes and one lonely fag"), but by the early 1990s, "queercore" had grown into a full-fledged subculture that encompassed bands (e.g., Tribe 8, Pansy Division, Mukilteo Fairies, Team Dresch, PME), zines (e.g., *Homocore*, *Holy Titclamps, Chainsaw*, *Outpunk*) and films (including several made by La Bruce and Jones themselves), all fueled by a D.I.Y. (do-it-yourself) ethic and an anti-conformist spirit (Spencer 40). What started as a local movement based in Toronto also became a global phenomenon, with queer punk bands in such diverse locales as the United Kingdom (e.g., Sister George and Huggy Bear) and Brazil (e.g., Dominatrix) aligning with the queercore cause of gender

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[2] To be clear, queercore is not the only cultural movement with this mission. Riot grrrl, an underground feminist youth culture that followed in queercore's footsteps in the early 1990s and that shares many of the same artists and participants, was also formed with the intent of co-opting rock to address issues of gender and sexual identity. Although riot grrrl cuts across sexual categories and is in some respects indistinguishable from queercore, it differs from queercore in its primary focus on female issues and the production of safe, accessible and sometimes separate spaces for girls and women, separate spaces that are crucial within a male-dominated music scene that, like society at large, is often hostile to girls and women. In contrast, queercore is a multi-gendered movement that explicitly aims to bring together gay men, lesbians, and transfolk in order to combat the ideological and physical segregation that often exists between identity groups within the queer community. In addition, queercore is somewhat of a less youth-oriented culture than riot grrrl, which is partly due to the length of time "members" affiliate with each.

[3] "Homocore" and "queercore," as noted above, are virtually interchangeable. From here on out I will be using the term "queercore."

and sexual subversion through independently produced art. Today, although continuing to be influenced by its punk roots, queercore has expanded beyond the punk scene to include an array of artists who, while still championing the same rebellious attitude, oppositional stance and D.I.Y. ethics of the original movement, have found inspiration in other musical genres (e.g., hip hop and dance) and have adapted their political and artistic strategies in accordance with shifts in dominant ideologies and changes in technology including, most notably, the development of the Internet.

This story of queercore's genesis and development, the one that is generally told in written accounts of the subculture,[4] glosses over the messy details, however, and ignores the wider discursive, political and cultural histories in which queercore is necessarily imbricated: Queercore was not created by Jones and La Bruce in a vacuum, as they drew inspiration from aesthetics and values that have long been a part of punk. Likewise, the radical, anti-assimilationist queer politics of queercore follow a wider radical political history as enunciated by such erstwhile militant organizations as the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). Indeed, the previously quoted lines from "Queer Disco Anthem" ("We're here, we're queer, we're going to fuck your children. Get used to it") provide a direct indication of queercore's broader aesthetic and political affinities. "We're here! We're queer! Get used to it!" was a popular slogan used in the 1990s by the confrontational activist organization Queer Nation, known for its aggressive, but theatrical responses to such issues as anti-queer violence and homophobia in the media. Queer Nation, for example, staged a series of kiss-ins at malls in the 1990s, as a protest against the heterocentrism of public space. By adopting Queer Nation's slogan, God Is

[4] See, for example, David Ciminelli and Ken Knox, *Homocore: The Loud and Raucous Rise of Queer Rock*, Los Angeles: Alison Books, 2005.

My Co-Pilot signify their political allegiances, and link themselves to Queer Nation's goals of challenging homophobia, winning public space and generating queer visibility at all costs.

Queercore's correspondence with punk, however, can be gleaned from the words that God is My Co-Pilot adds to Queer Nation's slogan: "we're going to fuck your children." This additional line intentionally plays off the taboo topic of pedophilia and the fear of queer "recruitment" of youths through sexual means, taking Queer Nation's already-aggressive catchphrase one step further, adding to it the shock-effect common to punk: As discussed in greater detail below, punk often deliberately deploys the outrageous and the offensive in order to incite a visceral response from audience members and, in the best of circumstances, to jar them out of complacency and into awareness and action.[5] Punk is, of course, also evident from the musical qualities of "Queer Disco Anthem": pounding drums, Flanigan's noisy and improvisational guitar playing, which demonstrates no regard for chord progressions or other accepted musical patterns, and Topper's trademark half-sung, half-shouted sweet-meets-savage vocalizations. Accordingly, in "Queer Disco Anthem," radical queer lyrics, a punk twist of the profane and punk-style music combine to forge a cohesive whole that is stylistically punk and politically queer: definitively queercore.

It is this melding of radical queer politics and punk aesthetics and values, evidenced in "Queer Disco Anthem" and endemic to the history of queercore more

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[5] As Walter Benjamin argues, although one reaction to shock-effect is resistance and rejection, the traumatized receiver tunes out the offending material, neutralizing its effect, if the shock-effect is "cushioned, parried by consciousness," it can be integrated into the receiver's experiences, leading her to a heightened state of awareness. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968. For more on the shock-effect as discussed by Benjamin see the "Punk Aesthetics and Values" section of this proposal.

generally, that is the subject of this dissertation. Due to common understandings of punk as both straight and male – that is, anything but queer – the concept of queer punk may appear to be antithetical or even impossible (and, indeed, a common reaction to my dissertation topic has been surprise that such a thing as queer punk exists). But, in reality, queer and punk are not as contradictory as some assume (in fact, as will be discussed later in this dissertation, they have material histories that are entirely intertwined). Both punk and queer delight in the abnormal and the outlandish, both object to bourgeois society's uptight notions of "proper" behavior and appearance, and, at times, both have worked to undo accepted ideas of gender and sexuality. Accordingly, as this dissertation maintains, punk and queer are energies that share some common ground and that have the potential for mutual benefit, and it is this commonality and potentiality that queercore attempts to exploit to its fullest. But, what exactly does this mean? As evidenced by queercore, how have anti-establishment, D.I.Y. punk aesthetics and values furthered the radical queer project of subverting normativity, and how have queer challenges to the sex/gender system been beneficial to the punk movement? These are research questions that I will address in this dissertation through an exploration of particular queercore artifacts. This exploration will be anchored by personal interviews with queercore practitioners as well as scholarship in queer theory and subcultural/punk studies. In the following pages I review the relevant literature within these areas. Before I do so, however, I want to say a few words about my inspiration for this project as well as my usage of the word "queer."

I. Inspiration

I have long been compelled by underground punk culture. As a gay teenager growing up in a small, conservative town in which I was the only "out" person at my high school, music was a primary means of escape from days filled with taunts of "pansy" and "faggot," and the occasional fists of bullies. The anger of punk music, targeted at a corrupt and non-inclusive "system," matched my own frustration and feelings of societal un-belonging, and I spent countless hours alone in my room listening to punk bands that seemed to understand the alienation and abuse I was experiencing. As this was before I had fully discovered queercore (as well as its sister movement riot grrrl), many of these bands were straight and male, like Crass and Fugazi, but some were not. For example, I came across my first Pansy Division record – "Homo Christmas" – while flipping through the "New Release" bin at a local record store and decided to buy it. Possession of this record was short lived, however, as my mother overhead me listening to it one day, and upset over the sexually explicit gay lyrics, yanked the record of the player and threw it on the ground, before stomping it into pieces. Although I, of course, didn't know it at the time, this was a foundational moment in the development of this dissertation, as my interest in exploring queercore as a topic is at least in partially due to a desire to rebel against those who have tried to prevent me from expressing my identity and indulging my queer(core) tastes.

As I have grown older, my appreciation of punk has become slightly more nuanced. I am someone who values personal expression and is wary of corporate controlled art, and I appreciate punk's efforts to create spaces for grassroots creation outside of, and in opposition to, the commercialized mainstream. In *Society of the*

Spectacle, a book published in 1967 that is commonly associated with punk and its political underpinnings, Guy DeBord warns that "everything that was once directly lived has moved away into representation" (thesis 1) and that humanity is slowly being suffocated under "geological layers of commodities" (thesis 42). This reality – the simultaneous dehumanization and commodification of society, brought about by consumer capitalism and the separation between representation and life, production and consumption – continues to resonate in present times. Today, by our own volition, the most intimate details of our lives are uploaded onto computers, and transformed into spectacles for the amusement and surveillance of others. Meanwhile, billboards, magazines, televisions and computer screens bombard us with images that tell us to be consumers, not producers, to purchase beyond our means, and to find all pleasure, happiness and self-worth in material goods. Punk, which promotes a return to the basics, encourages self-production, and rails against consumer capitalism, offers a satisfying, if only symbolic, refusal of the deadening effects of mainstream media and all of the "geological layers of commodities" to which DeBord alludes. Of course, punk does not always (if ever) achieve its goals. But, its promise of independent, provocative, D.I.Y. cultural creation is why punk appeals to me, why I want to write about it, and why I believe punk culture is as necessary today (if not more so) as it was in the 1970s, shortly after the appearance of DeBord's book.

I am also compelled by radical queer politics. Specifically, the politics of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), the activist organization that emerged immediately in the wake

of the Stonewall riots,[6] and its radical successors, from the confrontational national organization Queer Nation, to the local, Austin-based outlaw celebration Queerbomb. GLF and its descendants have denounced capitalism, militarism, institutionalized heterosexuality, and the patriarchal nuclear family, and have championed a politics of complete societal transformation. In opposition to the gay and lesbian political mainstream, which seeks inclusion in hegemonic institutions, like marriage and the military, radical queers have advocated the formation of alternatives to existing social structures. I agree with the goals of radical queer liberation and, as is reflected in their cultural creations, so do most of the adherents of queercore. Accordingly, my interest in spotlighting queercore is also derived from my affinity with radical queer politics and a feeling that these politics are in urgent need of foregrounding at a time when integrationist gay and lesbian politics have taken center stage. Think, for example, of organizations like the Human Rights Campaign whose push for gay marriage rights has dominated public "gay liberation" discourse for more than a decade.

All of which is to say that *Queer as Punk* is a project born out of passion and personal investment. In studying queercore, a movement that is a vehicle for radical queer politics and non-commercial punk production, I am motivated by a desire to bring attention to queer points of view and underground queer creations that stand as vital symbols of the potential for change within our contemporary American landscape of creeping conformity and destructive consumer capitalism. This motivating desire, and

[6] The story of Stonewall is well known and cherished within queer communities: In the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, the patrons of the Stonewall Inn, a motley mix of, primarily, drag queens and street youths of color, responded to a routine police bar raid not with the usual embittered acquiescence, but with taunts and punches, sparking a riot that lasted for several days.

memories of a time when I had no choice but to keep my queercore interests to myself, has kept me afloat during the grueling days of dissertation writing.

What's more, *Queer as Punk* is a project born out of the need for queercore's documentation and preservation. As will be discussed in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, efforts to chronicle queercore have been few and far between, in part because both punkness and queerness are seen as unworthy of archival attention by a homophobic mainstream and a normative-minded gay and lesbian majority. To make matters worse, queercore presents a series of obstacles to would-be-archivists as it is comprised of hard-to-find music and films, live performances that happened once and were never recorded, and seen-as-disposable zines and flyers that were never retained. Thus, this dissertation takes on the difficult but necessary task of recovering queercore, one of the most important independent queer cultural scenes of the past century, representing, as it does, a vital link between the 1960s/1970s avant-garde camp underground of Jack Smith and John Waters and the 1990s popular art school creations of the New Queer Cinema movement (think Todd Haynes and Gus Van Sant).

This dissertation is just the beginning of the archival process, however. After competing this dissertation I plan to create an on-line repository for my queercore interviews, musings and digitized finds. These interviews, musings and digitized finds will exist alongside various queercore artifacts and links to germane information and essays. My hope is that this on-line site will, alongside my dissertation, function to disseminate the artifacts of queercore, as well as the punk practices and radical queer ideologies that inform them. Likewise, my hope is that my work will serve as a useful starting point for academics and fans interested in not only acquiring knowledge about

queercore, but in extending, via their own intellectual contributions and archival efforts, the recuperative project that I have begun here.

II. A Word (About) Queer

In this dissertation, the term "queer" will be utilized in two distinct ways. The first is as an umbrella term that encompasses a range of non-heterosexual gender and sexual identities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, genderqueer, and intersex. I will employ "queer" in this inclusive sense only when I am referring to all of the above identities in unison. When referring to specific identities, practices or representations, I will use the appropriate and particular label, since, on their own, lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc., remain culturally and politically relevant identities. Queer in the inclusive sense suggests a powerful alliance between those who have been excluded by hegemonic society's definition of "normal" sexual and/or gender behavior. This is a fraught alliance, however, as these different identity groups often see themselves as unrelated, and hierarchies exist between them: in a racist, sexist and transphobic society, gay male interests are often privileged above all others (which is something I acknowledge as a gay, white man myself). Still, there is a value in insisting on a commonality between the above-mentioned identities and in maintaining the idea of "queer" in the inclusive sense, as this inclusive "queer" provides the hope, however impossible or utopian, for a collective of non-heterosexual peoples, united in their differences from the sex/gender status quo.

Second, for younger scholars and activists, "queer" is an expression that "proudly flaunts its deviance from the norm" and revels in "its ability to interfere with and to

thwart established social, political, and philosophical conventions which privilege heterosexuality" (Carlin and DiGrazia 1). Within this framework, queer is understood as that which deliberately breaks the rules of gender and sexuality, rejects fixed and stable categorizations, and explicitly opposes the normalizing tendencies of hegemonic sexuality as well as the processes of domination and exclusion that these tendencies uphold. As Alexander Doty puts it:

> [S]omething different from gay, lesbian, and bisexual assimilation . . . queerness is something that is ultimately beyond gender – it is an attitude, a way of responding, that begins in a place not concerned with, or limited by, notions of a binary opposition of male and female or the homo versus hetero paradigm usually articulated as an extension of this gender binarism. (xv)

This anti-assimilationist and anti-binary version of "queer" is a reason why "homocore" was renamed "queercore" in the early 1990s: queercore's radical impulses were seen to be more in-line with the newly conceptualized "queer" of queer theory/radical activism than the old-fashioned "homo" of medical and psychological discourse.

"Queer" will thus be employed throughout this dissertation as both an umbrella term and as a synonym for anti-normative and anti-assimilationist. I realize, however, that "queer," in both its common usages, presents some drawbacks and difficulties. For one, queer was originally a term of insult for gays and lesbians, and despite its now popular usage, some individuals still find it offensive. Second, and paradoxically, others have argued that "queer" has become so commonplace and overused that it no longer has the bite it once did. Witness, for example, the popular early 2000s television program *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (*Bravo*, 2003-07), a program on which a team of five gay

men would remake a hapless straight male each week, teaching him the "virtues" of shopping, grooming and cultural connoisseurship. *Queer Eye* had "queer" in its title, but was more invested in fueling consumer capitalism and reiterating dominant taste and beauty norms than in upsetting dominant sex and gender hierarchies, as the "queer" of radical queer theory would have it. Such "misuses" of the word "queer" have, without a doubt, blunted the term's subversive edge.

Finally, to expand upon the previously mentioned hierarchies within "queer," despite its insistence on inclusivity, "queer" often seems to mean just middle-class, white, and male. In other words, as Cathy Cohen asserts, people of color by and large interpret queer "as a term rooted in class, race and gender privilege" (451). The equation of "queer" with white, middle-class men has partially to do with who is most often featured in "queer" media and who is most often the author of "queer " texts: bourgeois gay white men. Bourgeois gay white men have also dominated many queer activist organizations, like the previously referenced Queer Nation.[7] This white, middle-class, male supremacy within queerness can be attributed to lingering prejudices within the LGBTQIA community, as well as disinterest among many minorities, who cannot relate to a politics of anti-normativity and anti-assimilationism. For, minorities have, by and large, never have the luxury of being considered normative or being able to assimilate. What's more, as Miguel Gutierrez argues, people who are poor or non-white often cannot afford to be

[7] It is also worth pointing out, however, that just because the members of these activist organizations were largely middle-class, white and male does not mean that there were not also active and important members who were women, working-class and/or racial minorities. At the 2009 Queer Studies conference at the University of California Los Angeles, scholar Luz Calvo criticized the prevailing view of Queer Nation as a white, male organization, stating that this view is an oversimplification which overlooks the valuable contributions women of color such as herself made to Queer Nation.

anti-normative and anti-assimilationist, since their primary concerns are the basics of eating, living and surviving (qtd. in Doty xiv).

So, there is no denying that "queer" has not always been either the radical or the all-encompassing label that it has set out to be. As such, I use the term "queer" with some trepidation. Yet, I also insist that "queer" is a word worth holding onto. Despite its shortcomings and overuse in recent years, it still conveys better than any other word the militant spirit at the heart of queercore and this dissertation. Not to mention it is the term preferred by many within the queercore subculture. For these reasons, I am sticking with "queer."

III. Queer Theory

As hinted within the previous section, queer theory guides my theoretical and political perspective throughout this dissertation. "Queer Theory" is a phrase first coined by Teresa de Lauretis at a 1990 conference on lesbian and gay sexualities held at the University of Santa Cruz, and refers to a body of literature that departs from the more traditional premises and strategies of gay and lesbian studies – namely, gay and lesbian studies' essentialist view of gender and sexual identity as innate, fixed and biologically ordained. In contradistinction, queer theory, grounded in post-structuralism, and drawing heavily from the work of Michel Foucault, exposes sex, gender and desire to be socially constructed and historically specific fictions through which heterosexuality establishes an appearance of stability and inevitability. The goal of queer theory is to expose the illusory nature of the sex/gender system and to unearth the inconsistencies and

incoherencies in the supposedly secure relations between sex, gender and desire. In so doing, queer theory seeks to disrupt the (hetero)sexist and homophobic social order.[8]

For queer theorists, destabilizing categories of sex, gender and desire also involves querying the (hetero)normative ideologies and discourses that have brought these categories into being and that have granted them power and meaning. It is here that a clear and productive alignment between queer theory and queercore can be discerned. That is, as previously mentioned, queercore is an anti-normative movement that refuses the strictures of mainstream (straight and punk) culture as well as dominant models of gay and lesbian identity. It therefore comes as no surprise that noted scholars working within the of Queer Studies, such as Ann Cvetkovich, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz have, at one time or another, used examples from the world of queercore to support their theoretical arguments. Within queer theory one finds a philosophy that suits queercore rebellion and within queercore one finds examples that underscore the theoretical arguments made by queer theory scholars. In other words, if queer is the theory, than queercore is one of the practices; or, as queercore instigator G.B. Jones has claimed, "We [queercore folks] kind of invented queer theory. We lived it. But, we're not academics, so we don't get credited with it, because we didn't write the book about it" (Personal Interview). Which is not to say that queercore adherents are necessarily versed in post-structuralism or have read the work of queer theory superstar Judith Butler,

[8] One critique of queer theory is that it *only* offers a symbolic solution to problems of (hetero)sexism and homophobia and that a more sexually progressive future will not be achieved through academic gender play, but rather grassroots activism and organizing. It should be said, however, that queercore moves beyond the merely theoretical to incorporate real practice and activism. Moreover, while gender and sexual hierarchies persist in spite of queer theory's attempts at deconstructing them, queercore remains for some a generative space for questioning and resisting tese hierarchies, however limited.

but rather that their outlook and practices have been shaped by and, as Jones reminds us, have *shaped*, queer theory, especially in its challenge to heteronormativity.

Queer theory's critique of heteronormativity can be traced back to Gayle Rubin's groundbreaking essay, "Thinking Sex." In this essay, Rubin proposes a "radical theory of sex," related to, but distinct from, feminism, that will "identify, describe, explain, and denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression" (275). Rubin claims that there are several ways of thinking – what might retroactively be termed "heteronormative ways of thinking" – that have prevented the development of such a theory of sex and that have kept sexual minorities subjugated, including: "sexual essentialism" (the conceptualization of desire as preexisting and natural); "sex negativity" (the view of sex as hazardous and damaging to one's health and state of mind); "the fallacy of misplaced scale" (the intolerance toward relatively insignificant differences in sexual values and behavior); "the hierarchical valuation of sex acts" (the attachment of religious/medical/ psychiatric/social stigma to certain [homo]sexual acts and the attachment of virtue to other [hetero]sexual acts, elevating the latter); "the domino view of sexual peril" (the belief that tolerance for "questionable" sexualities such as lesbianism will force tolerance for truly "bad" sexualities like bestiality); and "the lack of a concept of benign sexual variation" (the supposition that sex should be performed in one way and one way only: between a man and a woman, preferably in the missionary position, always in the bedroom and for reproductive purposes) (275-83). These premises, laid out so clearly by Rubin, have strongly informed queer theory, specifically by bringing into view what an anti-heteronormative queer politics must set itself against: all forms of sexual essentialism, persecution and hierarchy. In retrospect this may seem like a fairly obvious

point, but Rubin's genius also lies in her rejection of a biological explanation of sexuality in favor of a view of sexuality, following Foucault, as constructed through regulation and stratification, and in her insistence that sex and gender are not synonymous, leading her to conclude that hetero-homo differentiation demands "an autonomous theory and politics specific to sexuality" (307).

Early lesbian feminist thought has also been instrumental in ushering an anti-heteronormative queer politics into view, particularly the work of Adrienne Rich and Monique Wittig. In "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Rich defines heterosexuality as a patriarchal institution that is violently thrust upon women as a means of sustaining male power. Compulsory heterosexuality teaches women that they must be dependent on men for their emotional, financial and sexual well being, but lesbianism disrupts this patriarchal rhetoric and, thus, for Rich, is key to women's liberation. Similarly, in the "Straight Mind," Wittig posits heterosexuality as a universalizing tendency that frames all understandings of the world and, in particular, the concepts "man" and "woman." That is, "man" and "woman" only make sense in binary relation (i.e., as a mutually reinforcing conceptual pair) and within a system that defines women as commodities to be exchanged by men. Wittig's solution to this predicament is the complete rejection of the label "woman" and all that it stands for within the logic of patriarchy, a solution that leads Wittig to her famous conclusion, "Lesbians are not women" (32). The work of Rich and Wittig has proven invaluable to an awareness of the ways in which patriarchal and heterosexist meanings structure society to the benefit of (straight) men and the detriment of women and queers.

This work has had a profound impact on subsequent queer theory writings. For example, in the key queer theory text, *Gender Trouble*, echoing Rich and Wittig, Butler defines gender as an act that is performed reiteratively through an array of "acts, gestures and desires" for the ultimate purpose of reproducing normative heterosexuality (136). That is, in *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that, rather than being something innate or natural, gender is an act that patriarchal society compels us to perform. We are coerced into performing gender reiteratively through an array of "acts, gestures and desires" and these "acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core" (173). Through reiterative acts, gender and, in turn, sex categories become naturalized such that they appear to be stable and foundational, when they are "in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices [and] discourses" (xxix). Butler suggests that these categories can be destabilized through stylized performances that expose sex and gender as "regulatory fictions," regulatory fictions that uphold "regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression" (43). For example, Butler points to drag as a practice that, through exaggerated performance, calls attention to the fact that gender is a fabricated construct that requires a great deal of work to sustain (174-5). In addition, at their best, drag performances enable their audience to think about gender differently, as they displace settled conceptions of male/female and masculine/feminine, provoking productive uncertainties about their status as natural and normal.

Rich, Wittig and Butler have played a key role in elucidating queer theory's heteronormative critique. However, the word "heteronormative" itself did not come into being until 1993, when Michael Warner coined the term in the anthology *Fear of a Queer Planet* to refer to the "logic of the [hetero]sexual order" that is embedded in a wide range

of social institutions and practices (e.g., the family, the state, school, reproduction, and childrearing) (xii). As Warner argues, heteronormativity situates heterosexual culture as fundamental to, and synonymous with, humanity itself and sets in motion a process of normalization that privileges monogamous, heterosexual coupledom and punishes all deviations. By way of example, Warner points to an image, created by Carl and Linda Sagan, of a coupled naked man and woman that was sent into space in order to inform alien beings about life on Earth. As Warner notes, this is a clear example of heterosexual arrogance and presumption: heterosexuals literally figuring themselves as the center of the world. The heterosexual couple is inscribed as the essential human relation and as the epitome of normality and the human. This heterosexual claim to normality leads Warner to assert that a radical queer politics dedicated to overthrowing heterosexual hegemony must entail a "thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (xxvii).

Under Warner's formulation, queer is about creating a space in opposition to dominant norms where transformational political work can begin. But, this leads to an interesting question: Who gets to participate in this transformational work? Just lesbians, gay men and transfolk, or can others, including heterosexuals, join in as well? Warner states that queer is opposed to *normativity* and not *heterosexuality* per se, but this point gets muddled when it comes to his actual examples, including the example of the heterosexual couple drawing shot into outer space. Others have been even less clear on this point, to the detrimental effect of excluding those heterosexuals that are also oppressed by the normalizing powers of the status quo and those heterosexuals who are not necessarily in any way oppressed, but can still be valuable queer allies.

Critical race and gender scholar Cathy Cohen understands that this exclusion of potential heterosexual allies from the radical queer project is a reason why it may be, ultimately, doomed to failure. In "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens" Cohen asserts:

> The inability of queer politics to effectively challenge heteronormativity rests, in part, on the fact that despite a surrounding discourse which highlights the destabilization and even deconstruction of sexual categories, queer politics has often been built around a simple dichotomy between those deemed queer and those deemed heterosexual. Whether in the infamous "I Hate Straights" publication or queer kiss-ins at malls and straight dance clubs . . . all heterosexuals are represented as dominant and controlling and all queers are understood as marginalized and invisible. (440)

As Cohen further elucidates, this dichotomous way of thinking, which positions queer as marginalized and heterosexual as dominant, has created a blind spot within queer politics – a blindness to the unequal distribution of power both within the queer community and without. In other words, not all queers are equally victimized and not all straights are equally privileged, as sexuality is enmeshed in broader structures of power, intersecting with and inseparable from race, gender, and class oppression. For example, as Cohen points out, women of color who are on welfare are neither considered normal or moral under dominant precepts. Thus, any movement genuinely dedicated to combating heteronormativity needs to align itself with their cause. It is in creating such coalitions between non-normative individuals of all sexual identities that the potential of a truly progressive queer politics can be realized.

By arguing that not all heterosexuals are equally privileged, Cohen explains how anti-heteronormative critique can benefit not just the white, the male and the middle-

class. In arguing that not all queers are equally oppressed, Cohen points the way toward *homo*normative critique. The idea being that not all lesbians and gay men have resisted the sway of normativity and the powers and privileges that accompany it. In a racist, sexist, classist society some lesbians and gay men are more advantaged than others. Still others are more interested in integrating into dominant institutions than transforming them. Such folks have come to be known as "homonormative," a concept first introduced by Lisa Duggan in *The Twilight of Equality?* Duggan identifies homonormativity as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them" (50). Duggan's concern, and one shared by many queercore enthusiasts, is that lesbians and gay men are increasingly abandoning their commitment to radical politics in a misguided attempt to find acceptance and respectability within the very economic and political institutions that have historically been the sources of their – and other marginalized folks' – degradation. For instance, the institution of marriage. As Warner points out in *The Trouble with Normal*, in attempting to gain access to an institution that is inherently exclusionary, gay marriage proponents are reinforcing a false morality, one that further stigmatizes those who have chosen to structure their sexual lives outside of the straight and narrow confines of monogamous coupledom. In this way, gay marriage expands access to the status quo for the privileged few while leaving the most vulnerable members of society on the sidelines.

Queercore cultural works express similar critiques of hetero- and homo-normativity as those that are found in these queer theory texts, albeit in less abstract terms. For example, as I will discuss in greater detail later on, one of the most notorious pieces of queercore writing is the S.C.A.B. (Society for the Complete Annihilation of

Breeding) manifesto, a riff on Valerie Solanas's infamous S.C.U.M (Society for Cutting Up Men) manifesto. The S.C.A.B. manifesto appeared in issue one of *S.C.A.B.*, a zine created by Johnny Noxema in 1990, and called for, "The absolute obliteration of what is generally regarded as the American nuclear family. Our method? Violence, pornography, abortions, castration, mindless sex, mass murder and the widespread destruction of private and state property" (n.p.). Heteronormativity, and the theories of Rich, are directly referenced in this manifesto when, for example, Noxzema speak of the evils of heterosexism that "begin with compulsory heterosexuality."[9] In a similar vein, the topic of gay (homonormative) vs. queer (anti-normative) is broached in issue two of *S.C.A.B*, which features a drawing of gay beat writer William S. Burroughs alongside the statement, "But...he's gay. Yes, he is gay; gay NOT queer, there is a difference . . . Gay and lesbian society is dying from the same diseases killing hetero culture – racism and sexism, and William S. Burroughs is a malignant tumor personified." This statement was motivated, in part, by the "accidental" shooting death of Burrough's long-time girlfriend Joan Vollmer at his own hands, a crime for which Burrough's received a suspended sentence. For Noxzema, it was clear that Burroughs had gotten away with murder because he was a man and she was a woman, and what made his crime even worse was that he glorified this murder by posing with a gun in photos after his trial. These examples from *S.C.A.B.* are among the numerous instances of the intersection of queer theory and queercore. Throughout this dissertation, many more examples will be unearthed, and queer theory will be a central pillar around which this dissertation will be structured.

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[9] Retrieved from the following website: http://36-c.blogspot.com/?zx=19726fa74fb210ff. For full citation see the works cited page of this proposal under "Noxema, Johnny."

IV. Subculture

Queercore has been classified as both a "movement" and a "subculture." Queercore is a movement insofar as it is a community of cultural producers and fans who share a common goal – namely, as explained in greater detail below, to antagonize and provoke the mainstream punk and gay communities and to overturn both hetero- and homo-normative thinking. Queercore is also a subculture, a subculture being broadly defined as any identifiable and cohesive group that shares particular interests and practices, often related to differences of race, religion, class, gender, sexuality, status and lifestyle. Subcultures exist in relation to, and on the outskirts of, dominant culture and ideology and, as such, "subcultures are groups of people that are in some way represented as non-normative and/or marginal" (Gelder 1).

The representation of subcultures as non-normative and marginal is both internally and externally derived: As Dick Hebdige maintains in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, subcultures construct their unique group identity via practices, styles and values of their choosing, but are also defined by forces outside of their control. In other words, while a particular subculture may foreground its differences, and may even exaggerate its eccentric characteristics and unruly behavior to confront normalizing power, these differences are also used by dominant culture to stigmatize and exclude the subculture. Likewise, the "difference" of a subculture exists in binary relationship to the "sameness" of dominant culture and, thus, contributes to a sense of the dominant's ordinary rightness. Indeed, dominant culture often *projects* forbidden characteristics onto subcultures in order to disassociate itself from those characteristics it deems shameful, as well as to secure its status as the normal and the ideal. Hence, the classist/racist media

depictions of punk performers and gangsta rappers as, for example, violent, good-for-nothing hooligans in opposition to the banal and harmless (adult) artists of popular music. Such binarism creates a complex dynamic between sub- and dominant cultures, as even the most oppositional and resistant of subcultures is bounded to, and defined by, cultural norms, and inevitably functions to support them.

"Subculture" is a problematic term given that the prefix "sub" means "under" and can, therefore, be said to indicate a culture that is somehow inferior to, or less than, the dominant.[10] Yet, "sub" also carries connotations of the subterranean and the subversive and it is these connotations that are particularly apropos to queercore, an underground movement with an oppositional edge. It should also be noted that there is an affinity between the subcultural and the queer: both are described as "abnormal" and both are vilified by dominant culture. Murray Healy notes this affinity in his book *Gay Skins*:

> There's something queer about all subcultures – just like dirty homosexuals, they're dangerous, delinquent and demonized by the press… Both act as conspicuous reminders of what men [and women] should not be. Both are transgressive in their style. (27)

To this I would add that both queers and subculturalists often claim power and challenge the status quo through the reinscription of what society deems worthless and aberrant. In

[10] The term "subculture" has also been faulted for being overly broad and for supporting the idea of cultural memberships as fixed when, in fact, cultural membership has become increasingly fluid and unstable within contemporary society. That is, an individual might be a punk one day and a preppie the next or may dress like a punk and not identify as one. For more on this critique of the term "subculture," see Andy Bennet and Keith Kahn-Harris, eds., *After Subcultures: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

this way, they share strategies of rebellion. So, whereas gender studies scholar Anna Tripp describes the queer as that which takes "what has been stigmatized by culture as 'perverse' and uses this as a lever to decentre, deconstruct or 'query' notions of the 'natural' and the 'normal'" (15), Hebdige describes subcultures as entities that transform everyday commodities in ways that "go 'against nature', interrupting the process of normalization."[11] Spectacle has also been essential to both the subcultural and the queer, with subcultures emphasizing unusual styles in order to differentiate themselves from the blandness of the mainstream, and queerness employing highly stylized, exaggerated and campy presentations to confront the straightness of the status quo (Hebdige).

It is for these reasons that I have chosen to adopt the term "subculture" in relation to queercore, as opposed to more general terms like "public" or "culture," which, while appealing in their rejection of the hierarchy implied by the "sub" of subculture, do not possess the same, decidedly queer, resonance of the abnormal, the deviant, and the underground. Alternatives such as "lifestyle" (originally introduced by Max Weber in *Economy and Society* and recently adopted by cultural scholars such as David Chaney and Steven Miles) and "counterculture" seem equally out of place (partly because "lifestyle" has been used to condescendingly dismiss same-sex desire as a mere "choice" and "counterculture" is a term that is strongly associated with the 1960s student protest movements that preceded punk and that, in some respects, punk was a reaction against).[12] Counterculture is not without its appeal. It suggests an antagonistic relationship with the

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[11] Interestingly, Hebdige comes to this understanding of subcultural subversion by way of contemplating the life and writings of queer writer and filmmaker Jean Genet, who Hebdige refers to as "the archetype of the 'unnatural' deviant" (18).

[12] For further discussion of the antagonism between punk and hippie, see Lucy O'Brien, "The Woman Punk Made Me," In *Punk Rock: So What?: The Cultural Legacy of Punk*, Ed. Roger Sabin, London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

mainstream, which befits queercore. Yet, subculture is the preferred term within scholarship on punk culture, and since queercore is a punk phenomenon, subculture appears as the most suitable word to describe it.

In addition, the "sub" of subculture indicates (in a way that "public," "culture" and "lifestyle" do not) a relation to a broader social system: mainstream or dominant society. This *relation to* mainstream society that the word "subculture" denotes underscores an important point about queercore: that queercore defines itself in highly oppositional ways. As Michael du Plessis and Kathleen Chapman explicate, the "establishment of an inside and an outside, an 'us' versus a 'them,'" is central to queercore. First, queercore sets itself in opposition to dominant heteronormative society. Second, it sets itself in opposition to the masculinist and homophobic tendencies of the wider punk movement, especially its hardcore incarnation.[13] Third, it sets itself in opposition to the increasingly assimilationist bent of the mainstream gay and lesbian community.

However, although queercore is adamant about its differences from both mainline (hardcore) punk and mainstream gay/lesbian culture, it is not entirely distinct from either. Indeed, it is the central premise of this dissertation that queercore incorporates elements from each of these "parent cultures."[14] This may seem self evident, but this is also important to stress, as it puts into conversation two categories – queer and punk – that

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[13] Hardcore punk is a subgenre of punk that originated primarily in North America – specifically Los Angeles – in the late 1970s and into the 1980s with such bands as Black Flag, Bad Brains and Minor Threat. Hardcore punk is harder and faster than early punk and most hardcore punk bands are all-male, all-straight and testosterone driven. Women and queers have not always felt safe or welcomed within the straight-male environment of hardcore, hence the emergence of riot grrrl and queercore as alternatives. As mentioned previously queer*core* is a play on hardcore. Likewise, certain queercore bands, such as Black Fag, a queercore group that performs queer renditions of Black Flag songs, intentionally satirize and mock the andro- and heterocentrism of the hardcore scene.

[14] A parent culture is any culture of which a subculture is a part. Admittedly, "parent culture" has a condescending tone, so I use it sparingly and without a sense of commitment.

have generally been thought of as antithetical. Indeed, common reactions from people upon hearing my dissertation topic are surprise ("Queer punks exist?") and disbelief ("I have never heard of queercore"). These reactions are, at least partly, the result of the social mythologies attached to both punk and homosexuality. Punks have been represented in the popular press as aggressive, violent, working-class (at least in the British context), and hyper-masculine men. Alternately, gay men are depicted as passive, weak, middle-to-upper-middle class, and effeminate: the opposite of the punk. Within this framework, the gay punk is seen as a contradiction in terms, and the lesbian punk, despite in many ways being stereotyped in similar ways (i.e., as aggressive and masculine), is entirely disregarded – perhaps even moreso because, as women with no romantic interest in men, lesbian punks challenge women's assumed place within punk culture as groupies and girlfriends of male band members. Thus, to proclaim the existence of gay/lesbian punks is to derail accepted beliefs about both punks and gays/lesbians. It could even be said that the reality of queer punks throws into question the presumed heterosexuality of all punks. In other words, the presence of homosexuality within the predominately straight and male realm of punk threatens to (homo)sexualize the entire environment: to reveal the fragile line between the homosocial and the homoerotic. Queer punks also undermine the view, held by some, that punks are asexual.[15]

The incomprehensibility of the queer punk is, ironically, also a subject within writings by queer punks themselves. For example, in "Impossible Spaces," José Esteban

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[15] Lucy O'Brien contends that, "Despite the prevalence of fetish gear and provocative clothes, it [punk] was curiously asexual" (194). See Lucy O'Brien, "The Woman Punk Made Me," in *Punk Rock: So What?: The Cultural Legacy of Punk*, ed. Roger Sabin, London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

Muñoz, a former queer punk kid himself, discusses *The Chameleon Club*, a photographic installation by Kevin McCarty. In this installation, McCarty places photographs of empty stages at queer and punk bars in Los Angeles side by side: juxtaposed but completely cut off from one another. According to Munoz, this installation depicts "the interconnected and impossible spaces of gay belonging and punk belonging" or, more to the point, McCarty's experience of being a gay fan of punk in early 1980s Los Angeles and feeling equally out of place within the city's disco-infused queer clubs and straight-dominated punk clubs (428). As McCarty himself describes the experience, "My utopia existed at the doorway on the threshold – in neither space and in both spaces simultaneously" (427). McCarty's photographic installation thus testifies to the lack of queer inclusion and visibility within early punk scenes. Undoubtedly, in addition to the social mythologies of punks and gays/lesbians, this historical lack of queer punk inclusion and visibility helps account for the inconceivability of queer punks within the popular imagination.

Yet, this inconceivability is also the result of the ways in which subcultures have been defined and framed within subcultural studies. Subcultural studies stem from the work of the early twentieth century urban sociologists that have come to be known as the "Chicago School" (on account of their placement within universities in the Chicago area). Through their studies of gangs, the Chicago School theorists challenged then-dominant perceptions of subculturalists as delinquent and deviant and argued that such perceptions were the result of societal "labeling": "social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular persons and labeling them as outsiders" (Becker 9). The Chicago School set the foundation for a more sympathetic strain of subcultural studies, a strain that came to fruition within the

writings of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and, in particular, the 1975 collection *Resistance Through Rituals*. In *Resistance Through Rituals*, diverse scholars such as Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, Dick Hebdige, Paul Corrigan, John Clarke, Angela Robbie and Jenny Garber, drew from the theoretical work of Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser to analyze the working-class "youth formations" that had emerged in Great Britain since World-War II (e.g., the Teddy boys, the mods, and the skinheads).

Within these working-class youth subcultures members of the CCCS located various strategies of resistance to hegemonic social and cultural forces, expressly in their creation of unique identities and styles from the trappings of material culture. As John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts reason in the introduction to *Resistance Through Rituals*, through their adoption and reorganization of material objects, youth cultures not only express their collectivity, but lodge a protest against the working-class experience. Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts believed that the ingenuity of youth subcultures offered a solution to the social and economic problems endemic to British working-class life, *but* one that was "magical" rather than "real": They saw the resistances of youth subcultures as symbolic and, therefore, incapable of truly altering the class-based order of society (47-8). This cautionary view of subcultural resistance is furthered by Hebdige, who in *Subculture* argues that the resistant aspects of subcultural style are always in danger of either being co-opted or reinscribed by the mainstream.

In the years since its publication, *Resistance Through Rituals* has remained a key text and continues to be a benchmark for all those who have written about subcultures in its wake. Nonetheless, several important criticisms have been leveled against *Resistance*

Through Rituals and British subcultural theory. These include a lack of engagement with the subjective viewpoints of actual subculturalists themselves, what David Muggleton refers to in *Inside Subculture* as the "most serious failure" of the CCCS, and a blindness to the possibilities of subcultural evolution: as Gary Clarke states in *Defending Ski-Jumpers*, "There is an uncomfortable absence in the [CCCS] literature of any discussion as to how and with what consequences the pure subcultures are sustained, transformed, appropriated, disfigured, or destroyed" (82). Most important to this current study, with perhaps the exception of McRobbie and Garber, the CCCS failed to adequately engage questions of gender and sexuality and, thus, overlooked the possibility of queer subculturalists. This erasure of queer subcultural lives is the result of CCCS's explicit equation of subcultures with the working-class and implicit equation of subcultures with straight men/boys.

The working-class male focus of most of the CCCS literature functioned to effectively erase any possible gay male subcultural presence, precisely because working-classness and heterosexuality are so firmly linked within the collective imagination. As the hegemonic logic goes, working-class men are society's "real men," and because "real men" cannot be queer, working-class men cannot be queer. Early CCCS scholars likely fell victim to this twisted logic, as they assumed that all the mods, Teds, and skinheads that they studied were straight, without taking into account the ways in which stereotypes of class constructed and fixed the discourses of masculinity within their studies.[16] This

[16] The CCCS was specifically focused on working-class youth subcultures, so it is perhaps not surprising that their work on punk – mostly written by Dick Hebdige – situates punk as a working-class phenomenon. This may, however, be an error. For, as Dave Laing's research in *One Chord Wonders* reveals, only roughly half of the British punk bands in the 1970s were of working-class origins. See Dave Laing, *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock,* Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985, p. 121.

erasure of gay men held true even if scholars like McRobbie and Garber noted the male effeminacy of particular subcultural *styles*, like those of the mods.

To makes matters worse, not only did CCCS deal with class in such a way as to cloud queer participation, almost all of the early work on subcultures presumed the dominance of boys. This meant that girls were only peripherally considered or were ignored outright, a fact that Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber decry in "Girls and Subcultures." Although, it should be noted that McRobbie and Garber, like their male counterparts, make the mistake of assuming that all subculturalists are straight and fail to consider the possibility of lesbian subcultural participation, a point that Mary Celeste Kearney raises in "Productive Spaces: Girls' Bedrooms as Sites of Cultural Production."

Most early subcultural scholars were, at best, indifferent to matters of gender and sexuality within boys' subcultures, even though the subversive sex/gender implications of boys' subcultures should be a cause for pause. For one, subcultures offer boys a temporary escape from girls and what McRobbie terms the "pressures of heterosexuality," making them homosocial environments with perhaps even homoerotic undertones (26). In addition, subcultures have provided some boys with a safe space in which, against normative gender expectations, they can engage in such coded-as-feminine activities as obsessing over clothes and worshiping androgynous figures like David Bowie and Prince.

Given that, outside of the pioneering work of folks like Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, early subcultural scholarship overlooked issues of gender and sexuality, it is not surprising that queer subcultures have been under-recognized and under-theorized. However, the story is not entirely bleak. Queer subcultural scholarship does exist. Since

the 1980s there has been increased attention paid to gender and sexuality in subcultural studies, particularly in the burgeoning field of girls' studies, which includes scholars like Susan Driver, Anita Harris, Mary Celeste Kearney and Sharon R. Mazzarella. Much of this literature contemplates both gender *and* sexuality (e.g., Kearney's *Girls Make Media*) and some of this literature focuses entirely on queer youth subcultures (e.g., Driver's *Queer Girls and Popular Culture* and her edited anthology, *Queer Youth Cultures*).

Of course, it should be said that *all* scholarship on queers is technically about subculture, as the queer community *is* a subculture. But, the majority of literature on the queer community does not directly acknowledge the history of subcultural scholarship. Yet, in addition to the books noted above, one scholar that frequently acknowledges this history is Judith Halberstam. Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place*, in its queering of subcultural scholarship and exploration of contemporary queer music subcultures has, despite its limitations (noted in the next section), provided me with substantial inspiration for this dissertation. In this text, Halberstam argues that queer subcultures demand new theories. Specifically, new theories of time and place, as (most) queers possess lives "unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing" and, thus, resist a logic of temporality defined by such "life markers" as marriage, reproduction and death (2).

In accordance with this queer logic of time, which Halberstam simply calls "queer time," most queer subcultures cannot be classified as youth cultures. That is, queers by and large do not obey the heteronormative imperative that insists subcultures are something to grow out of on the way to marriage, child-rearing and adulthood. As a result, queers are more likely than straights to remain engaged with a particular

subculture for an extended period of time (174). Queercore bears out this logic of "queer time," for although queercore has a youth contingent, it is not just a youth subculture. Many of the original queercore producers (G.B. Jones, Bruce LaBruce, Matt Wobensmith, Larry-Bob Roberts) are still participants, even though they are now in their 40s and 50s. As such, queercore, like queer subcultures more generally, challenges the conflation of youth and subculture instigated by the Chicago School and engrained by the CCCS.

Thus, in several important respects, a queer subcultural study like this one marks a rupture in subcultural studies as usual. I insist on calling queercore a "subculture" not only to choose a convenient term that holds connotations of the deviant and the oppositional, but to deliberately work against the erasure of queerness within subcultural studies and to force a rethinking of what a subculture is and can be. It is worth investigating the various ways in which queer subcultures both continue and disrupt the inherited wisdom of subcultural studies and, as such, the issues raised in this section will appear again in various forms throughout this dissertation as I exploit the potential for a subcultural studies intervention.

V. Punk: Aesthetics and Values

In the previous section, I provide an overview of subcultural theory, situating queercore as a subculture with two primary parent cultures: queer and punk. I have already indicated, via an overview of queer theory, the queer impact on queercore. In this section, I turn my attention to the scholarship on punk aesthetics and values in order to flesh out the punk influence on queercore. My understanding of punk as a set of aesthetic

strategies and ideological values has been shaped by the work of Stacy Thompson. In *Punk Productions*, Thompson makes the bold claim that any aesthetic exploration of punk:

> [M]ust take place alongside considerations of economics, because, in punk, questions of aesthetics and economics are intertwined: economic concerns will necessarily lead to and find expression in aesthetic forms, and aesthetic forms will both reflect and inflect economics. (2)

That is, punk aesthetics, which emphasize the raw, the imperfect, the simple, and the difficult to consume, are indivisible from punk's desired (although not always achieved) goals of turning consumers into producers, taking cultural production out of the hands of an "elite technocracy" and creating a model of production and consumption outside of the normal tenets of consumer capitalism ("Punk Cinema" 21). For example, as Dave Laing notes in *One Chord Wonders*, the aesthetic rawness and simplicity of punk music is said to carry the implicit message to punk audiences that, regardless of skill, expertise or mainstream access, that they too can create music that audiences will appreciate and enjoy. In this way, the aesthetic qualities of punk encourage music production outside of the profit-driven music industry. Likewise, in deliberately fashioning products that are hard for those with a mainstream sensibility to consume (due to, for example, their intentional incoherence or confrontational use of violence), punk limits its commercial viability. Thus, punk disregards some of the central tenets of capitalism: to consume ad nauseam while producing only highly sellable items for the profit and benefit of others (rather than onself).

As I have said, this understanding of punk as an aesthetics and as an economics has strongly influenced the way I have conceptualized punk in this dissertation. However, I am replacing Thompson's "economics" with "values," as the ideologies that inform punk extend beyond the economic realm. Also, Thompson's notion of punk as an alternative economics leads him to a stricter definition of punk than I find useful for the purposes of this dissertation. Specifically, under Thompson's logic of "economics," "punk" bands that have done business with the music industry are, in effect, not punk:

> In punk history, two of the most famous examples of sell-outs are Green Day and Chumbawamba. Both bands began as punk groups but, as soon as they signed with Reprise (which is owned by Warner Music Group) and EMI, they became non-punk bands, regardless of the fact that their aesthetics had not, technically, changed. ("Punk Cinema" 23)

This kind of policing of punk's borders is perhaps too limiting, not to mention counterintuitive. The Sex Pistols, who signed with EMI were not punk? Moreover, in terms of this dissertation, such a definition would exclude significant queercore bands. For example, Le Tigre, one of the most well known queercore bands, while an otherwise anti-capitalist and pro-independent queercore outfit, released an album via major label Universal in 2004. Although my own tastes and political sympathies lie with truly independent punk bands, I am not prepared to write-off all those that sign to major labels, as there is something to be said for bringing punk's rebellious message to the masses. Indeed, as Neil Nehring avers, "significant musical alternatives do manage to emerge from the current [corporate music] regime," and pitting corporate rock against independent ("indie") rockers is "a dead end, a permanent stasis" (xxix). In supporting this position, Nehring quotes Kathleen Hanna, lead singer of Bikini Kill and Le Tigre:

"The whole martyr thing . . . chaste, poor, and suffering . . . [is] a bunch of bullshit," the glorified notion that "the only way you can create authentic art is if you're suffering [just] helps people stay in the same place" (xxix).

Feminist scholar Jill Dolan has made similar claims in relation to theater. In "Feminist Performance Criticism and the Popular," she revisits the work of Wendy Wasserstein, a liberal feminist and one of the most successful female playwrights on Broadway, whom she had previously dismissed as co-opted by mainstream American theater and its decidedly non-radical politics. In this essay, however, Dolan acknowledges that the presence of women, like Wasserstein, within the mainstream may be beneficial to feminist progress and that their work deserves to be engaged by feminist scholars, including those who are more radical-minded. As Dolan suggests:

> [F]eminist theatre criticism might relax its dogma about form and production context, as well as political ideologies, to allow liberal feminist, popular dramaturgy to be considered more positively. This reconsideration might put feminist scholars and academic critics into closer dialogue with those writing for mainstream presses, and increase our mutual influence on the discourse about theatre and performance staged in the public sphere. (437)

While Dolan is clearly writing about theater, not music, zines or films, her thoughts are still relevant to discussions of "selling out" within punk and queercore subculture. As Dolan reminds us, to be truly effective scholars and academic critics, we must take all cultural forms seriously, including those that are more popular.

Thus, with Nehring's, Hanna's and Dolan's critiques in mind, I have decided to replace Thompson's too-strict "economics" with "values." I maintain that punks share an anti-corporate politics, a deep-seated admiration for self-made media and a distaste for the slick and polished products of the mainstream entertainment industries, but realize that other factors sometimes intervene that cause punks to negotiate these principles. My revised version of Thompson's thesis thus reads, "any aesthetic consideration of punk must take place alongside considerations of punk's *values*," where "values" refers to punk's anti-establishment politics, grounded in (although not hemmed in by) a rejection of the principles of corporate culture industries, as well as punk's D.I.Y. media practice: the practice of creating alternatives to mainstream media products, which represents a refusal to be satisfied with dominant culture or with the role of passive consumption.

These punk values have their historical roots in both anarchist and folk cultures. Like punks, anarchists have always placed a high premium on authenticity, individualism and rebellion – anarchism itself being the "philosophy of individual dissent within the context of volunteer communities" (Duncombe 40). As Stephen Duncombe argues, these values have led anarchists to reject dominant political and communication structures and to emphasize the importance of highly personal acts of expression (40-1). It comes as no surprise then that anarchist ideology and imagery (e.g., the anarchy "A" symbol) has a prominent place in punk subculture, for the anarchist refusal of mainstream culture and celebration of self-creation has helped to pave the way for the values of punk. It should also be noted that it is within the anarchist movement of the late 1800s that one finds the first public proponents of homosexual rights. The infamous anarchist leader Emma Goldman, for example, insisted that the anarchist philosophy of social liberation should

extend to homosexuals. As German sex researcher and homosexual rights advocate Magnus Hirschfeld once said of Goldman, "She was the first and only woman, indeed one could say the first and only human being of importance in America to carry the issue of homosexual love to the broadest layers of the public" (Qtd. in Kissack, 4). Arguably, it was within the anarchist movement that proto-punk and proto-queer values and politics first became intertwined.

Similarly, the D.I.Y. ethics and anti-corporate politics of punk can be traced to early folk cultures. Within rural, pre-industrial society, doing-it-yourself, a necessity often fueled by poverty, lack of commercial alternatives and/or boredom, translated to such things as making clothes last longer by mending them, growing and cooking one's own food, and creating one's own domestic goods (e.g., candles and quilts) (Atkinson, 4). These D.I.Y. activities often combined pleasure and practicality, but were generally segregated along the lines of gender, with men and boys participating in, for example, woodworking and household repairs and women and girls engaging in such tasks as knitting, weaving, sewing, quilting, cooking, and pottery making (Edwards, 12). In all instances, small quantities of cultural artifacts were produced by hand without the aid of advanced technology and without the goal of making a profit. In addition, early American folk cultures from the Creoles to the Shakers developed their own forms of dance, song and (oral) storytelling, taking responsibility for their own entertainment, handing down traditions and fostering community in the process.

Folk cultures have provided inspiration for countless D.I.Y. movements, which have emulated the folk emphasis on individual, non-commercial production. For example, there is the arts and crafts movement of the early twentieth century, which

idealized handmade goods as opposed to the hollow machine-made productions of the Industrial Revolution (Cumming and Kaplan, 9-30). There are also pre-punk music based movements that built upon the D.I.Y. principles of folk culture. For example, Amy Spencer writes about the D.I.Y. approach of the early twentieth century "skiffle" movement, a style of folk in which jazz and blues influenced music was played on homemade and improvised instruments, like washboards and cigar-box fiddles (219). And, in her essay "The Missing Link: Riot Grrrl, Feminism, Lesbian Culture," Mary Celeste Kearney highlights the importance of 1960s / 1970s lesbian-feminist folk artists (e.g., Holly Near and Cris Williamson) and record companies (e.g., Wax Records and Olivia Records) in creating a space for contemporary feminist D.I.Y. music production outside of "the patriarchal and misogynist mainstream music industries" (219). As Kearney suggests, more recent forms of D.I.Y. music making, including riot grrrl and queercore, owe a debt to the groundwork laid by these independent-minded lesbian-feminist musicians and organizations (219). Thus, it can be said that anarchism, folk cultures and previous independent music movements have all had an impact on punk's D.I.Y., non-corporate values.

To trace the roots of punk aesthetics, one can look to the work that set the aesthetic approach to punk studies in motion: Dick Hebdige's previously mentioned, and highly influential, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Hebdige does not speak of punk aesthetics in isolation from punk values, but rather speaks of the homology (or "symbolic fit") between punk aesthetics and values, noting that punk style enacted on a visual level the chaos and emptiness that defined the lives and value systems of working-class punks within the United Kingdom during the 1970s (113). However, despite his attention to

punk values, Hebdige's main focus is on punk aesthetics. Drawing from the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco, Hebdige posits style, resulting from the radical (re-)deployment of ordinary cultural objects, as the key to subcultural identity and resistance:

> By repositioning and recontextualizing commodities, by subverting their conventional uses and inventing new ones, the subcutural stylist . . . opens up a world of objects to new and covertly oppositional readings. The communication of a significant *difference*, then (and the parallel communication of a group *identity*), is the 'point' behind the style of all spectacular subcultures. (102, emphasis in original)

In other words, for Hebdige, subcultural rebellion is expressed through styles produced by the practice of bricolage: taking consumer products and making them one's own by giving them new meanings. This form of rebellious reinvention was common to black immigrant youth populations in the 1970s United Kingdom, which Hebdige views as a vital precursor to punk. Thus the story of British punk, according to Hebdige, is as follows: Inspired by the defiant rhetoric and fashions of black immigrant youth culture, punks set about dramatizing the problems of 1970s British working-class society via their own stylistic innovations. By salvaging the refuse of domestic working-class life – the common safety pin, the drab plastic trash bag, the grimy rubber stopper and chain from the bathroom sink – and combining these items with "vulgar designs" and "nasty colors," punks created a "revolting style" that projected "noise" and "chaos" and "offered self-conscious commentaries on the notions of modernity and taste" (107). In this way, through style, punks posed a symbolic threat to law and order, but one that was always in danger of incorporation, either through punk styles being transformed into mass-

produced commodities or through the ideological recasting of punk individuals as harmless, ineffectual or exotic.

Significantly, punk style is expressed through various cultural objects: music, fashion, zines (as well as other visual art) and films. Punk music is characterized by deliberate primitivism and basic musical structures. Typical punk rock instrumentation includes one or two electric guitars, an electric bass and a drum set, accompanied by vocals in which the lyrics are shouted with a minimum amount of variety in terms of pitch, volume or intonation. Guitar playing emphasizes distortion and eschews complicated arrangements and bass guitar lines are plodding and similarly uncomplicated. Drums tend to be fast paced and out of synch with the rhythms of the bass guitar, lending the songs a feeling of disorder and rebelliousness. This feeling of disorder and rebelliousness is furthered by the aggressive tempo and short duration of most punk songs. Punk lyrics are generally confrontational, aggressive and angry, with topics ranging from working-class politics (The Clash's "Career Opportunities"), to nihilistic rebellion (The Sex Pistol's "Anarchy in the UK"), to more traditional topics like romance and relationships (The Buzzcock's "Ever Fallen in Love?"). Above all, punk music is unpolished and raw, contributing to a sense that anyone can play it. Punk's unpolished rawness also suggests that the emotions and viewpoints expressed by the songs are more important than the skill and virtuosity that go into their creation (Laing 59-63).

Punk fashion varies widely, but recognizable elements include leather, denim, spikes, chains, combat boots, thrift shop clothes and the "fetish gear" associated with sadomasochism and pornography. Brightly dyed hair, piercings, tattoos and (at one time)

unconventional hairstyles, such as Mohawks and spiked hair, are commonplace. These rudiments symbolically associate punk with the illicit and the degraded and function to offend and startle mainstream sensibilities. The self-made, D.I.Y. ethos is visible in many punk outfits, with punks creating their own clothing or greatly altering readymade items. According to Dave Laing, the "organizing principle" of the "punk look" is binding and tearing, a principle that is rich with connotations:

> The torn or ripped T-shirts and other garments, the ear, the nose or even mouth punctuated by pins took up a half-formed range of associations. The torn or ripped garment might signify poverty, the lack of concern for appearance or the involvement with violence of its wearer. (95)

In its associations with, as Laing points out, such things as poverty, violence and a disregard for "proper" bodily decorum, punk fashion has historically been one of its most shocking elements, as well as one its most mobile (punk fashion, unlike punk music or films, being observable on the street and not just in specified locales, such as punk rock clubs and art-house movie theaters) (Laing 94-5). Yet, it should also be said that fashion has been an aspect of punk that corporate industries have been quick to appropriate and dilute. The retail chain, Hot Topic, which sells cliché and mass-produced punk-inspired clothing in shopping malls across the United States is a case and point.

Like punk fashion, punk fanzines ("zines") also express a D.I.Y. aesthetic. Zines are nonprofessional, low-cost and small-circulation publications produced by individuals that share a particular interest, such as science fiction or feminism. Zines are usually handwritten and photocopied and include a combination of original and appropriated text and images. The distinctive visual style of punk zines is derived from such D.I.Y.

production techniques as cut and paste letterforms, photocopied and collaged images and hand-scrawled and typewritten text (Triggs 69). According to Hebdige, the two typographic models for zines "were graffiti which was translated into a flowing 'spray can' script, and the ransom note in which individual letters cut up from a variety of sources (newspapers, etc.) in different type faces were pasted together to form an anonymous message," contributing to punk's scandalous criminal image (112). Zine texts often feature mistakes in grammar and spelling that are brazenly displayed or violently crossed-out and written over. These qualities evince a clear disregard for the dictates of professional publication standards and emphasize the urgency and transparency of the (political) rants and music reviews that comprise the majority of zine content (Triggs 72). As Teal Triggs claims, zines deliberately break the rules of design and layout and aim to recreate the chaotic buzz of punk music in visual form (the same can be said of punk fashion) (73). Punk zines, like punk music, also delight in their raw and unpolished qualities, spotlighting them as signs of authenticity and resistance to the overly slick and refined aesthetics of mainstream publications.

Punk cinema aesthetics are probably the most difficult to describe, partly because it is unclear what exactly qualifies as a punk film: Is a "punk film" a matter of content, authorship or style? If it is a matter of content, than punk cinema encompasses a wide range of films with few common attributes: Films about punks like *Sid and Nancy* (Cox, 1986) (a low-budget drama about The Sex Pistol's guitarist Sid Vicious and his troubled relationship with girlfriend Nancy Spungen), *Rock N Roll High School* (Corman, 1979) (a teen comedy featuring New York punk band The Ramones) and *The Decline of Western Civilization* (Spheeris, 1979) (a documentary on the Los Angeles hardcore punk scene)

vary greatly in terms of aesthetics and content and transverse borders of genre and form. If punk cinema is a matter of authorship, than punk cinema would seem to be any film made by a self-described punk, including the contemplative, experimental feminist films of Vivienne Dick and the in-your-face, underground sex-and-violence films of Nick Zedd. Again, in this instance, punk cinema includes films that are aesthetically quite distinct.

If punk cinema is about aesthetics, there is still disagreement over what qualifies. Nicholas Rombes argues that rapid-fire editing, jump cuts and non-linearity, which signify punk fragmentation and disorder, are the aesthetic threads that tie punk films together. An example of this type of film, cited by Rombes, is Darren Aronofsky's *Requiem for a Dream* (2000). Thompson, however, in contradistinction to Rombes argues that:

> [T]he punk cinema aesthetic is, in fact, the antithesis of what we might expect. Instead of fast-moving narratives, numerous cuts both within and between shots, innumerable scenes, and frequent jump cuts, punk filmmakers do just the opposite. To resist the easy commodification of their films, they slow their narrative pace to a crawl, scarcely move the camera, make infrequent cuts and, in general, forego most of the techniques that would lend their films commercial viability. ("Punk Cinema," 25)

Examples of this type of "slow" and "non-commercial" filmmaking include *The Foreigner* (Amos Poe, 1977) and *Suburbia* (Penelope Spheeris, 1984).

Thompson is on to something when he claims that punk films resist easy commodification (and, I would add, easy consumption). However, I contend that this resistance can, and does, take many forms, including the fact-paced, jarring edits that

Rombes champions and the slow-paced narratives and static camera that Thompson highlights, as well as many films that exist between these poles. In this regard, punk film aesthetics might be vaguely described as a hodgepodge of cinematic techniques that interrupt normative production and reception practices. These aesthetics are identifiable as "punk," as opposed to simply unconventional or experimental, when they are employed within films that include punk content (narratives about punk characters and/or cultures) or that are directed by self-described punk filmmakers. In addition, the low-budget properties of punk films should also be noted. Punk cinema's low-budget properties echo the D.I.Y. nature of punk culture at large, and translate to such things as dark, grainy images, poorly framed shots and a general unpolished quality.

Importantly, the aesthetic strategies that are observable in the various punk cultural objects mentioned above are not without precedent. As Hebdige notes, the roots of punk can be traced to several avant-garde traditions, most notably Dadaism. This is a point that Griel Marcus takes further in *Lipstick Traces*, a poetic account of several twentieth-century art movements – Dada, Lettrism and Situationism – and their influence on punk and, in particular, the notorious punk band, the Sex Pistols. In a succinct summary of the book's main thesis, Marcus states:

> [M]easured against the records the Sex Pistols and their followers made, the leavings of dada, the LI [Lettrist International], and the SI [Situationist International] are sketches of punk songs; all in all it is the tale of a wish that went beyond art and found itself returned to it, a nightclub act that asked for the world, for a moment got it, then got another nightclub. In this sense punk realized the projects that lay behind it, and realized their limits (442).

Accordingly, in *Lipstick Traces*, Marcus presents a repeated coupling of Dadaism, situationism and punk that reveals a rich and fascinating "secret history" of aesthetic disobedience.

Dada emerged in France shortly after World War I and was both an artistic movement centered on visual art, literature, theater and graphic design, and a protest against the cultural and intellectual conformity that was seen to be a root cause of the war. Believing that the "logic" of capitalism and colonialism, insidiously embedded in dominant art forms of the day, had led Europe and North America into war, the Dadaists advocated a turn away from logic in art and toward chaos and irrationality. The Dadaists set themselves on a mission to fundamentally alter society through the overthrow of all previously existing social and aesthetic values and hoped that by shaking people up with new artistic strategies, they could create a more enlightened and politically-minded public (Henry 32-4).

The Dadaists advocated nonsense and the anti-art and used parody and biting humor to unsettle their audiences. Nonsense and anti-art strategies included: scissor and glue "cut-ups" (collages); "assemblages" (three-dimensional artistic compositions made from putting together found objects); "readymades" (found objects reclaimed as art, such as the urinal Marcel Duchamp entitled *Fountain* and put on display in art museums); and appropriation (the act of "borrowing" and changing the meaning of popular culture, products, slogans and images and using them for new purposes). All of these strategies and techniques had a strong impact on the pioneers of the punk movement, many of whom attended art school and were exposed to Dadaism in college. They, thus, re-

appeared in modified form in the visual art of punk, especially in the "cut and paste" style of punk zines (Henry 32-4).

Importantly, Dada's aesthetic strategies and techniques were not just a matter of artistic whimsy. As Tricia Henry states, Dada "put familiar objects into unfamiliar relationships, changing meaning by shifting context," with the intended effect of assaulting the senses and startling audiences into new ways of thinking (33). As Walter Benjamin concisely states, for the Dadaists "one requirement was foremost: to outrage the public" ("The Work of Art" 239). It is in this desire to assault, startle and outrage the public that we find the "shock effect" for which Dada and, following in its footsteps, punk aims. The shock effect is produced when an audience is confronted with unexpected material that disturbs the aesthetic discourses to which they have become accustomed. According to Benjamin, under the best conditions, the shock effect blocks traditional meanings and forces audience members to see the world anew, bringing them to a heightened state of awareness and insight. While Benjamin did not exactly attribute this capacity to Dada (he saw Dada as being motivated by this desire to enlighten, but due to limitations inherent in visual art, only having the ability to traumatize), Benjamin *did* view Dada as an important precursor to the "positive" shock effects of cinema: According to Benjamin, through its "technical structure," and namely its succession of images that, unlike a static painting, interrupt the viewer's conventional associations, cinema "cushions" the trauma of the shock effect, and brings about the "heightened presence of mind" promised by Dadaism ("The Work of Art" 239).

The Situationist International (SI), another influence on punk, was a Paris-based artistic and political movement in the 1950s and 1960s that was inspired by Marxism and

previous avant-garde traditions, including Dada. The SI, following in the footsteps of the Italian-based Lettrist International (LI), was dedicated to redefining the boundaries of art by merging art, politics and everyday life, specifically through the construction of new "situations" in which alternative life experiences could be enjoyed and new desires fulfilled (Marcus). The theoretical underpinnings of Situationism are laid out in Guy Debord's bristling *The Society of the Spectacle*, mentioned earlier in this introduction.

In *Society*, DeBord argues that within contemporary culture, "everything that was once directly lived has moved away into representation" (thesis 1); "real life" is no longer experienced first-hand but passively consumed via "various specialized mediations" (thesis 18). In other words, as Debord maintains, social subjects, seduced by the excitement and glamour of mass-mediated spectacles are continually distracted from the task of truly living. In this society propelled by consumerism, images take the place of genuine human interaction, and the ever-present and reified spectacle serves a tool of human degradation and depoliticization that separates art (representation) from life and consumption from production. Mass-mediated spectacles entreat us to sit back and "enjoy" rather than to respond with production of our own. The body is numbed and primed for capitalist consumption under "a continuous superimposition of geological layers of commodities" (thesis 42).

The solution to this "society of the spectacle" according to Debord, and the Situationists more generally, is to recover human potential through creativity. The Situationists therefore encouraged a number of practices that would enable this resistance-through-creativity. They took to self-publishing, compiling pamphlets that, much like the punk zines that came after, incorporated ideological rants alongside cut-ups

and other Dada-inspired visuals. The Situationists devised new methods for distributing these publications, including mailing them to people chosen at random from the phone book. They advocated an anti-copyright policy so that readers could "feel that the work was their own and did not belong to a distant writer" (Spencer 126). And, in-line with their view that culture belongs to no one individual and should sometimes even be used against itself, the Situationists advocated the appropriation and reworking of popular cultural images, slogans, texts and objects for political purposes; a process that is known as *détournement*.

Insofar as Situationism has impacted, however residually, the punk movement, it has done so not merely within the terrain of style, but the terrain of values as well. For example, the Situationist goal of eradicating the line between art and everyday life and between consumer and producer finds its reflection in punk efforts to breakdown the separation between performer and audience. Dave Laing explicates this punk impulse:

> The impossible dream was to abolish the distance, and then the difference, between performer and audience, the activity of one and the passivity of the other. Punk was formed in opposition to rock music which ranged the superstars with their banks of technology on stage against the audience with nothing but expensively acquired ticket stubs. (82)

Punk bands abolish the distance between themselves and the audience through a variety of strategies, from performing among the crowd on the auditorium floor, to entreating audience members to rush the stage, to employing lighting structures that light the band and audience equally, to explicitly encouraging audience members to start their own bands.

These strategies can be seen as an offshoot of punk's more general emphasis on participatory culture and D.I.Y. practice. I have already mentioned D.I.Y. values and practices within the course of this introduction, but their significance within punk culture cannot be overstated. Kevin Mattson explains the importance of the D.I.Y. ethic in punk culture as follows:

> Instead of waiting for the corporate monoliths like Sony and Warner Brothers to bestow more acceptable products, young people simply made their own culture. They formed countless bands, publications, and alternative networks. This D.I.Y. ethic fueled the movement and gave it a distinct identity. (Mattson, 74)

Beyond the self-made media which abound in the punk community, this D.I.Y. ethic can be witnessed in the grassroots way in which punk shows are put together (oftentimes in places like basements and rented halls with bands playing for free) and the experiments in non-corporate music production and distribution that have resulted in the formation of independent, community-based record labels. As previously stated, these D.I.Y. practices serve to produce producers: they send the message that "you can do this, too."

Benjamin outlines the radical potential of such a message in his essay, "The Author as Producer." As Benjamin states, the important question to ask of radical culture is not "How does a literary work stand in relation *to* the relationships of production of a period," but rather "How does it stand *in* them?" (298, emphasis in original). In other words, for Benjamin it is not the content of a work that matters most. For, as he notes, "the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate an astonishing number of revolutionary themes, and even propagate them without seriously placing its

own existence or the existence of the class that possesses them in question" (303). Instead, what is important and truly revolutionary is:

> the exemplary character of a production that enables it, first, to lead other producers to this production, and secondly to present them with an improved apparatus for their use. And this apparatus is better to the degree that it leads consumers to production, in short that it is capable of making co-workers out of readers or spectators. (304)

Benjamin cites the "epic theater" of Bertolt Brecht as an example of production that, through techniques of alienation and disruption, elicits the kind of active, productive audience that is "capable of making co-workers out of readers." Although Benjamin was writing before its emergence, punk with its shock effects, D.I.Y. ethics and attempts to break down the distinction between performer and audience, is another example of an artform that elicits an active, productive audience and, hence, ostensibly meets Benjamin's definition of revolutionary art. Queercore too "leads other producers to production" and "presents them with an improved apparatus for their use." Not only in breaking down the line between producer and consumer, but in encouraging marginalized queer voices, almost entirely absent within the mainstream cultural field, to speak.

At the beginning of this dissertation I asked the research question: as evidenced by queercore, how have anti-establishment, D.I.Y. punk aesthetics and values furthered the radical queer project of subverting normativity? Returning to this question, I can now say that what I am essentially asking is how have queers placed punk aesthetics (including shock effects) and D.I.Y. practices (including the breakdown of performer and audience, producer and consumer) in the service of radical queer politics and the "improved apparatus" mentioned by Benjamin. Although, to be clear, there is no

necessary relationship between punk aesthetics/values and queer politics or left-wing politics more generally. This is a point that Michelle Phillipov makes apparent in her essay, "Haunted by the Spirit of '77." Chastising previous scholars of punk for assuming that punk's politics are by definition progressive and emancipatory and that these politics naturally flow from punk's aesthetic practices, Phillipov asserts that:

> [P]unk's amateurism (the fact that anyone can "have a go") or the desire to eliminate hierarchies between fans and performers may well facilitate the building of an egalitarian, proto-socialist community, but the same techniques might also be employed equally effectively to decidedly non-progressive ends. The rawness of "amateurish" compositions may instead lend intensity and urgency to right wing political messages . . . Equally so, a DIY approach to musical production and a circulation of materials through the independent and "underground" channels favored by many Oi and Nazi punk[17] bands may result less from the desire to subvert corporate control of music practice than from a more practical need to remain hidden from public view. (391-2)

With this argument in mind, my contention is that punk aesthetics and values have been used to facilitate the expression of radical queer politics in queercore, and not that radical queer politics has a necessary relationship with these aesthetics and values. D.I.Y. and non-hierarchical values and punk aesthetics may sometimes lead to non-progressive ends, but in the case of queercore they have served to carve out a path for radical queer politics to tread.

[17] Oi punk bands are working-class bands that have come to be associated with white nationalism and Nazi punk bands are white supremacist bands that support the anti-Jewish, anti-black and anti-queer rhetoric of Nazism and neo-Nazism.

VI. Queercore

Unlike the literature on queer theory, subculture and punk, writings on queercore are few and far between. There are only two works that have attempted to provide a holistic account of the subculture. The first is "Queercore: The Distinct Identities of Subculture" a 1997 article by Michael DuPleiss and Kathleen Chapman, which draws from the work of Pierre Bourdieu to argue that distinction from others (namely straight society and mainstream gays, lesbians and punks) is the defining element of queercore. The second is *Homocore: The Loud and Raucous Rise of Queer Rock* by David Cimenelli and Ken Knox, a 2005 book that consists mainly of interviews with notable queercore musicians. "Queercore" is an excellent and insightful article, but despite its all-inclusive aim, at a mere thirteen pages it does not capture the full breadth and depth of queercore, and only speaks of the subculture in the broadest of terms, and with few examples. Likewise, while the interviews in *Homocore* are informative and illuminating, they are accompanied by very little narrative context and the book fails to address the non-musical facets of queercore. Accordingly, a more comprehensive account of queercore has yet to be achieved.

Other writings on queercore exist, but they focus on even more specific aspects of the subculture than Cimenelli and Knox cover in *Homocore* and, thus, also do not account for the subculture's scope and diversity.[18] For example, in "Do Doc Martens Have a Special Smell?," Ashley Dawson concentrates on the gender politics at work in queercore performances by male bands, noting that one of the defining elements of these

[18] One reason why many of the writings on queercore do not reference one another may be that much of this scholarship was produced during the same time period, the mid to late 1990s, meaning that the various authors would not necessarily have been aware of the similar scholarship that was already out there or soon to be published.

performances is their ironic and critical appropriation of the styles and posturings of straight male punks. In "Queer Punk Fanzines," Mark Fenster limits his focus to queercore zines, such as *Homocore* and *Sister Nobody*, and comments upon the way in which these zines construct alternative sexual desires within hardcore punk and new queer identities, meanings and representations within the gay mainstream. In "Kinky Escapades," Matias Viegner also focuses on queercore zines, asserting that their over-the-top campy aesthetics function to transform political issues into outrageous spectacles. And, in "Mapping Subversion." Robert DeChaine considers the music of queercore band Pansy Division to support his argument that queercore is grounded by a sensibility of play that encourages participants to use irony and humor as a means of working through the repressions of dominant culture.

All of these articles make valid arguments and are useful to this study. However, most of them are "one-offs," do not place themselves in conversation with other writings on queercore, and have a limited focus, sometimes to their detriment. Dawson, for example, erroneously equates queercore with just men and music (although he does briefly reference the films of Bruce LaBruce). Fenster's essay is astute and well written, but leaves readers with the impression that queercore zines are alone responsible for the alternative queer spaces, identities, meanings and representations that he champions (as opposed to the queercore performances, music and films that all played an important role in carving out these spaces). Similarly, DeChaine's argument that queercore is grounded in humor and play is possible only because he employs Pansy Division as his primary example, a band known for its tongue-in-cheek, often sexual, humor and lighthearted

stage antics. Other queercore bands, like Huggy Bear, Limp Wrist and Mukilteo Fairies, are not so much playful as angry, political and confrontational.

Queercore has also appeared as a secondary subject matter within works with a wider focus. Amy Spencer's *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture* includes two sections on queercore – one on queercore zines and one on queercore music – both of which situate queercore as a key subculture within the larger history of D.I.Y. cultural production. Likewise, in *An Archive of Feelings*, a book that positions trauma as a potentially generative force in the consolidation of queer identities and communities, Ann Cvetkovich explores the lesbian public cultures that have formed in relation to the irreverent stage performances of dykecore band Tribe 8; Tribe 8 notoriously working through the traumas of sexual abuse through such on-stage rituals as acts of feigned castration with a strap-on dildo. And, in Judith Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place*, a book mainly concerned with the significance of the transgender body within contemporary art and film, she dedicates one chapter to queer music subcultures, in which she discusses everything from lesbian feminist folk to queercore to homo-hop (i.e., lesbian and gay hip hop). Again, these pieces are all excellent and are all beneficial to this study. But, as single sections in larger works, their discussions of queercore remain secondary to larger arguments.

So, a comprehensive, multifaceted, focused, scholarly account of queercore has yet to be written. This is surprising considering how long queercore has been around and what an important queer cultural movement it has been. While much has been written about the early gay underground of folks like Andy Warhol, John Waters, Kenneth Anger and Jack Smith, very little has been written about queercore, the queer underground that

followed in the footsteps of these queer cinema giants, and that came before the more thoroughly researched "New Queer Cinema" movement of the early 1990s. Accordingly, my interest in this project is grounded in a desire to bring needed attention to contemporary alternative multimedia queer subculture. That is, to preserve in writing a subculture that has yet to be fully recorded or theorized. What's more, in lending my attention to a subculture structured around radical punk and queer aesthetics and politics, I seek to keep these aesthetics and politics resonant (and not just associated with the 1970s, when both punk and modern radical queer politics came to fruition), as well as to spotlight some of the alternative queer creations and viewpoints that continue to be absented from public discourse.

VII. Theoretical Perspective

As the preceding sections intimate, my theoretical approach in this dissertation is post-structuralism with an emphasis on queer theory, as well as related theories of feminism and race. Accordingly, within this dissertation I bring a queer critical and theoretical approach to bear on the representations, performances, practices and discourses of gender and sexuality within queercore. Feminist and critical race theories will be used to further understand the operation of gender and race in queercore and, as queercore is a white-dominated subculture, to also point to queercore's shortcomings.

VIII. Methodology

In the final chapter of *In a Queer Time and Place*, Judith Halberstam contends that queer subcultures, comprised of "subterranean scenes, fly-by-night clubs, and

fleeting trends" require what José Esteban Muñoz has termed "an archive of the ephemeral" (161). For Halberstam this means that:

> Ideally, an archive of queer subcultures would merge ethnographic interviews with performers and fans with research in the multiple archives that already exist online and in other unofficial sites. Queer zines, posters, guerilla art and other temporary artifacts would make up the paper archives, and descriptions of shows along with the self-understandings of cultural producers would provide supplementary materials. (169)

That is, as Halberstam explains, the study of queer subcultures requires that researchers delve into and interpret an archive that is both physical and "a construction of collective memory" (170). Taking my cue from Halberstam, my dissertation, itself concerned with queer subculture, will take a three-pronged methodological approach: textual analysis, which will allow me to analyze the physical materials that comprise queercore (zines, music, films); ethnographic work, namely personal face-to-face interviews, to "get at" the less tangible traces and memories of queercore and its objects; and discourse analysis, to further interpret and contextualize these texts and interviews.

The major cultural objects that I will investigate include zines, music, and films as well as the archives that house these objects themselves. The queercore zines that I will address include the foundational *JDs* (Chapter 2) and *Outpunk* (Chapter 5), the inflammatory *Bimbox* and *S.C.A.B.* (Chapter 3), and the anti-racist *Bamboo Girl* (Chapter 4). In addition, Chapter 5 will examine one of the main repositories for queercore zines in the digital age: the on-line *Queer Zine Archive Project* (*QZAP*). Music groups that will be highlighted in my dissertation include: Pansy Division (Chapter 2); Tribe 8 (Chapter 3); The Gossip (Chapter 4); although other queercore musicians, such as God is

My Co-Pilot, Fifth Column, PME, and Fagatron, will also be referenced. Queercore films that I will analyze include: Bruce LaBruce's *No Skin Off My Ass* (Chapter 2); G.B. Jones's *The Yo-Yo Gang* (Chapter 2) and *The Lollipop Generation* (Chapter 2); Greg Araki's *The Living End* (Chapter 3), Tracy Flannigan's *Rise Above: A Tribe 8 Documentary* (Chapter 3); Scott Treleaven's *Queercore: A Punk-u-mentary* (Chapter 5); and Lucy Thane's *She's Real, Worse Than Queer* (Chapter 5). Music videos, such as those of Tribe 8 and The Gossip will also be engaged. My analysis will also extend to on-line queercore forums, including the aforementioned *QZAP* (Chapter 5) and *Soul Ponies* (Chapter 5), a digital home for riot grrrl and queercore music. The objects that I will explore date back to 1985, when the first issue of *JDs* was published and the concept of "homocore" was established, and will extend to the present day (via such contemporary queercore artists as The Gossip and Courtney Trouble). However, the main focus of my dissertation will be on the "heyday" of queercore: the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s.

The physical queercore materials that I will be looking at primarily hail from United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, the central sites of punk and queercore production. Yet, it should be noted that queercore is not limited to these locales. There have been, for example, queercore zines produced in places like Australia (*The Burning Times*), Italy (*Speed Demon*) and Brazil (*Queercore*), and queercore bands have formed in such distinct locations as Germany (Low End Models), Norway (Kids Like Us) and Argentina (She Devils). Likewise, queer filmmakers as diverse as Pedro Almodovar from Spain and Slava Mogutin from Russia have, at various times in their careers, been associated with the punk movement (the former with the Madrid punk scene of the late

1970s/early 1980s and the latter with the contemporary queercore scene in the United States). Thus, there is still work to be done on the global dimensions of queercore, and my hope is that this dissertation will help to facilitate further research in this area.

In terms of the specifics of my textual analysis, I will be utilizing both semiotic and discourse analysis, in conjunction with a queer (and feminist and anti-racist) ideological perspective. Semiotic textual analysis is derived from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of modern linguistics. Saussure proposed that signs (discrete units of meaning like an image, sound or word) are comprised of both a signifier (the material aspect of the sign) and a signified (the mental concept derived from the signifier) and that the relationship between a sign and the meanings we attribute to it is arbitrary. That is, there is no natural relationship between the red flower with the thorny stem and the word "rose," let alone the associations this flower evokes, such as love, romance and sexual desire. To this semiological system theorist Roland Barthes added the idea that there are two orders of signification: denotation (the literal, surface meaning of the sign) and connotation (the associative elements attributed to the sign). According to Barthes the connotations we apply to particular signs are rooted in ideology (the values and discourses of a culture) and frequently take on the function of cultural myths. For example in *Mythologies*, Barthes contends that the connotations that the French attach to wine, such as "health" and "relaxation," activate a set of myths about the fermented beverage, myths that reify French ideals and help support a profit driven wine industry (77).

Semiotic textual analysis has two distinct advantages. For one, it can be applied to any media text, which is beneficial to a project such as this that encompasses several

different art forms. Second, semiotic textual analysis brings with it the understanding that every cultural artifact is comprised of numerous signs that produce pleasures and displeasures and assert particular ideologies. Thus, semiotic analysis encourages the interpreter to take apart the multiple layers of a cultural product, to look beyond the surface and establish underlying conventions and meanings. Accordingly, building on the insights of Barthes, semiotic analysis will allow me to answer an important question about queercore: What sort of (ideological) conventions and meanings underlie particular queercore texts?

Discourse analysis is based on Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse as a group of statements, a body of knowledge, that sets the parameters of how something will be talked about or represented in any given sociohistorical moment. As Foucault maintained, discourse both reflects and constitutes (speaks for and as) ideology, whether dominant or marginal. For Foucault, discourse is not inherently good or bad, oppressive or liberatory, but instead is a channel through which power flows. As such, knowledge can also be inverted through what Foucault refers to as "reverse discourse." Discourse analysis thus involves looking at the "bodies of knowledge" encapsulated within a particular text as well as those that surround it and attempt to fix its meaning. Discourses external to a text include those that are popular (e.g., critical reviews and fan postings on websites) and those that are scholarly (e.g., theories of a punk or sexuality).

As a method rooted in post-structuralism, discourse analysis does not seek to discover the "true" meaning of a text, but rather to contend with the ways in which a text's meanings are conditioned by its social surrounding and the dominant discourses of its time. With discourse analysis, as with post-structuralism more generally, the aim is to

deconstruct social values, belief systems, concepts and assumptions rather than to simply repeat or record them. Discourse analysis will, thus, allow me to look at the "bigger picture" of queercore: to analyze the relevant buzz happening around queercore texts as well as within them. Moreover, it will allow me to think critically about the values, belief systems, concepts and assumptions that queercore espouses. Foucault's concept of reverse discourse will also be useful in understanding the oppositional nature of queercore and its ideologies.

Finally, as previously stated, I rely on personal face-to-face interviews to analyze the more fleeting components of queercore. Individual interviews have been conducted with twenty major figures within queercore subculture, including: Bruce LaBruce, G.B. Jones, Ed Varga, Gary Gregerson, Jena Von Brucker, Johnny Noxzema, Jon Ginoli, Kate Messer, Larry Bob Roberts, Leslie Mah, Lynnee Breedlove, Matt Wobensmith, Nomy Lamm, Tantrum, Christopher Wilde, Milo Miller, Stacey Konkiel, Gretchen Phillips, Margarita Alcantara, and Silas Howard. My primary interest during these interviews was the "story" of my interviewees' involvement as well as their personal take on queercore and its evolution.

In choosing interviewees I approached individuals who have made a major impact on the subculture. I also used the snowball method of having initial interviewees suggest additional people to whom I should speak. Although there are many more people whom I would like to interview for this project, I had to limit my interviews for financial reasons and in order to complete this stage of the project in a timely fashion. More interviews will be conducted at a future time. Again, these interviews helped me to get to the traces

of queercore. They also helped me to temper my own interpretations with those of the people from within the subculture itself.

IX. Chapter Breakdown

The chapters in this dissertation are arranged thematically, starting with a general overview of queercore and continuing with chapters based on queercore's primary themes. Given the expansive, ever-evolving and willfully undisciplined nature of queercore, organizing a structured analysis of it is a difficult task. But, I have striven to construct a manageable and sensible dissertation that, as a whole, will give the reader a fuller understanding of queercore's ideals, practices and themes. In chapter one I provide an overview of queercore's development and contextualize the subculture within its proper historical frameworks. Chapters two, three and four focus on guiding themes within queercore: sex, imagined violence, and bodily difference, respectively. Chapter five details the efforts that have been made to archive queercore and, along with the Conclusion, functions to situate this dissertation itself as a contribution to the queercore archive. A more in-depth breakdown of these chapters is provided below.

Chapter one will provide an overview of the histories of punk and radical queer politics leading up to queercore's emergence in the mid 1980s. For the purposes of clarity and manageability, I will focus on the major punk scenes in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK). These include: the original US punk scene that was sparked by underground rock and glam bands in New York City (The Velvet Underground, Jayne/Wayne County and the Electric Chairs, The New York Dolls) and

Detroit (MC5, Iggy and the Stooges), and which culminated in the mid-1970s explosion of "art school" bands in New York City (Patti Smith, The Ramones, Blondie, Television, Richard Hell and the Voidoids, etc.); the UK punk scene that emerged in the late 1970s and that revolved around (primarily) working-class bands with nihilistic and/or highly political viewpoints (The Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Slits, The X-Ray Spex, Stiff Little Fingers, Sham 69, The Buzzcocks, etc.); the hardcore punk scene that arose on the US West Coast in the early 1980s and that included bands that were rougher, angrier and had more hard-edged in sound than those that came before them (e.g., The Germs, X, Black Flag, The Dead Kennedys, The Avengers, The Circle Jerks); the Austin punk scene which had a pronounced queer element via bands like The Dicks and Meat Joy; and the womyn's music scene which further stimulated queercore's D.I.Y. ethics and personal politics. This punk/womyn's music overview culminates with an extended discussion of queercore's development and expansion that pays particular attention to the specifics of the subculture's values and aesthetics. In order to relay this information I will be drawing from my personal interviews with queercore practitioners as well as some of the key punk history texts, including Jon Savage's *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols,* and Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain's oral history of the New York punk scene *Please Kill Me*.

My overview of radical queer politics will center on the US gay rights movement that emerged in the aftermath of the Stonewall riots; a movement, led by the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), that was decidedly anti-assimilationist in bent. However, my overview will also encompass pre-Stonewall "homophile" organization the Mattachine Society, which had roots in the Communist party, and will touch on the beginnings of the

gay rights movement in the public speeches of turn-of-the-century anarchist Emma Goldman. Key texts on histories of radical gay/queer politics that will inform this section include: Donn Teal's *The Gay Militants: How Gay Liberation Began in America, 1969-1971*; Michael Bronski's *The Pleasure Principle: Sex, Backlash, and the Struggle for Gay Freedom*; and both Terence Kissack's "Freaking Fag Revolutionaries" and *Free Comrades: Anarchism and Homosexuality in the United States, 1895-1917*.

By including these histories, my intent is to provide an understanding of queercore's origins and to reveal its connections to wider histories of punk and radical queer politics. In an effort to show the overlap between these histories, this chapter will also aim to queer the punk movement and punk the gay liberation movement. That is, to demonstrate that punks have always been a little queer and queers have always been a little punk.

Chapters two, three and four center on some of the main themes of queercore: explicit sex, imagined violence and unruly bodies. Chapter two draws from Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque to discuss Pansy Division's sexually irreverent songs and on-stage performances; the work of sex positive thinkers Herbert Marcuse and Wilhelm Reich is employed to explore the sexually explicit films of Bruce LaBruce; and the power-conscious writings of Michel Foucault are made to bear on the anti-patriarchal films and art of G.B Jones. Chapter three expands upon Judith Halberstam's notion of "imagined violence" – symbolic expressions of aggression on the part of minority subjects in resistance to powerful white, straight, male, bourgeois hegemony – in order to discuss queercore works that use a representational rage to spark queer empowerment and to threaten change (Johnny Noxzema's anti-normative zines *Bimbox* and *SCAB*, Tribe 8's

aggressive music and on-stage performances, and Gregg Araki's HIV/AIDS road movie fantasy *The Living End* are all analyzed in-depth). Chapter four engages theories of the carnivalesque (Bahktin), the grotesque woman (Mary Russo) and the unruly woman (Kathleen Rowe), as well as contemporary theories of fat, disabled and transgender cultural activism to explore the bodily subversive work of "fat" Gossip singer Beth Ditto, disabled musician Nomy Lamm and transgender filmmaker Silas Howard, all participants in queercore. In tandem these chapters reveal some of the main topics and approaches that set queercore apart from the straight and gay and lesbian media mainstreams.

Finally, chapter 5 investigates current efforts to document and archive queercore in physical spaces like university libraries and non-profit community centers, on-line, and within documentary films, and pays particular attention to the benefits and drawbacks of each of these approaches. This chapter, like archives themselves, takes a step back in order to observe the history of the subculture from the perspective of the modern day. At the end of this dissertation I return to my thoughts about the erasure of radical queer art and politics within contemporary straight and gay society. As stated toward the beginning of this introduction, there is a need for alternative queer artistic expressions and viewpoints that can counteract the assimilationist forces of the gay mainstream, which threaten to place gay existence firmly within the very institutions (the nuclear family, the military) that have historically been the sources of our oppression. By exploring queercore in this dissertation as an anti-assimilationist queer subculture that has lasted almost thirty years, I hope to recover a part of the queer movement's radical past (and present) and, through the exposure of alternatives, to trouble the reductive and limiting terms that undergird contemporary mainstream gay discourse.

Chapter 1: Queercore Contexts

This chapter presents a brief overview of queercore and the history leading up to, and extending beyond, its emergence within the Toronto underground. This is a necessary chapter, in that it provides a framework and context for the following chapters on queercore's primary themes. However, this is a chapter that is written with some reservation, as, for multiple reasons, explicating queercore is a tricky endeavor. For one, those who have asserted an affiliation with queercore (or who have had this affiliation hoisted upon them) come from multiple locales and work in various media formats. These individuals are generally united by a shared alienation from hegemonic gay and punk culture, but are divided when it comes to their more specific tastes and opinions, as well as their level of devotion to, and identification with, queercore. Which is to say that queercore is a subculture with meanings that are highly dependent on whom you ask, the particular scene and medium in which they are engaged, and the degree to which they are invested in the community.

Second, as a concept that is now over twenty-five years old, the meanings of queercore have, not surprisingly, evolved over space and time. In its initial incarnation, as conceptualized by a cadre of misfits and malcontents in 1980s Toronto, queercore was primarily concerned with: creating anti-assimilationist, do-it-yourself art; challenging the orthodoxies of the punk and gay and lesbian mainstreams; and dismantling the cultural barriers that exist between queer men and women. Over the years, however, as new politics, economic strategies and media technologies have materialized, the contours of the punk and gay and lesbian mainstreams opposed by queercore have transmogrified, and many of queercore's original adherents have moved on, queercore has readjusted its

borders to incorporate fresh ideas, people and media: Queercore is not, and never was, a singular or static entity.

For these reasons – the diversity of queercore participation and its continual evolution – any attempt to simplify queercore, while beneficial in terms of clarity, is detrimental in terms of accuracy. Simplification requires skimming over the messy and complex details and leaving out information that may in fact be vital to a full portrait of the subculture. Moreover, it misses the point, as the charisma generated by queercore's protean nature – that is, its multiple meanings, practices, interpretations and possibilities – is part of its heritage and allure. To demystify queercore is to diminish its dynamism and to take away the excitement that accompanies its cool mystery and exciting unpredictability. As deviser of queercore Bruce LaBruce has said of efforts to illuminate the volatile essence of punk, "sometimes to explain is to weaken" (193).

In addition, there is the related, but larger problem, of historiography itself. That is, the tendency of historiography to construct definitive, consensus histories that rely on superficial understandings of the past as intrinsically coherent. This is a conundrum addressed by both Joan Wallach Scott and Scott Bravmann, specifically in relation to feminist and queer historiography. In *Gender and the Politics of History*, Wallach Scott draws from post-structuralist thought to query the process of historiography and the historian's role in the production of knowledge. Referencing post-structuralist literary critic Barbara Jordan and her ideas concerning the construction of meaning through implicit or explicit binary contrast (e.g., defining maleness in distinction to femaleness), Wallach notes that "Positive definitions rest always . . . on the negation or repression of something represented as antithetical to it. And categorical oppositions repress the

internal ambiguities of either category" (7). Accordingly, it is the job of the progressive academician "to expose repressed terms, to challenge the natural status of seemingly dichotomous pairs, and to expose their interdependence and their internal stability" (ibid.). As applied to the field of historiography, this means being aware of, and struggling against, the arbitrary omissions, constructed oppositions and subjective determinations that produce intelligible historical accounts. As Wallach Scott states:

> [I[f one grants that meanings are constructed through exclusions, one must acknowledge and take responsibility for the exclusions involved in one's own project. Such a reflexive, self-critical approach makes apparent the particularistic status of any historical knowledge and the historian's active role as a producer of knowledge. It undermines claims for authority based on totalizing explanations, essentialized categories of analysis (be they human nature, race, class, sex, or the "oppressed"), or systematic narratives that assume an inherent unity of the past. (7-8)

Sharing a similar post-structuralist perspective on historiography as Wallach Scott, Scott Bravmann in *Queer Fictions of the Past* makes the case for a queer cultural studies of history. This approach rejects over-determined causalities and shallow progress narratives, both of which, according to Bravmann, repress instructive exceptions, inconsistencies and experiences, especially those related to queers of color and the queer working-class, and create fictions of a clearly-delineated gay and lesbian past against which present-day identities, differences, politics and communities are fatuously erected. Accordingly, Bravmann's queer cultural studies approach "refuses both a notion of total history and a singular interpretation of any particular event, period or historical narrative" (125). This queer cultural studies approach also implores readers to interpret historical works as possible imaginings rather than as factual recordings. This

means a "a shift away from understanding lesbian and gay historical representations as literal or descriptive accounts of the past, towards reading those representations as performative sites where meanings are invented" (97). That is, a shift toward understanding lesbian and gay historical representations as *stories*.

Taking Wallach Scott and Bravmann's ideas seriously, this chapter is written with the acknowledgement that the history of queercore presented here omits other, potentially valuable narratives, experiences, and versions of events. In other words, I do not pretend to offer the definitive take on queercore and its development, and my hope is that this chapter will eventually exist alongside other, equally important and perhaps even contradictory, histories, that together will conjure something closer to the reality. But, to help guard against a completely subjective and one-sided account, in this chapter I use the words of punk's pioneers (culled from several oral histories) as well as those of queercore's participants (culled from my own personal interviews) to guide my chronicle of the subculture. When incorporating quotes from my own interviews, I have, when applicable, attempted to highlight, rather than to hide, the points of confusion and contestation within, and between, interviewees' explanations. But even with these precautions in place, this chapter remains a tentative and provisional queercore historiography, and one that, in the words of Bravmann, I encourage readers to engage as a "performative site where meanings are being invented," rather than as the irrefutable or final word on the matter.

I. Before Queercore

The antecedents to queercore are neither solitary nor immediately apparent. While, as stated in the introduction to this dissertation, queercore most clearly arises from the preceding, dual energies of radical queer politics and punk, these are not the only possibilities. We might, for example, regard the underground queer films of Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith, and perhaps even Barbara Hammer, as other important precursors. Likewise these energies, of radical queer politics and punk, have their own multiple and varied influences, begging the question: where should a history of queercore properly begin? In the case of radical queer politics, there is the longer history of various civil rights movements from which radical queer politics pulls and, in the case of punk, there are the earlier cutting-edge art and culture movements, such as Dadaism and Situationism (both of which are discussed in the introduction to this dissertation). Thus, to pick a set of origins for queercore is to choose rather arbitrary starting points. Nevertheless, the dictates of lucidity and manageability require some selective choices and generalizations. As such, in the following sections, I briefly outline a few of the antecedents to queercore, those that I see as most directly relevant, namely, radical queer politics, and the womyn's music scene, the first and second wave punk scenes in New York (NY), the United Kingdom (UK), Los Angeles (LA), and Austin.

A. Radical Queer Politics

Until recently, gay liberation (as it used to be called) was firmly aligned with political extremism. Specifically, early gay liberation politics in the United States were

enmeshed within the far-left anarchist and communist political movements.[19] [20] In *Free Comrades*, Terrence Kissack sketches the history of early sex radicals within the latter. As he notes, turn-of-the-twentieth-century anarchists "were interested in the ethical, social, and cultural place of homosexuality within society, because that question lies at the nexus of individual freedom and state power" (6). Accordingly, by the late 1800s, famed anarchist Emma Goldman was devoting entire lectures to the subject of homosexuality in Europe and the United States. Goldman understood that the state's persecution of homosexuality, brought into public view by the Oscar Wilde trial of 1895 in Great Britain, was a key example of government-sponsored subjugation and oppression and, as such, along with other anarchists, like Alexander Berkman who spoke favorably of the consensual love between men behind bars in *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, petitioned for better treatment of homosexuals and a transformation in societal mores regarding same-sex desire. Goldman was particularly effective in convincing those within the anarchist movement of the importance of homosexual rights to an anti-authoritarian agenda and at a time when such ideas were far beyond the pale. For, as one of Goldman's contemporaries, identified only as "Anna W." stated in response to one of Goldman's speeches on homosexual rights:

> Every person who came to the lecture possessing contempt and disgust for the homo-sexualists and who upheld the attitude of the authorities that

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[19] In general terms, anarchism opposes authority, heirarchical organization and power, especially in the hands of the state, and advocates stateless, egalitatrian and voluntary associations between peoples. Communism aims for the establishment of a classless, moneyless, and stateless social order structured upon common ownership of the means of production.

[20] It should be duly noted that anarchism is also the primary political philosophy cited by punk enthusiasts. Thus, given that both radical queer politics and punk have an affiliation with anarchism, queercore represents a not-so-peculiar coming together of queer and punk, as they are, in fact, derived from a common philiosophical root.

> those given to this particular form of sex expression should be hounded down and persecuted, went away with a broad and sympathetic understanding of the question and a conviction that in matters of personal life, freedom should reign. (Qtd. in Kissack, 145)

Decades after the anarchists put same-sex rights on the political map in the U.S., one of the first homosexual rights organizations, the Mattachine Society, was formulated in 1950. Founded by activist Harry Hay and a group of his male friends, most of whom were affiliated with the Communist Party, the Mattachine Society was, at first, a provocative assemblage that adopted the Communist model of cell organization. However, while the Mattachine Society was initially a revolutionary organization that called for societal upheaval through the complete emancipation of homosexuals, as the anti-Communist atmosphere, and attendant paranoia, of the McCarthy era came to a head in the mid-1950s, and more conservative members started filling the group's ranks, the Mattachine Society adopted a more traditional leadership style, as well as an agenda dedicated less to producing societal change than to convincing straight people that homosexuals were no different than themselves. Following in these more moderate footsteps, the Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian organization in the U.S., was formed in 1955 with the goals of establishing lesbianism as "normal" and "ordinary" and encouraging lesbian integration within prevailing heterosexual society (Kissack, "Freaking," 107-8).

It was not until the aftermath of the Stonewall Riots that radical sexual politics made a resurgence in the United States. The Stonewall Riots being a series of violent and spontaneous demonstrations that erupted in response to a police raid of the Stonewall Inn gay bar in New York City's Greenwich Village in the early hours of June 28, 1969.

These riots, which morphed into a series of disturbances that lasted for five days, were instigated by gays, lesbians and drag queens fed up with police harassment and general societal disapprobation, and are widely considered to constitute the single most important event leading to the gay liberation movement and the modern fight for gay and lesbian rights in the United States. Immediately following the Stonewall Riots, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was formed. Audaciously named after the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, GLF continued the confrontational and unapologetic approach of the Stonewall insurgence through public marches, passionate manifestos, lively community events and powerful slogans, like "Better Blatant Than Latent" and "Gay Power Now!" (Kissack, "Freaking," 113). More than a single-issue organization, in its founding document, GLF denounced not only institutionalized homophobia, but racism, classism, militarism and sexism, the patriarchal nuclear family, and the "dirty, vile, fucked-up capitalist conspiracy" (Qtd. in Carter, 220). GLF believed that American society was fundamentally flawed and that the movement should strive for alternatives to existing social structures rather than integration within them. They also believed that wide-scale change was only possible through coalition building and, as part of their efforts to combat racism, sexism, militarism and classism alongside homophobia, GLF aligned themselves with "the Vietnamese struggle, the third world, the blacks, the workers" and supported other militant groups like the anti-racist Black Panthers (ibid.).[21]

[21] Founded in Oakland, California by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale on October 15, 1966, The Black Panthers were a revolutionary, leftist African American organization that subscribed to socialist and communist doctrines and a belief in aggressive self-defense in the face of societal racism. GLF's support of the Black Panthers, an organization that some in the gay community argued was sexist and homophobic and, therefore, inimical to the goals of gay liberation, was a matter of great contention within GLF and led to several (mostly white, middle-class and male) members defecting from the group to form the single-issue oriented Gay Activist Alliance.

Due to internal disagreements and the lack of a coherent organizational structure, GLF lasted only roughly three years and was quickly overshadowed by an increasingly mainstream gay movement led by organizations like the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA), organizations that, over time, became more interested in lobbying Congress for legally sanctioned rights than in overthrowing the "system." However, the staunch anti-assimilationist politics and in-your-face style of GLF, as well as the sexual radicalism of the preceding anarchist movement and, to some extent, the Mattachine Society and Daughter of Bilitis, were, and remain, crucial to queercore and its effects. In addition, these early proto-queer organizations all used cultural creations as a form of social protest, creating a model for queercore's artistic rebellion: Emma Goldman edited the underground anarchist magazine *Mother Earth*, in which she discussed sexual freedom (among other topics); the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis sponsored social events and publications (*One* and *The Ladder*, respectively); and GLF organized community dances and helped create an alternative press for gay men through such foundational works as *Gay Flames* and *Come Out!* (Kissack, "Freaking," 117-18).

It should also be noted that, concurrent with the emergence of queercore, there were several organizations that reflected a similar set of confrontational politics and styles. These organizations, including the HIV-centered AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP), the anti-homophobic/anti-heteronormative Queer Nation and the anti-homophobic/anti-sexist Lesbian Avengers were brought about by the rise in queer bashings in the 1980s, as well as the advent of HIV/AIDS and dominant society's apathetic and bigoted response to it. The rise in gay bashings in the U.S. can be ascertained from the first national survey focusing exclusively on violence against

lesbians and gay men, conducted in 1984 by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF). NGLTF found that "94% of respondents had experienced some type of victimization; 19% had been punched, kicked, hit or beaten at least once because of their sexual orientation; and 44% had been threatened with physical violence because of their sexual orientation" (Singer and Deschamps, 69). Likewise, "in the five major U.S. cities that had professionally staffed agencies that monitor antilesbian and antigay violence – Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis and St. Paul, New York, and San Francisco – reports of antigay and antilesbian incidents increased by 172% between 1988 and 1992": from 697 incidents reported in 1988 to 1,898 incidents reported in 1992 (ibid.).

In terms of HIV/AIDS stigma and apathy, in the early days, HIV/AIDS (originally called "GRID," for "Gay Related Immuno-Deficiancy") was believed to be solely a "gay disease." This added fuel to the homophobic view of gay men as unhealthy and depraved societal menaces. Because of its association with a scorned population, many health and government officials were slow in responding to HIV/AIDS and entirely lacked empathy for those suffering from it. What's more, due to misinformation about how HIV/AIDS is contracted (one original fear was that it could be spread by casual contact), HIV positive individuals were often treated as pariahs and were even refused medical treatment. Evidence of the callous response to HIV/AIDS, from the top down, can be discerned from this particularly startling statistic: It was not until 1987, *six* years into the pandemic, when *36,058* Americans had already been infected with HIV, and *20,849* people had died of AIDS, that then-president Ronald Regan publically addressed the disease for the very first time (White, <www.sfgate.com/cgibin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2004/06/08/EDG777163F1.DTL>).

As stated, groups like ACT-UP, Queer Nation and the Lesbian Avengers materialized in relation to these startling realities. The deliberately provocative, angry and aggressive approach of these groups – evident in, for example, ACT-UP's rowdy disruption of a St. Patrick's Cathedral mass to protest the church's anti-sex education and anti-abortion stances, and the Lesbian Avenger's highly performative use of fire-eating and sign-burning to call attention to homophobic violence[22] – resonates in relation to queercore's own theatrical and politically-invested queer punk troublemaking. Indeed, the similarities between, for instance, the incendiary 1990 Queer Nation pamphlet "Queers Read This: I Hate Straights" and the equally incendiary queercore zines of the same period (see, for example, the *S.C.A.B* zine, discussed in Chapter 3) are so remarkable that Deborah Carlin and Jennifer DiGrazia confuse queercore with Queer Nation in their anthology *Queer Cultures* (see page 149). This is an understandable conflation, given that, like the queercore zines explored in this dissertation, "Queers Read This" does not mince words when rendering its frontal assault on heteronormativity ("Until I can enjoy the same freedom of movement and sexuality as straights, their privilege must stop and it must be given over to me and my queer sisters and brothers") and the political impotence of the gay and lesbian mainstream ("Queers are being attacked on all fronts and I'm afraid it's OK with us . . . We allow these attacks by our own continued lack of action against them . . . Feel some rage.") (138; 141). It should

[22] In a *New York Times Magazine* piece entitled "Fire-Eating Lesbians" from 1994, the use of fire-eating by the Lesbian Avengers is explained thusly: "Fire-eating, their [The Lesbian Avenger's] dramatic trademark, grew out of tragedy. Last year, a lesbian and a gay man, Hattie Mae Cohens and Brian Mock, burned to death in Salem, Ore., after a Molotov cocktail was tossed into the apartment they shared. A month later, on Halloween, at a memorial to the victims in in New York City, the Avengers (then newly organized) gave their response to the deaths. They ate fire, chanting, as they still do: 'The fire will not consume us. We take it and make it our own'" (n.p.).

also be noted that queercore and Queer Nation are two of the first cultural entities to reclaim the derogatory term "queer" as a source of defiant pride.

Of course, as will soon be discussed in relation to the differing opinions on AIDS activism that exist within queercore, not all of queercore's adherents share the exact same political outlook or affinities: the organizations and movements referenced above are not touchstones for every person involved in queercore. Likewise, these movements and organizations are not the only ones that have been sources of inspiration for folks within queercore. For example, one of my interviewees, Larry-Bob Roberts, editor of the queercore zine *Holy Titclamps*, speaks of his affinity with the Radical Faeries, a countercultural movement of gay men begun in the 1970s, also founded by Harry Hay (of the Mattachine Society). The Radical Faeries reject queer imitation of heterosexuality and seek to redefine queer identity through spirituality and pagan rituals involving such things as cross-dressing and drum circles that emphasize the "transformative power of play" (Adler, 361). As Roberts states:

> The other formative thing for me in terms of queer counterculture was the summer after college. Summer of 1988, I went to the first Northwoods Radical Faerie Gathering. Harry Hay and John Burnside and Jerry the Faerie came out for that. And this was on Phil Wilkie's land in Northern Wisconsin. Phil Wilkie published the *James White Review* which was a gay man's literary quarterly. I eventually was on the staff of the *James White Review* reading the slush pile for that. That was concurrent with the early issues of *Holy Titclamps*, kind of independent but still involved, sort of more mainstream gay publishing. I was reading the slush pile and helping with editorial decisions. Meeting the Radical Faeries was another alternative to mainstream gay culture that I was seeing. I discovered it around the same time I was discovering these [queercore] scenes. (Personal Interview)

For other queercore individuals, like Kate Messer of the short-lived queercore band

Power Snatch, feminist politics and Dadaism had a greater influence than any type of queer politics or previous queer political movement:

> Feminist was maybe even more of a guiding principle than specifically queer politics. Queer identity and queer politics were forming in different ways. Feminism was fiercely established . . . Power Snatch's politics, I think if we can claim a political movement at all it would be a fifty cent Dada before anything else. We really adored being silly and fiercely feminist and doing goofy things. (Personal Interview)

As these examples attest, the issue of queercore's political influences is, to a certain degree, a matter of the individual/band and their personal/group preferences and allegiances. Yet, I maintain that the radical, proto-queer organizations and movements highlighted in this section are, on the whole, the clearest political referents for queercore. Their imprint will become apparent in subsequent chapters that deal with the particular, and analogous, radical queer politics expressed within specific queercore works.

B. First and Second Wave Punk (New York, the United Kingdom, Los Angeles, Austin)

In *The Philosophy of Punk*, Craig O'Hara asserts that queerness has always been a component of punk and that, as a self-styled rebel culture, punk has long functioned as an enticing space for queers with anti-normative worldviews:

> Homosexuality has been a visible part of the Punk movement since it first began . . . Punk has been largely composed by people who perceive themselves as misfits or outlaws in one way or another. For some this is because of their physical appearance, dress, or political views. For an increasingly vocal segment of Punk, it is their sexual preference which forces their rejection of mainstream society. (115)

Yet, O'Hara also admits that punk has not, at all times, welcomed queers with open arms. He even goes so far as to claim (perhaps wrongly) that today, "it is much easier to find

Punks who are homophobic than those who are openly racist or sexist" (119). This kind of ambivalence between homophilia and homophobia has defined the long-standing relationship between punk and queerness. That is, the history of queerness within punk is a history of common, but occasionally shaky, ground. In the following pages, by way of an overview of several early punk scenes, I briefly trace the notable, but sometimes troubled, history of queerness within punk leading up to queercore's emergence in the mid-1980s. This history reveals that queercore builds upon a queer punk legacy that has been in place for quite some time, but also reacts to the homophobia that has plagued the subculture from the start.

Punk began in 1970s New York (NY) among the art school and bohemian sets as an inventive, back-to-basics, do-it-yourself (D.I.Y.) reaction to the bloodless corporate music industry and the over-bloated culture surrounding it, exemplified by the extravagant and costly stage shows of bands like Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin. While 1974 is generally cited as the official starting point of New York punk, Andy Warhol's Factory of the late 1960s and early 1970s is an important forerunner. It was in this "queer"[23] space, one in which pop artists, drag queens, underground celebrities and various social misfits mingled, that proto-punk bands like The Velvet Underground and The Modern Lovers made a name for themselves and motivated the punk generation that followed. Which is to say that gay and lesbian (retroactively "queer") culture was intertwined with the NY punk scene from its earliest awakening.

In addition, there were musicians in the NY punk scene that either flirted with "queerness" – from the New York Dolls, who were known for donning female drag on

[23] I am placing "queer" in quotes to acknowledge that this word was not in popular usage at the time, besides as a derogatory term for LGBT people. However, in its inclusive and anti-normative senses, "queer" is the word that best captures my meaning.

stage, to Iggy Pop of The Stooges,[24] who was known for his nude, homoerotic interactions with male band and audience members – or that were in fact queer themselves, such as drag artist/transgender punk icon Jayne (formerly Wayne) County.[25] There were also punk performers, such as androgynous singer-poet Patti Smith, who were allies of the gay and lesbian community. Smith was best friends with then-underground, controversial gay photographer Robert Mapplethorpe (a regular on the NY punk scene), and according to musician Richard Hell, came to prominence as a performer on the gay club circuit: "I went to see Patti read when she used to play these gay clubs, like Le Jardin, and they would just go nuts for her" (qtd. in McNeil and McCain, 114). Likewise, at least one prominent NY punk musician, bass player of The Ramones, Dee Dee Ramone, spent some time as gay-for-pay hustler. He later recounted this experience in "53rd and 3rd" (named after the famous cruising spot where he worked), and told an interviewer that the song, "[S]peaks for itself. Everything I write is autobiographical and very real. I can't write any other way" (qtd. in McNeil and McCain, 175).

The NY scene was also relatively sexually open, indicating a correlation with the sexual liberation of the earlier hippie movement. As remembered by Danny Fields, former manager of several celebrated punk and proto-punk bands, including The Modern Lovers, The Stooges, and The Ramones:

> When I wasn't getting laid elsewhere I went to Max's Kansas City [a restaurant, club and birthplace of punk] every night . . . You could have sex with all the busboys. I mean, not right there, but later. And anybody who walked into the room, you could fuck, because they all wanted to be

[24] While Iggy Pop was actually from Detroit, he was a regular fixture of the New York punk scene.

[25] Jayne (formerely Wayne) County began her career performing in drag as the eponymous lead singer of punk band Wayne County and the Electric Chairs. However, County later came out as transgender and now identifies as female. In fact, she has been credited as being the "first transgender star of rock n' roll."

> in the back room . . . So it was wide open, but it wasn't gay, thank god. We hated gay bars. Gay bars? Oh please, who wanted to go to gay bars? At Max's you could fuck anyone in the room, and that was what was sweet about it. (qtd. in McNeil and McCain, 27).

Respected punk photographer Lee Black Childers has also commented upon the "queerness" of the NY punk scene, asserting that, in the initial years of punk, "gay people made up most of the audience" (qtd. in Savage, 139). While this is anecdotal evidence and these may be overstatements on the part of Fields and Childers, they still suggest that early punk subculture was not as hetero- or a-sexual as may be initially assumed.[26]

It should also be mentioned that the term "punk" itself has queer origins. As John Robb explains its etymology:

> The word "punk" originally meant a prostitute, moldy wood or fungus. By [January 1976, when New York-based] *Punk* magazine took its name, it had gone on to mean a person who takes it up the ass in prison, a loser or a form of Sixties garage rock'n'roll. (150)

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[26] Lucy O'Brien, for example, has claimed that, partially as a reaction to the "free love" ethos of the preceding hippie generation, punk was largely asexual. As she states, "Despite the prevalence of fetish gear and provocative clothes, [punk] was curiously asexual . . . Punk choices to be asexual, gay, androgynous or celibate were usually accepted without comment [by other punks]. This was particularly liberating for young women . . . There was no pressure to 'couple up,' in fact, romantic love was frowned upon as something wishy washy and sentimental, and sex was just something you got on with" (194). However, O'Brien is speaking of the UK punk scene, and this claim appears to derive from a somewhat heterocentric point of view. That is, while in the first line, O'Brien argues that punk "was curiously asexual," she goes on to state that punk was also "gay" and "androgynous" which are, of course, not the same things. Indeed, how androgyny relates to sexual, as opposed to gender, expression is unclear. O'Brien goes on to assert that for (straight?) women there was "no pressure to 'couple up'" and that "sex was just something you got on with" (194). Neither of these statements appear to bolster her claim that punk was "asexual," but rather seem to imply that there was an absence of (hetero?)sexual or romantic *expectation* within punk (which, again, is not the same thing as asexuality: the lack of any *interest* in sex and the lack of a sexual *attraction* to others). So, while, at first glance, O'Brien's claim that punk was asexual appears to cancel out the "sexually open" experiences of people like Danny Fields and Lee Black Fields, she goes on to proclaim, however unintentionally, that punk had a significant gay component and that (heterosexual) sex and romance were not absent from punk, but were instead de-centered (at least as far as the [straight] women were concerned). What's more, O'Brien's argument that (straight) women were not pressured to be romantic or sexual in punk could be seen as further evidence of punk's gayness: Perhaps (some of) the men were not placing pressure on the women for sex and romance because they were, in fact, homosexual.

These various definitions of "punk" – as a prostitute, a passive homosexual, and a young tough (i.e., a "loser") – were intentionally played upon by the early punk rockers in their cultivation of an outsider image. For example, early punk fashion, which referenced the look of both the gay hustler/SM dominatrix and the juvenile delinquent (think of Marlon Brando's signature look in *The Wild One* or Mercedes McCambridge's androgynous tough girl in *Touch of Evil*) through an emphasis on leather jackets, skin-tight t-shirts and ripped jeans, simultaneously brought to mind all three of these "deviant" meanings of "punk."[27]

However, while homosexuality was certainly a part of punk from the start, so was homophobia. A famous example of homophobia in the NY punk scene involved the previously mentioned transgender musician Jayne County. One night while County was performing (as Wayne) at the renowned punk club CBGB's, Dick Manitoba of The Dictators verbally attacked her, calling County a slue of homophobic insults. County responded by hitting Manitoba in the shoulder with a metal microphone stand. As County recounts the traumatic ordeal:

> I kept hearing, "Drag queen, fucking queer!" I yelled something back like, "Stupid fucking asshole!" So then when I saw him come up on stage, well, on five black beauties [amphetamines], and him screaming "Queer!" at me, I didn't wait . . . [W]hen I swung it [the microphone], I made it go low, on purpose, so it hit him on the shoulder . . . He went first into tables and after that, he jumped up back on the stage and grabbed me. We rolled around the stage. I tried to get him to go off, I was kicking him off, he wouldn't go off again. It was horrible. It shocked everyone . . . And then after that, I was drenched in the blood, and I was totally freaked out. Yeah, totally freaked out. (qtd. in McNeil and McCain, 273).

[27] Jon Savage affirms the connection between these fashion choice and gay culture: "The ripped jeans and skimpy T-shirts, elements of their [The Ramones'] style that would soon pass around the world, were taken from the hustlers who worked that strip [the notorious gay-hustler spot at the corner of 53rd and 3rd]" (139).

This skirmish, which resulted in sixteen stitches and a broken collar bone for Manitoba, landed County in jail for a short period of time and caused a contentious split in the punk community, with some taking Manitoba's side, and others taking County's, such as Debbie Harry of Blondie fame, who helped raise funds for County's legal defense. The case against County was later thrown out of court. There was some good that came out of this disturbance, however, as according to New York Dolls filmmaker Bob Gruen, it provided an impetus for closeted gay folks within the punk scene to come out:

> It was kind of an interesting thing, because although there were a lot of gay people on the scene, it wasn't spoken of that much. I mean certainly Wayne [Jayne] was not in the closet, but many of the other guys who were around rock & roll were kinda heterosexual, macho males. For me, I felt that it [the County/Manitoba incident] was kind of a turning point, that all these guys had to fess up and say that Wayne's [Jayne's] our friend. And we stand up for him and it's not okay to come into a club and call a guy queer. It's not okay. (qtd. in McNeil and McCain, 275)

This balance between homosexuality and homophobia within the NY punk scene continued as the movement traveled overseas to the United Kingdom (UK). The UK punk scene, centered in London, has been associated with a more angry, political and working-class type of punk, exemplified by bands like The Clash, Stiff Little Fingers and The Sex Pistols (although as Dave Laing's research in *One Chord Wonders* reveals, only roughly half of the British punk bands in the 1970s were actually of working-class origins) (121). As with the first-wave NY punk scene, which had roots within Andy Warhol's hip and proto-queer Factory, the second-wave UK scene sprouted from a location in which homoeroticism was central: SEX, the clothing store run by punk impresario Malcolm McLaren and fashion maven Vivienne Westwood.

SEX was a central gathering spot for many involved in the punk scene (from The Sex Pistols to Siouxsie Sioux of Siouxsie and the Banshees to Chrissie Hynde of The Pretenders,[28] who worked at the store for a short period of time). The clothing sold at SEX was knowingly appropriated from gay male and female sadomasochistic (SM) culture: leather boots and jackets, chains and bondage gear.[29] In addition, Westwood designed and sold t-shirts that prominently displayed queer iconography. For example, one of the first t-shirts created by Westwood featured the likeness of Divine, the rude, crude and deliberately garish drag star of the early films of cult director John Waters.[30] Westwood also created t-shirts inspired by the (homo)sexually explicit drawings of pornographic sketch artist Tom of Finland, such as a signature philandering cowboy t-shirt worn by The Sex Pistol's bassist Sid Vicious, and described below by Jon Savage:

> One blatant design acted as an implicit graphic manifesto for the Sex Pistols. The image was drawn in the style of Tom of Finland, who exaggerated the parts of the anatomy that were desired by his target audience: two cowboys pose outside a dancehall, on Saturday night. Both wear cowboy hats, long boots and no trousers. One, in a leather vest, grips

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[28] While most of the bands and individuals associated with SEX were British, Chrissie Hynde was American.

[29] This connection between UK punk fashion and gay sadomascohism (SM) extends beyond the bounds of SEX boutique. Interestingly, one account of a Sex Pistols shopping spree, relayed by New York Dolls documentarian Bob Gruen, has the band buying items from a gay sadomasochistic fetish store in San Francisco. The story includes the rather interesting detail (unfortunately told with more than a hint of homophobia) of one member, bassist Sid Vicious, using K-Y jelly (a lubricant commonly used for anal sex) to spike up his trademark pointy hair: "When we finally made it to San Francisco, the band was feeling the strain [of tensions within the band]. So Noel Monk took the guys out to buy leather jackets for behaving themselves. We went to this gay store in San Francisco, a giant supermarket of leather stuff, so that the band could buy their leather jackets. But they also had all of these dildos and K-Y jelly. So Sid bought all of these leather bracelets, leather belts, and then he bought some K-Y jelly, or some lubricant, some butt-fucker's lubricant, and put it in his hair. It was like Crisco and Sid shoved it all in his hair and his hair was sticking up and Johnny Rotten (lead singer of The Sex Pistols] said, 'Great Sid. Now you can stick your head up somebody's ass" (330-31). Note: At the time, gay men stereotypically also used Crisco for lubrication during anal sex.

[30] In the early John Waters films, which date back to the late 1960s, Divine wore outlandish make-up, brightly-colored hair (sometimes styled into a mohawk) and deliberately garish outfits that prefigured punk fashion in the 1970s.

> the lapel of the other's faded Levi jacket: at the exact height of the latter's gun in its holster, two large, flaccid penises are a whisker away from contact. (100)

Similarly, female artist Siouxsie Sioux was known for her spiky hair, feline-inspired make-up and sheer-fabric bondage gear, often adorned with feathers and other embellishments. Such homoerotic t-shirts and SM fashions, mostly sold at SEX, served to construct and magnify the controversial images of bands like The Sex Pistols and Siouxsie and the Banshees. But, as discussed in the next chapter, these items also offered an abstraction and (perhaps even homophobic) parody of gay sex as much as, if not more than, an endorsement of it. Nevertheless, they still played a role in extending the punk movement's "queer" resonance, and in cementing the "queer" influence (begun by The Ramones and their gay-hustler wear), on punk fashion and visual culture.

Also, as with the NY scene, there were notable gay and lesbian participants within the UK scene, such as bisexual lead singer of The Buzzcocks, Pete Shelley, Andy Martin of the Apostles, and Jon Savage, the editor of punk zine *London's Outrage* and subsequent author of the award-winning history of UK punk, *England's Dreaming*. However, one of the most interesting queer works from the period was a punk *movie*: *Jubilee*, a 1978 art film by gay director Derek Jarman, which also has the distinction of being the first narrative film to represent the UK punk scene. Featuring a host of punk rockers, including Jayne/Wayne County, proto-riot grrrl (i.e., feminist punk) band The Slits and androgynous musicians Siouxsie Sioux and Adam Ant of Adam and the Ants, *Jubilee* is a somewhat plot-less film about of a group of renegade punk women who embark on an anti-establishment killing spree. This occurs within an economically depressed London, and all during the 25th-anniversary celebration of Queen Elizabeth II's

ascension to the throne (the "jubilee" of the film's title). As *Jubilee* is partially a critique of the nascent punk movement, it ends with the anti-heroines of the film visiting the castle of an eccentric socialite and Nazi-sympathizer, and seeming to take up the fascist politics that they, and punk more generally, ostensibly deride. But, *Jubilee* is also a tribute to the queerness of punk, featuring as it does a cast of gender-fluid and sexually rebellious characters, including a gay male couple who befriend the female gang at the center of the film, and who become a sympathetic focal point when they are killed by a pair of homophobic cops. Jarman would later re-engage with both punk and queerness in his 1987 film *The Last of England*, a frenzied vision of the decline of traditional English society as rendered via queerly-inflected, autobiographic poetic narrations and a flurry of visceral queer and punk images. Perhaps, most memorably, an extended sequence that depicts androgynous actress Tilda Swinton wielding a pair of scissors as she furiously shreds the elegant wedding dress that she is, most unhappily, wearing. This elegant wedding dress is a fitting symbol of both the hetero-normativity opposed by queers and the bourgeois culture opposed by punks, marking their symbiosis via a common "enemy."

As this quick rundown of NY and UK punk attests, these scenes had undeniable, pronounced queer elements. However, these elements have not always remained in the foreground, as by the time the late 1970s rolled around, punk became associated with a faster, harder and heavier sound known as "hardcore." Centered in Los Angeles (LA), the hardcore punk scene, led by such all-male bands as Fear and Black Flag, was more macho, straight and male-dominated than these previous punk scenes. As noted by drummer K. K. Barrett of the LA queer band Screamers, within this atmosphere,

homophobia reigned: "It was a time of gay fear and there were a lot of gays in the scene . . . but it was all hidden, 'cause there was a lot of homophobia going on" (qtd. in Spitz and Mullen, 164). However, in spite of the prejudicial environment, there were some notable gay and lesbian performers in the LA scene, including Darby Crash, the lead singer of popular hardcore band The Germs, who was, by all accounts, a bisexual man (although he was closeted throughout his life, which ended tragically from a heroin overdose in 1980) and Joan Jett (originally of the Runaways) who is widely acknowledged to be either bisexual or a lesbian (although, she refuses to discuss her sexuality publicly). Nervous Gender, a proto-queercore outfit, was also an important band on the LA scene, and an early innovator of "synthpunk": electronic music packaged in the brash and aggressive style of punk. Nervous Gender performed provocative songs about such things as Jesus being a "cocksucking Jew from Galilee" ("Confessions") and counted Phranc among its members, a charismatic, genderqueer and lesbian musician who would go on to become a successful folk singer, penning such unabashedly queer songs as "Surferdyke Pal" and "Bull Dagger Swagger."

North of Los Angeles, there was also a thriving punk scene in San Francisco. As with the Los Angeles punk scene, the San Francisco punk scene was largely dominated by straight male bands like the Dead Kennedys and Los Angeles transplants NOFX – perhaps ironically given that San Francisco has long been considered the "gay mecca." However, a gay presence is still discernible in, for example, the Dead Kennedy's remake of "I Fought the Law," which angrily decries the murder of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay person to be elected to public office in California, at the hands of homophobic San Francisco Supervisor Dan White in 1978. Likewise, the lead singer of San Francisco

punk band The Avengers, Penelope Houston, cultivated an androgynous, lesbian-esque image with her short, spiky hair and aggressive on-stage performances of songs like "Teenage Rebel" and "Fuck You." The Avengers' "queer" image has been further solidified in recent years with the addition of "out" gay drummer Luis Illades, who also plays with queercore outfit Pansy Division.

While by the early 1980s, punk, especially in its Californian incarnations, was, by and large, a straight male affair, "out" queer punk was also beginning to take off in Austin, Texas. As musician Gretchen Phillips describes the scene:

> What I found to my delight was a queerer scene here [in Austin] than in Houston [Phillip's hometown]. Since I was doing it with the bartender [in Houston] it was queer and we had our friends, but it wasn't the same [in terms of] depth [as in Austin]. Because [in Austin] you had the two stars, Randy "The Biscuit" Turner and Gary Floyd and then you had a sort of free floating bisexual openness. There was a women's band called Whom Elements, and Dianna Ray, and The Stains, who then changed their name to MDC. David Dicktor and David Stain identified as bi. There were a lot of queers in the scene. Then I got with this other girl and we started a band. Before Meat Joy was Suffragettes, it was a girl band . . . I got with this other dyke and there was just so much with my roommates turning me onto shit. Everybody was turning everybody onto great music. And I was voracious, with my Houston pals, and then with my pals here [in Austin], making mixed tapes, rifling through their singles collection. Buying everything I could by a woman who was doing sexual politics. (Personal Interview)

Regarded as an important bridge between the queerly-tinged first and second wave punk scenes and queercore proper, the Austin punk scene, as Phillips elucidates, featured a number of gay, lesbian and bi-sexual individuals, all of whom were at the forefront of the local scene: Gary Floyd, the imposing, rotund lead singer of hardcore band The Dicks; Randy "Biscuit" Turner the lead singer of The Big Boys, known as one of the first bands

to introduce funk rhythms into hardcore; Gretchen Phillips herself of Meat Joy (and later Girls in the Nose, Two Nice Girls and The Gretchen Phillip Experience), a pioneer of lesbian punk and electronica music who is still performing today; Dianna Ray of My Dolls, and outspoken Dave Dictor, the bisexual singer of political, speed-punk band MDC (Million Dead Cops). At a time when many non-heterosexuals in the punk scene were in the closet, these individuals were forthright about their sexualities and performed songs that dealt explicitly with queer topics, setting a precedent for the queercore scene that followed. Examples of the bold songs coming out of the Austin scene included The Dick's ode to anonymous gay sex "Saturday Night at the Bookstore," in which Floyd sneers, "I think I just fucking fell in love with a glory hole"[31] and challenges listeners with the repeated lines, "I'm at the bookstore, I'm at the bookstore, I'm at the bookstore – You're at the bookstore too!!!!" Also, MDC's "Dead Cops/America's So Straight," a song about the killing of fascist/homophobic police that contains the recurring, shouted line, "What makes America so straight and me so bent?," and ends with a bald-faced warning to cops: "Macho fucking slaves, we'll piss on your graves."

Such angry and unapologetic declarations of queerness from within punk culture had a definite impact on queercore. This is made clear by the multiple references to bands like The Dicks in such early queercore zines as *J.D.s* (discussed later in this chapter). However, while the Austin scene took punk's already-established queer elements to new and more unabashedly "out" heights, it did not construct an autonomous queer punk subculture with its own set of values and practices. As such, it was not until

[31] A "glory hole" is a hole in a wall, or other partition, through which two individuals can engage in sexual activity, while (usually) preserving their anonymity.

the materialization of queercore that queer punk became a full-fledged and highly visible phenomenon.

As this brief overview hopefully attests, historically punk has been (more than) a little queer. In fact, in a 2002 on-line interview with Andrew Gallix of *3:AM Magazine*, zinester and music historian/journalist Jon Savage, answers the question, "How important were punk's gay roots?," with the following statement:

> As important as they are throughout the history of popular culture and artistic movements: damn near central. Many of punk's original participants were gay and much of the original aesthetic was also. There is much about this in *England's Dreaming* [Savage's book on the history of UK punk]. Gay involvement in pop culture is always downplayed, if not ignored by scared and insecure het boys who can't admit that much of what they love comes from queers. Well it does, so get used to it. (www.3ammagazine.com/litarchives/2002_jun/interview_jonsavage.html)

In-line with this assertion, it is imperative to re-center queerness within punk's historical lineage. And, here I am reminded of Alexander Doty's assertion that queer readings are not "wishful or willful readings" but rather "result from the recognition and articulation of the complex range of queerness that has been in popular culture and their audiences all along" (15). Which is to say that any attempt to position queercore in a wholly separate or oppositional relation to the history of punk is to be treated with skepticism. Queercore should not be viewed as a departure from punk, but rather a return to, and reclamation of, its queer origins. Likewise, queercore is not so much a wholesale refutation of punk, but is instead a reaction to the homophobia that slowly crept into the movement and that is, in fact, a betrayal of its queer past and queer potential.

It should also be reiterated that, as examined in the introduction to this dissertation, punk, along with radical queer politics, is the primary source of queercore's aesthetics and values. Established punk aesthetics are observable in the fast, raw and stripped down music of queercore, in the seemingly chaotic cut 'n' paste zines of queercore, and in the fashions, designed to confront and unsettle, that are worn by queercore participants. Likewise, established punk values are apparent in the D.I.Y. ethic of queercore, in queercore's rejection of conformity, and in queercore's participation in direct action for political change and refusal to sell out to mainstream interests for economic gain.

F. Womyn's Music

The punk scenes discussed thus far are not the only precursors to queercore. Although less acknowledged, the lesbian/feminist music scene of the 1970s, identified by the term "womyn's music," paved the way for a host of other independent, anti-patriarchal music scenes, including queercore and riot grrrl, a feminist punk movement that, as explained later in this chapter, overlaps with queercore. This is the thesis of Mary Celeste Kearney's "The Missing Links: Riot Grrrl—Feminism—Lesbian Culture." Although, in this essay, Kearney focuses on the continuities between womyn's music and riot grrrl specifically, her arguments are also applicable to womyn's music and queercore. For example, summarizing points made by journalist Val Phoenix, Kearney notes that both womyn's music and riot grrrl encourage and put into practice

> [a]n assertive pro female stance; a radical opposition to patriarchy, misogyny and homophobia; the creation of safe havens where girls and women can gather and express themselves; grassroots organizing

> strategies; and alternative forms of production strongly informed by the DIY ethos. (218)

These statements are true of queercore as well, with the exception of the creation of safe spaces for girls and women, which are less possible within queercore's multi-sex environment, although the notion of "queer safe space" is applicable here. Which is to say that links can also be drawn between the feminist politics, grassroots organizing and alternative production cultures of the womyn's music scene and those of queercore.

The womyn's music scene, however, is generally overlooked as an influence on queercore. This is likely because womyn's music is primarily folk-based and largely affirmational in its politics and, therefore, appears at odds with queercore's penchant for hard music and confrontation. But, beyond the qualities of the music, these two scenes are not so opposed. In their respective time periods, both worked to create non-corporate, politically-engaged spaces for female, including lesbian, artists to occupy in contradistinction to the sexist and homophobic commercial media industries. And both movements bravely showcased defiantly "out" musicians (as well as "out" filmmakers, writers and artists in womyn's culture more broadly). For these reasons, the womyn's music scene provided an important example of an anti-sexist and non-heteronormative independent music economy that, even if it did not impact queercore directly, at least foreshadowed its emergence.

The larger feminist principles that animated the womyn's music scene can also be observed in relation to queercore. For example, the feminist insistence on creating one's own culture and telling one's own story in the face of adversity and erasure, embodied in the civil rights mantra popularized by second wave feminism – "the personal is political"

– undergirds queercore's D.I.Y. emphasis on hand-made and confessional productions. Proto-queercore musician Gretchen Phillips suggests as much when she states that the necessity of doing it yourself as a marginalized artist and the importance of being "out" as a musician are ideas which are attributable to the womyn's music scene as much as, if not more than, to punk:

> Women had to do it for themselves because the institutional man was not going to support this . . . They [women] were making it up as they went along. Making it in a way so hard for themselves and challenging themselves in order to expand and learn and in order to represent what was being completely overlooked . . . It's the same, I assume with punk, which is that you're doing it for yourself, because that's how it's going to get done. But the brave specificity of womyn's music stating "my name is Alix Dobkin and I'm a lesbian," I think that was unprecedented in a way. (Personal interview.)

This debt to feminism does not go entirely unnoticed within queercore. Although queercore's adherents have sometimes scorned, as antiquated and overly precious, "older" cultural feminist beliefs and practices, such as the equation of women's bodies with nature or the cultivation of separatist spaces for women, the importance of earlier feminist movements has also been acknowledged within queercore. For example, Leslie Mah, guitarist of the queercore band Tribe 8 (and former member of proto-queercore band Anti-Scrunti Faction) states that while, in the past, she often dismissed the work of the feminists who came before her,[32] these days she has a new found respect for these women who paved the way for her lifestyle and art:

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[32] Leslie Mah's band Tribe 8, for example, has a song entitled "Manipulate" that begins with a "Kumbaya"-style chorus of, "Women's love is so friendly, women's love like herbal tea, women's love it empowers me," which is quickly followed by the decidedly non-feminist line, "I just want to manipulate my girlfriend," effectively serving to distance Tribe 8 from traditional feminism and its associations with

> I felt like when I came out a lot of lesbians were separatists and it made it really hard for me to find where they were, cause they had cut themselves off. And I can see the value in being a separatist, but it seems like it doesn't make sense if you're not going to rejoin everybody. You do this and you're with your specific community to gather strength and identity, but you bring that back to the rest of everyone else. I never saw myself being a separatist. With my band [Tribe 8] we made a lot of fun of those values, of the old lesbian values. But at the same time I don't know if it gets through enough that I have huge massive respect for the people who came before me. The women who risked their lives so that I can vote. You get a little older and you think "wow there's this whole lineage of people who really had to risk everything including their lives just so I can have credit in my name or I can have the lifestyle that I can have." If I was my mom or my grandmother I don't know if I could have this lifestyle – find employment where you can support yourself and you're not eventually marrying a man to take care of you. (Personal Interview)

In the end, the presence of feminism within queercore is not all that surprising considering the strong role that women have played in the subculture. As will be discussed shortly, feminist musician, zinester and filmmaker G.B. Jones was one of the initial co-creators of queercore (and by some accounts was the primary creative force behind the idea). Likewise, among queercore's roster are feminist bands, such as Tribe 8, Team Dresch, The Need, Sister George and The Butchies; feminist zines such as *Chainsaw*, *Double Bill*, Jane *Gets a Divorce, Sister Nobody, Bamboo Girl* and *I Heart Amy Carter*, and feminist films like *The Yo Yo Gang* and *Itty Bitty Titty Committee*. What's more, explicitly feminist content in queercore works is commonplace, from Team Dresch's "She's Amazing," a musical ode to an "outspoken" woman who "holds her head as if its truth," to the zine *Double Bill*, a scathing feminist critique of underground icon

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tender female bonding. This distanciation is also suggested sonically as the acapella harmonies of the opening chorus suddenly become replaced by thrashing guitars and screaming vocals.

(and admitted misogynist) William Burroughs edited by G.B. Jones, Caroline Azar, Jena Von Brucker and Johnny Noxzema[33] (discussed in greater detail in chapter 2).

II. **Queercore Arrives**

GB Jones, Bruce LaBruce and, in some versions of events, Candy Parker[34] are the three friends responsible for the creation of "homocore," which later evolved to "queercore" (the term I shall use for the remainder of this dissertation) in order to reflect the inclusivity and radical edge that had always been intended.[35] On account of his notoriety, Bruce LaBruce is sometimes given the lion's share of credit for creating queercore, although Jones and Parker had, unlike LaBruce, already been engaged in queer punk cultural production prior to their association with queercore. This is something that LaBruce himself acknowledged in my interview with him: "I came in kind of late to this group. It was a bunch of girls mostly, involved in the punk scene in Toronto. They had been doing fanzines even before I met them" (Personal Interview). This business of credit over starting queercore eventually caused a rift between LaBruce and several of the other participants in queercore, including Jones, who view the subculture and its artifacts as collaborative endeavors, and who became displeased with

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[33] Johnny Noxzema is one of the few men within queercore who has consistently articulated feminist viewpoints in his art. Other men have as well, including folks like Gary Gregerson, lead singer of queercore band Sta-Prest who has stated that he started a queercore band because he was inspired by the riot grrrl movement and was "trying to be a feminist ally, or an ally to women" (Personal Interview). However, much of the burden of practicing feminism has been placed on the women within queercore.

[34] By "some versions of events" I mean those of Jones and LaBruce themselves. While Jones and LaBruce have acknowledged Parker's influence, accounts of queercore's development generally leave her out. This may have to do with the fact that Parker is a less prolific artist than Jones and LaBruce, as well as the fact that her work that has not garnered widespread attention. Parker is also a straight ally, making her a bit of an anamoly within a predominately LGBT queercore subculture.

[35] Exactly when "queercore" became the more popular alternative to "homocore" is unclear (although this likely happened in the late 1980s/early 1990s, around the time of Queer Nation's emergence), as is who, if anyone in particular, is responsible for this change in terminology.

LaBruce's rising status as "queercore poster child" within the mainstream press as well as LaBruce's seeming embrace of his "star status."

The origins of queercore can be traced to Just Desserts, an all-night restaurant in downtown Toronto. A local hangout for punks, junkies, sex workers and artists, Just Desserts was the place where Jones, LaBruce and Parker met for the first time in their capacity as Just Dessert employees. Forming a fast bond over their mutual distaste for mainstream culture, alienation from gay and lesbian society and appreciation of punk, the triad soon found themselves living together in a rundown, cockroach-infested apartment at Queen and Parliament, an industrial neighborhood decidedly on the far outskirts of Toronto's official gay neighborhood, Church and Wellesley.[36] Virtually broke, estranged from their gay and lesbian peers, and living off of shoplifted groceries from the local Loblaw's (a grocery store chain in Canada), Jones, Parker and LaBruce concocted queercore in their soon-to-be-condemned apartment as a Situationist-style spectacle[37] with the explicit goal of putting "the gay back in punk and the punk back in gay" (Jones and LaBruce, "Don't Be Gay," 30).

At the point of their meeting, Jones was the drummer, guitarist and background vocalist for the seminal all-female and proto-queercore band Fifth Column, as well as an

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[36] This apartment at Queen and Parliament was a primary setting of the early films of GB Jones, Candy Parker and Bruce LaBruce. For example, much of Jones's *The Troublemakers* (1990) takes place in this apartment, where LaBruce, Joe St. Pierre (aka, "Joe the Ho") and their friends pierce each other's nipples, cut hair and witness a car accident on the street below. At one remarkable point in this film, Jones pans to the ceiling, revealing a giant hole with a raccoon sticking his head through. This was Jones' bedroom and, and as she explains, the footage was originally taken not for artistic purposes, but as potential courtroom evidence: "I started out filming that scene because I thought, if there's ever going to be a fight with the landlord, I want to have that on film!" (Jones. Personal Interview.).

[37] To remind the reader, Situationism is derived from the Situationist International movement, which was dedicated to redefining the boundaries of art by merging art, politics and everyday life through the construction of new "situations" in which alternative life experiences could be enjoyed and new desires fulfilled. For more on the Situationist movement and its connections to punk, see Marcus, Greil, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

art student at the Ontario College of Art (now the Ontario College of Art and Design), where she was known for her détourned *Archie* comics: manipulated, cut and paste versions of the classic American comic that made it appear as if Jughead Jones, the lazy and girl-averse best friend of Archie Andrews, was gay.[38] LaBruce was a graduate student in film studies and social and political thought at York University, working on his Master's thesis: a shot-by-shot analysis of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). LaBruce was also a writer for the Canadian film journal *CineAction*, and a sometimes performer in the irreverent queer punk band, Zuzu's Petals. Finally, Parker was the creator of several highly regarded zines: *Dr. Smith*, *Fist in Your Face*, and *Hide*, a part zine and part D.I.Y. music label, or "tapezine," that Parker co-created along with Jones and Fifth Column frontwoman, Caroline Azar.

Although, much like many of the original NY punks of the 1970s, Jones and LaBruce were art students, they were becoming disenchanted with the educational institutions to which they were ostensibly attached: graduate art and graduate film school, respectively. Whereas Jones had come to see art criticism as sophistry, preferred alternative art spaces to sanctioned galleries, and refused to refer to herself as an artist or to participate in any sort of orthodox art environment, LaBruce was discovering that academia is a space riddled with hypocrisy:

> I had a lot of professors at university – which is one of the reasons I got disillusioned with academia – who were extremely radical in their politics. They were anti-materialist and anti-patriarchy. They were against monogamy. They were against marriage. And, yet, they were married. They were monogamous. They lived in nice houses. They had tenure . . . I

[38] As it turns out GB Jones's détourned Jughead comics prefigured an actual out character in the *Archie* comics series: gay "army brat" Kevin Keller, who premiered in September 2010.

> didn't think that they had any intention of living what they were theoretically espousing. (Personal Interview)

Jones's and LaBruce's dissatisfaction with academia helped (re-)fuel their commitment to punk, which they saw as embodying the rebellious, anti-establishment spirit and radical, anti-capitalist politics that their professors professed but did not practice. As such, by the time of their initial encounter at Just Desserts, the pair had already begun to drift away from school and further into the Toronto punk scene. The trouble was, as already indicated, the mid '80s "hardcore" punk scene in Toronto (as elsewhere, with the exception of, perhaps, Austin) was dominated by macho, straight men who were, to say the least, unwelcoming to women and queers. This homophobia became quite apparent during a performance by LaBruce's band Zuzu's Petals, in Toronto:

> There was this punk club in Kensington Market. It was called Quoc Te. It was a Vietnamese restaurant by day and then at night it was a punk venue. There was a show there and Zuzu's Petals played. This guy with a huge Mohawk came up and punched me in the nose. He punched me! I think I had a nose bleed. And, Leslie [Mah] and some of the Fifth Column girls formed a human shield around me and were protecting me from these guys. We already knew that this [homophobia] existed, but it drove it home. (Personal Interview)

Jones and LaBruce saw this homophobia as a betrayal of punk's sexually experimental roots and, in an effort to reacquaint these once compatible energies, set about creating a queer punk fanzine that targeted an imagined audience of "Disillusioned kids who didn't feel comfortable in the gay community, who turned to punk, but then when they got into punk, if they were gay or transgendered or whatever, they would find hostility there" (Personal Interview). They titled the zine *J.D.s*, which officially stood for "Juvenile

Delinquents" but was also a nod to Just Desserts and, in its intentional ambiguity, a signifier for: popular post-punk band Joy Division; favorite beverage of hard-drinking punks, Jack Daniels; and J.D. Salinger, whose blunt, rebellious, youthful writing style LaBruce deliberately imitated in the pages of *J.D.s*.

Although *J.D.s* is generally considered the first queer punk fanzine, Parker's *Dr. Smith* (1984-1988) was an important precursor. *Dr. Smith* was named after the flamboyant, gay-coded character played by Jonathan Harris on the 1960s television show *Lost in Space*; a man who had a suspiciously close relationship with pre-pubescent boy Will Robinson. *Dr. Smith* is notable for cultivating a discernable queer punk aesthetic through the intentional "queering" of straight punk culture, and long before the concept of "queering" was popularized within the academy:[39] *Dr. Smith* placed a decidedly queer perspective on the bands and cultural events of the day, interspersing anti-sexist and anti-homophobic critiques with reprints of sex scandals from newspapers, interviews with the likes of Bunchofuckingoofs, Black Flag and Fifth Column, and grainy photos of rough and tumble punks slyly styled so as to re-imagine them as cute teen idols, softening their macho edge.

Taking their aesthetic and thematic cues from *Dr. Smith*, Jones and LaBruce (with some help from Parker herself) published the first issue of *J.D.s* in 1985. Referring to themselves and their comrades as the "The New Lavender Panthers" ("Lavender" being a time-honored euphemism for homosexuality[40] and "Panthers" being an homage to the

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[39] This is not to suggest that *Dr. Smith* is the first text to deliberately "queer" popular culture. For example, slash fiction, a genre of fan fiction that reworks popular culture to focus on interpersonal attraction and sexual relationships between fictional characters of the same sex, has existed since at least the 1970s.

[40] Lavender as a euphemism for "homosexual" dates back to the 1920s. Listed as slang for "an effeminate man or sissy" in the 1935 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, this euphemism refers to the fact that lavender is the color obtained by mixing blue and pink, the two colors commonly designated to boys and

radical, anti-racist organization, The Black Panthers), Jones and LaBruce used *J.D.s* as a primary platform from which to attack the conformist and exclusionary elements of both punk and gay and lesbian culture. As made clear in a manifesto/promotional piece later published in the pages of *MaximumRocknRoll* (*MRR* – a popular and long-standing not-for-profit punk fanzine out of San Francisco), chief among their concerns were the normative sexual notions that Jones and LaBruce felt were a scourge on the extant gay and lesbian scenes in Toronto and beyond:

> Sex. The Final frontier. This is the voyage of *J.D.s*, its continuing mission: to seek out and destroy outdated ideas about sex . . . When you're reading *MaximumRocknRoll*, everything is question authority – question rules applied to music, ecology, politics, the mosh pit……[sic] But what about sex? If you're fighting against how the majority tells you to act, then how can you act like the majority when it comes to sex-type-stuff? The biggest way schools, parents, the church, and other institutions control youth is by telling them who they have to love and fuck. How you have to act according to the rules of being a girl or a boy. Who says girls can't be butch? Who says boys can't be fags? *J.D.s* is the homocore movement . . . *J.D.s* is a softcore zine for hardcore kids. All you punks who have ever been called a fag or a dyke – you know what we're talking about. (Jones and Labruce, "*J.D.s* Manifesto," Reprinted at http://brucelabruce.com/print.html)

Advocating the ideals of gender and sexual non-conformity within a punk milieu, in eight issues over a six-year period, and with ample contributions from friends, Jones and LaBruce created this "softcore zine for hardcore kids," which combined: original prose (early issues, for example, contain an ongoing story by LaBruce recounting, in

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girls in modern Western culture. Interestingly, boys used to be associated with the color pink, but are now associated with blue, and girls used to be associated with the color blue, but are now associated with pink. Accordingly, in the spirit of reclamation, "lavender" has been the chosen moniker for several LGBTQIA organizations, including the 1970s lesbian-feminist activist group, The Lavender Menace, and the 1990s gay Asian American social group *The Lavender Dragon Society*. See Karla Jay and Allen Young's *Lavender Culture: The Perceptive Voices of Outspoken Lesbians and Gay Men*.

confessional style, his sexual escapades with "Butch," a sexy and laconic stud); photos (generally of friends, one of whom would be granted the title "Prince of the Homosexuals" each issue, or of straight punk performers, captured in various states of undress); artwork (most notably Jones's drawings of eroticized, hyper-aggressive rebel women, done in a parodic Tom of Finland style); and appropriated images of punks, gay porn performers and Hollywood stars culled from other publications. This was all executed in the seemingly haphazard cut-and-paste-and-then-photocopied style of early punk fanzines and added up to what Mark Fenster refers to as *J.D.s* "confrontational camp/porn" aesthetic (86).

But, more than just a zine, *J.D.s* aimed to be a multi-media experience. From the start, *J.D.s* was known for its "*J.D.s* homocore Top 10" lists: lists of punk and post-punk songs that contained some type of provocative, as opposed to "positive," queer content (e.g., "The Anal Staircase" by Coil and "They Only Loved at Night" by The Raincoats). These lists underscored Jones's and LaBruce's thesis that queerness in punk was nothing new, and eventually evolved into an actual mix-tape distributed to friends and readers. The mix-tape included twenty-one songs from mostly straight bands, such as Aryan Disgrace ("Faggot in the Family") and Mighty Sphincter ("Fag Bar"), bands that like the editors of *J.D.s* were more interested in the subversive, anti-normative aspects of homosexuality, than in presenting homosexuality in any sort of politically correct light. Witness, for example, the following line from "Fag Bar," typical of the irreverent lyrics preferred by Jones and LaBruce: "I wanna go where the boys have class. They suck each other's cocks and take it up the ass."

In 1990, *J.D.s* also solicited queer punk songs from readers, collected eleven, and released the first (and inaccurately numbered as a probable joke) queercore compilation, *J.D.s Top Ten Homocore Hit Parade Tape*. This cassette featured what would belatedly be known as the initial queercore (or proto-queercore) groups:[41] The Apostles, Academy 23 and No Brain Cells from the United Kingdom; Fifth Column, Zuzu's Petals and Toilet Slaves from Canada; Bomb, Big Man, Robt Omlit and Nikki Parasite from the United States; and Gorse from New Zealand. Distributed by Jones and LaBruce themselves and no longer in circulation, *J.D.s Top Ten Homocore Hit Parade Tape* has now become a much sought after collector's item among queercore enthusiasts.

In 1991, shortly after the release of *J.D.s Top Ten Homocore Hit Parade Tape*, the editors of *J.D.s* also began hosting film nights. This was a natural progression for the *J.D.s*' creators, as Jones, LaBruce and Parker had already been involved, as fans, in the Toronto film scene via The Funnel, an experimental film collective providing 16mm, 8mm and super 8 film production, distribution and exhibition facilities for film artists engaged in highly personal forms of filmmaking. These *J.D.s* film nights consisted primarily of films made by Jones, LaBruce and Parker themselves, including *Unionville* (Jones, 1985), an experimental meditation on the murder trial of a cult leader in Jones's hometown and *I Know What It's Like to Be Dead* (LaBruce, 1987), LaBruce's melancholy response to AIDS in which he drags a zombified self through Toronto's transit system and various urban landscapes.[42] These films served to document the lives

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[41] It should be noted that, as this chapter attests, the history of querness within punk prior to queercore is primarily a history of music/bands. Queercore, however, was first a movement of zines, followed by films and bands.

[42] *I Know What It's Like to Be Dead* is a precursor to Bruce LaBruce's zombie-porn trilogy which, to-date, includes *Otto; Or Up With Dead People* (2008) and *L.A. Zombie: The Film that Wouldn't Die* (2010). Both of these films will be discussed in the next chapter.

of Jones, LaBruce, Parker and their friends, and to continue *J.D.s*' mission of filtering the punk movement through a queer cultural lens and vice versa.

An excellent example of both of these themes – the recording of everyday realities and the queering of punk culture – is found in Parker's *Sex Bombs!* (1987), which consists of three parts. In the first, LaBruce and his hustler boyfriend Joe St. Pierre (aka, "Joe the Ho") perform an erotic living room slam dance in which the two violently collide and passionately rip each other's clothes off in the process.[43] In the second, Sue Smith, a friend of Parker's with a huge Mohawk, tight vinyl skirt and chains around her neck, prepares to go out for the evening. In the third, Steve Milo, a member of the punk band Sudden Impact, lies in bed, sensually making out with his skateboard, kissing and licking it, before falling asleep with the skateboard cuddled in his arms. While the first and third segments uncover the covert homo- and auto-erotic elements of the pit and skateboard culture respectively, the second simply documents a friend's nightly routine. Together these parts reflect an interest, observable throughout *J.D.s* entire oeuvre, with both quotidian self-representation and the subversion of hegemonic culture, specifically via the undercutting of the presumed hetero-masculinity of the punk.

It is through the *J.D.s* zine, mix tapes and films that the notion of queercore came into wider public view. As with much punk production, this happened through informal means of distribution in-line with queercore's emphasis on grassroots community and

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[43] This queer performance echoes the homoeroticism on display in actual punk moshpits. Punk scholar Stacy Thompson comments on the homoeroticim of the punk moshpit in his discussion of the "dogpile": "The DC [punk] scene also created the dogpile: the lead singer would enter the crowd in order to stir it up emotionally through his proximity, and when the emotional charge in the audience had reached a certain point its members would pile upon the singer, who often continued to shout out the lyrics from under the mass of writhing young men on top of him. Although the homoerotic quality of these acts was rarely explicitly acknowledged within the scene, it testifies to a desire for intimate relations between men that would fall somewhere between the poles – heterosexuality and homosexuality – of the homosocial continuum" (51).

necessitated by the limitations of media circulation in a pre-Internet age. Specifically, zines and mix tapes were exchanged by hand or through the mail and films were transferred onto video and disseminated by the artists themselves (again via the mail). In the spirit of punk anti-commercialism, these exchanges generally happened at little to no cost or were based on a barter system (e.g., zines were swapped for other zines). Likewise, queercore bands and artists toured with their work bringing attention to the queercore subculture in the new locales to which they travelled. Eventually college radio stations began to play queercore music and independent film festivals and distribution companies began exhibiting and selling select queercore titles (most notably those of Bruce LaBruce).

Accordingly, through their artistic productions, Jones, LaBruce and Parker sparked a rebellious enthusiasm among alienated queers and formed the impression of a full-blown scene. At first, however, this was far from reality: The queercore scene was initially an illusion, propped up *Wizard of Oz* style in order to foster an underground buzz and, as a result, to call into being the very queer punk scene that Jones and LaBruce had cunningly envisioned in the pages of *J.D.s*. This fabricated illusion of a queercore community was quite successful, as the following anecdote concerning LaBruce and a visit from established gay filmmaker Gus Van Sant attests:

> He [Van Sant] came to Toronto to make *To Die For* in 1994, and we had a mutual friend from San Francisco, Adam Block, who used to write a rock column for *The Advocate* called "Rock On Block" . . . Adam had told [Van Sant], "There is this exciting punk movement, spearheaded by this gay guy Bruce LaBruce, and you have to meet him when you go to Toronto." So, when he got here he was expecting me to show him this full-blown

> movement that was really established with bars and everything, and I said, "Basically it's just me and two dykes."[44] (Personal Interview)

But, while queercore started out as a myth rather than a reality, it was not long before people, bands and zines started to identify with the queercore label and its anti-normative principles, and a real queercore scene surfaced. Key to this development was a manifesto published by Jones and LaBruce in *MRR* in 1989 entitled "Don't Be Gay or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Fuck Punk in the Ass," a riff on Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), which demonstrated the punk practice of re-appropriating elements of popular culture for new purposes and highlighted Jones's and LaBruce's cultural capital as film fans and media savvy art school kids.[45] This manifesto brought queercore and its values to the attention of a larger audience, one not necessarily in-the-know about *J.D.s*. That is, true to the ideologies at the very core of queercore, "Don't Be Gay" was an invective lobbed against hardcore punk's misogyny and heteronormative presumption:

> Let's face it. Going to most punk shows today is a lot like going to the average fag bar (MIGHTY SPHINCTER notwithstanding): all you see is big macho "dudes" in leather jackets and jeans parading around the dance floor/pit, manhandling each other's sweaty bodies in proud display. The only difference is that at the fag bar, females have been almost completely banished, while at the punk club, they've just been relegated to the periphery, but allowed a pretense of participation (i.e., girlfriend, groupie, go-fer, or post-show pussy). In this highly masculinized world, the focus is doubly male, the boys on stage controlling the "meaning" of the event (the style of music, political message, etc.) and the boys in the pit

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[44] Gus Van Sant also recounts this anecdote in a yet-to-be-released documentary on Bruce LaBruce, *The Advocate for Fagdom*, directed by Angelique Bosio.

[45] Cultural capital refers to the non-monetary social assets that promote social mobility, including such things as education and style of dress. This concept was first elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu in "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction."

> determining the extent of the exchange between audience and performer. And where does this leave the rest? (Jones and LaBruce, p. 27)

"Don't Be Gay" was also a critique of mainstream lesbian and gay culture:

> The gay "movement" as it exists now is a big farce, and we have nothing nice to say about it, so we won't say anything at all, except that, ironically, it fails most miserably where it should be the most progressive – in its sexual politics. Specifically there is a segregation of the sexes where unity should exist, a veiled misogyny which privileges fag culture over dyke, and a fear of the expression of femininity which has led to the gruesome phenomenon of the "straight-acting" gay male. (Jones and LaBruce, p. 27)

As made clear in the introduction to this dissertation, this type of hostility to normative iterations of punk and homosexuality defines queercore ideologically. Oppositionality, in other words, is a key component of the subculture: "establishment of an inside and an outside, an 'us' versus a 'them' is essential to queercore" (duPlessis and Chapman, 47). However, while queercore rails against hetero-normativity, both within punk and society at large, its critique of homo-normativity – that is, the incorporation of hetero-normative ideals and constructs into lesbian and gay culture – has been even more pronounced.[46] As Matias Viegner avows, "What gay punks reject most rigorously is 'nice,' post-Stonewall gay culture, as it is manifested in disco, gay marriages, *The Advocate*, polo shirts, David Leavitt's fiction, and Calvin Klein advertisements" (117).

To this list should be added "gay and lesbian bars/clubs," for, if my interviews with queercore practitioners are any indication, it was the typical 1980s gay and lesbian bar and club scene with which the original queer punks often found themselves most at odds. This alienation from the bar and club scene was especially distressing given that

[46] Homonormativity as conceptualized by Lisa Duggan is "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them" (50).

bars and clubs have long been crucial gathering places (and cruising spots) for members of the gay and lesbian/queer community, who historically have had few opportunities to socialize in public and few safe spaces in which to congregate. Jena Von Brucker, a queer zine producer (*Jane and Frankie*, *Jane Gets a Divorce*, *Double Bill*), contributor to *J.D.s* and star of Jones's films *The Yo Yo Gang* (1992) and *The Lollipop Generation* (2008), explains the alienation that she and her fellow queer punk friends experienced in the mainstream gay and lesbian bar scene in Toronto:

> I never felt that I fit into gay culture. I remember going to the stupid bars and we would practically get into fights with everybody. Practically thrown out. In fact, thrown out of all kinds of places. Because everyone was so fucking humorless. They were so humorless it was ridiculous . . . They [my friends] would decide that they were going to do the jitterbug in the middle of the dance floor at The Rose [a popular lesbian bar in Toronto], and, oh my god, people would be outraged. They'd be so upset. They'd be complaining. They'd be getting us thrown out . . . It was like there was no spirit or anything. They were just so boring. They just wanted to go in their stupid jeans, and their stupid tucked in shirt and dance to the same stupid music every week. And we weren't like that, we were a little more lively. So, we didn't really fit in. (Personal Interview)

This split between Von Brucker and her friends and the mainstream gays and lesbians at the bars was about more than just differences of tastes in music and fashion. As Jones, responding to Von Brucker's above comment opines, this fissure was ultimately about shame, and specifically the queer shame that Jones observed in the bar crowd but stridently rejected herself:

> How I see it is that we hadn't internalized all the oppression and shame that other gay people seemed to have . . . So, they'd [the other gay people] go to the bars and be really humorless and, "We're only here to pick up somebody and get the hell out. And we're not going to have fun." It just seemed like all the oppression and all the messages that society had sent

> out about gay people, they'd just totally taken it all to heart and believed. Whereas we were like, "We don't care what people think of us." We were so opposed to that . . . We're not going to run around with our heads between our legs, feeling so guilty and shame-ridden every time we walked down the street. That was, I think, the huge difference. (Personal Interview)

In addition, both Jones and Von Brucker objected to the gendered segregation of the bar scene. As Von Brucker explains, in the mainstream gay and lesbian community:

> A women's bar was a women's bar, and a men's bar was a men's bar. And a guy couldn't get into The Rose [a lesbian bar] unless he was with women, and even then maybe not. They'd say, "no," they'd turn you away at the door. It was just ridiculous. (Personal interview)

The reasons for this gay/lesbian segregation are multiple. Von Brucker states that there was a mutual dislike between gay men and lesbians, undoubtedly fostered by a sense of gendered difference between these two groups. However, as she also remarks, gay male misogyny, supported by patriarchal power and femalephobia, played a prominent role in women's exclusion from gay male bars:

> It was like gay men hated women. There was this undertone of hostility. Not even an undertone, it was an overtone. It was like, "Eww, what are *they* doing here?" It was just gross . . . It's almost like, sometimes you can feel the hate between heterosexuals. You can feel the hate between the men and the women, except that they need each other. They have to find some way to get along on some level, even though they don't really want to. It's sort of like that, but they [gays and lesbians] don't need each other for anything. So, they were just completely polarized and there was a lot of animosity. (Personal Interview)

Queercore, a cross-sex subculture from the start (recall that the movement was started by two women and one man), actively works against this type of sex-based segregation and animosity. This occurs through, for example, open events, such as the

J.D.s film nights, which encouraged participation regardless of sex. Queercore's male and female participants have also produced media collectively, creating zines like *Double Bill* that were crafted by men and women in tandem, and have performed in mixed-sex bands like Huggy Bear and Zuzu's Petals. In this regard, queercore harkens back to the previously mentioned activist organization GLF. While prior to GLF, the two primary gay activist groups were the gay male-centered Mattachine Society and the lesbian-centered Daughters of Bilitis, GLF aimed for all-inclusivity through its broad range of political goals (recall that GLF targeted sexism and racism in addition to homophobia) and mixed-sex events (GLF regularly held dance nights that were open to both gay men and lesbians). This goal of "all-inclusivity" was not always achieved – for as Terrence Kissack remarks, the women involved in GLF often felt "marginalized by the movement's masculine rhetoric" – but it was fairly unprecedented prior to queercore ("Freaking Fag Revolutionaries," 112). Queercore, which was likely also inspired by lesbian and gay male cooperation during the early days of the HIV/AIDS crisis and the gender inclusivity of early punk, has continued in GLF's cross-sex footsteps.

It should also be noted that queercore has challenged the male/female divide by troubling hegemonic constructions of "male" and "female," and "masculinity" and "femininity" through an emphasis on identities and performances that betray these categories: Androgynous and transgender identities and performances are common in queercore, from the terrorist drag shows of queercore artist Vaginal Davis, in which Davis enacts a deliberately confusing array of racial, sexual and gender identities, to the gender-bending stage shows of lesbian punk band Tribe 8, in which lead singer Lynnee Breedlove struts on stage with a masculine bravado, while wearing a strap-on dildo that

she makes straight men fellate (both of these artists are discussed in greater detail later in this dissertation).[47] As these examples confirm, one of the ways that queercore labors to obliterate the sex-based dualism that has structured the mainstream gay and lesbian community is through making "male" and "female," "masculine" and "feminine" unstable, and ultimately unproductive, designations.

In addition to reacting to mainstream gay/lesbian culture's lifeless sexual politics and draconian gender segregation, queercore also rejects its increasing corporatization. In this regard, it is important to observe that the time period that queercore first came into being, the late 1980s and early 1990s, is also the time when advertisers and retailers started to take advantage of the gay and lesbian market. This issue is addressed by Suzanna Danuta Walters in her book *All the Rage*. In a chapter entitled "Consuming Queers: Advertising and the Gay Market," Walters observes that as gays and lesbians became more visible within the public sphere during the 1990s, they also became "specifically targeted *as gays* by corporations eager to capitalize both on the supposedly greater wealth of gays and on the supposedly chic status of (white, bourgeois) gay identity" (236). This increased targeting of gays and lesbians not only reiterated stereotypes of gay white (mostly male) wealth and exploited the "cool cache" of gays and lesbians among a younger and more urban set, but repackaged gay and lesbian identity and politics as mere expressions of style. As Danae Clark explains, there is an insidious, depoliticizing logic to advertisements aimed at gay and lesbian consumers. Clark's focus is on lesbian consumers, but the same logic applies to gay men.

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[47] Note: At the times of these performances, Lynnee Breedlove identified as a woman and a lesbian. However, he now identifies as transgender.

> Just as early twentieth-century advertisers were more concerned about women's votes in the marketplace than their decisions in the voting booth, contemporary advertisers are more interested in lesbian consumers than lesbian politics. Once stripped of its politics underpinnings, lesbianism can be represented as a style of consumption linked to sexual preference. Lesbianism, in other words, is treated as merely a sexual style that can be chosen – or not chosen – just as one chooses a particular mode of fashion for self-expression. (197)

As a subculture enlivened by radical queer politics and bound to the D.I.Y. punk refusal of corporate culture, it is not surprising that queercore sets itself against this type of commercial exploitation. What's more, given the rising commodification of gay and lesbian culture in the late 1980s and into the 1990s, it is probably no mere coincidence that queercore surfaced when it did. Queercore appeared as a grassroots and independent alternative to the corporate onslaught. Moreover, through its zines, films, music and cultural events, queercore offered an explicit critique of this corporatization, denouncing, for instance, the intrusion of corporations at Gay Pride events and the deluge of mainstream advertisements in gay publications like *Out* and *The Advocate*.

This section has served to establish queercore's early development in Toronto, the core values that precipitated this development and the mediums first used to form and maintain queercore identities and communities. Now that these details have been provided, attention can be paid to the artifacts of the Toronto scene. In the coming chapters, readers will be exposed to particular examples of the anti-establishment, D.I.Y. work made within the Toronto scene, including Bruce LaBruce's film *No Skin Off My Ass* (1991), GB Jones's film *The Yo Yo Gang* (1992), and Johnny Noxzema's zines *Bimbox* and *S.C.A.B*. These works will correspond with the history revealed in this section and will bear out the points made about the political underpinnings of the initial

queercore scene: an aversion to the orthodoxies of the punk and gay and lesbian mainstreams, a desire to dismantle the cultural barriers between queer men and women, and a rejection of the commercialization of gay and lesbian culture. However, the Toronto queercore scene was not the only one, as it inspired new queer punk communities in the United States and elsewhere. It is this evolution to which I now turn.

III. **Queercore Expands**

By the early 1990s, building on what G.B. Jones, Bruce LaBruce and Candy Parker had instigated, queercore scenes began to spring up in cities on the other side of the Canadian border, in places like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Minneapolis and San Francisco. These scenes were comprised, in part, of provocative new zines in the vein of *J.D.s*, such as *Shrimp* by Vaginal Davis (Los Angeles), *Holy Titclamps* by Larry-bob Roberts (San Francisco), *Homocore* by Tom Jennings and Deke Nihilson (San Francisco),[48] *Outpunk* by Matt Wobensmith (San Francisco) and *Chainsaw* by Donna Dresch (Portland).[49] The latter two zines also functioned as record labels, releasing albums, singles and compilations featuring some of the most well-liked queercore bands of the day: Pansy Division, Tribe 8, Mukilteo Fairies, God is My Co-Pilot, Sta-Prest, The Need, The Third Sex, Team Dresch and others.[50] Outpunk, in particular, was central to the support and dissemination of queercore music. It was the first and most prolific queer

[48] Deke Nihilson was also a member of Comrades In Arms, considered to be one of the first queercore bands, along with Fifth Column and Anti-Scrunti Faction.
[49] Donna Dresch is also in the popular dykecore band Team Dresch.
[50] In addition to Outpunk and Chainsaw, the following independent record labels also released work by queercore bands during the same time period: Alternative Tentacles, K Records, Kill Rock Stars, Lookout! Records, Yoyo Recordings and Candy Ass Records. Today, labels such as Queer Control Records and Crunx Not Dead continue their legacy.

punk music label and, as Wobensmith himself explains, was instrumental in turning *J.D.s'* dream of a queer punk movement into a flesh and blood reality:

> I respected the homocore movement immensely, but I had my own need to put my own stamp on it and to take it a step further from zines that are highly theoretical. To me embodying it in a record and bands that can play live and tour and speak, actually gave it a third dimension. *J.D.s* is a zine of fantasy, really. They tried to make it look like there was an army of people behind it. They tried to make it look like it was a scene . . . You could credit *J.D.s* for having a blueprint for a scene, but I ultimately felt like we were making the scene happen for real. (Personal Interview)

It was not until 1991, however, that those involved in the now international queercore scene had the opportunity to come together en masse. This first large-scale, in-person gathering of queercore artists and enthusiasts was Spew, a queercore zine convention held on May 25th, 1991 in Chicago and organized by Steve LaFreniere, editor of *The Gentlewomen of California*. Spew II took place in Los Angeles in 1992, and Spew III in Toronto in 1993. These well-attended events allowed zinesters to display their creations and trade them with others, and were also multimedia.[51] For example, the first Spew, which promised "NO boring panels. NO pointless workshops. TRUCKLOADS of noisy dykes and fags," featured: the editors from such zines as *J.D.s*, *Bimbox*, *Homoture*, *Cunt*, *Sister Nobody*, *Fist in Your Face*, *Piss Elegant*, and *Chainsaw*; films and music videos by GB Jones, Bruce LaBruce, The Afro Sisters, The Yeastie Girlz, Glen Meadmore, and others; performances by Vaginal Davis, Fifth Column and Joan Jet Blakk, and others; and a reading by controversial, underground author Dennis

[51] Exact attendence numbers for the Spew conventions are unknown. But, it is commonly asserted that these events were well-attended. In fact, so well-attended, that by the third Spew event, some folks complained that the event had become too trendy among non-queers and had lost its subcultural appeal.

Cooper (Spew poster, author unknown).[52] Spew II, billed as "the carnivallike [sic] convention of queer misfits" featured most of the above listed zines and their editors, plus new work by folks like Mark Ewert, Lily Baindrop and Kathleen Hanna; performances by Pansy Division, Tribe 8, Cholita, Hole; and films by LaBruce, Jones, Greta Snider, Candy Parker and others (Block 77). In keeping with queercore's aversion to the mainstream gay and lesbian community, these events were held in community art venues outside of the usual "gay ghetto." Spew I took place at the Randolph Street gallery, an alternative exhibition space in Chicago that specialized in showcasing artists who created work that was unsupported or perceived to be unsupportable by commercial or institutional funders. Likewise, Spew II, took place at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), a non-profit artist-run space based upon principles of grassroots community organizing and social change and committed to presenting experimental works of art in all media.

In 1992, Mark Freitas and Joanna Brown began hosting "Homocore Chicago," a monthly event in Chicago that featured queercore bands, offering a stable arena through which the scene could proliferate. Again, these events were held at non-mainstream and non-gay scene places like the low-rent Czar Bar. This was a deliberate decision in order to combat limited conceptions of queer culure, as was remarked upon by a Homocore Chicago t-shirt which read, "A lifetime of listening to disco is too high a price to pay for your sexual identity" (Spencer 281). Sticking with the queercore principles of anti-corporatism and D.I.Y., all of the money raised from the events were paid to the bands. The shows, which also followed the ethic of inclusivity, were all-ages and cross-sex: As

[52] As evidence of the volatile times in which Spew was taking place, organizer Steve LaFreniere was stabbed by gay bashers on the last day of the event. He quickly recovered, however, and the event was still deemed a success.

noted by Amy Spencer, Homocore Chicago challenged "the idea of separate gay and lesbian bars. Through Homocore events, they aimed to create a space for men and women to be together, as opposed to the sense of gender segregation which was the norm in mainstream gay culture" (281). The all-ages component of Homocore Chicago furthered this inclusivity and created a rare space in which queer youths could gather and feel welcomed and safe.

Shortly after Homocore Chicago began, "Homocore Minneapolis," organized by Ed Varga followed suit. Homocore Minneapolis put on approximately thirty shows over five years at District 202, a queer youth center. As Varga explains, these shows and their location at District 202 allowed for more community control and provided a "different" atmosphere and experience than found within the typical gay and lesbian bar scene:

> All the shows were all ages and that was important. So, it was important not to have them at a bar. There were no bar options where you could have even an 18 and up show, where you have wrist bands for people who are over 21. So, none of the shows served alcohol and none of the shows were in a bar. And yes, it was definitely a different environment and that was on purpose and that was important to me. There's a lot of things that make it different and good. I like to have complete control when I do an event. You're renting a venue, you're not depending on the bar to do security, they are making money on you from drinks or whatever. I feel like in terms of being able to create an experience as opposed to just your average rock show at a club to be able to control all those elements, of who runs the door and not having a surly bar staff but actually having people who are volunteers or my friends, running the box office and stuff like that . . . It was less about putting on four bands in a row and more about interspersing it with film and other performances and reading and stuff like that too. So you are creating more of an experience or event than just another night at a bar. (Personal Interview)

Both Homocore Chicago and Homocore Minneapolis became models for future queercore events, such as Yo-Yo-A-Go-Go (based out of Olympia, Washington) and

Homo-A-Go-Go (based out of Olympia, Washington and, later, San Francisco). Until Homo-A-Go-Go's final run in 2010, these events provided yearly, weekend-long forums for queercore bands, zinesters and filmmakers to showcase their work. Unlike Homocore Chicago and Homocore Minneapolis, however, these events were national in focus. Ed Varga, who also started Homo-A-Go-Go describes the impetus behind creating a national, multi-media queercore event:

> It's [Homo-A-Go-Go] a natural progression, I want to do bigger things, I want to do more challenging things. I want to take something that was fun and intimate and local and make that a national event and help create this community nationally. These networks that happen nationally amongst people who like queer D.I.Y. music . . . [Also,] the potential to expose people who might just go to see a DJ or a band, but might not go to see a performer or writer like Kate Bronstein, for example, who was at our first festival, or Michelle Tea, or other writers – to kind of make the writers as much of rock stars as bands and DJs. And to use culture as a way to politicize people and have as a gateway drug to radical politics. (Personal Interview)

As with its original Toronto incarnation, the new queercore scenes that developed in relation to the above-mentioned zines, bands, records labels and events drew their inspiration from punk and queer culture while simultaneously challenging punk and gay/lesbian orthodoxy. But as queercore and its bands, zines, films and fans moved across space, spreading influence and picking up new ideas in new places, its politics and practices shifted and evolved beyond the precepts laid out by the Toronto scene. Although influenced by what was started in Toronto, each subsequent queercore scene had its own local antecedents. To take the San Francisco scene as an example, in addition to being inspired by the creations of the *J.D.s* gang, those in the San Francisco scene were shaped by Klubsitute, an outlandish queer cabaret that hosted bands, drag

acts, and performance artists. The San Francisco scene also developed in relation to QTIP (Queers Together in Punkness): live performances staged at San Francisco's Epicenter, such as "Full-on Asian Action," featuring queer punk bands with Asian American members, like Kicking Giant and Sta-Prest. And in San Francisco, local zines like *Outpunk* and *Homocore* had as much, if not more, of an impact than *J.D.*s.

The political underpinnings of the newer scenes were also sometimes different than those for the Toronto scene. For instance, while many in the *J.D.s* crowd viewed radical queer organizations, like Queer Nation, as watered down co-optations of queercore, and criticized AIDS activist organizations, like ACT-UP, for privileging men's health care needs over women's, members of other scenes disagreed, and were sometimes even members of these very organizations.

To illustrate this conflict, take the following quote from Jones about the sexist thinking of AIDS activists and her disassociation from ACT-UP:

> We had the impression that, here were all these gay men who claim to hate women: "We don't want you in our bars. Ew, you ugly fish." And then: "Oh we have AIDS, come and take care of us and be our nurses." And so many women just flocked: "We'll take care of you. We'll be the nurses." And we just thought, "What is going on? This is crazy." It's so hypocritical in so many ways . . . It was like the women will take care of it. And when you get it [AIDS], we'll be here to take care of you. But, don't worry if we get breast cancer, that's not *your* problem. That's what we were all trying to express: The level of hypocrisy that existed at that point. That's why I get really irritated when I read things on-line that claim, "Homocore all started with *JDs* and ACT-UP. They were all part of ACT-UP." No, none of us were part of ACT-UP. (Personal Interview)

This critical perspective on AIDS activism was also articulated in the media coming out of the Toronto scene. For instance, in the zine *Jane Gets a Divorce*, echoing the sentiment expressed by Jones above, Von Brucker states:

> The next time some boy is blubbering on your shoulder about AIDS, tell him to back off 'cause we girls have way bigger problems . . . After comparing the statistics with those of, say, breast cancer, an intelligent person may well wonder why anyone would spend all of their time fussing over some disease (AIDS) which, by comparison, you would have to work to get. (n.p.)

But, compare this outlook on the AIDS pandemic and AIDS activism to that expressed by Jon Ginoli, the lead singer of San Francisco-based band Pansy Division. He, and as revealed by my personal interviews, many others outside of the Toronto scene – including Leslie Mah, Larry-bob Roberts, and Matt Wobensmith – see organizations like ACT-UP as catalysts for their involvement in queercore:

> When I got here [to San Francisco] ACT UP was in full swing and I got involved in that because it was really what was important and necessary. I needed to be a part of it back then. [But,] the early part of '91, let's say by April '91, was the last ACT UP meeting I went to. The ACT UP here split into two groups then kind of ended up imploding . . . After ACT UP broke up and fell apart, I realized I could do this band Pansy Division. The phrase I concocted was "cultural activism" instead of being political activism where you're trying to get somebody to write a letter, or sign a petition, or vote a certain way. I wanted to do something that made those same kinds of gains but in a cultural way. (Personal Interview)

Thus, as these conflicting viewpoints on HIV/AIDS activism demonstrate, there is no universal path to and through queercore. The politics of one queercore scene or individual are not necessarily shared by all. Accordingly, while all queercore scenes are

united by their oppositions to the punk and gay and lesbian mainstreams, they are not necessarily united in their more specific politics and value systems. While this makes queercore difficult to define and analyze, it also makes it multi-dimensional and exciting.

IV. **Riot Grrrl**

In the early 1990s, as queercore was expanding across the U.S, another anti-homophobic and anti-misogynist punk movement emerged alongside it: riot grrrl.[53] Initially centered in Olympia, Washington and Washington, D.C, riot grrrl was an affiliation of young feminist women who were collectively producing zines (e.g., *Girl Germs* and *I Heart Amy Carter*), performing in bands (e.g., Bikini Kill and Bratmobile), holding activist meetings and addressing pertinent issues facing girls, such as incest and eating disorders. Similar to queercore, riot grrrl was a reaction to the sexism of male-dominated hardcore yet also a corrective to the feminist movement, which had long ignored the interests of girls and young women, whether due to a desire on the part of feminists to distance themselves from derogatory associations between girls and frivolity or out of basic ageism.

Although similar in a number of respects, queercore and riot grrrl are not entirely the same. For one, while males and females participate equally in queercore, riot grrrl is primarily a young female subculture. And while queercore fosters cross-gender interactions and alliances, riot grrrl works to create safe and separate spaces for girls and

[53] Credit for the term "riot grrrl" is generally given to Jen Smith (of the band Bratmobile and later Rastro! and The Quails) who, in response to the Mount Pleasant race riots of 1991, wrote in a letter to Allison Wolfe (also of Bratmobile) that "This summer's going to be a girl riot." Eventually the "ir" of "girl" was replaced with the growling double or triple "r" of "grrrl" in order to evoke a link between girlhood and mental and physical toughness.

young women outside of patriarchal control and abuse. Nevertheless, the two movements are inextricably intertwined. Many queercore practitioners are also riot grrrl practitioners (e.g., Team Dresch and Huggy Bear are considered to be both queercore and riot grrrl bands) and many individuals intentionally work across these subcultures. For example, G.B. Jones, Jena Von Brucker, Johnny Noxema and Rex Boy, the four co-creators of the queercore zine *Double Bill*, were was also regular contributors to the influential riot grrrl zine *Girl Germs*, produced by Allison Wolfe and Molly Neuman.

Moreover, even though queercore preceded riot grrrl by about five years, some in the queercore scene learned about queercore only belatedly through riot grrrl. And others in the queercore scene cite riot grrrl, and not queer punk, as their primary source of inspiration, including, interestingly, some of the men involved in queercore. For instance, Gary Fembot, author of the queercore zine *Fembot* and member of the queercore band Sta-Prest asserts that riot grrrl, not queercore, is what prompted him to start a queer punk band:

> I wanted to be a riot grrrl . . . [I was] trying to be a feminist ally. I know a lot of gay guys who like music made by women and I wanted to take it a little further personally in terms of supporting what they were doing. (Personal Interview)

Yet, even though queercore and riot grrrl are indisputably interconnected, outsiders have not always recognized this fact. Mary Celeste Kearney contends that the popular press historically disassociated these two movements in order to contain, through a process of heterosexualization, the anti-patriarchal threat posed by riot grrrl:

> In spite of the coterminous emergence in the United States of riot grrrl and queercore bands like Tribe 8, Random Violet, The Mudwimmin and Team Dresch, there have been relatively few links made by the mainstream press between lesbian, feminism, queercore and riot grrrl. In somewhat obvious attempts to distance this radical female youth culture from the taint of homosexuality, the press most often confine their discussions of riot grrrl's relationship with lesbianism to this community's appropriation of the practices and style of queercore. (222)

With this in mind, and in spite of the confusion it may cause, this dissertation looks at many of the places where queercore and riot grrrl collide and collapse. This is accomplished in the following chapters through the analysis of bands, zines and films – from Tribe 8 to *Bamboo Girl* to *The Yo Yo Gang* (Jones, 1991) – that are examples of both queercore and riot grrrl.

V. **A Note About Race**

The racial component of queercore is difficult to write about in a way that does the topic justice. Queercore is, and always has been, a white-dominated movement (despite its anti-racist lip service), much as punk and gay and lesbian culture more generally have been white-dominated. Some of queercore's most prolific and important contributors have been people of color, including drag performers Vaginal Davis and Joan Jett Blakk, Leslie Mah and Tantrum (of Tribe 8), Tae Won Yu (of Kicking Giant), Brontez Purnell (of Gravy Train!!!! and The Younger Lovers), Araya Robles (of Sta-Prest), Ernesto Foronda (owner of Heart Core Records), Margarita Alcantara (editor of *Bamboo Girl*), and the all-Latina and almost-all-lesbian band Girl in a Coma. This creates a bit of a double-bind: To emphasize the whiteness of queercore is to risk de-emphasizing the importance of people of color within the scene, and to emphasize the people of color within the scene is to risk dismissing the ways in which queercore has

marginalized people of color through representational exclusions (depictions of people of color are relatively rare in queercore art, on queercore album covers and within queercore zines and film) and through instances of arguable racism (e.g., the veneration of the suspect, and connotatively bigoted, figure of the skinhead in the films of Bruce LaBruce). Rather than getting tied up in this conundrum, I'd like to share two anecdotes, offering two very different perspectives on the intersections of race and queercore.

The first comes from bi-racial (Chinese and Caucasian) Mah, for whom punk provided a respite from racist and homophobic taunts:

> It [punk] was definitely a big part of forming my identity as a teenager. I think it was just sort of a way to latch onto something, the whole outsider idea. To be somewhere [Denver, Colorado] that was very conservative and still had a cowboy view of gender and race. To have a Mohawk as a teenager, it was easier to get yelled at for that than to have people say things that were homophobic or racist. They would scream 'Devo' at me instead. That was a little less painful than getting called other more traditional slurs. (Personal Interview)

The second comes from African-Canadian Tantrum, who was a member of Tribe 8 along with Mah. Tantrum found punk to be a hostile place for women of color. And, as the below quote makes clear, Tantrum's queercore compadres were less than understanding of the insidious racism she faced in the punk community:

> I feel like there was definitely a certain amount of [racialized] alienation within the punk music movement that I felt even when I was in Tribe 8, without question. Because, yeah, it's a white scene . . . There was an incident at Gillman in San Francisco. We played there a couple of times. And, again, not coming from the punk scene and not understanding the importance of this venue or whatever. Every time we'd play a show at this place I could feel the racism all around me. I was completely not treated like a member of the band. All of this sort of bullshit would

> happen to me. And there were members of the band [Tribe 8] who felt like this was something that we'll just have to get over because this venue is a very important place for Tribe 8, as a punk band, to be playing at. And when I started to kick up a stink about it, I didn't get any positive reaction until one of the band member's girlfriends – who also had a punk band of her own and was also playing at Gillman's and also had a person of color in their band who experienced something very similar to what I was experiencing – it wasn't until the girlfriend of my bandmate said, "You know what, that's fucked up." But, I don't think that was at all about me or about being conscious of race issues. I feel very much if the girlfriend hadn't said anything, it would have been like, "Well, what's more important right now is that we play the punk venues that the big punk bands are supposed to be playing in. Suck it up Tantrum." That's pretty much the attitude that I felt like I got until someone's girlfriend said, "You know what, that's really fucked up," and I guess maybe wagged her finger in their faces and then all of a sudden there was, "Oh, let's talk about it…" I was like "Fuck you, forget it, I don't have time for this. I'm not here to teach you about race." (Personal Interview)

Tantrum's experiences of the racism within queercore need to be taken seriously, and therefore should temper any notion of queercore as a utopic space. Correspondingly, especially in matters of race, class, age and ability, when thinking about the values and benefits of queercore, it is important to always ask, "for whom?" Race was and continues to be a contentious issue within queercore. It also tends to be a weak spot in academic writings on queercore. To help rectify this, in this dissertation, I seek to include the work of queercore's non-white participants, while avoiding the trap of racial tokenism by discussing the work of non-white participants throughout, as opposed to having a special section on "race and queercore."

VI. **Queercore Today**

Although queercore's heyday was in the late 1980s and early 1990s, its anti-normative queer, punk spirit can still be discerned in contemporary bands (e.g., Limp

Wrist, The Hidden Cameras, Gravy Train!!!!, and The Shondes), zines (e.g., *Dildo Machine*, *Fag School*, and *Bamboo Girl*), films (e.g., *Malaqueerche* by Devon Devine and Sarah Adorable and *Rebels Rule* by Will Munro) and public events (e.g., Queeruption and Homo-A-Go-Go). There have been a few changes, however. For one, queercore is no longer just a North American phenomenon. Queercore has become a small, but transnational, movement that includes bands like Mambo Taxi from the United Kingdom and the zines like *The Burning Times* from Australia. As Larry-bob Roberts, author of the queercore zine *Holy Titclamps* observes:

> We can't just think of queercore as U.S.-centric anymore . . . There's been a sort of ongoing U.K. scene, not just in London, but Cardiff. People who have been ongoing queer punks and queer anarchists . . . There are also a few European festivals. There's a festival every other year in Poland called Queer Reporgeschnacht that's a feminist and queer punk festival. And there was recently Stockholm Shame and some other Swedish queer music festival. (Personal Interview)

Second, queercore music now extends beyond punk to encompass other genres like hip-hop (aka, "homo-hop") and electroclash (a type of music that combines New Wave and electronic dance music). Examples include the electronica/hip-hop group Scream Club, the electro-punk outfit Gravy Train!!!! and the dance-meets-punk-meets-hip-hop stylings of drag performance artist Christeene. As Ed Varga explains:

> Now queercore is such a wide genre of music. Even into the late 90s things were starting to change with people doing more solo, electronic or mixed media stuff. The late 90s it started to changing from punk rock to being a lot of different genres of music. And now it's everything one could think of. (Personal Interview)

Third, the social context for queercore is different, because the politics and realities of have changed. It is easier to live an open life as a gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer or transgender person in the West than it was twenty plus years ago when queercore began. As Jon Ginoli argues, "The moment that created it [queercore] is long gone . . . It's also that the stigma isn't there that was there twenty years ago about being gay and in a band" (Personal interview). At the same time, homophobia still exists – in the punk movement and elsewhere -- and the mainstream gay and lesbian movement has become even more commercialized and homonormative. Which is to say that queercore is still as vital as ever. As queercore zinester Johnny Noxzema (known for the zines *Bimbox* and *S.C.A.B.*), argues, queercore continues to exist today precisely because the issues that instigated the subculture have not been resolved:

> The main thing of what I know about people who are doing queercore now is that they have a lot of the same complaints that we had. For example, gay pride. The corporate involvement is just ridiculous. Pride day is so ridiculous compared to what it was back then. (Personal Interview)

Thus, while queercore has transformed, it is still around and still alive to those who continue to claim it. The rebellious, creative, defiantly queer movement that GB Jones, Bruce LaBruce and Candy Parker started decades ago still resonates with many disenfranchised queers and will, undoubtedly, continue to do so, as long queers find themselves marginalized from punk and the gay and lesbian mainstreams, not to mention heterosexual society. As Noxzema puts it:

> Even though the music is very different and the fashion is very different, it's the same thing: alienated people, a group of queers of all genders and all facets of

sexual orientation, and they've created a space for themselves that may be largely delusional – totally exaggerated and over the top – but, at the same time, it's very inclusive and wonderful. (Personal Interview)

Chapter 2: Queercore Sex

In his essay, "Periodizing the 60s," querying whether nodes of resistance exist within the postmodern, Frederic Jameson parenthetically asks his reader to "(think of punk or pornography)" (196). As signaled by this aside, punk and pornography align via their deliberately offensive violations of artistic and social norms, even if, as Jameson argues, this shared offensiveness has been blunted by their absorption into hegemonic aesthetics and commodity culture. Think, for example, of the trendy punk clothing store Hot Topic, located in shopping malls across the United States, or the risqué "queer" imagery of mainstream pop icons from Madonna to Lady Gaga. But, the link between punk and porn is not merely theoretical and, as this chapter imparts, has often been queerly inflected. Punk band names like The Circle Jerks and The Butthole Surfers stand as proof.[1] As does the British punk scene, which, as detailed in the previous chapter, developed in and around SEX, the boutique run by Malcolm McLaren, famed punk impresario, and his partner, fashion maven Vivienne Westwood. Existing as an ostensible switch point between punk and queer, SEX was a sartorial hot spot where punks could purchase hip gear inspired by sadomasochistic practice, gay porn and various sexual fetishes (e.g., rubber suits, leather harnesses, stiletto boots and t-shirts featuring naked cowboys and chicken bones that spelled out "P-E-R-V").

Journalist Lucy O'Brien has argued that, "Despite the prevalence of fetish gear and provocative clothes, [punk] was curiously asexual" (194), but, as already noted, the experiences of actual punks, and especially queer punks, suggests otherwise (see page 78). However, even if one subscribes to the view of punks as asexual, on a

[1] "Circle jerk" denotes the homoerotic practice of a cadre of men masturbating themselves and each other in a circular formation, and "butthole surfer" is a thinly veiled allusion to a practitioner of anal sex.

representational level punk and porn have, without a doubt, long shared common ground. Examples of punk and pornographic convergence are abundant. Indeed, the etymology of the word "punk" itself makes the connections between punk, sex and queerness clear: recall that punk has, at various times, been used to refer to prostitutes, passive homosexuals, and juvenile delinquents. Punk has also mined the pornographic for inspiration and edge, for example, in songs like The Buzzcock's "Orgasm Addict," about a compulsive masturbator, and Blondie's "(Se)X Offender," about a prostitute with a cop fetish. And, in turn, porn has exploited punk in service of its ever expanding markets of desire, from "rough trade"[2] videos of street punks to pornographic websites featuring pierced, tattooed and mohawked women (e.g., SuicideGirls.com and BurningAngel.com).

Yet, although punk and porn have long been on familiar terms, their relationship is a complicated one. For every song celebrating sexual perversity, such as The Stooge's proto-punk ode to the joys of sexual submission, "I Wanna Be Your Dog," there is another not-so-enthusiastic number like Bad Brains' bigoted and sexphobic "Don't Blow Bubbles," which warns straight men "Don't blow no bubbles[3] (and we can stop the AIDS)."[4] Even SEX itself was a store divided: While SEX glorified the taboo allure of the erotic, using salacious appeal to sell merchandise and to re-imagine sexual practices and predilections as the ultimate in street fashion, it also "reflected the deadening of the sexual impulse in the newly industrialized sex districts like Soho, where, by the mid-

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[2] The overlap between punk, pornogaphy and queer can be gleaned from the term "rough trade" itself. While the term formally denotes "gay hustler" and is an appellation frequently applied to tough, straight-acting men in gay porn, Rough Trade is also the name of a germinal punk music store and record label.

[3] "Bubbles" is used in this song as a euphemism for effeminate gay men.

[4] The lyrics to "Don't Blow No Bubbles" have generally been interpreted as homophobic and as suggesting that AIDS is God's cure for homosexuality ("Ask Jah, he'll make the change"). Indeed, Dr. Know, guitarist of Brad Brains has stated that, "We wrote the song as kind of an angry warning to homosexuals," the song's message being "Don't be a faggot" (Andersen 292).

1970s, the great promise of liberation had been honed down into a series of stock postures" (Savage 101).

In spite of this complicated relationship, sex has undeniably served as one of punk's "go to" sources for the offensive. And insofar as punk has turned to sex for provocative material, homosexuality has often been its chosen subject par excellence. In the previous chapter, I mentioned the notorious Tom of Finland-style "gay cowboy" t-shirt designed by Westwood and worn by Sid Vicious in concert, as well as the homoerotic songs by straight bands, such as the Angry Samoan's "Homo-sexual" and Mighty Sphincter's "Fag Bar," that were spotlighted in the pages of *J.D.s*. As these instances attest, straight punks have often appropriated homosexual themes for their controversial art.

Far from indicating a sincere alliance between straight punks and queers, however, homosexual subject matter has been used by straight punks in much the same way that they have utilized brutal death imagery and Nazi paraphernalia: for pure shock value. That is, Vicious did not wear a Tom of Finland shirt as an expression of solidarity with an abused sexual minority or because he was a fan of popular gay art. He wore it in the hopes of scandalizing a conservative public in the name of resistance and bad taste. In other words, straight punk's creative dalliances with queerness should not be confused with anti-homophobic commitment. Indeed, as already established, many punks, including those who employ queer images and themes, are openly hostile to actual members of the LGBTQIA communities.

Yet, if straight punks have taken up queer sexual imagery simply to shock, the same cannot be said of queer punks, and specifically those within queercore. For

queer(core) punks, the dissemination of queer sexual imagery is never an empty gesture of titillation, but one that is inescapably enmeshed in the personal and the political. It is also a gesture that is not only rooted in the history of punk practice, but also in the history of modern gay liberation, for as Jeffrey Escoffier notes:

> In the period immediately after the Stonewall riots, the gay and lesbian movement did not at first focus on the question of identity, or even strictly on civil rights – though black civil rights was, most certainly, on the political horizon – but on sexual liberation. (42)

In other words, with sexualized slogans like "Perverts of the World Unite!" and "Up the Ass of the Ruling Class," early gay liberationists sought liberation not only in the streets, but in the bedroom as well. Accordingly, in utilizing sexual imagery pertinent to their own identities, queer(core) punks borrow from a wider history of punk *and* gay politics, and also rail against a system of sexual oppression and persecution that has been detrimental to their very lives.

While the entire history of homosexual oppression and persecution is too lengthy and varied to recount here, it is worth noting the social-sexual context in which queercore emerged: the 1980s. For one, the 1980s was the first decade of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the "moral panic" surrounding it. Originally called GRID for "gay-related immunodeficiency," the blame for HIV/AIDS was placed squarely on the shoulders of gay men and was seen as a manifestation of, and punishment for, their deviant sexual behaviors. Such notions of gay male lechery served to position them in shamed

opposition to the innocent and defenseless heterosexual family unit. As Simon Watney explains:

> [T]he axiomatic identification of AIDS as a sign and symptom of homosexual behavior reconfirms the passionately held view of "the family" as a uniquely vulnerable institution. It also sanctions the strongest calls for "protectionist" measures, of an ever intensified censorship that will obliterate the evidently unbearable cultural evidence of that sexual diversity which stalks the terra incognita beyond the home. Hence the incomparably strange reincarnation of the cultural figure of the male homosexual as predatory, determined invert, wrapped in Grand Guignol cloak of degeneracy theory, and casting his lascivious eyes – and hands – out from the pages of Victorian sexology manuals and onto "our" children, and above all onto "our" sons. (77)

Within this cultural climate of heightened abhorrence for gay male sexual behavior – indeed, for all queer sexual behavior by implication – the explicit queer representations propagated by queercore participants signified a rebellious refusal to capitulate to shame.

HIV/AIDS was not the only "sexual problem" facing LGBTQIA folks in the 1980s either, since sexual minorities continued to be criminalized and pathologized via various anti-gay legislation, most prominently anti-sodomy laws, which were bolstered by conservative religious doctrine[5] and misguided medical and psychological science.[6] In

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[5] In the 1980s, Christian Fundementalists in the United States were, in particular, quite outspoken in their criticisms of LGBT peoples and their sexual behaviors. Evangelical Southern Baptist pastor Jerry Fallwell, for example, famously comdemned homosexual acts as forbidden by the Bible, stating "this vile and satanic system will one day be utterly annihilated and there'll be a celebration in heaven" (Burns). Similarly, and around the same time, conservative politician and devout Christian Fundamentalist Jesse Helms called homosexuals "weak, morally sick wretches" and tried to cut funding for the National Endowment for the Arts due to the organization's support of the highly-sexual "gay-oriented artwork of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe" ("Jesse Helms").

[6] For example, while the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality as a disorder category from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1973, splinter organizations, such as *The National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality* (NARTH) continue to argue that homosexuality is a mental order. NARTH further advocates the eradication of homosexuality through conversion therapy: the supposed transformation of homosexuals into heterosexuals through psychoanalytic therapy, visualization, social skill training, spritual intervention and aversive treatments like electroshock.

her foundational queer theory essay "Thinking Sex," Gayle Rubin exposes the insidious logic behind these anti-sodomy laws, which not only outlawed homosexual acts, but once again situated queers as social pariahs:

> [Anti-sodomy laws] criminalize sexual behaviour that is freely chosen and avidly sought. The ideology embodied in them reflects value hierarchies . . . That is, some sex acts are considered to be so intrinsically vile that no one should be allowed under any circumstance to perform them. The fact that individuals consent to or even prefer them is taken to be additional evidence of depravity. This system of sex law is similar to legalized racism. State prohibition of same sex contact, anal penetration, and oral sex make homosexuals a criminal group denied the privileges of full citizenship. With such laws, prosecution is persecution. Even when they are not strictly enforced, as is usually the case, the members of criminalized sexual communities remain vulnerable to the possibility of arbitrary arrest, or to periods in which they become the objects of social panic. When those occur, the laws are in place and police action is swift. Even sporadic enforcement serves to remind individuals that they are members of a subject population. The occasional arrest for sodomy, lewd behaviour, solicitation, or oral sex keeps everyone else afraid, nervous, and circumspect. (291)

As Rubin's account of the "anti-sex" climate in the United States in the early 1980s (the time period in which Rubin wrote her essay) and Watney's contextualization of the early HIV/AIDS pandemic make clear, by creating sexually explicit works in this decade of fear, nervousness and circumspection, queercore's early practitioners were committing an act of brave defiance. And while much has changed since the 1980s, with HIV/AIDS education removing some of the stigma previously placed on gay men and *Lawrence v. Texas*[7] effectively banning anti-sodomy laws, anti-queer sex ideologies continue to linger. The general public may now view gay men and lesbians as more

[7] *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) is a landmark decision by the United States Supreme Court. In the 6–3 ruling, the Court struck down the sodomy law in Texas and, by extension, invalidated sodomy laws in thirteen other states, making same-sex sexual activity legal in every U.S. state and territory.

acceptable on the whole (especially those who are coupled and monogamous), but their sexual behaviors are still, by and large, viewed with suspicion and distaste. Accordingly, sexually explicit queercore artifacts continue to resonate with the electric charge of sedition and subversion.

What's more, these artifacts have never simply reacted to a homophobic mainstream, but have also circulated in opposition to a sexually uptight gay and lesbian majority, one that has become ever more sexually conservative in recent years in line with their obsessive bid for mainstream acceptance and respectability via marriage and monogamy. This is a topic that Michael Warner addresses in *The Trouble with Normal*. As Warner asserts, the mainline gay and lesbian political movement, increasingly compelled by a desire to obtain rights from the state (e.g., the right to marry and serve openly in the military) has moved away from the goal of radical sexual liberation to the goal of normalizing gay and lesbian identities and relationships. As Warner succinctly puts it, "The [gay and lesbian] movement in too many ways has chosen to become a politics of sexual identity, not sex" (40). In this light, queercore's front-and-center representations of explicit sex are significant not only because they reject the sexual shame of the homophobic mainstream but because they signal a refusal to downplay homosexual expression and pleasure for the benefit of heteronormative assimilation and appeasement.

With this context in mind, it should be acknowledged that the queercore practitioners analyzed in this chapter, all of whom privilege the sexually explicit in their art, are creating their work in opposition to both the sexual conservatism of the homophobic mainstream *and* the gay and lesbian majority. Although, it should also be

noted that, in line with the heterogeneity of queercore culture, each of the queercore practitioners discussed in this chapter have engaged sex in distinct ways. While some have presented sex as a clear-cut emancipatory force, others have been attuned to the ways in which sex is a terrain of struggle and contestation, balanced somewhere between liberation and exploitation. In the pages that follow, I highlight the work of four queercore artists – Pansy Division, Bruce LaBruce, G.B. Jones and Courtney Trouble – whose creations collectively encompass the mediums of music, film, and zines. In combination, the work of these artists demonstrates some of the ways in which sex has been approached within queercore: as play (Pansy Division), as politics (Bruce LaBruce), as power (G.B. Jones), and as something that touches on all three (Courtney Trouble).

I. **Pansy Division: Sex as Play**

Pansy Division is one of the longest running and most commercially successful queercore bands.[8] Formed in 1991 in San Francisco after frontman Jon Ginoli took an ad out in a local paper seeking a "bassist and drummer to form an openly gay rock band," Pansy Division broke new ground, and eventually captured the national spotlight, with an entire line-up of "out" gay male musicians: guitarist and lead singer Ginoli, bassist Chris Freeman and drummer Jay Paget (Ginoli, *Deflowered*, 31).[9] The impetus for the band was Ginoli's estrangement from San Francisco's Castro "clone" community. As he explains

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[8] The name "Pansy Division" enacts a queer reclamation of "Panzer Division," the tank division of the Nazi SS Army.

[9] While Jon Ginoli and Chris Freeman have been permanent members of Pansy Division, the band has had a notoriously difficult time finding a permanent drummer. Over the years, Pansy Division has featured seven drummers, including: Jay Paget (1991-1992), David Ward (1992-1994), Liam Hart (1994), David Ayer (1994), Patrick Hawley (1995), Dustin Donaldson (1995-1996), and Lucas Illades (1996-Present). There have also been several lead guitarists in the band: Patrick Goodwin (1997-2004), Bernard Yin (2004), and Joel Reader (2004-Present).

it, this community's attachment to discotheques, show tunes and crew cuts was out of step with his passion for punk rock bars, street activism and long hair down-the-back. He thus set about assembling a band that would articulate and circulate a set of alternative identities, meanings and representations in distinction to San Francisco's dominant gay scene, effectively expanding the possibilities of the gay experience and gay culture:

> Pansy Division was created to address the kind of alienation I felt in not being able to relate to much gay culture . . . it was a way, hopefully, to make real connections with like-minded people. (qtd. in *Homocore*, 61).

In addition, Ginoli hoped that the band would improve his unsatisfactory love life and that finding a "like-minded" community would also mean finding a man (or men):

> I did have issues (meeting men) because I'm a little guy. I'm 5'6'' and when I moved here [San Francisco] I weighed 128lbs. It seemed like it was happening for other people and not for me. It all just seemed to tie in. I didn't look right, my interests weren't right, the music I liked wasn't right. I thought, okay, I still think I'm glad where I'm at and I want to find my people. I want to find people I can relate to and I want to have a boyfriend. So I'm going to make this music and it will help me meet who I want and guys too. (Personal Interview)

In fostering this alternative community (and in garnering potential dates), the members of Pansy Division have insisted on being forthright about their identities and desires. The band has avoided the innuendos and vague references of their more closeted musical contemporaries (e.g., Erasure and The Pet Shop Boys), and they have refused to mince words in their lyrics or during on-stage banter. Their songs resolutely focus on gay themes, insist on using pronouns like "him" that signify queerly when articulated by men (as in "I love *him*") and are remarkable for their pornographic lyrical depictions of

gay sex. Pansy Division is a band dedicated to pushing the boundaries of "respectable" gay culture and to forging an open environment in which explicit gay desires can be expressed and realized. This intent is spelled out in the lyrics to "Anthem," the first song Ginoli wrote for Pansy Division, and the band's ostensible manifesto:

> We're here to tell you, ya better make way
> We're queer rockers in your face today
> We can't relate to Judy Garland
> It's a new generation of music calling
>
> We're the buttfuckers of rock & roll
> We wanna sock it to your hole
> With loud guitars, we're gay and proud
> We're gonna get ya with your pants down

True to Pansy Division's unapologetic and blunt disposition, "Anthem" makes the queerness of the band unambiguous, as does the euphemistic "pansy" of the band's name. The song presents an in-your-face challenge to settled forms of gay identity ("It's a new generation of music calling") and, as with most of their output, vocalizes this challenge in sexual terms ("We wanna sock it to your hole"). Yet, although this type of in-your-face challenge is not unusual within Pansy Division's oeuvre, Pansy Division is not a particularly antagonistic band. Their tongue-in-cheek lyrics are, more often than not, intended to invoke amusement rather than anger. And the band's pleasant pop-punk style does much to soften the jagged edges produced by their song's lyrical content. In fact, Pansy Division is one of the most melodic bands within queercore, their sound being inspired as much by '60s pop icons The Beatles as the rougher, rawer sounds of The Clash.

As Ginoli himself notes, the band's comparatively smooth (for punk) sound and jovial attitude also serves the band's activist aims. It allows their potentially contentious pro-gay messages to be more easily digested by listeners and, perhaps more importantly, works against the popular view of homosexuality as a bleak and unhappy existence:

> I'm a liberal progressive kind of guy [and am] politically oriented, but I didn't like a lot of bands who did political music, because it wasn't any fun . . . [In] ACT-UP, a lot of activism we did was born out of anger, but it was fun to do, and it was also fun to watch other people do things you were too scared to do . . . So I wanted to do something that would be enjoyable. I wanted to show that I was enjoying myself being gay. I want to be on stage putting out something that is joyful to people and not in a superficial way, but in a really deep meaningful kind of way. Yes, we can sing about sex and be outrageous and have fun and be good with that, and can do that by using humor. (Personal Interview)

However, although Pansy Division's humor is "fun" and has arguably granted them a broader appeal, this humor is much different from the disempowering anti-queer humor of the mainstream. Indeed, Pansy Division re-appropriates the "queer as joke" of popular homophobic discourse, using humor to empower, rather than to ridicule, homosexual practice and identity. LGBTQIA individuals have long been the butt of the joke in popular media. Think, for example, of the frivolous sissy characters of early radio and cinema, the locker room "fag jokes" of teen comedies or the "It's Pat!" sketches on *Saturday Night Live*, in which indeterminable gender and sexual identity becomes an endless source of heterosexual confusion and amusement. Such humor functions to not only demean queers, but also to contain the threat they might otherwise pose to heteronormative society by, for example, safely enclosing Pat's anti-normative gender/sexual mischief in a cage of goofy, awkward unattractiveness. The sexually-

infused humor of Pansy Division, in contrast, does the opposite: it functions to powerfully assert, and sexily celebrate, anti-normative sexuality on its own terms.

In "Mapping Subversion," D. Robert DeChaine places the irreverent humor of Pansy Division within a more expansive history of the carnivalesque. The carnivalesque, as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin, refers to the conditions in which social and cultural hierarchies are inverted and/or debased, albeit only provisionally. In Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, the medieval carnival functions as the central example of such anti-hierarchical conditions. The carnival is a place in which: pecking orders are upended (i.e., within the playful and parodic space of the carnival, fools and peasants become revered and royalty become deified); vulgarity, bodily excess and carnal pleasures (especially those related to eating and fornicating) are tolerated and encouraged; and spectacle and laughter reign (Bakhtin 7). According to Bakhtin, the carnival offered commoners an escape from the rules, regulations and power structures of the everyday. But, importantly, this escape was only temporary and was sanctioned by those in charge: The carnival provided a bounded field for anti-normative behavior, with the assurance that once participants left the time and space of the carnival, everyday life, with all its constrictions and inequalities, would continue unabated. Thus, the disruptive activities of the carnival did not ultimately lend themselves to revolution, but to the contrary, served to keep the peasantry happy and docile in their enslavement (Bakhtin 7).

DeChaine contends that Pansy Division engages in carnivalesque play via songs and performances that are vulgar, profane and that emphasize bodily and physical pleasures. For example, the band's most requested track is "Bunnies," an upbeat number about a "never-ending non-stop boy fuck" that features the following chorus:

> I got the carrot, you got the stick
> You start to nibble, I start to lick
> And we get our bodies all hot and sweaty and runny
> Then we all fuck like bunnies

Per usual for the band, unmistakable allusions to "boy fucks" and two male partners – one with a "carrot" and the other with a "stick" – preclude potential heterosexual readings. Bucking the imperative that popular music should have "universal appeal," Pansy Division insists on homosexual specificity. Moreover, symbolic references to bunnies, and lines such as "never-ending non-stop boy fuck" and "three times a day is barely enough," evoke a Bacchanalian, hyper-sexual over-indulgence that places the song squarely within the realm of carnivalesque hedonism, even if this carnivalesque hedonism represents, as Bakhtin would have it, a momentary unruly release, rather than a permanent disruption of the status quo.

This foregrounding of sexual abundance not only resonates with the decadence of the carnivalesque, but also the dictates of visual pornography. For, as Linda Williams avers in *Hard Core*, pornography, by design, offers viewers a seductive utopian fantasy of erotic plentitude that contrasts with the scarcity and inelegance of the average sex life (155). "Bunnies" does the same, entreating listeners to immerse themselves in a fantasy of unlimited sexual pleasure in which more is never enough. So do other songs in Pansy Division's corpus, such as "I'm Gonna Be a Slut," a song that reclaims "slut" as a positive appellation, and that includes the following orgiastic chorus:

> I want to live for pleasure,
> I want to live for fun!

So many lovely guys,
I wanna sleep with every one!

"Slut" is, of course, a term most commonly used by men to denigrate sexually active women, since it has generally been socially acceptable for men to be philanderers. In this regard, Pansy Division's celebration of the term "slut" is not all that extraordinary or progressive. At the same time, accusations of promiscuity have long been lobbed against gay men and used to justify anti-gay discrimination and mistreatment (think, for example, of the early years of the HIV/AIDS crisis, when HIV positive gay men were said to deserve their plight because of their "immoral" and "reckless" sexual behaviors). In this light, Pansy Division's embrace of the term "slut" does have a political edge.

Most Pansy Division songs are about sex, but their songs tackle a wide spectrum of sexual themes and practices, from conventional homosex ("Vanilla") to sadomasochism ("James Bondage"), from one time furtive encounters ("Anonymous") to ongoing sexual escapades ("Fuck Buddy"), and from kissing ("Kissed") to blithely switching between anal penetration and reception ("Versatile"). Multiple eroticisms are also visible in the artwork that accompanies their music: Pansy Division's contracted album covers regularly showcase sexual situations and gay pornographic images that further the band's association with the carnality and vulgarity of the carnivalesque. 1993's *Undressed*, designed by Kevin Lyons, depicts a nude longhaired young man superimposed over a field of purple flowers. Cut off at the waist, the man's hand reaches for his unseen penis, in a gesture that suggests masturbation. 1994's *Deflowered*, designed by Marc Gellar, portrays two male youths, Mark Ewert and Moon Trent, lying on a bed, their bodies intertwined and their pajama shirts unbuttoned. Ewert fondles his

own nipple, and Trent looks down at his companion's crotch, where his hand is seemingly nestled. As with *Undressed*, the viewer only sees the upper halves of the boys' bodies. And, on 1995's *Pile Up*, designed by Frank Wiedemann, a sepia-toned sea of male body parts promiscuously overlap and intermingle in what could either be a gay orgy or a punk slam dance. The joke being that, at first glance, these two cultural practices can look remarkably similar, thus, encouraging contemplation and reevaluation of the typically all-male punk mosh pit.

The human figures put on display on these and other Pansy Division covers are primarily what are referred to in queer parlance as "twinks": young, generally white, gay men (in their late teens or early twenties) with slender builds, little or no body hair, and no facial hair. This type of imagery is consistent with the dominant depictions of youth and beauty that crowd the gay and lesbian ghetto and mainstream gay media and, thus, can be criticized for replicating a kind of body fascism in which the old, the fat, the hairy, the non-white and the otherwise "imperfect" are pushed out of the frame. However, as boyish and feminine figures, twinks are also an alternative to the hyper-masculine men generally privileged within gay male culture and society at large: as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick observes in "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay," within mainstream discourse, the "healthy homosexual is one who (a) is already grown up, and (b) acts masculine" (19). For this reason, Pansy Division's twink covers can be said to have *some* subversive appeal, although they may be the least radical aspect of Pansy Division. They also hail a particular audience: young, white gay men who can presumably identify with the white teens/early twenties pictured, as well as older gay men who are attracted to twinks for their sweet good looks and apparent innocence.

It should also be said that Pansy Division's songs, despite their gay content, can be accused of reinforcing a typical male sexual bravado with their idealized musings on the male libido unhinged. Yet, although their songs are certainly androcentric and man crazed by design, they and their artistic output also actively question and trouble traditional forms of masculinity. For instance, in "Fem in a Black Leather Jacket," one of the band's earliest recordings and most popular tunes, Ginoli expresses desire not for the standard straight-acting, macho man showcased in most media targeted to gay men, but for a decidedly feminine man who "looks as good in a skirt as he does in jeans":

> I don't like macho, put it away
> Doesn't appeal to me, straight or gay
> But I know a boy who catches my eye
> He don't act tough, why should he try?
>
> He's a fem in a black leather jacket . . .
> And I wanna take him home with me

Given the ubiquitous, and body normative, refrain of "no fats, no femmes," familiar to anyone who has ever read a gay male personal ad, this desirous ode to a femme sticks out as a rare instance of eroticized femininity within gay male culture.[10] And within Pansy Division's body of work, "Fem" does not stand alone. Other Pansy Division songs confront such things as hetero-masculine presumption ("Cowboys are Frequently Secretly Fond of Each Other") and normative male homosexuality ("Negative Queen"). And tracks like "He Whipped My Ass in Tennis (And Then I Fucked His Ass in Bed),"

[10] Unfortunately, fat men are not given the same erotic treatment as femmes in Pansy Division's songs. In fact, some of Pansy Division's songs are outright fat phobic. For example, "I Can't Sleep," a song about a one night stand contains the lines, "Laying next to this beached whale, I haven't got the choice. He looked good at the time, I must have been out of my mind."

playfully flip conventional masculine/feminine power dynamics, lending credence to the adage that sometimes a "butch in the streets" is indeed a "femme in the sheets."

This satirization of traditional forms of masculinity, both hetero or homo, also occurs within Pansy Division's numerous cover songs. In some, like the band's versions of Iggy Pop's "Loose" and Pete Shelley's "Homosapien," Pansy Division make gay-themed songs more authentic by virtue of their actual, rather than feigned (as is the case with Pop), homosexuality. In others, the band queers the lyrics of popular songs by straight male bands. For example, in Pansy Division's hands, Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" becomes "Smells Like Queer Spirit" and The Ramones's "Rock and Roll High School" becomes "Rock and Roll Queer Bar."[11] These revised versions of classic punk songs not only transform ostensibly straight tunes into gay ones, but also instigate a re-thinking of the heterocentrism of the originals.

By way of illustration, "Rock N' Roll High School" begins with the lines:

> Well I don't care about history
> Rock, rock, rock n' roll high school
> 'Cause that's not where I wanna be
> Rock, rock, rock n' roll high school

Pansy Division's "Rock N' Roll Queer Bar" modifies these opening lines, re-imagining the original's rejection of history as a rejection of heterosexuality. But, more than simply enacting a critique of heterosexuality writ large, Pansy Division's remake also, by implication, critiques the heterocentrism of the original song and band:

[11] "Rock N' Roll Queer Bar" is also the name of a club where Jon Ginoli deejayed along with *San Francisco Bay Times* columnist Don Baird.

> Don't care about heterosexuality
> Rock, rock, rock n' roll queer bar
> Cause that's not what I wanna be
> Rock, rock, rock n' roll queer bar

Pansy Division's cover songs are among their most requested at live shows, speaking to the appeal among queercore fans of straight culture's undoing. But, Pansy Division has also confronted straight culture directly and in the flesh, most famously in 1993 when the band went on tour with LookOut! Records label mates Green Day.[12] At the time, the tremendous commercial success of Green Day's album *Dookie* had catapulted them to mega pop stars who suddenly found themselves playing massive fifteen-hundred seat arenas, rather than the small clubs to which they were previously accustomed. However, this newfound fame attracted listeners who were not necessarily aligned with Green Day's liberal politics. So, the band asked Pansy Division to open for them on tour, in the hopes that Pansy Division and their hyper-(homo)sexual music, would push Green Day's new audience out of its comfort zone. As Ginoli explains:

> They [Green Day] already had a large grassroots following based on their two LookOut! albums – and they had an adverse reaction to mainstream jocks and idiots getting into their band. They thought we would be a good weapon to inflict upon the more narrow-minded segment of their audience. And they loved our songs! There was an MTV special on them, filmed at the end of 1994, where they are seen on their tour bus singing our song "Groovy Underwear." (qtd. in *Homocore*, 61).

Performing songs about such things as well-hung men and anal sex in front of a mostly straight male audience was certainly an act of bravery on the part of Pansy Division. In

[12] In addition to LookOut!, Pansy Division has also made albums with Outpunk Records, Mint Records and Alternative Tentacles, their current label.

fact, there were occasions when their songs were greeted with anger and flying debris. As Ginoli records in his tour diary for November 1, 1994:

> The audience tension during our set was more palpable. In the middle of one song, I got hit in the chest with a full Big Gulp-size cup of ice water. Pelted with coins, at one point I turned to David Ward mid-song to see a trickle of blood dripping down from the middle of his forehead. He'd been hit with a quarter square on, but didn't know he was bleeding. Coins made big dents on my guitar. But, we were defiant, Chris even more in-your-face than before, and it was exhilarating. (Ginoli, *Deflowered*, 104)

Yet, this hostility notwithstanding, Pansy Division also won over many straight fans on the *Dookie* tour, a testament to their ability to both challenge and coax heterosexual audience members through their playful use of sexual humor. As Ginoli insists, "Before we did the Green Day tour, our audience was probably, I don't know, eighty percent gay . . . and after we did the Green Day tour our audience was probably eighty percent straight" (qtd. in *Queer Music Heritage*). What's more, the tour greatly increased Pansy Division's notoriety:

> Without Green Day involving us with their career I think we would have gone on to have a career about as long as we have now, but it would have been a more modest career . . . About half a dozen different LookOut! bands got to do what we did [tour with Green Day], but we got to do it the year they broke through . . . The difference between August [when Pansy Division first toured with Green Day] and October [when Pansy Division toured with Green Day again] was the difference between playing 1,200 seat place and a 15,000 seat place. That was astonishing. By Green Day adopting us as their badge of indie identity it changed our lives. (Personal Interview)

While the tour with Green Day marked the commercial pinnacle of Pansy Division's career, they have continued to release albums and maintain a loyal audience.

And the band remains committed to their sexed-up legacy, as the anthem "20 Years of Cock" from their most recent album, 2009's *That's So Gay*, asserts:

> I'm getting older, but I'm getting bolder
> Yeah I'm aging, but I'm still raging
> I'm getting grayer, but feeling gayer
> I'm not ailing, but I'm always railing
> I've had twenty years of cock, and I'm never gonna stop
> I've had twenty years of cock, and I'm never gonna stop

Although the band has expanded their repertoire to include songs that are more melancholy and serious (especially on 1998's *Absurd Pop Song Romance*), their specialty has remained outlandish and unrestrained songs about gay sex in a raunchy carnivalesque vein. Reveling in myriad bodily pleasures and sexual excesses, the band has provided an unprecedented space for gay men (and others) to publicly engage and contemplate their marginalized and shamed desires, if only for the period of a three-minute punk song or an hour-long on-stage or record performance.

Importantly, like the carnival theorized by Bakhtin, the sexual space opened by Pansy Division offers only a temporary escape from, and symbolic remedy to, the problems facing gay men. As Dechaine notes:

> These songs do not attempt to forecast or prescribe any "solutions" to society's ills – in this case the oppressiveness of heteronormativity – but rather offer diversions and subversions from the circumstances . . . Theirs is not a proposal for radical change. Rather it is a tactical form of evasion and resistance. (28)

But, regardless of this lack of political solutions and the contingency of the ludic space Pansy Division opens up, at a time when assimilationist-minded gays and lesbians are

busy making themselves more acceptable to the mainstream through a process of desexualization, by refusing to stay quiet about their most deviant fantasies and desires, and by encouraging queer listeners to take pride in their own sexualities, Pansy Division performs a kind of radical act.

II. **Bruce LaBruce: Sex as Politics**

As discussed in the last section, through their proverbial "out loud and proud" music and performances, Pansy Division engages in various forms of sexual play that contribute to their progressive sexual politics. In this section, an artist who is even more directly concerned with sex as a form of politics will be considered: the notorious underground filmmaker, zinester and queercore originator Bruce LaBruce. While Pansy Division has done perhaps the most to push the boundaries of acceptable gay sexual expression within queercore's aural realm, within the visual, this distinction belongs to LaBruce. As previously noted, in the zine *J.D.s*, LaBruce regularly combined provocative rants against the punk and gay/lesbian establishments with erotic pictures of naked men and women. Similarly, in his films, intentionally crude stories about skinhead love, terrorist gangs and gay zombies have been articulated via a mixture of dramatic/comic action and sexually explicit interludes replete with erections, fellatio, anal penetration and ejaculation. In the pages that follow, I discuss the collision of gay sex and radical politics in LaBruce's films, á la the theories of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse.

LaBruce's films are noted most often for their sexually explicit content. All of his feature films to date – *No Skin Off My Ass* (1991), *Super 8 1/2* (1993), *Hustler White* (1996), *Skin Gang* (1999), *The Raspberry Reich* (2004), *Otto, Or Up With Dead People*

(2008), and *L.A. Zombie* (2010) – contain scenes of unsimulated sexual activity. LaBruce combines this unsimulated sex with radical politics in films about anti-corporate terrorist organizations (*The Raspberry Reich*) and interracial couples targeted by neo-Nazis (*Skin Gang*). This is all done in LaBruce's signature style, which generally includes: grainy black and white Super 8 film stock; steadi-cam; non-professional actors (including, most conspicuously, LaBruce himself); and a low-production-values style that matches punk's cultivation of a rough and raw authenticity, via such things as non-synchronized sound and poorly framed shots.

Given LaBruce's penchant for mixing explicit sex, militant politics and punk aesthetics, reviews of his films have tended to focus on their uncertain status as either art or pornography. LaBruce's films deliberately blur the line between artistry and obscenity and, moreover, self-consciously foreground the impossibility of delineating the two. As film scholar Eugenie Brinkema remarks:

> [LaBruce's] corpus not only discursively exists on the boundary between the two fields [of art cinema and pornography], but explicitly theorizes its position thusly. In turn, his works bear witness to the aesthetic and historical crisis of this borderland, speaking the wild language of the indeterminable. (97)

This "wild language of the indeterminable," born from LaBruce's mischievous intermingling of porn, punk, politics and the avant garde, has made it difficult for his work to find a comfortable home in either the art or porn cinema canons, something that is undoubtedly fine with LaBruce who has made a career out of deliberately failing to fit in. His films are at once too pornographic for the art film crowd and too intellectual for the average porn consumer. But, pornography has also been a major selling point of his

work, especially for gay male audiences seduced by the promise of witnessing taboo and unsimulated male-on-male action in his films. *L.A. Zombie*, for example, was largely sold on its guarantee of outrageous gay zombie sex, including a rumored scene of a zombie shoving his erect penis into a corpse's wound. And although the controversial sexual material in LaBruce's films has sometimes had unintended negative effects, as when *L.A. Zombie* was denied a public screening at the Melbourne International Film Festival,[13] it has also guaranteed LaBruce attention from a wider public. Indeed, LaBruce is probably the most well known of all queercore artists due in large part to the risky pornographic content of his work and the buzz it has generated, in addition to his own self-promotion.

But, for LaBruce, sex is not simply a matter of shock and commerce. It is, as already stated, also a matter of politics. Indeed, LaBruce has sometimes adopted the moniker of "pornographer" for political reasons: to confront the hypocrisy of a society that secretly loves pornography, but openly hates the pornographer. By aligning himself with the abject pornographer, LaBruce rejects the safety of "artist" and "auteur," distances himself from classism and elitism, and (re-)establishes his commitment to an outsider ethic. Or, as LaBruce explains:

[13] *L.A. Zombie* was scheduled to have its second and third screening as part of the Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) in Australia in the August 2010. However, the Australian Film Classification Board advised festival organizers that the film could not be screened as it was likely to be refused classification. Under Australian law, films that are refused classification may not be imported, sold, screened or distributed. In defiance of this censorship, the Melbourne Underground Film Festival (MUFF), which occurs concurrently with MIFF, but screens films regarded as too controversial for the mainstream event, held an illegal screening of *L.A. Zombie* on the 29th of August. While police did not attend or stop the screening, that night they raided the home of MUFF Festival Director Richard Wolstencroft. Wolstencroft admitted to police that an August 29 screening had occurred but claimed to have destroyed the only copy of the film afterwards. Victoria police have stated that he will face court at a later date.

> People who watch pornography don't want to be reminded that there are people who make pornography. Or they have this weird fantasy about pornography where they don't want it to be made by real people. So they are more than willing to consume pornography – to watch it, to use it in their sex lives. But, they look down their noses or keep a distance toward people who actually make it or appear in it. Which I find even today. I mean it drives me crazy. That's why I'm always very straightforward about calling myself a pornographer and I express solidarity with pornographers, even though I think a lot of it is not so interesting. Because there is this prevalent prejudice against people who make porn or appear in it. (Personal Interview)

In line with queercore's anti-normative ideology, LaBruce is also attracted to pornography as a genre that inherently challenges homophobia and sexual shame. Gay pornography defiantly asserts male-male desire in the face of homophobic condemnation and suppression: While "homosexual desire has been constructed as perverse and unspeakable; gay porn does speak/show gay sex" (Dyer 123). Pornography is also a counter to the safe, desexualized representations of the assimilationist contingent of gay and lesbian culture, apparent on U.S. television shows like *Will and Grace* and, more recently, *The New Normal*, for example. In fact, through blunt depictions of explicit same-sex desires, queer pornography arguably retains some of the in-your-face sexuality of post-Stonewall activist groups, like the Gay Liberation Front, whose members, as mentioned earlier, advocated "turning on to gay sex" and defiantly marched in the streets shouting "Perverts of the world, unite!" As LaBruce puts it, in a world of creeping sexual conservatism, pornography offers one of the only spaces in which explicit, willfully aberrant gay desires are still publicized:

> I think that porn is the last bastion of gay radicalism on a certain level. Because it's this unapologetic, straightforward representation of gay sex and a lot of people, a lot of liberals for example, don't want to face that kind of bald reality. It's the old thing: What it boils down to is the gay

> conservative movement has tried to distance itself from its more extreme elements, from the sexual extremes that were so central to the early movement. And the [heterosexual] liberals who kind of support homosexuality, or who are tolerant of it, basically are telling gays, "As long as you don't flaunt it, as long as you're well behaved and tone it down, then we'll accept it." So, porn is kind of the last place where those rules don't apply. (Personal Interview)

The foregrounding of sex as politics in LaBruce's films places his work in-line with the theories of Reich and Marcuse, two psychoanalysts whom LaBruce himself cites as influences. Reich, a protégé of Sigmund Freud, was an Austrian Marxist who integrated psychoanalytic insights into a critique of capitalism, devoting his energy to "filling in the theory of alienation as it applies to the sexual realm" (Reich xiv-xv). Freud believed that libidinal energies are powerful and disruptive forces that need to be sublimated for the maintenance of a well-adjusted society. For Freud, the "normal" child is the child that breaks free of attachment to oral and anal pleasures (and to parents) and seeks an erotic object of the opposite sex for genital intercourse. In contrast, Reich avowed that all consensual sexual expression is natural and that social control of libidinal energies by the family, social institutions, and the state is destructive. Ultimately, for Reich, sexual repression is hazardous as it has the potential to produce authoritarian and fascist behavior. By insisting on the link between domination and sexual repression and for arguing that *sexual* liberation is the foundation of *social* liberation, Reich (along with others, like feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir who argued for women's empowerment and social equality via their sexual liberation) had a profound influence on the 1960s U.S. sexual revolution as well as subsequent thinkers, like Norman O. Brown and Marcuse, both of whom have stressed sexuality as irreducibly bound together with the social.

In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse similarly rejects Freud's theory that sublimation is key to the advancement of the healthy individual and a productive society, and maintains that sexual repression is responsible for much of the violence, apathy and spiritual malaise in technologically advanced cultures. As an antidote to sexual repression, Marcuse proposes sexual liberation through the cultivation of a "polymorphous perverse"[14] sexuality that eschews a narrow focus on genital heterosexual intercourse. Under Marcuse, homosexuality, as the radical standard bearer of sex for the sake of pleasure rather than procreation, is a consummate form of radical hedonism that repudiates forms of repressive sexuality organized around genital heterosexuality and biological reproduction:

> Against a society which employs sexuality as a means for a useful end, the perversions uphold sexuality as an end itself: they place themselves outside the domination of the performance of principle . . . and they establish libidinal relationships which society must ostracize because they threaten to reverse the process of civilization which turned the organism into an instrument of work. (50)

Together Reich and Marcuse suggest that the best defense against capitalism, state suppression, and human rights violations is a politicizing of erotic pleasure.

Directly influenced by both Reich and Marcuse, LaBruce uses cinema to disseminate the idea of political liberation through sexual emancipation, most obviously in *The Raspberry Reich*, a pornographic account of a neo-terrorist organization loosely

[14] "Polymorphous perversity" is a concept originally articulated by Freud in relation to young children. According to Freud, polymorphous perversity, or the ability to gain sexual gratification outside of normative sexual behaviors, is an expected aspect of human life from infancy to around age five. Reich, however, turns this concept on its head by insisting that polymorphous perversity is a normal sexual disposition at any age.

based on The Red Army Faction.[15] In *The Raspberry Reich* scenes of hardcore heterosexual fucking are interspersed with photographs of revolutionary leaders (e.g., Gudrun Ensslin, Ulrike Meinhof, Andreas Baader, and Che Guevara), militant slogans that flash across the screen in bold red letters (e.g., "Heterosexuality is the opiate of the masses!," "Join the homosexual intifada!" and "Put your Marxism where your mouth is!"), and a plot about a female-led hetero-male terrorist gang that engages in homosexual activity as a means of expressing solidarity with the oppressed. At several points during the film, the sexual action pauses while the characters recite long passages from Marcuse and Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, a key text of the Situationists International. These juxtapositions create a wild amalgam of sex and politics that seek to arouse the spectator on both fronts simultaneously, highlighting the sexiness of politics and the seriousness of sex.

There is no doubt that the combined elements of sex and politics in *The Raspberry Reich* directly correspond to the theories of Reich and Marcuse. Indeed, both thinkers are directly referenced in the film. But LaBruce's understanding of sex is ultimately less optimistic than either of these thinkers. While LaBruce champions uncensored sexual expression, he is also cognizant that such expression is always in danger of being appropriated by the capitalist machinery, weakening its revolutionary appeal: Although sex can be used toward revolutionary ends, it can also be used to further the interests of commerce as usual. *Sex and the City*, a popular U.S. television show now on DVD, comes to mind here with its depictions of female sexual agency that go hand-in-hand with a high fashion consumerist ideology. More to the point is the mainstream pornography

[15] The Red Army Faction was one of post-WWII Germany's most violent left-wing terrorist organizations. They were dedicated to armed resistance against what they viewed as the fascist state.

industry itself, which manufactures (often sexist and racist) images of sexual freedom and pleasure for financial profit. Accordingly, as much as LaBruce is concerned with sex-as-politics, he is also attuned to the sex-money nexus and its deadening effects on erotic liberty. LaBruce's films routinely call attention to the multiple linkages that can be drawn between sex and money in a capitalist society that systematically converts human bodies and pleasures into sexual commodities.

Super 8 1/2, for example, is a film "stuffed with transactions and transgressions, both sexual and economic," centered on a washed-up porn star (played by LaBruce) exploited both by the sex industry and an opportunistic lesbian filmmaker wanting to make a name for herself in the avant garde art scene of Toronto (Waugh 225). In other words, the film provides a not-so-subtle commentary on the way in which both the porn and art worlds (worlds in which LaBruce is himself immersed) exploit sex and objectify bodies for cash. Likewise, *Hustler White* spotlights an array of sleazy characters on Los Angeles's Sunset Boulevard, from the gay-for-pay hustlers to the sadistic johns and unscrupulous researcher (played by none other than LaBruce) who use these hustlers for their own selfish needs. *Hustler White* also calls attention to the constant exchange of sex and money necessitated by the business of prostitution. As Thomas Waugh notes:

> There are no fewer than four insert shots of cash being exchanged within sexual-exchange scenes, usually close-ups of bills being piled on a bedsheet. The last one is under [star Tony] Ward's voice-over explanation of the fluctuations and devaluations in sex-work rates, and the dialogue elsewhere is no less concrete. (Waugh 228).

By highlighting the sex-money nexus, the commodification of bodies and the potential financial abuses of sex, LaBruce's own participation in "selling sex" is symbolically acknowledged. While this may do little to prevent his films from becoming standard exercises in sexual exploitation, LaBruce also employs various distancing techniques in an attempt to guard against commodification. All of his films feature film-within-film structures that self-consciously call attention to the audience's own lewd voyeurism, similar to Bertolt Brecht's deliberate destruction of theatrical illusion in his plays designed to elicit rational self-reflection. In *Raspberry Reich*, for instance, the terrorists produce a sex video of a kidnapped young man in the hopes of using the video to acquire money from his rich industrialist father. The spectator of *The Raspberry Reich* thus watches a doubly-mediated scene of the young man having sex with one of the terrorist gang members: the meta-film by LaBruce and the micro-film ostensibly shot by the terrorist filmmakers, whom the audience witnesses filming the sex scene, in addition to seeing the sex scene itself. Thus, the abduction tape itself becomes a porn movie, and through distance and critical viewing, the audience is made aware of their collusion in the pornographic process.

Another distancing element at work in LaBruce's output is their low-budget, D.I.Y. style. As previously mentioned, this style includes dark, grainy images, non-sync sound and amateur acting, all of which call attention to the films's constructedness, interrupting the seamless illusion of the mainstream cinematic apparatus: These formal elements function to make the viewer conscious of her/his spectatorship and to remove her/him from the sexual fantasies depicted on screen. For example, in *No Skin Off My Ass* the spectator's voyeuristic access to the film's multiple scenes of unsimulated sex is

continually blocked by out of focus, and unconventionally (for the 1990s) black and white, images as well as non-synch sound, which creates an odd rupture between the activities being depicted on-screen and the sounds of pleasure heard on the soundtrack.

Finally, humor also defends against facile cinematic consumption. Overacting, cheeky dialogue and absurd scenarios function to keep LaBruce's sexual representations at a remove through the use of a detached comic irony. In fact, LaBruce's humor is often so strong that it threatens to turn his films into feature-length jokes. But, as LaBruce himself states, humor also allows his films to appeal to a broader audience. That is, just as with Pansy Division, humor reels in viewers who would otherwise be turned off by a more sternly iterated politics:

> I really don't think people will pay attention to you as an artist if you present yourself as someone that is making work that's political. With *Raspberry Reich* I wanted to present this extreme leftist discourse. It was after 9/11 and the left was dead in America and I just wanted to get this discourse reinvigorated somehow. But, I knew if I tried to do it in any serious way that it would just be ignored or dismissed. So, essentially what I did was just used the rhetoric and the actual political discourse of these extreme left wing terrorists groups like the SLA and the Baader-Meinhoff and the Weathermen, and bombarded the audience with it, but in the context of a kind of almost bedroom farce or an absurd kind of satire. So, what they're actually saying, the actual political discourse that's being presented, I totally agree with. But, I'm just presenting it in a more palatable way. In a humorous way and a romantic way. (Personal Interview)

As all of this suggests, LaBruce's films are not straightforward in their approach to the erotic. Sex is presented as a radical political act, but one that is precariously positioned between authenticity and exploitation, freedom and control, seriousness and humor. And while his pornographic images are intended to arouse, humor, self-

reflexivity and other distancing techniques keep the critical viewer one step removed. Add to this the often mixed messages and ideological complexity of LaBruce's plots, and you are left with texts that encourage an unusually wide spectrum of interpretations and engagements. *The Raspberry Reich*, for example, gives voice to pro-sex, anti-corporate, anti-capitalist politics, but also operates as a critique of the left, skewering people who either don't practice what they preach, or who become so self-righteous and intractable in their beliefs that they themselves become oppressive and dogmatic. As such, in a scathing indictment of political insincerity, *The Raspberry Reich* ends with terrorist gang leader, Gudrun, becoming everything she supposedly despises: a bourgeois, wedded mother, pushing a baby carriage down the street, still (and now clearly hypocritically) spouting her revolutionary rhetoric.

Nevertheless, in spite of the complexity of LaBruce's films, and the caution LaBruce takes, through techniques of distanciation, to avoid simply glamorizing or commodifying sex, looking across his body of work, the impression that one is invariably left with is that sex, in line with the theories of Marcuse and Reich, is an extremely potent and positive sociopolitical force. In his first feature, *No Skin Off My Ass*, for example, sex has the power to turn a hypermasculine skinhead into a sensitive gay punk: *No Skin* uses the sway of sex to counter the skinhead's heteronormative articulation.

No Skin's narrative begins with an effeminate hairdresser (LaBruce) discovering an attractive, and apparently mute, skinhead (Klaus Von Brucker) on a park bench. The hairdresser brings the skinhead home, gives him a bath, the skinhead runs away then comes back, and the two eventually end up in bed together, filming themselves eating peanut butter, exchanging blow jobs, and making love. Along the way we meet the

skinhead's sister (G. B. Jones), a nascent filmmaker preoccupied with revolutionary politics and her ongoing video project, *The Girls of the SLA*.

A no-budget cinematic concoction, *No Skin*, as David McIntosh observes, "reworks *J.D.s'* grim, high contrast black-and-white photocopy imagery and convoluted fetish signs of skins colliding with queers into a barely touching love story" (145). Although fictional, *No Skin*'s "barely touching love story" has some basis in reality, following as it does on the heels of LaBruce's own troubled romantic fling with a skinhead: "I even fell in love with a skinhead hustler who hated fags, and during our tempestuous relationship, got the shit beat out of me on more than one occasion" (LaBruce, "The Wild," 193). In *No Skin,* LaBruce gets creative revenge on his past skinhead lover-cum-tormenter, substituting the violent reality for a happy ending and a heavy dose of eroticism.

Eroticism is, in fact, in the air from the very beginning of *No Skin*. The film opens with an overhead shot of a gritty Toronto street, as various skinhead boys wander the sidewalk. On the soundtrack, Beefeater sings the repeated refrain, "skinhead guys just turn me on," while LaBruce's camera-eye remains transfixed on the skins sauntering in and out of frame. Finally, the camera settles on one skin in particular (Von Brucker)—described in LaBruce's script as "an absolute dreamboat: nineteen, baby-faced, blank, flawless" —as he stands outside Hercules, a used clothing store. These images of meandering skins are juxtaposed with shots of the hairdresser watching Robert Altman's *That Cold Day in the Park* on television, and are followed by a scene in which the hairdresser observes, and then picks up, the skinhead in a park. Together, this opening sequence, with its focus on various forms of scopophilia – from the observation of skins

on the street, to the watching of a film at home, in the true LaBruce fashion of distanciation – self-consciously evokes the interconnections between the pleasures of cinema watching and the pleasures of (homo)sexual cruising.[16] The spectator of *No* Skin is no mere bystander, as they are compulsorily aligned with LaBruce's voyeuristic camera and the sexual fetishization it enacts as it cruises sexy skinheads on the street. To watch *No Skin* is, therefore, to be compelled into a queer mode of viewing, or perhaps more properly a *queercore* mode of viewing, as the spectator is effectively situated in the position of queer punk's desire.

The eroticization of the skinhead is most apparent in the unsimulated pornographic sex scenes scattered throughout the film. In the first, the skin masturbates in the hairdresser's tub, as the camera moves lasciviously in on the action. In the second, the hairdresser has an erotic dream in which he steps on the skin and then licks his head in a softly-lit close-up. The skin, in turn, licks the hairdresser's boots and a toilet, the camera focusing, in extreme close-up, on the sensual roughness of his tongue. In the third, the hairdresser treats the skin to an erotic head shaving in an intimate two-shot reminiscent of Andy Warhol's minimalist take on coiffeur eroticism, *Haircut* (1963). In the fourth, another fantasy sequence, also in two-shot, the hairdresser performs fellatio on the skin in the bathtub, before the two masturbate themselves to climax. And, in the fifth and final, the hairdresser sucks peanut butter off the skin's toes, and the two roll around

[16] Although not directly related, there is an affinity between my argument here and Bruce Brassell's thoughts on cinema and cruising in "*My Hustler*: Gay Spectatorship as Cruising." In this article, Brasell posits an alternative to psychoanalytic accounts of film spectatorship, one not predicated on heterosexual male positioning, but on the gay cultural practice of cruising: checking out potential sexual partners on the street through the exchange of occassional subtle and flirtatious glances. Brasell contends that the "cruise" or "glance" is a better way to describe film spectatorship than the "gaze," as it suggests a selective, non-unified spectator; a spectator who is sometimes forced or compelled to look away; and a spectator engaged in the contemplative reading of a film.

in bed, exchanging oral sex as a diegetic camera zooms in, ostensibly becoming the third in a quasi–ménage-a-trois.

The eroticization of the skin within these sexual interludes is one of *No Skin's* most complicated and confounding aspects. For one, this eroticization demarcates the film's difference from more mainstream gay romances – think, for example, of *The Broken Hearts Club* (2000) or *Eating Out* (2004) – films populated with handsome, bourgeois, bland white men. For the skinhead punk, in his stereotypical associations with bigotry and violence, is the ultimate bad queer object, while in *No Skin,* he is foregrounded as the ultimate in desirability, "precisely because of the politically incorrect nature of the desire he embodies" (Healey 172). *No Skin* intentionally confronts the gay (and lesbian) mainstream by celebrating "the skinhead as the romantic outsider, an erotic focus beyond the confines of the recognizable closet of gay identity" (Healey 172).

At the same time, the skin's "bad object" connotations, including the suggestion of racism and fascism, are troubling. To be clear, there is no evidence that the white skin at the center of LaBruce's film is in any way bigoted. Indeed, the film suggests the opposite. For example, in one scene undoubtedly designed to upend our expectations, the skin listens intently, and with respectful admiration, to an anti-racist interview from the 1970s with infamous activist-academic Angela Davis. However, on a symbolic level, at least part of the skin's appeal, to both the intra-textual hairdresser and extra-textual gay male viewer, lies in his perceived violent, rough and rowdy ways that are inescapably tinged with racism/fascism. Accordingly, the film plays on a wider history of gay male erotic fascination with fascist figures. In "The Killer in Me is the Killer in You: Homosexuality and Fascism," a speech first delivered by Judith Halberstam at the

University of Southern California in October of 2010, Halberstam explores this history, noting the oft-contradictory response to fascism within gay male culture: simultaneous anger and arousal, as evidenced by the work of artists like Tom of Finland (discussed later in this chapter) who eroticize otherwise oppressive authoritarian figures in their work. Similarly, in "Fascinating Fascism" Susan Sontag wrestles with the contradictory nature of gay male fascist engagement via such thing as sadomasochistic practices of bondage and flagellation, opining that such fascist play produces a paradoxical state for gay men, as they engage in erotic identification with an authoritarian form that ultimately forbids the very expression of same-sex desire.

The white focus of LaBruce's films also needs to be acknowledged here. That is, all of the characters in *No Skin* are white, as are most of the characters in LaBruce's other films. Thus, while LaBruce points toward anti-racism and racial inclusivity through such things as *No Skin*'s auditory reference to Davis, people of color (not to mention their thoughts and ideas) are almost entirely absent from his films. This type of, at best, half-hearted anti-racism is not something that LaBruce alone can be accused. Many, especially white, queercore artists have tended to ignore issues of race all together. For example, the previously discussed and – with the exception of Latino drummer Luis Illades – entirely white band Pansy Division does not engage questions of race (including their own whiteness) in their playfully sexual songs and on-stage performances. When queercore artists do engage issues of race, they, like LaBruce, tend to do so without the inclusion of actual non-white bodies and voices.

However, while it is true that *No Skin* eroticizes the figure of the skinhead, and this remains one of the film's most confounding aspects, the film also uses its eroticism

to undermine the traditionally hypermasculine, and symbolically fascist, skin. Specifically, the sexual interludes between the hairdresser and skin engage, and strive to collapse, the ideologically loaded oppositions of hairdresser/skin, effeminate/macho, gay/straight, queer/punk. One example is the bath scene. Returning from the park, the hairdresser runs a bath, assists the skin in disrobing, and smokes a cigarette while the skin masturbates in the tub. Distracted by his sexual performance, the hairdresser drifts into fantasy: a black-and-white still montage of tough skinheads with tattoos, aggressive postures, and the typical working-class garb of buttoned up shirts, denim/donkey jackets, army greens, sta-prest trousers/working jeans, industrial boots and suspenders. These images extend the film's fetishization of the skin. Yet here the skin is also desired with a measure of irony, as the soundtrack that accompanies the montage is none other than a campy orchestral version of "My Favorite Things"—a juxtaposition that informs spectators that LaBruce's tongue is planted firmly in cheek.

Another example is the second to last sexual interlude, in which the hairdresser daydreams of giving the skin a blowjob in a bathtub. On the soundtrack, the hairdresser reads from Nick Knight's *Skinhead:* "Generally, short hair is associated in the public mind with convicts, prison camp inmates and the military. It was exactly this mean look which the skin wishes to cultivate" (13). Then, as the hairdresser begins to caress the skin's face and playfully pinch his nipples, the voice-over continues with theoretical insights by subcultural theorist Dick Hebdige:

> Oi [skinhead punk music] is a ritual purge on everything that doesn't sound like the voice of the Mob with its back against the wall. It aims to root out all the "impurities" of "soft," "pretentious" post-punk rock—

> artiness, "weird," spacey lyrics, a studio dependent electronic sound, a flirtation with sexually ambiguous imagery. All these "taints" have been boiled away in the good old-fashioned aggro of Oi. (29)

This scene climaxes, both narratively and sexually, with the hairdresser ejaculating on the skin, while his excited voice-over describes the various styles and sizes of the skin's Doc Marten boots. Via this sexual swoop, the ostensible heteromasculinity of the punk (what we hear about on the soundtrack) is pitted against the queer reality (what we see in the profilmic event). If Hebdige informs us that the skin is opposed to all things "soft," "arty," weird," and "sexually ambiguous," LaBruce shows us the opposite.

The resignification of the skin, begun in these earlier sexual interludes, comes to fruition at the film's conclusion. After visiting his sister, who urges him to fuck the hairdresser, the skin and hairdresser are reunited and finally have sex in the real. The skin turns out to be a "total fag" after all. In the end, *No Skin* satirizes the skin, impugning his exaggerated masculinity and connotatively fascist ways as a hypocritical front for a repressed homosexuality. Yet the conclusion of *No Skin* also suggests that the queer and the *skinhead* punk may still be incompatible. Throughout the film, the skin's sister begs him to forgo his shaved head for the earlier punk style of the Mohawk, and in the end he acquiesces. It is this symbolic transformation to a "classic" punk style that facilitates his foray into homosexuality. As the big sister muses, "Everything turned out okay for my brother. His hairdresser friend gave him a Mohawk and then he gave him a blow job." From this angle, the skin is not so much queered as he is converted to a punk form more amenable to fellatio from a hairdresser. As such, the final moments of *No Skin,* the punk and the hairdresser screwing to Bomb's punk anthem "Be A Fag," is

readable as an intimately articulated vision of a queer/punk utopia—the queer and the punk literally intertwined in a physical manifestation of *J.D.s*' goal to put "the punk back in the queer and the queer back in punk." While *No Skin*'s politically incorrect elements uproot hackneyed homosexuality, explicit homosex upends the skin.

This emphasis on the transformative power of sex is on display also in LaBruce's most recent film, *L.A. Zombie*, a film in which sex has the ability to bring the dead back to life. In *L.A. Zombie*, a homeless man, played by the late porno star Francois Sagat, roams the streets of Los Angeles in search of dead bodies, which he "fucks back to life" by penetrating open wounds on the corpses's bodies. In one scene, for example, a corporate businessman is shot to death by his business partner in a deserted industrial landscape, only to be fellated back to life by zombie Sagat. While the living version of the businessman was an unfeeling capitalist suit, his undead self is a man of carnal pleasure who enthusiastically penetrates the zombie anally before ejaculating onto his back. And, in another scene, zombie Sagat has sex with a deceased homeless man inside a fly-infested cardboard box house. Remarkably, the sexual interaction between the zombie and the homeless man not only resurrects the latter, but magically transforms his tiny box dwelling into a giant warehouse in which the couple assumes multiple positions, fucking in erotic abandon.

Thus, like *No Skin*, L.*A. Zombie* thus represents a logical extension of LaBruce's Marcuse and Reich-informed sex-as-politic platform. The film positions sex as a vital transformative energy, and as perhaps the one thing that can resurrect a dying queer culture, symbolically, and not without irony, represented not by the walking undead, but by the living drones of normative hetero-capitalist society. Although LaBruce is not so

naïve to believe that sex can cure all sociopolitical ills, his cinematic canon nevertheless exists as a strenuous resuscitation of the sex-positive radicalism that once defined queer activism and that is slowly disappearing under what LaBruce calls "the new assimilationist gay conservatism" (Personal Interview).

LaBruce's sex positive radicalism is not without its flaws. In most of his films, white, masculine, thin-to-muscular men are figured as the ultimate in desirability, reinforcing hegemonic norms of race, gender and attractiveness. And while LaBruce's films all feature compelling female characters, it is LaBruce's male characters who are central and most fully realized. Indeed, LaBruce's vision of emancipation through sexual freedom appears to largely exclude women and men of color, as white male characters are, with few exceptions (e.g., the African American lead in *Skin Gang*), the only ones who participate in LaBruce's scenes of revolutionary, unsimulated sex: In LaBruce's world, sexual autonomy, liberation and erotic expression are largely white, male prerogatives. The same, however, cannot be said of the world created by LaBruce's fellow queercore instigator, G.B. Jones.

III. G.B. Jones: Sex as Normative Critique

As just established, Bruce LaBruce addresses the exploitative elements of the sex-money nexus in his work and struggles against sexual commodification through such distancing techniques as film-within-film structures. Yet, in-line with the philosophies of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse, he ultimately concentrates more forcefully on the sociopolitically liberating aspects of sex via pornographic films in which sex has the power to turn dubious straight skinheads into cool queer punks and callous capitalist suits

into sentient queer zombies. The opposite can be said of LaBruce's one-time collaborator, artist and filmmaker G.B. Jones. Although Jones produces queer art that is undeniably arousing, she is also sharply attuned to the exploitation of sex and its disciplinary effects.

Central to Jones's sexual critique is an understanding of sex as entangled in a perpetual spiral of mutually reinforcing power and pleasure in which hegemonic authority feeds off erotic deviancy. That is, Jones is keenly aware that while public sexual expressions can be (or at least can *feel*) emancipatory, these expressions are never entirely free from the workings of normative power or the impact of invasive surveillance. Thus, while Pansy Division is in conversation with Mikhail Bakhtin and the carnivalesque and LaBruce with Reich, Marcuse and the generativity of libidinal energy, Jones is most clearly aligned with the theories of Michel Foucault.

In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that power does not, as is commonly believed, operate to repress sexuality (the "repressive hypothesis"), but actively produces sexuality through an incitement to discourse.[17] That is, within institutions, such as those related to the fields of medicine, psychiatry and criminology, sex is not stifled or suppressed, but is in fact constantly spoken of, articulated, mapped, defined, named and categorized: modern societies have "dedicated themselves to speaking of [sex] *ad infinitum*" (35). Through a process of enunciation and disclosure, sexualities are discovered and subsequently assessed and hierarchized, elicited through impelled declarations of "guilt" and then delineated, appraised and pathologized. Through this confessional production of sexual "truth" ("*scientia sexualis*"), "unnatural" sex becomes

[17] For Foucault, discourse encompasses more than just talking. It includes all institutions, technologies, experts, and systems of knowledge, and not merely what is said, but what, under specific historical conditions, is capable of being said, known, or comprehended.

the favored object of social construction and scrutiny. Homosexuality, specifically, is called into being only to be positioned as an example of sexual abnormality situated in mutually reinforcing contradistinction to "normal" heterosexuality.[18]

Thus, for Foucault, sexual expression is never purely liberating, regardless of how bold or anti-normative it appears to be. While individuals may derive pleasure and a sense of power from subverting the status quo through aberrant sexual acts, social observers also obtain pleasure and power from monitoring, categorizing and assessing these same behaviors. In this regard, within a Foucaultian logic, pornography is not a signifier of sexual freedom (as Reich, Marcuse and LaBruce might have it), but a mechanism through which sexual acts are witnessed, scrutinized and contained. This is something of which Jones is clearly cognizant, as in her film *The Lollipop Generation* (discussed shortly), the pornographer is figured as an exploitative agent who perverts and manipulates authentic sexual expression through his colonizing camera lens.

Generally speaking, the distorting influence of visual surveillance, including the kind intrinsic to pornography, is a key theme for both Foucault and Jones. The image of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, a prison constructed in such a manner that a guard can see every prisoner at all times, is at the heart of Foucault's perspective on surveillance.[19] Foucault maintains that our society is one in which individuals, like prisoners in the panopticon, come to internalize the gaze of the other: Unsure of when, or from where, they are being watched, individuals develop an understanding of themselves as

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[18] Indeed, Michel Foucualt argues that the explosion in sexual discourse produced the very idea of the homosexual. One of his most well known quotes: "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration, the homosexual was now a species" (43).

[19] The Panopticon is a type of prison building designed by English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in 1785. The concept of the design allows a guard to observe all prisoners from a centrally located tower, without the incarcerated being able to tell whether they are being watched, thereby conveying to the imprisoned the feeling of constant observation, and thus self-surveillance.

permanently exposed to the observation and judgment of others. As a consequence, they learn to regulate their behavior as if a punitive agent is always watching. Picking up on this idea of Foucaultian panopticism, Jones's films exhibit a heightened awareness of, and guarded orientation toward, the virtual omnipresence of media surveillance (a phenomenon that has only increased since Jones first started making queercore art, on account of the Internet and celebrity culture).

For example, Jones's first film, *Unionville* (1985), tells the true story of a cult leader and convicted murderer from Jones's hometown. More specifically, the film reconstructs the news media's coverage of the event while a voice-over recounts the context for the murder as a dialogue between two local friends. Featuring simulated news media vignettes in which people run into courtrooms with coats over their heads as the press hounds them for information, the film is an incisive commentary on the role of sensationalistic publicity in constructing the criminal and the crime. As Jones describes the film:

> It [*Unionville*] was about the intersection of crime and the media and how the media takes things and alters them [sic]. It was a contrast between the mediation and the reality: the documentation versus the events that happened. I was interested in living in a surveillance society, as I call it, where we are monitored constantly, with cameras everywhere, which is actually just becoming more and more prevalent. (Personal Interview)

This theme of omnipresent, distorting observation is also central to Jones's second film, *The Troublemakers* (1990), in which Jones documents the petty shoplifting crimes committed by a cadre of her juvenile delinquents friends, paying acute attention to the

authoritarian mechanisms of newspapers and surveillance cameras that record and interpret their every illicit move.

The theme of *sexual* surveillance, however, turns up most prominently in Jones's most recent film, *The Lollipop Generation* (2008). *The Lollipop Generation*, a feature-length production fifteen years in the making,[20] takes on the male-dominated sex industry and its exploitation of at-risk youths, fully raising the specter of Foucault and the conception of pornography as a mechanism through which sexual acts are elicited, observed, and, ultimately, contained. That is, *The Lollipop Generation* is primarily concerned with the ways in which pornographers use media to extract, distort and exploit sexuality and, specifically, the sexuality of queer youths. The film proposes a solution to this predicament, and it is the usual punk one: taking hold of the means of production and doing it oneself, with "doing it" here referring to the acts of both media production and sexual activity. Hegemonic surveillance and the social production of sexual "truth" are pitted against creative self-representation and open-ended sexual re-definition.

The Lollipop Generation centers on Georgie (played by Von Brucker), a white teen girl who leaves home after her father berates her in a homophobic diatribe ("You can't even try to be a decent normal person for my sake, can you?!"). Homeless, Georgie finds refuge in a city park where she makes fast friends with Peanut (K.C. Class) and Janie (Jane Danger), two young queer runaways who turn tricks for money. Over the course of the film, the trio unites with other queer misfits, and together they negotiate their way through an onslaught of johns and pornographers bent on taking advantage of their vulnerability. Featuring an ensemble cast of folks familiar within queercore and riot

[20] There are several reasons why *The Lollipop Generation* took fifteen years to finalize, including the difficult of wrangling a cast dispersed across North America and Jones's lack of finishing funds. (Personal Interview.)

grrrl – including drag star Vaginal Davis, K Records co-founder Calvin Johnson, Hidden Cameras frontman Joel Gibb, and Jen Smith, the woman credited with coining the term "riot grrrl" – *The Lollipop Generation*, in addition to being a fiction narrative, is a quasi-documentary of the 1990s underground music scene.

The Lollipop Generation, in fact, began its life as a documentary. It was initially a filmic record of the people and places Jones encountered while touring with her band Fifth Column. It was only later that Jones decided to re-work this footage into a feature length narrative film. *The Lollipop Generation*'s history as a tour diary is still evident in, for example, a set of early montages in which the audience is presented with multiple shots taken from car windows of locations across North America that feature queerly-inflected billboards (e.g., "Lesbo Real Estate and Home Center") and roadside oddities (e.g., a dilapidated restaurant named "Thelma and Louise"), as well as pornographic neon city lights (e.g., "Adult Movies!").[21]

The documentary quality of *The Lollipop Generation* is also emphasized by Jones's use of Super 8, her consistent film format of choice. Super 8 is of particular significance given its historic associations with home/amateur and pornographic filmmaking. In *The Lollipop Generation*, Jones makes use of Super 8's links to both. That is, the Super 8 film stock itself contributes a sense of home movie authenticity, while also serving to accentuate the film's lurid narrative elements.

The lurid narrative elements of *The Lollipop Generation* involve the sex peddlers and pornographers who misuse Georgie and her friends. For example, in one scene, Janie

[21] Interestingly, the pornographic neon lights in *The Lollipop Generation* expose the insidious links that can be drawn between pornography and pedophilia: Under the "Adult Movies!" sign mentioned above there stands a young male hustler waiting to be picked up by a john. And, another sign for a strip club aptly named "Baby Dolls" further hails the pedophilic adult with its advertised "Girls!"

visits a pornographer at a run-down building in an industrial area of town. Throughout their encounter, the pornographer remains an unseen off-screen voice that first commands Janie to "Sit down. We're going to make a movie."[22] Following this command, there is a sudden shift from Super 8 to digital filmmaking, as the film ostensibly switches from the one Jones is making to the pornographer's own. This shift entails an aesthetic change from vague, grainy images shot by a wavering hand-held camera to motionless, ultra crisp and bright images from the digital one, as Janie, ensconced in light, looks nervously into the pornographer's unrelenting camera lens. This close-up is followed by an abrupt cut to a police car outside that informs the audience that something terrible has happened. The audience only belatedly learns that Janie has been killed as part of what turned out to be a snuff film. The message of this scene is clear: Pornography can kill. What's more, and true to Jones's nightmare vision of our "surveillance society," it is the camera itself that is positioned as the most potent weapon in the pornographer's arsenal.[23] That is, since both the actual murder of Janie and the physical murderer are never seen, it is as if the act of filming itself has killed Janie.

In another similarly conceived scene, black porn star/drag queen Beulah Blacktress (Vaginal Davis) abducts a young white Catholic schoolboy and re-names him "Rufus" (Marcus Ewert).[24] Drugged and forced to perform in a pornographic film with another seemingly intoxicated boy (Mitchell Watkins), Rufus is jostled about and

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[22] Since the pornographer is never seen, he is granted an authority akin to the "voice of God" narrator within the conventional documentary and the subjectivity not afforded those objectified by the camera's gaze. Throughout the unfolding scene he dictates the events that occur with the power of his patriarchal voice alone.

[23] This calls to mind Michael Powell's controversial film *Peeping Tom* (1980) about a serial killer who murders women while using a portable movie camera to record their dying expressions of terror.

[24] Rufus's real name is never known. When Georgie later asks him his name, he replies timidly, "I guess it's Rufus now."

humiliated by an out-of-control and, in spite of the situation, wildly funny Beulah. This all happens in front of the uncaring pornographer (now corporealized via the actor Johnny Noxzema) who casually stands at the foot of the bed on which Rufus is being abused, looking through his imposing apparatus. As in the scene with Janie, at various moments there is a shift from Jones's film to the pornographer's own – again signaled by a switch from Super 8 to digital filmmaking – that brings attention to the way in which the pornographer's camera can literally construct an alternative view: The pornographer's camera turns this scene of abuse (made clear through Jones's meta-film) into a series of images that appear to depict sexual pleasure (what the audience is encouraged to see through the pornographer's camera eye).

The lollipops of the film's title are also indicative of the way in which the "truth of sex" is manufactured by the pornographer. Throughout the film, the youth's consume these confections as a means of maintaining energy and staying warm (much as real homeless kids might do).[25] But, the youths also consume these confections with the full knowledge that the lollipop is a prop that is frequently used by pornographers to signify a childhood innocence that invites defilement. As Jones explains:

> I was interested in how those creepy porno things are always using lollipops to indicate young people. It's just all very fake and very constructed, so I imagined this world where the kids were all already hyperaware of that, as I'm sure kids are nowadays. (Personal Interview)

This type of anti-pornography talk (i.e., "creepy porno things") might suggest that Jones is anti-sex, but her target is really the wrongdoings of the visually exploitive and

[25] Homeless kids also sometimes shoplift lollipops because they are generally located at the front of stores where they are easy to grab as a quick source of both energy and pleasure.

powerful pornographer, not sex itself. In fact, *The Lollipop Generation* features a scene of unsimulated sex between several young men[26] in a restroom that serves as a potent contrast to the other scenes just mentioned.[27] Set to the upbeat "The Lollipop Generation" by Anonymous Boy and The Abominations, this spontaneous bathroom orgy is all fun and mutual gratification, indicating that sexuality is best experienced away from the pornographer's probing gaze. Of course, ironically, although not filmed by the diegetic pornographer, Jones herself becomes the "pornographer" of this scene, although she can also be said to reconfigure the role of pornographer through a different visualization of sex. In measured distinction to the merciless and motionless camera of the diegetic pornographer, Jones's camera floats about this sexual scenario, discreetly recording bits and pieces of the action, while allowing the rest to happen off-camera, unmediated and private.

In the end, the message engendered by *The Lollipop Generation* is not to repudiate sex and sexual representation, but to take control of one's own sexuality, to enjoy sex on one's own terms, and to perhaps even create one's own erotic images. This is what the tearoom participants in *The Lollipop Generation* do in breaking societal rules of where, when and how sexuality should be expressed. And this is what Georgie and Rufus do in the triumphant conclusion the *The Lollipop Generation*: At the end of the film, under false pretenses, the pair gains entry into the apartment of the pornographer. Once inside his apartment, they steal his camera, tape over the porn film featuring Rufus,

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[26] One of the participants in this public restroom sex scene is Scott Treleaven, author of the revered queercore zine *The Salivation Army*.

[27] This sequence also recalls one of Fifth Columns most popular tunes, "The Fairview Mall Story," a protest song leveled against the police and their surveillance and prosecution of individuals who engage in tearoom sex (i.e., public restroom sex). In Jones's work, the police and the pornographer are both vilified for their intrusions into otherwise private and pleasurable sexual encounters and for the larger institutions with which they are associated.

and substitute their own. Rufus's and Georgie's new film shows them looking and speaking directly into the camera, waving a lollipop in front of the lens, as if to shove the symbol of their degradation back in the pornographer's face. The words they speak are as follows:

> Surprise. Ha ha ha! This isn't your movie anymore, it's *our* movie. Now you're in *our* movie. Surprise! Na na na na na. Wakey wakey. Something's happened while you were asleep. We never sleep, that's when we get things done. Now you're in *our* movie. Yeah, why would we want to be in your movie when we can make our own movies now? Yeah, we're going to make our own movies. We know just as many perverts as you do. Perverts with way bigger pockets than you'll ever have. Why shouldn't we make movies? Why shouldn't we get the money? We'll be able to buy all the lollipops we ever wanted. And we'll make you pay to watch us lick them. Ha ha ha. We're the stars of our own movie. Don't worry, we'll tell everyone where we got the camera. And what you did to our friend. We'll tell them everything in our movie. Maybe we won't even make sexy movies. Maybe we'll keep our clothes on. Yeah we're so bored of sex maybe we'll never make another sexy movie again. We'll make movies about anything we want. And we'll have fun! . . . So, thanks for the camera, it's going to come in very handy.

This jubilant statement against exploitive pornographic observation and in favor of D.I.Y practice is a central concern of Jones art. Jones's art calls attention to our "surveillance society" and its disciplinary effects, and encourages viewers to take control of the means of representation and to tell their own stories in response. Within Jones's ethics of self-creation, bad sex is the sex that other people construct, define and represent for us, and good sex is the sex that we create for ourselves.

(Re-)creating sex for herself is exactly the thing for which Jones is herself most renowned. This is what Jones accomplishes with her sexy drawings of young, leather-clad rebel dykes called the "Tom Girls," a reference to the fetish art of Tom of Finland, which Jones's pencil sketches satirize. Referred to as the "most influential creator of gay

pornographic images," Tom is the architect of more than three thousand illustrations of hyper-masculine men engaged in hardcore sexual situations, often of a sadomasochistic nature: acts of whipping, fisting, rough foreplay, double-penetration and other forms of aggressive sex are commonplace in his art, which was primarily produced from the late 1950s through the late 1970s. Tom's men are massive and bulging, their large muscles and equally sizeable penises and buttocks barely contained by their tight clothing – that is, when they are not proudly displayed to the voyeuristic eye. As a man obsessed with brute masculinity, Tom's men are generally sailors, cops, bikers, lumberjacks and other macho working-class types.

A typical example of his work is "Untitled" which depicts a leather-clad cop, penis fully erect, in the process of anally penetrating a man who has been visually reduced to a gaping orifice and testicles (the rest of his body remaining uncorporealized by Tom). Behind the cop is a burly construction worker who fingers the cop's naked and protruding bottom, while an equally burly military man fondles his bulging testicles. While this type of image can be, and has been, viewed by gay men as empowering in its unrepentant depiction of man-on-man sex (similar to the music of Pansy Division), it can also be accused of supporting aggressive hyper-masculinity as the ideal. In Foucaultian terms, this deceptively "sex-positive" drawing is inseparable from external judgments (from a homophobic public and a homonormative gay culture) concerning good and bad sex, and good and bad identities. Jones brings this to light in her seditious revisions of Tom's art.

The similarities between the drawings of Jones and Tom are intentional and clear. Jones's sketches are analogous to Tom's, first and foremost, in terms of their rough and

ready hypersexual content. But, they are also analogous in terms of style: Both Jones and Tom produce expertly drawn and obsessively rendered pencil drawings that aim for an exaggerated realism. In addition, as poet Kevin Killian maintains, there is a similar critical impulse at the center of each artists' work, as both Jones and Tom lampoon and deconstruct the "American fantasy of unlimited sex, power, and class" (7). Yet, there are also significant differences between the two. Most obviously, Jones replaces the swollen, aggressive and hyper-masculine men of Tom's drawings with strong, androgynous and proud dykes. This "replacement" is sometimes literal. For example, in Jones's "I am a Fascist Pig," a leather-jacketed female cop[28] is tied to a tree, her pants pulled down and re-tied to her calves, the words "I am a Fascist Pig" scrawled across the crotch. In the background, two female juvenile delinquents, a blonde and a brunette, the clear culprits in the scenario, ride away on their motorcycle victorious. The blonde, who sits behind the brunette, has her arm raised in the air, whip in hand, in a gesture of defiance. This drawing repeats, with a difference, Tom's "I am a Thief," which depicts the exact same circumstances, but with the positions inverted: In Tom's original, it is a male juvenile delinquent, with "I am a Thief" scrawled across his pants, who is tied to the tree, and it is a male cop[29] and his companion that triumphantly speed off on their motorcycle.

This example illustrates that, although in dialogue, the art of Jones and Tom are not in unison. Jones's sketches are not simply lesbian versions of Tom's. For one, Jones, who identifies as queer, staunchly rejects the label of "lesbian" due to its associations

[28] We know that the woman is a cop, or at least a figure of authority, because her hair is arranged in a tightly wound bun, a symbol of rigidity that Jones utilizes througout her work to signifiy individuals in a position of social power.

[29] We know the man is a cop because he wears Tom's signature "cop cap." Although he wears jeans and can also be read as a "leather daddy," his more casual attire is indicative of the element of fantasy in Tom's renderings of iconic figures.

with the conservative wing of the community to which her work, including the "Tom Girls," has always been opposed. As she herself states:

> I think people have referred to them as being lesbian drawings, which undermines the whole thing we were doing with queercore, and is just another co-optation . . . To me, that is a really strong example of the co-optation that was going on with all of our work. It was this attempt to bring it back into the gay and lesbian community that we were so much against, in so many different ways. The whole, "We want to be just like you. We want to be in the military. We want to be getting married and having our picket fences." Not only that, but on a political level, the Republican gays and conservative gays and the religious gays that we were all opposed to as well. So, I tried as hard as I could to make sure people would understand in these drawings that these girls were against all of that. (Personal Interview)

What's more, Jones is too much of an innovator and independent thinker to be, as she has erroneously been called, just a "female Tom of Finland."[30] "I am a Fascist Pig" demonstrates Jones investment in critiquing the insidious power relations in Tom's originals, rather than in paying homage to him: they are satiric, not parodic. Through her "Tom Girl" drawings, Jones actively works against the homonormative power relations that Tom and his fans eroticize and venerate via the hypermasculine, fascistic men, that Tom, literally, places on top. Furthermore, Jones seeks to expose the way in which Tom's vision of erotic freedom rests on images that symbolically denigrate women and effeminate men and that appear to support authoritarian belief systems:

> [The "Tom Girl" drawings] were always meant to be a critique of Tom of Finland and, most especially, the authoritarianism that I saw in Tom of Finland. The almost fascistic feeling that is present in his work. The adoration of uniforms and authority and . . . this kind of total adoration of

> anyone in power. Anyone who has power in society is invested with this omnipresent power that ranges from actual political power to sexual power, so that any kind of authoritative figure is just entrenched. And even more so through the use of the eroticism in his drawings. (Personal Interview)

To be fair to Tom, there is a good deal of debate among fans and art critics over the degree to which his drawings are indeed invested in male power and authority. Nyland Blake, for example, maintains that power is fluid in Tom's art, as nearly all of his characters are sexually versatile: "Cops may have authority, a uniformed man may begin to flog his prisoner, but these situations will soon reverse themselves as the cop bends over to be fucked, and the man in uniform allows himself to be bound" (350). And throughout *Dirty Pictures: Tom of Finland, Masculinity and Homosexuality*, Micha Ramakers is at pains to remind readers that the penetrability of Tom's characters, as well as their momentary expressions of tenderness and play, subvert rather than support hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, Ramakers maintains that by implanting homoeroticism within conventional masculinity, Tom's drawings undermine the latter:

> Glorifying masculinity in a (virtually) exclusively homoerotic context destabilized the traditional image of masculinity by recuperating its symbols for gay porn. The image of the male as eternally dominant was to a large extent canceled out by shifting balances of power, by insisting on permanent fluctuation between submission and domination.

Yet, even if it is agreed that masculinity and authority are somewhat ambiguous in Tom of Finland, masculinity and authority are *clearly* in question in the "Tom Girls." Likewise, while in Tom's art the underdogs sometimes take the advantage, in Jones's art it is *always* the queers, the punks and the juvenile delinquents who have the upper-hand.

If Tom constructs a fantasy in which various subjects take turns submitting to power, Jones creates a fantasy in which normative power is consistently upended. For example, in Jones's "Prison Breakout" series, a pair of dykes, a butch and a femme, find themselves arrested and thrown in jail by a stern female cop. Undefeated by their imprisonment, the two delinquents seduce the cop into entering their cell, before punching, grabbing and binding her, and then making their escape. In a kind of upside-down panopticism, these images bring to life a narrative in which the conventional power relations between prisoner and guard are reversed: the authority of sly observation providing the delinquents with the power to usurp the guard's (sexual) dominance and freedom. It can be argued that this type of female-on-female violence replicates, and therefore justifies, male abuse against women. But, it is also true that Jones's drawings exist in a non-patriarchal and non-heterocentric milieu and, thus, demand a different interpretive framework. For as scholar Jill Dolan makes clear in *The Feminist Spectator*, "Power, sexuality, and desire can be recuperated from the strictly male domain, and can assume distinctly different meanings placed in different sexual and gender contexts" (81).

What's more, while Tom's drawings can be said to reinforce stereotypical notions of (gay) male sexual prowess and promiscuity, Jones's drawings present a rarely depicted, and thus entirely refreshing, *dyke* sexual prowess and promiscuity. The women in Jones's drawings express an unapologetic sexual agency and, unwilling to be confined to the maternalized domestic sphere, do so in the public spaces of parks, bars, tattoo parlors and city sidewalks. In her "Cruising" series, for instance, Jones depicts a practice normally associated with gay men: cruising, or the act searching for a sex partner (or partners) in a public space, generally for anonymous sex. In a pair of drawings, Jones

sketches three punk women, two of whom appear to be a couple hunting for a threesome, exchanging erotic glances on the open streets outside of a bar and, then, settling into the beginnings of a menage-á-tróis, all in full public view. Such publicity invites the scrutinizing and defining gaze of others, as conferred by Foucualt.[31] But, the publicity in the "Cruising" series also troubles the usual chain of signifiers that has attached male/female and gay/lesbian to the hierarchical distinctions of public/private, active/passive and daring/prudish. It is also important to point out that the women in these sketches are not conventional erotic objects, readily available for consumption by the straight male observer. In line with queercore style, they are tattooed, bra-less, have messy hair with shaved sides and wear various leather accouterments that signify punkness, aggression and domination (shiny combat boots, caps with skulls and cross bones, jackets with spikes, etc.). They are also racially and ethnically diverse, although they are not as diverse in terms of body size, with thin-to-average women predominating.

In general, while the "Tom Girl" drawings, including the "Cruising" series, vigorously assert the unfettered dyke libido, by virtue of their exceptionality, they also make an implicit critique of the way in which similar male sexual expressions are so naturalized and go virtually unnoticed and unchecked: Through their conspicuous uncommonness, the "Tom Girl" drawings make an indirect critique of the way in which sexual agency has been unjustly attributed to the sexes. Although, in drawings like those in the "Cruising" series, this feminist appraisal and usurpation of male sexual privilege is subtextual, in some instances, Jones's drawings put forward an explicit critique of male sexuality. Such is the case in "Killing Richard Kern," a sketch in which a floppy haired

[31] Here it is instructive that in addition to creating voyeuristic drawings of dyke sex, Jones loves to sketch sensationalistic images of car crashes from the point of view of a prying public.

woman wearing a cleavage-revealing open leather jacket leans casually against a table in a bar. Her right hand grips a bloody switchblade, and her left leg is extended, as she trips the director notorious for films in which women are often objectified, raped and brutalized.[32] To her right, another woman stands defiant and amused, seductively removing her jacket to reveal her female body, a leaflet advertising a benefit for Kern torn and under her boot. In the background two androgynous women look on, guzzling beers, entirely unperturbed.[33]

The medium of these critiques of male sexuality and abuse is worth noting, as pencil drawing does not require great amounts of money or training. That is, pencil drawing is an extremely accessible art form that just about anyone can perform (as opposed to film- or music-making). Thus, in the punk spirit of D.I.Y., Jones's "Tom Girl" drawings suggest to their audience, and especially to women and girls, that they too can make this type of critical work. This once again reinforces the guiding principle of Jones's sexual art: resist normative sexual representations and the surveillance of others and create your own images.

This being said, Jones has also continued the critical re-evaluation of male sexuality in her "less accessible" films. For example, *The Yo Yo Gang* (1991), inspired by the director's experiences in the all-girl band Fifth Column, centers on a pair of female posses, the Yo Yo Gang and the Skateboard Bitches, as they "out-curse, out-fight and

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[32] Richard Kern was one of the primary filmmakers in the Cinema of Transgression movement, a movement of underground, experimental punk filmmakers who privileged shock tactics and dark humor. Kern's corpus includes such misogynistic titles as *Fingered* (1986) about a phone operator (played by notorious punk singer Lydia Lunch) and a customer who violently rape a woman in a junkyard, and *Thrust in Me* (1985), a short film about a young punk (played by Nick Zedd, another Cinema of Transgression director) who arrives home to find his girlfriend dead in the bathtub. Unbothered by her demise, he proceed to shove his penis in and out of her lifeless mouth, receiving a mock blow job from her corpse.

[33] In another act of symbolic revenge against Richard Kern, Bruce LaBruce's *Super 8 ½* includes a pornogrpahic scene in which a woman places Kern in a wig and a dress and proceeds to aggressively penetrate him with a strap-on dildo.

out-sex every boys' gang around."[34] Primarily focused on women and their antagonistic/romantic entanglements, the film features only a handful of men. The men in the film include a half-naked go-go boy (played by LaBruce), whom Jones drags around her apartment on a dog leash, forcing him to dance on command; an abusive man on the street, whom the gangs join forces to attack with their signature Yo Yos and skateboards,[35] and most intriguing of all, two young men, Klaus (played by LaBruce's then-boyfriend, Klaus Von Brucker) and Deke (played by Deke Nihilson, member of the early queercore band, Comrades in Arms, and co-editor of the zine, *Homocore*). The latter two men spend the entire film having acrobatic sex on a living room couch, occasionally emitting amorous shrieks of "Oh! Let me suck that big dick!" and "I want to fuck that tight ass!"

Klaus and Deke thrash about in full view of Klaus's roommate Candy (played by experimental filmmaker and *J.D.*s contributor Candy Parker) who sits at a desk behind the couch on which the men noisily screw, chatting on the phone with her Yo Yo Gang pals about their ensuing conflict with the Skateboard Bitches ("They'll be eating their own shit when we're finished wiping up with them"). In between phone conversations, Candy attempts to engage the sexually absorbed men in conversation about the household

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[34] According to Jones, being in an all-girl band in the 1980s was much like being in a gang, as she and her bandmates had to stick close together to make it within the sexist male-dominaed punk scene: "Being in an all-girl band at that point in time was very much like being in a gang. We were very much like a gang . . . Oh my god, we'd march down the street and everyone would have to clear out of the way. We'd fight with people. We were really horrible, but in a good way. We were always up for a fight . . . Even on stage, not between the band members, but fighting with the audience at certain points in time. If they tried to yell stuff at us, we weren't inclined to accept it." (Personal Interview.) This symbolic connection between girl bands and girls gangs is also evident in the casting of *The Yo Yo Gang*, as the members of the girls gangs are played by members of female-led queercore and riot grrrl bands, including all of the musicians in Jones's band Fifth Column and members of Team Dresch, Anti-Scrunti Faction and The Nancy Sinatras.
[35] One of the reasons for the use of Yo Yos in the film was Jones's desire to re-purposen this childhood toy as a weapon for girls: "We all just loved Yo Yos. We learned how to flick them at people so it hit them. We thought, 'Oh, this is a good weapon that girls could use.'" (Personal Interview.)

chores that need to be performed. But, her question of, "Did you do the dishes?" is met with the dismissive reply, "I don't do dishes, I'm not a girl!," followed by the following heated exchange:

> Klaus (to Deke): Oh yeah man, I want to fuck your tight ass!
> Candy: That reminds me, did you boys buy toilet paper?
> Klaus: Boys don't use as much toilet paper as girls do, so I shouldn't have to buy any!
> Candy: What?! What about the shit on the end of your dick while your packing that fudge? Brownie hounds!

Similar to Jones's re-workings of Tom of Finland, with typical punk irreverence, this dialogue lampoons gay male sexual narcissism (the kind that Pansy Division and LaBruce might celebrate), suggesting that male erotic entitlement, including the homosexual kind, often comes at the expense of women.

As the examples of *The Lollipop Generation*, the "Tom Girl" drawings, and *The Yo Yo Gang* attest, the most frequent target of Jones's feminist and Foucaultian critiques are (gay) men and their sexual proclivities. As such, Jones's work provides a valuable and potent counterpoint to the unfettered, male-centered sexual celebrations of the likes of Pansy Division and Bruce LaBruce. Also, in the true spirit of punk, Jones's favorite tactic of subversion is do-it-yourself art. Through the creative re-fashioning and satirization of hegemonic (gay) male sexual desire and representation, Jones assembles a strong feminist defense against not only the patriarchal majority, but the patriarchal elements within her own subculture.

IV. Courtney Trouble: Queer(core) Alt-Porn

The individuals discussed thus far are all from the original wave of queercore. Indeed, as noted in the previous chapters, Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones are the two initial instigators of the subculture. But, bold sexual exploration does not end with Pansy Division, LaBruce and Jones, as more recent queercore artists have sustained the subculture's sexed-up legacy. Accordingly, in the interest of "keeping things up to date," I end this chapter with a focus on a contemporary queercore artist whose work is, like her predecessors, all about sexual rule-breaking: queer punk pornographer Courtney Trouble. Trouble's community-invested, activist-minded and feminist porn films recall the playful sexual fantasies of Pansy Division, the sex-cum-political work of LaBruce and the erotic anti-patriarchal art of Jones, but her films also more fully realize queercore's professed goal of sex/gender/racial inclusivity. In this manner, Trouble continues queercore's tradition of combining punk aesthetics and values with explicit sex as an affront to the mainstream, but does so in a way that also challenges the exclusions of the queercore artworks that came before her.

A Bay Area native, punk musician, and affiliate of the feminist sex shop, Good Vibrations, Trouble is a major figure in not only queercore, but the world of queer alt-porn, a sexually explicit subgenre that focuses on non-normative bodies and disregards conventional sexual categories, with gay, lesbian, bi and queer practices often occurring within the same text (Jacobs). Queer alt-porn, including the work of Trouble, exists far outside the conventions of mainstream straight pornography, but, more to the point, also exists in contradistinction to mainstream gay and lesbian pornography, with its often sexist, racist, body normative and sexually segregated representations.

Scholarship on gay, and to a lesser extent lesbian, pornography has routinely uncovered these shortcomings. In "Coming to Terms," for example, Richard Dyer laments that most gay pornography adheres to a hegemonic model of male sexuality in which the penis and male ejaculation – both markers of phallic power – take center stage:

> The [gay porn] narrative is never organized around the desire to be fucked, but around the desire to ejaculate (whether or not following on or from anal intercourse). Thus although at the level of public representation, gay men may be thought of as deviant and disruptive of masculine norms because we assert the pleasures of being fucked and the eroticism of the anus, in our pornography this takes a back seat. (28)

Scholars have also exposed the racism endemic to mainstream gay pornography. For instance, in "Looking for My Penis," Richard Fung contends that in gay pornography, as in dominant media more generally, Asian men rarely occupy roles that have power. If shown in gay porn at all, they are generally positioned in roles that cater to what Fung calls the "houseboy" fantasy: passive, servile and always taking the role of bottom. Similarly, in "Hot and Spicy," Christopher Ortiz critiques the manner in which the white male has been constructed as the universal subject of gay pornography. Ortiz observes that gay pornography tends to portray Latino and Black sexuality as a spectacle for the consumption of the white male spectator (i.e., we rarely, if ever, see the "action" through the eyes of men of color) and (re)inscribes men of color within oppressive and dominant cultural representations of race and sexuality (Latinos, for example, are most often portrayed as macho criminal-types).

Less has been written about lesbian porn (that is, lesbian porn made by and for lesbians, as opposed to by and for straight men), partially due to its relative rarity.

However, critiques have also been leveled against the limitations of lesbian porn, especially in terms of the subgenre's body normativity. For example, in "The Pleasure Threshold," Cherry Smyth asserts that representations in lesbian porn perpetuate the hegemony of the perfect, white female body. Likewise, similar to Ortiz, she argues that lesbian porn is typically only addressed to a white western female viewer, with women of color almost always functioning as objects, rather than agents, of desire.

While the above-mentioned essays are all more than a decade old, and the porn industry has changed significantly in the intervening years with the advent of the Internet and the increasing prevalence and variety of Internet porn, the problems of sexism, racism, and body normativity (and of course sexual segregation) within mainstream gay and lesbian pornography persist. Queer alt-porn attempts to address these issues by presenting sexually diverse and bodily non-normative images that challenge traditional capitulations of masculinity, femininity and race: non-white disabled female bodies in positions of sexual power, for example. In addition, as previously mentioned, queer alt-porn seeks to abolish the segregation between gay men, lesbians and transfolk, much as queercore has also done. Although not all queer alt-porn is directly related to queercore, the work of Trouble is definitely part of this lineage in terms of its queer punk aesthetics and values. Her films also adhere to the aesthetics and values of queer alt-porn and are noted for featuring integrated representations of men, women and transfolk of various racial identities and gender expressions. In opposition to the mainstream gay and lesbian porn described by Dyer, Fung, Ortiz and Smyth, Trouble's films regularly celebrate effeminate men and gay male bottomhood, and deliberately challenge sexual orthodoxy

by, for example, depicting Asian men as sexually aggressive tops and large-framed androgynous women as erotic figures of beauty.

The roots of Trouble's queer pornographic practice can be traced to a series of her adolescent artistic and sexual experimentations:

> When I was a kid I humped my best friend with a sock in my undies and pretended I was the boy she had a crush on. When I was a teen, I stole my school's digital camera to take photos of my fat body to publish in my zines, and also took photos of the girl I loved fucking her bisexual boyfriend, and also my partner transitioning from female to male. Then I found myself working as a phone sex operator 60 hours a week fulfilling other people's fantasies . . . so I decided to put the performances and photography I've been doing my whole life to some use and started making some porn I could relate to. (qtd. on *NoFauxxx.com*)

Undefinable and perverse by design, this "porn [Trouble] could relate to" first surfaced in 2002 on her website Nofauxxx,[36] and has continued via a mounting catalog of films in which multi-racial and multi-sexed fat bodies, transitioning partners and bisexual boyfriends still play a crucial role. That is, queer alt-porn's two defining characteristics – a focus on non-normative bodies and a disregard for sexual classification – are indeed central to Trouble's corpus.[37] The former is encapsulated in Trouble's all-inclusive casting policy, which earned her film *NoFauxxx Roulette* the 2009 prize for "Most Diverse Film" at the Feminist Porn Awards. The latter is evidenced by the willfully indeterminate sexual practices within Trouble's films (women having sex with refrigerator doors, for instance) as a well as NoFauxxx's genre and gender-less navigation system, which entices users to stumble into new sexual realms. At the same

[36] True to alt-porn's stress on the authentic, NoFauxxx translates to "no fake sex."

[37] In this way, Trouble's films are unlike those of other queercore artists like Bruce LaBruce, whose films are generally focused on attractive white men. As such, Trouble's work can be said to represent a more progressive blossoming of queecore's anti-normative potential.

time, Trouble's conception of queer porn is closely connected to her (queercore) D.I.Y. practice: Trouble engages media from a decidedly independent point of view, creating new experimental queer languages beyond the boundaries of both identity *and* corporate imperatives. Memberships on NoFauxxx start at $9.99 per month, but Courtney Trouble has a stated commitment to accessibility for all users, and accepts barters for those who cannot afford the subscription fee (similar to the barter system historically used to exchange queercore zines).

This D.I.Y. mode of inception contributes to the punk status of Trouble's films, as do the attendant non-professional performances, low-tech digital presentation and overall lack of technical gloss. But, more than anything, it is Trouble's innovative musical engagements that assure punk recognition, and beyond the superficial marker of style. Trouble, a musician in the San Francisco queercore outfit The Divine Feud, is herself an active punk participant, and this comes through in films that induce spectators to experience new sensual pleasures by way of creative interminglings of punk and pornography (creative interminglings that have resulted in Trouble being twice nominated for the "Best Music Soundtrack" *Adult Video News* award).[38] For instance, Trouble's *NoFauxxx Roulette* features not only an unremitting soundtrack of queer punk tracks – from the anarcho-feminist/anti-capitalist jeremiads of Erase Errata to the sexual musings and oblique poetics of Scream Club – but also situates music videos in-between the film's sexual numbers, creating an evocative slippage between the aural pleasures of raw sexual ecstasy and those of raw musical energy, and even fostering the occasional poignant juxtaposition.

[38] *Adult Video News* (AVN) is a trade journal that covers the adult video video industry in the United States. They sponsor an annual awards show modeled after the Academy Awards.

The latter can be gleaned from one of *NoFauxxx Roulette*'s most memorable scenes: a ten-minute sequence in which the viewer is introduced to Cyd, a genderqueer Latino/a wrestler and apparent recipient of cruel taunts from zis narrow-minded teammates. In a small changing room, Cyd breaks into a teammate's locker, steals a dildo hidden inside, constructs a makeshift strap-on, and masturbates to climax in front of a chalkboard on which "Cyd is a pervert faggot" has been scrawled. At one point, lost in autoerotic pleasure, Cyd leans against the chalkboard, smudging this inscription, literally erasing hate speech through zis performance of erotic self-love. This emotionally charged scene is followed by a music video for white female-to-male transgender rapper Katastrophe's "Big Deal," a homo-hop declaration of exaggerated self-importance that effectively places a trans-affirmative exclamation point on the prior scene of genderqueer self/sexual-actualization.

Discussions of porn sound have tended to focus on the voice and its capacity for realistic effect: In *Hard Core*, for example, Linda Williams establishes the sound of women's orgasm as key to heterosexual pornography's truth claims, vocalizations of pleasure allowing viewers to assume (often erroneously) that female performers are genuinely aroused (121-6). But, as the example of *NoFauxxx Roulette* attests, in Trouble's art, it is the *music* as much, if not more than, the voice, that plays a vital role in evoking and confirming pleasure, music providing the ostensible proof that real *punk* pleasure is taking place, long after the suspenders, dog collars and combat boots have dropped to the floor and the Mohawks have been tousled beyond recognition. Enveloping and non-localized, it is also music, rather than *image*, that makes interpellation into Trouble's queer punk universe unavoidable.

Perhaps most importantly of all, Trouble's multifaceted musical and pornographic engagements produce the fantasy of a sex-positive queer punk subculture into which the viewer is welcomed. This happens most obviously in relation to Nikolaj Tange Lange and Walter Crasshole, two white queer punk musicians and a real-life gay couple who appear in a sexually explicit from fellatio-to-anal-penetration rooftop scene in *NoFauxxx Roulette*, and again in a hardcore flip-fuck bedroom romp in *Roulette Berlin*. In addition to these sexual interludes, which at-times engender a feeling of privileged access to a couple's private sex life, the DVD releases for these films feature supplementary materials that provide a wider queer punk context for the amorous pair. On the *NoFauxxx Roulette* DVD, a behind-the-scenes documentary establishes the couple's relationship, dating history, punk fandom and excitement at appearing in a porn film that is at least partially aimed at women. And the *Roulette Berlin* DVD includes a documentary of Lange and Crasshole's decidedly low-key wedding in the city of the film's title as well as a music video for Lange's band, Nuclear Family, a queer punk electro outfit known for such aggressive anthems as "Gay is the New Punk" and, appropriately enough, "Let's Pretend We're in a Bruce LaBruce Movie." Together, these supplementary materials unfold an intimate and multi-dimensional story of queer punk that moves beyond the basic requirements of the pornographic. That is, Trouble's films are not just tools for sexual arousal, but also archives of individual and collective queer punk existences, and affirmations of queercore identity and subculture.

Trouble's productions forge a continuity with queercore's past insofar as they utilize explicit sexual representations and punk aesthetics to challenge mainstream gay and lesbian culture. Like the work of all the artists discussed in this chapter, Trouble's

art, which spotlights explicit sex and non-normative bodies, is inimical to established punk and gay/lesbian identities. Her art poses a challenge to the hetero- and homo-normative status quos, in addition to mainstream gay and lesbian pornography, through an unapologetic celebration of queer sexuality that includes multi-sex/multi-racial representations. The fact that Trouble's work is even more pornographic than the work of predecessors like LaBruce, in that her films favor sex over narrative exposition, is perhaps emblematic of our current homonormative time in which a queer focus on the radical possibilities of sex has been muted by those who seek to appease the straight majority: desperate times call for more pornographic measures. While artists like Pansy Division, Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones successfully articulated and circulated a set of alternative identities, meanings and representations for queers to occupy and engage within social space – producing a subculture of queer punk misfits where none existed before, and doing so in a manner that kept sex front and center – Trouble provides continued sustenance with perverse desirescapes on the fringe of both punk porn incorporation and the safe representations of the gay and lesbian majority.

V. **Conclusion**

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, not all queercore artists have approached the topic of sex in the same manner. My analysis of their work has shown this to be true, with Pansy Division's sexual play, rooted in the carnivalesque, brushing up against LaBruce's Marcuse and Reich inspired visions of sex as political and transformative, and with Jones's Foucaultian D.I.Y. and anti-patriarchal sexual creations caressing the contemporary queerly provocative pornography of Courtney Trouble. In

exploring the work of the above artists, this chapter has intended to showcase the important role that sex has played in queercore, and to demonstrate how sex has been deployed, in various ways, in pointed opposition to punk and gay and lesbian convention. The queercore artifacts engaged in this chapter are all vital texts within the annals of radical queer culture. They present a different version of sexuality than is proffered by gay assimilationists, one that labors toward nonconformist and non-normative ends. In these works, queerness is not safely removed from the perverse sexual behaviors and dangerous identities that have been pushed under the rug in the rush for mainstream acceptance. Instead, these works point toward a future aligned with unapologetic pleasure and uncensored expression.

Chapter 3: Queercore Violence

In "Imagined Violence/Queer Violence," Judith Halberstam advocates symbolic expressions of aggression on the part of minority subjects, springing from what poet June Jordan identifies as "a place of rage," and grounded in resistance to powerful white, straight, male, bourgeois hegemony (188). For Halberstam, imagined violence is a rhetorical strategy, one that deliberately confounds the line between feigned and real violence in an effort to instill fear in the opposition. In addition, imagined violence opens a political space of counter-possibilities in which subjugated minorities garner pleasure and empowerment by figuratively enacting their revenge against the system that subjugates them. Imagined violence is both a threat and a release, a way of potentially producing change by eliciting terror, and a means of working through the anguish associated with being a disadvantaged minority in a prejudicial society. It's a refusal to play, if only symbolically, by the nice rules of peaceful demonstrations, carefully considered marches, bureaucratically-minded petitions and other more socially acceptable, and less immediately satisfying, forms of non-violent protest. Imagined violence supports the time-worn adage that the best way to fight fire is with fire, even if the fire is, in this instance, ultimately nothing more than smoke and a little spark.

Halberstam's essay includes numerous examples of imagined violence within contemporary popular culture. The first is rapper Ice-T's infamous "Cop Killer" track from 1992, a song that contains a to-the-beat call to "fuck police brutality." "Cop Killer" generated a frenzied response from a public unsophisticated in interpreting an instance of representational, as opposed to actual, retaliation against authoritarian abuse. Many (predominately white, middle-class) folks reacted to the song as an irresponsible, and

literal, call to violent arms, and advocated its removal from store shelves. But, Halberstam maintains that the song is preventative: It is intended to scare police into thinking twice about their often sadistic on-the-job interactions with African Americans. Halberstam reasons that the very fact that critics were so taken aback by "Cop Killer" is a demonstration of just how powerful representations of violence can be. It also confirms the hypocrisy of a society that, time and again, turns a blind eye to *actual* white violence against racial minorities, while becoming incensed by the mere *imagining* of black-on-white violence.

Halberstam also explores the writings of David Wojnarowicz, the artist, dying of AIDS in the 1990s, who used his fury and his pen to bring attention to the pandemic and the government's blasé reaction to it. Lamenting the slow and callous response to the disease in his autobiographical work *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* (1991), Wojnarowicz writes, "We're supposed to quietly and politely make house in this killing machine called america [sic] and pay taxes to support our own slow murder and I'm amazed we're not running amok in the streets" (108). Later, Wojnarowicz queries, "Should people pick up guns to stop the casual murder of other people?" (160). According to Halberstam, in making such statements, and raising the possibility of "armed and dangerous" answers to society's ills, *Close to the Knives* becomes a "call for bloody violent change," and one that "confronts the Jesse Helmses of America with the possibility of violent retaliation; it threatens precisely in its potentiality" (195). The word *potentiality* is key to the concept of imagined violence, as Halberstam is quick to remind readers that "the relationship between imagined violence and 'real' violence is unclear, contested, negotiable, unstable and radically unpredictable" (187). In other words, there

is no guarantee that imagined violence will produce any particular, or even positive, effect. But, imagined violence, nevertheless, draws from the realm of fantasy with the *hope* of generating a productive, status-quo altering fear (Halberstam, 195).

Writing "Imagined Violence/Queer Violence" from the vantage point of 1993, Halberstam wisely connects these, and other, cultural examples (including vigilante women-on-the-run film *Thelma and Louise* and June Jordan's poem of racial and gendered retribution, "Poem About My Rights") to the sociopolitical landscape of the moment, specifically, the rise in militant and theatrical queer activism as LGBTQIA communities mobilized around both the HIV/AIDS crisis and the, not entirely un-related, 1980s/early 1990s rise in anti-queer violence (both discussed in Chapter 1). Particularly relevant within this sociopolitical context is the activist organization Queer Nation, known for their performative protests, including such elements as kiss-ins at highly trafficked suburban shopping malls. Queer Nation's oft-quoted slogan "Bash Back" perfectly encapsulates the idea of imagined violence, as it is a challenge to would-be gay bashers in its evocation of the "menace of retaliation" in order to instill a "productive fear" in the prospective basher: "The power of the slogan . . . is its ability to represent a violence that need not ever be actualized. There is no 'real' violence necessary here, only the threat of real violence" (Halberstam, 193).

Yet, as attuned as Halberstam is to the 1980s/ early 1990s queer political context that helped feed an upsurge in representations of imagined violence, she has startlingly little to say about the unprecedented representations of imagined violence that were being produced within the queer underground at this same time. Instead of analyzing the plethora of queer and subcultural works at hand (many of which were part of queercore),

the majority of the texts that Halberstam discusses – from "Cop Killer" to *Thelma and Louise* – are straight-male authored and, more or less, mainstream (although, admittedly, texts like *Thelma and Louise* hold much potential for subcultural queer readings). What's more, Halberstam spends the second half of her essay making the case for imagined violence via *Basic Instinct*, a lesbian exploitation piece (directed by straight, white male Paul Verhoeven) that employs a narrative of killer lesbians and bi-women to titillate heteronormative audiences through its peak into the "strange" and "deadly" world of homosexuality (and through its literal peak up star Sharon Stone's skirt in a notorious crotch-revealing shot). Accordingly, the essay climaxes with an extended defense of *Basic Instinct* on the grounds that it showcases a unique and intelligent approach to the themes of "reality and representation, imagined violence and the maintenance of law" (196). Halberstam thus misses the opportunity to engage the more decidedly *queer* body of work that would best support her thesis: the queercore cultural productions that were contemporaries of *Basic Instinct* and that displayed the same concern with queer rage, but that came out of a more community-authored and politically-grounded context. This chapter seeks to rectify this shortcoming by placing queercore into the conversation begun by Halberstam.

Imagined violence has, of course, long been central to both punk and radical queer politics. In terms of the latter, it is instructive to remember that the modern gay liberation movement started with a *riot* at the Stonewall Inn. This instance of real violence morphed into a set of confrontational, but less directly violent, political tactics in the post-Stonewall era. For example, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), and later the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA), popularized the use of the "zap": raucous public demonstrations

designed to embarrass public figures while calling attention to LGBT rights. GAA founding member Arthur Bell explains the logic behind the zap as follows:

> Gays who have as yet no sense of gay pride see a zap on television or read about it in the press. First they are vaguely disturbed at the demonstrators for "rocking the boat;" eventually, when they see how the straight establishment responds, they feel anger. This anger gradually focuses on the heterosexual oppressors, and the gays develop a sense of class-consciousness. And the no-longer-closeted gays realize that assimilation into the heterosexual mainstream is no answer: gays must unite among themselves, organize their common resources for collective action, and resist. (qtd. in Gross, 46)

This type of anti-assimilationist and resistant zap was common within the gay liberation movement of the 1970s. For example, in 1974, members of Lesbian Feminist Liberation (LFF)[1] forcefully took over the office of NBC Vice President Herminio Traviesas after NBC aired an episode of *Police Woman* featuring a trio of murderous lesbian women who killed nursing home residents for their money. In another zap, several members of GAA infiltrated opening night of the 1970 Metropolitan Opera in order to shout gay slogans at Mayor John Lindsay and his wife as they entered the building (GAA was upset that Lindsay refused to support gay rights publicly). Such aggressive political tactics have had an effect on the development of radical queer politics, with the aura of the zap being discernible in Queer Nation's "Bash Back" marches and kiss-ins (mentioned above), ACT-UP's direct actions, like their Wall Street "die-in" in which 250 people demonstrated against what they saw as price gouging for anti-HIV drugs, and the angry,

[1] Lesbian Feminist Liberation (LFL) were a Gay Activist Alliance (GAA) splinter organization that developed due to the sexism and lack of attention to women's issues in GAA.

theatrical street protests of contemporary radical queer organizations like Gay Shame and OutRage!

Imagined violence is also an established component of punk and, in particular, hardcore punk (often referred to as simply "hardcore"), the fast, thick and heavy iteration of the genre that rose to prominence in the 1980s, ostensibly overshadowing the experimental art-school stylings of the original New York punk scene. Hardcore music's overtly aggressive sounds have often operated in tandem with gruesome lyrics shouted in an ominous howl against the "system." Symbols of nihilism, violence, death and destruction, from skulls to zombies, are common in hardcore art and band designations. Think, for example, of Against All Authority, Disorder, Atari Teenage Riot, The Avengers, Comrades in Arms, The Stranglers, The Poison Girls and The Damned.

Imagined violence is also central to queercore, which has, on repeated occasion, used a threatening anger, both visual and aural, in the service of its radical queer politics. This use of imagined violence is less of a nod to hardcore, however, than it is a re-appropriation: As mentioned in previous chapters, it is hardcore punk, in its privileging of the hetero-normative and the hyper-masculine, that queercore is most strongly opposed. Accordingly, the use of imagined violence within queercore for decidedly non-heteronormative and non-hypermasculine ends represents a queer interference with mainstream punk, and an homage to the radical politics of queercore's predecessors.

By way of example, one can point to a queercore song like Fagatron's "Asskickatron," an unrelenting "don't mess with me" anthem that entreats listeners to "use their hands" against bigoted oppressors. After a rousing drum solo, the song opens with the following fighting words:

In high school, I was a punching bag
When I got out, I was a punching fag
You fuck with me, I'll fuck with you back
Ain't gonna fall between the cracks

"Asskickatron," in its support of violent revenge against homophobic attacks, echoes the "Bash Back" slogan of Queer Nation and, in its threatening musicality, repeats with a difference the rage-as-possible-preventive tactic of Ice-T's "Cop Killer." It also provides a potential cathartic release for queer listeners who may feel helpless in the face of the violence they encounter in their own lives, as well as a sense of connection, however illusory, to a community of likeminded, fed-up queer outsiders. In this regard there are links to be drawn between "imagined violence" and Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined community": Anderson's notion that even in the smallest country, in which individuals have no chance of knowing more than a tiny portion of the people who make up their community, they still experience feelings of commonality and solidarity with the people they will never know, often through media. Likewise, the cathartic experience of imagined violence calls to mind Jill Dolan's concept of "utopian performatives," albeit with a darker twist. Dolan defines utopian performatives as "small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense" (5). While imagined violence can also produce "profound moments" that "call the attention of the audience," taking them out of the present and into a better world, imagined violence produces less a

feeling of being "lifted above the present," as it does a feeling of being powerful and dangerous enough to destroy it and start anew.

"Asskickatron" represents just one of many instances of the appearance of imagined violence within queercore. In this chapter, I explore several other salient examples. These examples have been chosen because they highlight some of the usual targets of queercore rage: hetero- and homo-normativity (*S.C.A.B* and *Bimbox*), sexism and homophobia (Tribe 8), racism (*Shut Up White Boy* and *Bamboo Girl*) and HIV/AIDS apathy (*The Living End*). These examples are also some of the most popular and well known within queercore, although they are far from the only ones. For instance, anti-sexist rage can be observed throughout the films of G.B. Jones, the music of bands like Huggy Bear and Le Tigre, and queercore zines from *Dildo Machine* to *Jane Gets a Divorce*. I end the chapter with the related topic of "terrorist chic" within queercore. This concluding section includes an extended discussion of black activist Angela Davis's status as an icon within queercore, as evidenced by her prominent representation in queercore works from *No Skin Off My Ass* (Bruce LaBruce, 1993) to *Itty Bitty Titty Committee* (Jamie Babbit, 2007).

I. **Johnny Noxzema, Rex Boy and Queer Rage**

It is not merely a coincidence that representations of imagined violence within queercore coincided with the reclamation of the term "queer" by certain – generally younger and more radical – members of the same-sex community in place of the term "homosexual," which they viewed as antiquated, and the terms "gay" and "lesbian," which they understood to indicate homonormative identities. Which is to say that,

simultaneous with, and partly as a result of, the advent of queercore in the mid to late 1980s, the once derogatory term "queer" began to be resuscitated. The reasons for this are manifold and involve the eddy of meanings that the term has come to engender. First and foremost, queer was adopted as an umbrella term for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (as well as, later, intersex, questioning and allies). Within academia, "queer," as in "queer theory," also marked a philosophical break from the earlier formation of lesbian and gay studies. Lesbian and gay studies had performed the necessary work of legitimizing same-sex subjects, practices texts and histories within a largely homophobic academia. To do so, it relied largely on the tenets of identity politics. Diana Fuss explicates identity politics as "the tendency to base one's politics on a sense of personal identity – as gay, Jewish, as Black, as female" (97). That is, in order to build a viable community, both within academia and without, it was imperative to assert discrete, unified, coherent and visible gay and lesbian identities from which political organization could advance. Alternative to lesbian and gay studies, queer theory "denies the existence of any fixed or stable notion of identity and, like postmodernism generally, disputes the notion that there exist universal, absolute truths in or across cultures" (Carlin and DiGrazia, 2). Queer theory understands homosexuality as a social construction, a fiction, built on the elision of cultural and temporal distinctions, and placed in the service of a status quo obsessed with neat human categorization.

Lastly, and related to the concept of imagined violence, "queer" has also been employed to indicate a rebellious youthful sensibility invested in proudly flaunting deviance and refusing to capitulate to societal norms. In line with Halberstam's "queer rage," this version of "queer" is synonymous with an angrier, more confrontational and

less assimilationist approach to sexual politics in comparison to a "lesbian and gay" approach rooted in appeasement and integration. This militant form of "queerness" is evident in, for example, "Queers Read This: I Hate Straights," a leaflet written by some anonymous members of Queer Nation and distributed at New York City's 1990 gay pride parade. The aggressive impulse of the leaflet is evident within its opening paragraphs:

> Until I can enjoy the same freedom of movement and sexuality as straights, their privilege must stop and it must be given over to me and my queer sisters and brothers. Straight people will not do this voluntarily and must be forced into it. Straights must be frightened into it. Terrorized into it. Fear is the most powerful motivation. No one will give us what we deserve. Rights are not given, they are taken, by force if necessary. It is easier to fight when you know who your enemy is. Straight people are your enemy. (138)

"Queers Read This" goes on to decry sedate forms of protest ("I will not march silently with a fucking candle"), to promote anger among queer folks ("Feel some rage. If rage doesn't empower you, try fear. If that doesn't work, try panic") and to make a case for the word "queer" itself ("When a lot of lesbians and gay men wake up in the morning we feel angry and disgusted, not gay") (139-40; 141; 145). As a whole, the leaflet marks a clear break from gay and lesbian attempts at mainstream appeasement and shamed silence. Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman in fact align "Queers Read This" with "new gay power tactics" of danger in which "what is dangerous is rage, and the way it is deployed both to an 'internal' audience of gay subjects and an 'external' straight world" (306).

It should be said, however, that this transition from "lesbian and gay" to "queer" has not been greeted with universal acceptance within the LGBTQIA community. While older generations have had a difficult time embracing a word that had long been used to

insult, queers of color have been suspicious of the term's primary associations with white gay men, an association that is at least partially derived from the dominance of whiteness within early queer-identified formations like Queer Nation and, in fact, queercore.[2] Perhaps more than anything, some gays and lesbians view the angrier, harsher rhetoric of the new queer generation as simply immature and dangerous bad behavior. Indeed, several of the folks involved in queercore found themselves chastised by an older, more conservative wing of the community for their so-called juvenile mischief. This occurred notoriously in relation to Johnny Noxzema (born John Richard Allen) and his one-time romantic/artistic partner Rex Boy, who were derided in the popular gay press for their edgy anti-normative zines *SCAB* and *Bimbox*. Both zines used the language of camp and violence to oppose hetero- and homo-normative thinking and to create a space for alternative ideas and expressions within the conformist lesbian and gay scene of 1990s Toronto.

Representative of the negative critical reception of Noxzema and Rex Boy's work is a 1992 piece published in *NYQ* entitled "Letter to the Queer Generation." Written by Arnie Kantrowitz, a professor of English at the College of Staten Island, the essay cites the pair as prime examples of the trouble with queer youths today, condescendingly dismissing the dark satire of their zine *Bimbox* as the behavior of "bad boys" looking to "get some attention" (814). Kantrowitz, wrote this piece in response to an editorial letter written in *Bimbox* in which the death of Vito Russo, a longtime gay and AIDS activist and the film historian, was seemingly celebrated by Noxzema and Rex Boy:

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[2] See, for example, comments concerning the term "queer" in Cherry Smyth's "Lesbians Talk Queer Notions," such as Isling Mack-Nataf's remark, "I'm more inclined to use the words 'black lesbian,' because when I hear the word 'queer' I think of white, gay men" (43).

> Just 'cause someone has AIDS doesn't mean they're exempt from being labeled an asshole. Russo is/was/and will remain one of the most miserable disgusting insufferable clones ever to enter the public eye. Honey, rest assured we were well aware of his medical condition at the time our inning list was together, and to be honest, we're elated he's off the planet . . . Oh sure, Vito's finally dead and we got our wish and we should just drop the whole thing, but we won't be satisfied until we dig him up and drive a stake through his filthy film queen heart.[3]

This rant against Russo was ostensibly composed in response to a letter the *Bimbox* editors had received protesting their "inning"[4] of Russo for "defiling the good name of our people." The joke, however, was that this letter to the editors was in fact written by Noxzema and Rex Boy themselves as a way of purposely stirring up controversy through satire. Which is to say, the volatile exchange of letters was an irreverent in-joke, entirely manufactured by Noxzema and Rex Boy, although one that was spurred by Russo's failure to include the work of John Waters, a favorite of the Toronto queercore crowd, in his book-length historical overview of gay and lesbian representations within Hollywood cinema, *The Celluloid Closet*.

Yet, for Kantrowicz, who refers to Noxzema and Rex Boy as "idiots" and "unforgiveable moron pig assholes," the letters were to be taken literally and the duo's disrespect was emblematic of everything that was wrong with the rebellious new generation of "queers." Krantrowicz specifically objects to the animosity Noxzema and Rex Boy appear to have toward older members of the community: "Reviling people who could be your allies is not empowerment; it is bullshit. If you want to feel empowered,

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[3] Although I am unsure of the date of his diagnosis, it is worth mentioning that Johnny Noxzema is himself HIV positive and an HIV/AIDS activist. He currently runs the HIV/AIDS information and dating website *PozPlanet*.

[4] "Inning" is a play on the practice of "outing": Revealing a celebrity's homosexuality to the public without their consent. As the reverse of "outing," "inning" seeks to disassociate already out gay and lesbian individuals from the queer community.

feel the richness of your past. Learn from those who came before you and build on what they have accomplished" (816). However, these criticisms aside, Kantrowicz does also, begrudgingly, and perhaps unintentionally, admit that the work of Noxzema and Rex Boy ultimately elicits his contemplation:

> [Noxzema and Rex Boy] want to say they're at war with me and that they will join in if they see me being assaulted. It took me a while, but I think I can accept it. Even if it doesn't make me laugh, it does make me think. (814)

This is, of course, exactly the point: Noxzema and Rex Boy, like other artists who utilize "imagined violence" in their art, use incendiary rhetoric to induce thought – in the case of Noxzema and Rex Boy, on issues of gender and sexuality. Here it is instructive to recall Walter Benjamin's theory of "shock effect," mentioned in the Introduction to this dissertation. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin contends that new 20th-century artistic forms, such as Dadaist art, which place familiar objects in unexpected contexts, and moving pictures, which are comprised of rapidly changing images, jolt audiences by presenting them with unexpected, unsettling material. This "shock effect," as Benjamin terms it, interrupts the passive viewing experience, forcing spectators into a space of active contemplation and reflection. As David Laing observes in "Interpreting Punk Rock," this "shock effect" is common to punk. It can be witnessed in such things as "punk clothing torn and held together by safety pins in a parody of expensive fashions" and the words of X-Ray Spex's "Oh Bondage Up Yours!" (penned by lead singer Poly Styrene), which radically disrupt the conventional lyric-structure with a contradictory celebration of "the delights of bondage as a sexual activity

and [simultaneous] attack on social bondage" (126-7). This "shock effect" can also be witnessed in the work of Noxzema and Rex Boy, which not only confronts and startles audiences with violent words and images, conveyed in an abrasive punk bricolage style,[5] but unseats stereotypical expectations of gay male weakness and sissiness with a focus on a surprising queer aggression.

This thought-inducing "shock effect" holds true, even if the pair are better at raising controversial *questions* regarding gender identity, sexual object choice and political approach in their work than they are at providing intelligible *answers* to societal problems. For, in the end, as controversial queer author and queercore enthusiast Dennis Cooper states in a defense of Noxzema and Rex Boy, their work is best understood not as a prescription for social change, but as an antidote to the false image of an innocuous and monolithic LGBTQIA community:

> Noxzema and Rex Boy incite an argument with queer culture that cannot be won. They pose questions about identity that are as lushly poetic as they are superficially irresponsible. Like the surrealists who tortured early 20th century political ideas into wittily gorgeous ambiguities, their points are both dauntingly sophisticated and antibourgeois. To become engaged in their illogic is to sense the idiocy that goes hand in hand with delusions of a united front. (293)

To read *Bimbox* is, therefore, to risk being offended, baffled, disturbed, perhaps even amused and then, hopefully, enlightened. Half serious and half in jest, this incendiary work is not for everyone, and being able to appreciate its subversive humor is part of what solidifies and distinguishes members of the queercore subculture from the rest of

[5] To remind readers, "bricolage," as defined by Claude Levi-Straus, refers to the appropriation and intermixing of cultural elements (images, words, slogans) in order to put them to new, and generally more subversive, purposes (12).

the LGBTQIA community. In other words, queercore works like *Bimbox* function similar to the avant-garde as observed by Pierre Bordieu. Bordieu details how the history of the field of cultural distinction is determined by struggles over difference and distinction:

> On one side are the dominant figures, who want continuity, identity, reproduction; on the other, the newcomers, who seek discontinuity, rupture, difference, revolution. To "make one's name" means making one's mark, achieving recognition (in both senses) of one's difference from other producers, especially the most consecrated of them; at the same time, it means creating a new position beyond the positions presently occupied, ahead of them, in the avant-garde. To introduce difference is to produce time. (106)

Bimbox thus "creates a new position" that is "ahead of" the "consecrated" gay and lesbian (not to mention straight) establishment, and queercore fans who appreciate this type of work are a particular bunch. They belong to what Herbert Gans, disputing the notion that high culture aesthetic standards are universal, refers to as a "taste culture," or cultural cluster that embodies similar values and aesthetic standards, often influenced by aspects of class. This queercore taste culture appreciates art that the mainstream would likely refer to as "lowbrow" (i.e., unruly and unrefined), an attribution that many within queercore would undoubtedly, and defia ntly, embrace.

This "bad taste" can also be found in Noxzema's other zine, *SCAB* (produced without Rex Boy). *SCAB* (The Society for the Complete Annihilation of Breeding) is a play on Valerie Solanas's *SCUM* (Society for the Cutting Up of Men) *Manifesto*. Whereas the latter, written by the woman who infamously shot Andy Warhol in 1968, was a radical feminist treatise that encouraged gendercide and the creation of an all-

female society on the basis that men are a "biological accident" and "emotional cripples" (1), *SCAB* sets its savage satirical sights on the heterosexual lifestyle and its complimentary forces of patriarchy, capitalism, and religious fanaticism. The first issue of *SCAB*, released in 1990, begins with a manifesto, superimposed over images of happy heterosexual families and salacious news headlines about the deaths of nuclear families from acid burnings, stabbings and pipe bombs:

> **The Truth** is **SCAB** exists; a giant multinational conspiracy with participants numbering in the millions who thrive on the two-fisted excitement involved in over-throwing civilization on a global level. It's a hard story to tell – not an easy one to believe – but then **The Truth** ain't never easy.
>
> **SCAB. Society for the Complete Annihilation of Breeding.**
>
> **Our goal?** The absolute obliteration of what is generally regarded as the American nuclear family. **Our method?** Violence, pornography, abortions, castration, mindless sex, mass murder and the widespread destruction of private and state property. (3)

This manifesto goes on to state that the "nuclear family is fueled by heterosexism" and quotes Mariana Valverde, the feminist author of *Sex, Power and Pleasure*, by way of "heterosexism's" explanation:

> **[H]eterosexism** begins with **compulsory heterosexuality**. This is when a couple – a man and a woman – are pushed into a relationship by social forces beyond their control. First, they're made to believe they got together out of their own free choice. Then they're glorified as examples of personal success and stability. (6)

Although in the pages of *SCAB*, Noxzema references the more "reasoned" academic/popular work of Valverde, as well as *Toronto Star* columnist Lois Sweet, he

also insists on a crucial difference between *SCAB* and more intellectual responses to heterosexism, the crucial difference being (imagined) violence as the necessary solution to heterosexism: "*SCAB* acknowledges Sweet and Valverde's observations, however it is our theory that rather than slowly raise consciousness amongst the enemy, it is much more effective to render our opponents ***un****conscious*" (7). Such statements in favor of aggression and against heterosexuals are, of course, intended to be tongue in check (as Noxzema himself states, *SCAB* "put the 'ha!' in hate speech"), but they are also intended to startle normative straight folks into possibly rethinking their heterosexist thoughts and behaviors. Whether they actually have this effect is another question, for as Halberstam cautions, "there is no direct and simple relationship between imagined violence and real effects" (191). What's more, satire is not always effective, as it depends on the cultural capital of its recipients.[6] But, here it is telling that the initial printings of *SCAB* were bravely left on the windshields of parked cars at the Skydome during a Toronto Blue Jays baseball game. This is a break from the usual manner in which zines are exchanged – that is, by hand or mail between like-minded fellow producers and fans – and, thus, demonstrates that Noxzema was invested in literally, and physically, confronting the heteronormative mainstream, creating a stir among its ranks: "I went down to Skydome, the baseball stadium, and gave these [*SCAB*s] to straight people at the baseball game. I put them on their windshields. If I did this today, I'd be arrested – terrorism stuff" (Personal Interview).

The pointed critique of heterosexuality outlined in *SCAB*'s opening manifesto continues throughout its inner pages. A short essay entitled "Are heterosexuals

[6] "Cultural capital," as conceptualized by Bordieu in "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," refers to forms of knowledge, both tangible and intangible, that have value in a given society in relation to status and power.

'people'?" compares straights to the highly reproductive cockroach and advocates savage terrorism as the "only mode of thinking breeders comprehend" (8-9). Two pieces, "What Exactly *Is* Heterosexuality . . . And What Causes It?" by Alan Wakeman and "Are You a Heterosexual?" by Gloria Guss Back, both turn homophobic thinking popularized by the medical and mental health fields back on itself. While "What Exactly *Is* Heterosexuality" provides several hypotheses for homosexuality's cause, including hormonal imbalance, economic conditioning, social conditioning and childhood trauma, "Are You a Heterosexual?" asks several questions of heterosexuals that are more customarily posed to queers (e.g., "What do you think caused your heterosexuality?," "Is it possible that your heterosexuality is just a phase that you may grow out of?," and "Would you want your child to be heterosexual, knowing the problems s/he would face?") (12-15). Finally, a second manifesto provides a nine-step plan to "destroy the nuclear family," including confining heterosexuals to maximum security camps, forcing them to undergo lobotimization and sterilization, and abolishing all money, media and religious activity.

SCAB 2 extends this biting critique of heterosexuality through a specific target on kids and procreation or what Lee Edelman calls "reproductive futurity," a set of heteronormative ideologies that equate the heterosexually produced child – pure, innocent and imperiled – with the hope of the future. *SCAB 2* directly confronts the notion that children are virtuous and emblematic of society's future good:

> I am sick and tired of people talking about how great kids are . . . Kids are rotten. They beat each other up, verbally harass each other, lie, steal, and generally make life miserable for anyone who is unlucky enough to cross their path. Maybe it's just because their parents rub off on 'em – I'm not saying that children are intrinsically evil but whatever the reason, let's

> knock off this hogwash about children being intelligent, introspective caring people. Leave that to the sitcom writers. (4)

Likewise, the back cover of *SCAB 2* is a collage in which a poster for a missing child is overlaid with a scathing message directed at the child's parents: "If you hadn't bred, she wouldn't be dead." Solidifying *SCAB*'s indictment of the heterosexual prerogative to procreate, below the poster in bold scrawled letters it reads, "NO ONE HAS THE RIGHT TO HAVE KIDS."

SCAB's venom for "breeders" is unmistakable. And, yet, *SCAB* is not just an attack on heterosexuals, but rather all those who perpetuate heteronormative philosophies and ideals, including the more conservative (i.e., homonormative) members of the gay and lesbian community. This much is spelled out in the *SCAB* manifesto:

> Attending the wedding of a sibling or relative, celebrating your birthday, adopting children, going home for Christmas, participating in ***any*** sort of religious ritual – even attending "gay" church services – are all examples of traitorous anti-Revolutionary activity. Any lesbian or gay individuals who even entertain such thoughts are essentially breeders whether they like it or not. (3)

Implicit in this attack on lesbian and gay assimilationists is a distinction between queers and gays and lesbians. That is, gay and lesbians are those who "willingly appease heterosexual culture" and queers are those who seek to destroy it. Taking a highly oppositional stance, in *Bimbox 2*, Noxzema and Rex Boy not only emphasize this dissimilarity, but declare war on the lesbian and gay majority:

> We will not tolerate any form of lesbian and gay philosophy. We will not tolerate their obsolete thought processes. We will not tolerate their

> segregated bars, books, bath houses, magazines, music, or films. We will not tolerate their voluntary assimilation into heterosexual culture. We will not tolerate their trivialization of racism. We will not tolerate their warped shallow twisted concept of feminism. We will not tolerate their appeasement of Christianity and the greedy white male corporate power structure . . . Effective immediately, BIMBOX is at war against lesbians and gays. A war in which modern queer boys and queer girls are united against the prehistoric thinking and demented self-serving politics of the above-mentioned scum. [n.p.]

As this quote attests, in the pages of *Bimbox* and *SCAB*, homosexuals are threatened with merciless violence as much as heterosexuals. As a result, Noxzema and Rex Boy can even be accused of adding fuel to the homophobic bigot's fire. As Ashley Dawson remarks of *SCAB*, "The nugatory intent behind the critique is so powerful, the refusal of the traditional parameters of gay and lesbian identity so total, that *SCAB* is led to embrace the most virulent forms of homophobia" (139). A prime example of this is a "Guide to Gay Bashing in Toronto" included in the pages of *SCAB 2*. Not, as might be assumed, a manual for those lesbians and gays wanting to protect themselves from harassers, this "guide" is a map of the downtown Toronto gay and lesbian bar scene that is situated next to a "bash code" based on each individual bar's level of gay and lesbian identification and, thus, degree to which its patrons deserve to be tormented, with "1" ("Verbal abuse and a smack upside the head") being the lowest and "4" ("Next stop: The Morgue") being the highest. This bash code pushes the discourse of queer rage in an unexpected direction, producing a self-directed revision of Queer Nation's "Bash Back" campaign that is decidedly more sinister and menacing than the original. If Queer Nation's intent was to scare straights into good behavior, Noxzema and Rex Boy's intent is to scare lesbians and gays into non-normative *mis*behavior.

To be fair, not all of the content of *SCAB* and *BIMBOX* is quite so harsh. Humor is abundant in Noxzema and Rex Boy's work, and is illuminated, for example, by special "Happy Gay Pride" pop-up penis and labia spreads in *Bimbox 2* that playfully lampoon the de-sexualization of established lesbian and gay events. And much of the content in the zines is dedicated to the promotion and discussion of, mostly female, musicians, from The Carter Family to Fifth Column. This is all accomplished via inventive and complex word/image collages typical of zine art, although here executed with extra care and craft, as evidenced by such difficult-to-produce handmade elements as the pop-ups.

Nevertheless, what stands out in Noxzema and Rex Boy's work is the use of imagined violence and subversive humor to push at the boundaries of acceptable queer representation. At a time when gay and lesbian identity was beginning to solidify and homogenize (the late 1980s/early 1990s), Noxzema and Rex Boy sought to shake things up by sharpening the community's edges, even if these edges were sometimes turned against the community itself. Halberstam has described imagined violence as "the fantasy of unsanctioned eruptions of aggression from the 'wrong people'" (199), which is a perfect description of Noxema and Rex Boy's most irreverent work.

II. Gregg Araki, *The Living End* and AIDS Rage

One of the most prolific New Queer Cinema[7] filmmakers of the past twenty years, Gregg Araki makes films that deliberately work against the conventions and practices of the mainstream film industry as well as the dictates of bourgeois good taste. As a young director, Araki was known for his "shoot-and-run 'guerilla' techniques" that involved

[7] New Queer Cinema is a term coined by academic B. Ruby Rich to refer to the LGBTQIA filmmakers, like Araki and Todd Haynes, who rose to prominence in the early 1990s via such highly regarded film festivals as Sundance and the Toronto International Film Festival.

filming without permits and for his fierce independence and artistic control, with Araki doing just about everything himself (or with a small cadre of close friends) – from financing, screenwriting, directing, shooting to editing – and all on a miniscule budget (Moran 18). Today Araki's films, such as *Mysterious Skin* (2004) and *Kaboom* (2011), are made under more comfortable conditions, with bigger budgets and bigger stars, but Araki's commitment to independent, button-pushing cinema has remained constant. And, so have the characteristic themes of his films: an extreme mix of sex and (imagined) violence that is often executed with a flair for camp. As Glyn Davis remarks, Araki's films showcase several recurring camp elements: bad acting that reminds us "that we are watching actors performing"; settings crowded with "trashy ephemera" that "tramples standards of taste" and both celebrates and denigrates popular culture; and the heavy use of send-up and parody, specifically in relation to popular cinematic genres, with the road movie (*The Living End*) and the teen flick *(Totally Fucked Up*) being Araki's most common targets. It should also be noted that Gregg Araki is Asian American. However, his work rarely, if ever, deals with issues of race. Araki has, in fact, been criticized by Asian American critics for making films that are largely focused on white queers, a criticism that reflects the "burden of representation" often placed on people of color, and other minorities, to represent "their" people.

In addition, Araki's work has been highly influenced by punk/post-punk[8] music and values. Araki describes himself as "the black sheep, punk rock, artistic kid" and explains his filmmaking thusly, "I was a very anti-Hollywood, guerilla filmmaker . . .

[8] Post-punk is a genre of music that emerged in the late 1970s/early 1980s in the wake of the New York punk explosion. Post-punk is similar to punk in that it defies mainstream musical standards and often adheres to D.I.Y and anti-corporate principles, but is often more sonically complex and experimental than punk.

The more radical and subversive elements of my movies are kind of like the punk rock music of the late '70s and early '80s" (qtd. in Asch). For this reason, Araki has been linked to the queercore movement, even though he himself does not use this term to describe his work.[9] Punk is evident, first and foremost, in the bleak and crude style of Araki's films. As Kylo-Patrick Hart notes, Araki's films capture "the rawness, aggressive energy, nihilistic themes, and intentional lack of (full) commercial appeal that were the hallmarks of punk music in its heyday" (37).

Araki's connection to punk is not only manifest through the abstraction of style, however. Araki's films generally include: throbbing punk/post-punk soundtracks featuring the likes of Radiohead, Dead Can Dance, Curve, Hole and Marilyn Manson; iconic punk/post-punk images (e.g., the front-and-center Smiths poster that hangs in protagonist Jon's kitchen in *The Living End*); and characters who are "defined more by what music they listen to than anything else" (Yutani, 85). According to Hart, Araki's films are also linked to punk by way of their use of "bricolage." In punk, bricolage has traditionally involved such things as revamping school uniforms with safety spins and spraypaint. For Araki, bricolage has largely meant the modification of traditional film genres through the injection of an explicit and rough-edged "gay sensibility" (Hart 33). In addition, the non-politically correct, queer anti-heroes at the center of most of Araki's films can be viewed as (re-)appropriations of the negative stereotypes of queer folk from within mainstream media. Some have argued that these (re-)appropriated gay stereotypes do more harm than good, confirming the "worst" aspects of homosexual life (e.g., sexual promiscuity and dangerous and anti-social behavior). But, Roy Grundmann contends that

[9] For example, in "Queercore," Dennis Cooper positions "filmmakers like Gregg Araki and Sadie Benning" as representative of the queercore phenomenon (292).

these "stereotypes emerging from within our own queer film culture may be no less reductive but at least we can control their production and make sure they will always be only a few of the multiple ways in which we see ourselves" (25).

Like the other artists reviewed in this chapter, Araki uses his punk style and practices in the service of expressions of rage against the machine. Here I highlight Araki's *The Living End*, a film fueled by fury over the HIV/AIDS crisis. *The Living End* is Araki's third feature and a nominee for the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival in 1992. A gritty 16mm film made on a meager $20,000 budget, *The Living End* tells the story of two HIV positive gay men: a movie critic named Jon (Craig Gillmore) working on an essay on the "death of cinema" and a drifter named Luke (Mike Dytri), who moonlights as a hustler. The two first meet when Luke jumps into Jon's car following an attack in which three gay bashers confront Luke with baseball bats and Luke, in retaliation, shoots them dead. Later, Luke kills a homophobic police office, forcing the two to embark on a cross country road trip under the cynical motto, "Fuck work! Fuck the system! Fuck everything!"

Jon is a skinny art nerd who loves the dark, emotional post-punk of Joy Division and Echo and the Bunnymen, and Luke is a tough, hunky vagabond who loves the pounding rhythms of punk and industrial rock. As James Moran observes, with his chiseled-t-shirt-and-jeans good looks, Luke calls to mind rebel icons of the past from Marlon Brando to James Dean as well as the queered rebels in the films of Andy Warhol and Kenneth Anger (most notably in Anger's ode to 1960s leatherman *Scorpio Rising*). At the same time, Luke is also a parody of these predecessors with, for example, the cigarette that hangs from his mouth throughout the film, in true bad boy style, but that is

never smoked. Jon and Luke are linked, not only by their HIV positive statuses, but by their status as misfit outsiders. Indeed, the pair are named after one of the great rebel iconoclasts of the French New Wave, Jean Luc Godard, a filmmaker whose disjointed techniques (e.g., jump cuts, off kilter shots, non-linear editing) are abundantly evident in Araki's oeuvre.[10]

In its entirety, *The Living End* combines queer rage,[11] AIDS angst and punk nihilism into one volatile, and pessimistically humorous, package. These various threads are all apparent in the film's opening. Vandalism is sonically in the air, as on the soundtrack, we hear "Where the Pavement Ends" by industrial punk band Braindead Sound Machine intermingled with the sound of a can of spray paint being shaken. "The Living End," in confrontational big red block letters, suddenly slides across the screen. This title is followed by the first diegetic image, a red spray painted "Fuck the world!" scrawled by Luke on a pavement. In the next shot, Luke takes a swig of Jack Daniels and dances into a California desert landscape, his raised fist pumping in the air in a stereotypical gesture of protest and insubordination. This scene of vandalism and release is juxtaposed with a sequence taking place on the other side of town, in which Jon gets into his car (a "Choose Death" bumper sticker prominently displayed on its rear) and proceeds to drive through the streets of Los Angeles. On the soundtrack, Jon's "Notes from Oblivion," a recorded diary, reveals to the audience that today he was diagnosed as HIV positive. This opening establishes not only the film's main themes of anger and

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[10] A poster for Jean Luc Godard's *Made in the USA* hangs in Jon's apartment in *The Living End*. *The Living End* has also been compared to Godard's *Weekend*, with Kylo-Patrick Hart commenting that both films are "demented road movie variations" (33).

[11] To be clear, Araki's films are not "queer" in terms of representing a full spectrum of gender and sexual minority identities. His films are primarily focused on gay (white) men and (often underdeveloped) straight women. However, they are queer in the anti-normative and anti-assimilationist sense discussed at the onset of this chapter.

AIDS, but the two protagonists' different approaches to their impending deaths. While Jon sinks further into ennui and depression, basking in the gloomy mechanizations of Dead Can Dance and Joy Division, while struggling to finish his article on the "Death of Cinema," Luke "blames society" and, with nostrils flaring, sets his sights on brutal revenge against his oppressors.

Luke's first violent encounter occurs when a murderous lesbian couple picks him up while hitchhiking. This couple is played by punk performance artist Johanna Went and ex-Warhol superstar, Mary Woronov. These women, who make reference to killing with icepicks, are clearly meant to reference the then-popular film *Basic Instinct* (1992) and its icepick wielding anti-heroine, Catherine Tramell. The women taunt Luke for his cliché embodiment of the hipster vagabond type á la Jack Kerouac and are just about to kill him, when a bathroom break provides Luke with the opportunity to make an escape.

Elements of this interaction are misogynistic and lesbian-phobic, including the shrill personas of the women and Luke's dismissive reaction to their musical tastes: Luke steals their car to make his getaway and remarks of the music they have in their cassette player, "Don't these wenches listen to anything else besides k.d. lang and Michelle Shocked?" But this sequence can also be viewed as a parody of the then-pervasive mainstream representations of lesbians as psychotic killers á la *Basic Instinct* and as "earthy crunchy" types á la folk bands like the Indigo Girls. In this regard, the women are not to be taken simply at face value. As Kim Yutani argues, "The women are minor, innocuous, campy characters, and simply add to the over-the-top tone of the hostile city life that the protagonists escape" (88). Accordingly, Araki could more accurately be said to be dismissive of his female characters rather than outright hostile to them. This is, of

course, no less problematic, but less clearly motivated by misogyny than a self-absorbed androcentrism. This is further emphasized by the character of Jon's best friend, Darcy, whose sole purpose in the narrative seems to be to take care of, and worry about, Jon.

In Luke's second violent run-in, he comes across a trio of gay bashers with baseball bats on an inner city street who harass him with taunts of "Prepare to swallow your teeth faggot" and "It's cosmetic surgery time honey." Luke responds with a "Guess again fucking three stooges," before pulling a gun from his waist and shooting the three men dead. This sequence visualizes Queer Nation's "Bash Back" slogan, putting theoretical threat into representational practice as a visual warning to all homophobes. The sequence also makes a sly critique of the commercialization and misuse of independent cinema. For, as Moran observes, two of Luke's attackers wear t-shirts advertising successful independent films of the day:

> [I]n *The Living End*, when Luke kills off two gay bashers clad in t-shirts that read "Drugstore Cowboy" and "sex, lies, and videotape," Araki seems to imply that the films of independents such as [Gus] Van Sant or [Steven] Soderbergh, acclaimed by the popular press and bourgeois critical establishment, may ultimately be reappropriated by a set of values that they had initially set out to oppose. (20)

When Luke and Jon finally join up, rage against killer lesbians and gay bashers turns to collective anger over HIV/AIDS. In part, the duo react angrily to the disease itself, and specifically the restrictions and stigma placed on gay men and gay sex in the era of HIV/AIDS. Luke laments the loss of sexual hedonism in the 1990s and looks back to the 1970s with envy and bitterness: "We're the victims of the sexual revolution. The generation before us had all the fun, and we get to pick up the fuckin' tab." And, later, when Jon begins to have second thoughts about their cross-country thrill ride, Luke

lampoons safe sex head on: "Go back to your HIV-positive life . . . and don't forget to have sex in a plastic bag."

The full title of the film, *The Living End: An **Irresponsible** Film by Gregg Araki*, marks Araki's refusal to capitulate to this rhetoric of safer sex. Throughout the film, dangerous, promiscuous sex between Jon and Luke is unapologetically spotlighted in scenes of unprotected anal intercourse, rough SM bathroom fucking, fellatio in a moving car and a public roadside rendezvous. And, if homoeroticism is linked to the death drive, as Freudians believe, and especially in the age of HIV/AIDS, then *The Living End* only furthers this link in a scene in which Luke asks Jon to "choke me" as he is anally penetrated, as well as in a final sequence in which Luke forces himself on Jon while holding a loaded gun in his mouth. Both sequences give fresh impact to the metaphor of gay sex as suicide already heightened in light of the pandemic and its association with gay men. As Damon Young avers, these scenes also give "literal expression to the term *petite mort* [a French term meaning "little death" that is a euphemism for orgasm]," and are foreshadowed by Luke's earlier comment that "I hear death is a lot like coming – the same chemicals and stuff get released in the bloodstream" (19).

But, more than being upset about the injustices and inconvenience of safer sex, Jon and Luke are angry over government inaction in the face of HIV/AIDS. In the spirit of activist groups like ACT-UP, Jon and Luke are resolutely driven to aggressively fight for their lives and against their AIDS-phobic oppressors. When a man confronts Luke and Jon on the street, dismissing them with an "Adios, infected dick suckers," Luke chases after him, beating the man off-screen (perhaps to death) with a boombox. Later, Luke suggests to Jon, "Whataya say we go to Washington and blow Bush's brains out?

Or better yet, inject him with a syringe of our blood. How much you wanna bet they'd have a magic cure by tomorrow?" This question, as noted by Young, reflects with bitter malice "the widespread feeling among queers at the time that the government's failure to take action on AIDS constituted a de facto policy of extermination" (16).

Accordingly, Araki, like David Wojnarowicz before him, "imagines a violence generated by HIV+ bodies and transforms the AIDS-stricken body into a symbol of postmodern politics" (Halberstam 193). Interestingly, the above-mentioned instances of imagined violence within *The Living End* are exemplary, not only because they fit squarely within Halberstam's definition, laboring as they do to produce a political urgency around AIDS through violence, but because they are actually imaginary (i.e., un-represented) within the texts themselves. The threat against Bush is never realized, and the beating of the AIDS-phobic harasser, like the killing of the homophobic police officer later, happens off-screen, their only evidence being supplied by blood splatters on Luke's face and clothes. *The Living End* thus takes imagined violence in a new direction, forcing spectators to conjure images of bloody vengeance against oppressive forces in their own minds. *The Living End* prompts spectators to think queer rage, to internalize it and to envision what the results of this queer rage might look like. Accordingly, the film provides an *experiential* release and a sense of *felt* power, however momentary and illusory, for those disempowered by their sexual identities or HIV statuses.

III. **Tribe 8 and Gender Rage**

Tribe 8 was an all-female[12] queercore band that formed in San Francisco in 1991 and disbanded in 2005. While the band's line-up changed over the years, its core members included lead singer Lynnee Breedlove (born Lynn Breedlove), guitarists Silas Howard (a.k.a., Lynn "Flipper" Howard) and Leslie Mah, bassist Tantrum, and drummer Slade.[13] Tribe 8 came into being following a set of not-so-happy circumstances for two of its members. Recovering from drug and alcohol addiction and looking for a new, and less volatile, way to spend their time, Breedlove and Howard, two long-time punk enthusiasts, turned to the therapeutic release of rock 'n' roll performance. Drugs and alcohol had been a means for the pair to escape feelings of anger and depression brought on by past personal traumas and the ordeals of living in a sexist, homophobic, transphobic and classist society. This much is made clear in the lyrics to "Speed Fortress," the title of which refers to the street name for the psychostimulant drug, amphetamine:

> In my speed fortress
> No one can get inside
> No one can hurt me
> Cuz I have no feelings
> . . .
> You can't love me there
> You can't touch me there

[12] It should be noted that at the time of Tribe 8's inception, all of its members, to one degree or another, publically identified as women and, for this reason, I use female pronouns in reference to the Tribe 8 members. This is no longer true for guitarist Silas Howard and lead singer Lynnee Breedlove who now identify as male. My use of female pronouns is in no way meant to overlook or disrespect this fact, but rather my intent is to use the terms that would have been in play during the time period (the 1990s) that I am discussing. This terminology is also necessitated by my analysis of Tribe 8's decidedly female/feminist politics – an analysis which might become unproductively confusing if I were to use male pronouns.

[13] Tantrum, whose Canadian Green Card expired after nearly a decade of living in the United States, was ultimately replaced by bassist Mama T., and around the same time, Slade left the band and drummer Jen Schwartz joined in her place.

You can't reach me there
You can't fuck me there

As these lyrics verify, drugs and alcohol offered an emotional escape to Breedlove and Howard, a way to avoid the pain brought on by others and, specifically, homophobia as well as the physical, sexual and mental abuse that they and other members of the band had endured at the hands of men.[14] But performing in Tribe 8 enabled them, as well as their cohorts, to experience and publicly express the feelings of anger and sexual aggression that they had been eliding while under the influence. What's more, true to Halberstam's conceptualization of "imagined violence," Tribe 8 used publicly performed rage and aggressive eroticism to encourage societal change. Although some folks, especially from the feminist community, mistook Tribe 8's on-stage antics – involving such things as straight male conversion fantasies, sex toy castrations and sadomasochistic practice – as irresponsible endorsements of a masculinist obscenity and violence, these antics can be better understood as the band's means of "working through" the complications of the sexist vulgarity and abusive brutality that are part of the lived realities of women and transfolk. That is, Tribe 8's on-stage performances operated as a form of negotiation, contemplation and letting go of the psychosexual traumas of patriarchy.[15] And, for their audience, Tribe 8 offered the opportunity to get in touch with their own anger and desire, whether through releasing aggression in, and experiencing the eroticism of, the mosh pit or by joining the band on-stage to shamelessly enact taboo sexual poses.

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[14] In the documentary *Rise Above*, for example, Lynnee Breedlove reveals that her body was once "sold" to seven men for fourteen qualudes.

[15] Ann Cvetkovich makes a very similar argument in *An Archive of Feelings*. Indeed, Cvetkovich begins this text by noting that it was a Tribe 8 concert that inspired her to write her book on the politicizing and empowering effects of queer, sex-positive and public engagements with trauma.

On stage and within lyrics, two of the common targets of Tribe 8's subversive rage were straight men and heteronormative power. In the Tribe 8 documentary *Rise Above*, in the midst of a show at an unidentified New York City punk club, Howard hollers into the mic, "I'm looking for a young straight man to come up and suck Lynnee's dick." When no man rises to this challenge, Breedlove, topless and wearing a leather harness and a strap-on dildo, cajoles the men gathered beneath the stage: "I like girls giving blow jobs as much as the next guy, but just once I'd like to see one fucking New York boy have the balls to come up here and do it." While this bold invitation is immediately followed by an awkward silence, one man eventually jumps on stage and acquiesces to Lynnee's sexual demands. The documentary then switches to a montage from different Tribe 8 shows depicting various presumably straight men from around the country, climbing on stage, getting on their knees and "fellating" Breedlove in front of swarms of cheering fans. Set to Tribe 8's rendition of "Rise Above" by Black Flag, a song which includes the repeated lyrics "We are tired of your abuse!," this montage makes clear Tribe 8's performative purpose: to challenge and re-educate heterosexual males by usurping their sexual privilege and aggression.[16] This seduction of heterosexual males into quasi homosexual behavior on stage literally spotlights a public act of straight male sexual submission, penetration and humiliation – albeit an act that is consensual and performed in the spirit of transgressive play. As Breedlove states:

> I want to wake them [straight men] up. I'm trying to upset the status quo with men. The supposed punk rock revolution, it's full of a bunch of sexist little pricks. "I'm gonna show you bitch, how about that? Suck *my*

[16] Lynnee Breedlove states in *Rise Above* that, "It's important for people to be penetrated. It's like taking acid, it changes your whole attitude."

> dick." Plus, I was pissed. Part of me was, "Why can't I have everybody jump up on stage and say you're awesome?" To me it was like, "It's cause I'm a chick, huh? Okay, how about this? Breasticles, dicks, blowjobs, chainsaws." Anything I could do to get them motherfuckers to drop their jaws. (Personal Interview)

Here, again, we see the "shock effect" common to queercore and its representations of imagined violence, with Breedlove's provocative efforts to make straight men "drop their jaws" signaling a desire to motivate straight men to rethink and relinquish their sexist behaviors and hegemonic power.

However, although Breedlove, and by implication, the other members of Tribe 8, sought to frighten and shock straight men into a more enlightened way of being, they did not have a purely oppositional view of straight men. It would be more accurate to say that the band had an ambivalent relation to straight masculinity. To a certain extent, the onstage macho posturing of some the band members, most notably Breedlove, but also guitarist Howard and drummer Slade – which included exaggerated swaggering, aggressive instrumentation, and typical "cock rock" moves, like stage diving – functioned as a parodic assault on the brash male rocker, dismantling his traditionally masculinist, heterosexist subject position through the insertion of a decidedly queer, and for some female, subjectivity. Although members of Tribe 8 skewered the male rocker, they also paid homage to him through the embodiment of his persona. Which is to say that they engaged in a simultaneous refusal of, and identification with, straight masculinity. The fact that Breedlove and Howard now classify themselves as "transmen" only furthers this identification. That members of Tribe 8 identified with straight male rockers to a certain degree is something to which Breedlove attests in the following quote in which she cites her love of straight male punk band Black Flag as a strong influence on her own persona:

> Black Flag, they're hilarious. They were my heroes. They were funny. I was actually copying them. I wasn't really consciously parodying them. I was actually emulating them. Later I might have started to make fun of them a little bit, we put more of a spoof spin on it. But I loved fucking *Radar Love*. I listened to that when I was eight years old on my little old transistor radio. If you do comedy basically you have to believe fully in your character, you can't be making fun of it or it's not going to be good comedy. You have to fully inhabit the character like any kind of acting, any other kind of performance. You have to believe in it and I did. Was it a parody? It might have ended up being that, but really I wanted to be those guys. (Personal Interview)

So, while Breedlove and other members of Tribe 8 confronted sexism, homophobia and the straight men who perpetuated these evils, they also embraced certain aspects of an outlaw straight male subjectivity. To be clear, however, not all the members of Tribe 8 were as "male-identified" or "butch" as Breedlove, Howard and Slade. Guitarist Mah, in fact, stood out as the band's quasi-femme, or what Deanna Shoemaker, borrowing from artist Sharon Bridgforth, refers to as a "macha femme": a performance of femininity that "flaunts the female grotesque as a carnivalesque embrace of colored unruliness" (203). Here Shoemaker refers to Mah's identity as a bi-racial, bi-ethnic Irish Catholic Chinese Muslim, which translated to onstage performances in which Mah brandished her cultural dislocation and hybridity via deliberately confusing and confrontational bodily displays:

> Mah flaunts her freak status: her highly visible tattoos represent a lifelong commitment to battling mainstream ideologies . . . In this way she becomes powerfully and grotesquely uncategorizable as a form of survival. Her tattoos, along with her S/M macha femme look onstage, work to mark her exotic and degraded racial status. As [José] Muñoz says of African American drag queen Vaginal Crème Davis, "Rather than be alienated by her freakiness, she exploits its potential to enact cultural critique" (111). (253-4)

As this quote attests, Mah's conflicted, "uncategorizable" and racially coded performance of "macha femininity" matched her bandmates' ambivalent relationship to straight male subjectivity: In Tribe 8, gender performance was never a straightforward male vs. female, butch vs. femme, queer vs. straight affair. Consider, for example, the image of Breedlove on-stage, simultaneously bare-breasted and wearing a strap-on dildo in a puzzling display of both male and female signifiers. Breedlove's and Howard's current feminist beliefs articulated from their transmale bodies only adds to this mind-bending and anti-normative intricacy.

This type of ambivalence was also a key component of Tribe 8's most famous on-stage act: castration. During Tribe 8's heyday, Breedlove was notorious for a flamboyant ritual in which she would take a knife and saw off the dildo she had previously strapped on and made men fellate. This would usually occur during the band's performance of "Frat Pig," a furious, thrashing number that includes the following chorus:

> Frat Pig
> It's called gang rape
> Let's play
> Gang castrate

This song, and its accompanying performance of faux castration and fake blood, much like the female rape revenge fantasy *Thelma and Louise* discussed by Halberstam, was clearly intended to "produce a fear of retaliation in the rapist" (191). This on-stage castration ritual was an emotional release of feminist fury and a warning to would-be sexual abusers. As Breedlove explains: "I cut off a rubber dick [in performance] in the

context of talking about gang rape . . . It's a cathartic ritual; it makes us feel like we are getting some kind of revenge" (qtd. in Juno, 42).

Yet, this ritual also had another side, as Breedlove, in effect, castrated herself. That is, as queer cultural studies scholar Ann Cvetkovich argues, this performance was as much a representation of self-mutilation as it was a representation of retaliation against male abuse. It was a ritual of endurance and survival in addition to being one of anger and symbolic revenge:

> The violence of castration is thus directed as much at herself as it is externally, refusing any simple division between the subject and object of violence. Breedlove, though, emerges triumphant from the aggressive act of castration, holding the severed dildo aloft as if to suggest that castration is survivable, at least for those who don't have real penises. (86)

To add to Cvetkovich's argument, Breedlove's final "triumph" is also demonstrated by her ability to put on and take off the dildo/phallus in the first place. The dildo being a great sex equalizer that allows women to override an anatomical determinism that claims such appendages only belong to men, as well as take ownership of a perpetually available penis substitute, subversively minimizing phallic power by turning it into something one can simply decide to wear (Conway 151-3). As June Reich states in "Genderfuck," "At its most radical, the dildo, as an equal-opportunity accessory . . . undermines the penis as a meaningfully stable organ" (261).

Such anti-patriarchal interpretations of Tribe 8's music and live performances notwithstanding, over the years, the band members found themselves on the receiving end of harsh criticism, particularly from an older generation of feminists. This occurred most famously in 1994 when the band played at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival.

Tribe 8 was the first punk band to perform at this women-only music event known primarily for folk, "world beat," and pop. Although Tribe 8 had been asked by festival organizers to appear, there was a great deal of trepidation leading up to their performance. Of particular concern was not only Tribe 8's aggressive stage antics, but their explorations of taboo aspects of lesbian relationships, including sadomasochistic practice. In terms of the latter, some accused Tribe 8 of reinforcing hegemonic masculinity and repeating the uneven power dynamics of heterosexual relationships, and responded to the band's appearance at the festival with banners declaring, "Tribe 8 promotes violence against women" and "Tribe 8 = Woman Hating?" (Juno 40). This came as a surprise to Breedlove and the rest of Tribe 8, who had assumed that, as an avowedly lesbian-feminist band, they would be welcomed with open arms at this feminist music festival. As Breedlove recalls:

> They [the anti-Tribe 8 contingent] were like, "Tribe 8 are a bunch of pornographic blah blahs, and they're anti-females and anti-children and evil, and violence against women." So, our feelings were hurt. We thought we were among friends, we were starting to have fun, and our hearts were opening, our estrogen was all synched up. It was more of the same judgment and bullshit we had already had for four years, all over the place. People kicking us out, shutting us down, telling us to put our shirt on, put our dicks away, calling cops. We felt like it was our aunties, grandmas of our chosen family. Of course the people holding the signs were of all different ages, but it was led by an older contingent. (Personal Interview)

Emblematic of the controversy over sadomasochism was Tribe 8's characteristically gender-ambivalent song "Femme Bitch Top," concerning a virile femme dominatrix who puts "her high heel in your neck" and makes you "die a sweet torturous death with your face between her tattooed breasts." Tribe 8's live performances

of "Femme Bitch Top" featured women in high-femme regalia erotically whipping a butch Breedlove on stage, reversing conventional expectations of butch domination and femme submission. And the video for "Femme Bitch Top" features a barrage of semi-pornographic images of band members and their friends pinching, slapping, and tying one another up in restraints and metal chains.[17] For Tribe 8's detractors, such displays of sexual aggression were too reminiscent of acts of non-consensual male sexual violence against women. But others pointed to the significance of the switch in not only positions (femme on top, butch on bottom), but the female sex of both parties, which makes the depicted practices neither male nor heterosexual: As Breedlove maintained at the time, "I'm a woman, and I feel agro, and that means my aggression is not male" (Juno 41). Such performances also emphasized the element of fantasy. For, as Pat Califia maintains in "Feminism and Sadomasochism," "The key word to understanding s/m is *fantasy*. The roles, dialogue, fetish costumes, and sexual activity are part of a drama or ritual. The participants are enhancing their sexual pleasure, not damaging or imprisoning one another" (172). This element of fantasy within SM practice deserves acknowledgement, as there is a parallel to be drawn between the concept of imagined violence and the performativity inherent to SM: when it comes to SM, violent fantasies are indulged in order to "enhance sexual pleasure," and when it comes to imagined violence, violent

[17] In addition the questionable gender dynamics, the "Femme Bitch Top" video also raised questions of racial representation. As guitarist Leslie Mah explains, "[W]e tried to get varieties of different kinds of women [for the video]. Unfortunately, some people were sick and couldn't show up. It just sort of ended up that almost all of the women of color were being portrayed as the bottoms. And it was like, 'Oh, can we do this? People already have an issue.' It was SM, some people might consider it a big deal and some people would be like, 'It's nothing, you know, just depending on what they're into.' It was really frustrating. To try to take the footage and make it seem like, 'Okay, we don't want to portray all the women of color as slaves!" (qtd. in Alcantara, et al., 229).

fantasies are indulged in order to enhance the feeling of political power. In both cases real physical harm is rarely caused.

The controversy at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival was ultimately generative, however, as it led to dialogue on the often proscribed and under-discussed topics of incest, violence and SM practice via a series of workshops that were set-up in response to Tribe 8's performance. *Rise Above* includes documentary footage from one of these workshops in which the members of Tribe 8 sit in a tent with attendees responding to their questions and grievances. For example, one attendee claims that the violent aspects of Tribe 8's performances are disempowering to women: "All it's doing is taking the same power dynamic that I thought we were trying to wane out and saying it's ok, as long as we're the ones on top." To which another attendee responds, "Sometimes we are in situations where if you don't come out on top, you're going to be fucking dead. I think it's just so great to see women getting in touch with that power, so we know where it is and we can access it when we need to easily." As Cvetkovich attests, such debates within feminism, however difficult and uncomfortable, are actually a sign of progress:

> The debates spawned at Michigan and elsewhere, and the pain and conflict inevitably unleashed when safe spaces are established, should be considered signs of success rather than failure. Trouble sets in when controversy is viewed not as an integral part of transformation but as something to be avoided. (87)

Thus, in the end, through confrontational and aggressive stage antics, which imagine retaliative violence against male perpetrators and indulge in fantasies of sadomasochistic sexual play, Tribe 8 accomplished several feats. They challenged

gender stereotypes of weak, passive women (and those of strong, aggressive men). They endeavored to force straight men, and others, to think twice about their sadistic behavior. And they provided a valuable and rare space for queers and women to contemplate complicated issues of abuse, sexuality and rage.

IV. Race, Tribe 8, *Bamboo Girl* and Beyond

In addition to expressing anger over sexism and homophobia, Tribe 8 has also expressed rage over racism in their music and performances, specifically as articulated by bi-racial, Asian and Caucasian, guitarist Leslie Mah. Within queercore, Mah is not alone in this regard, however. Accordingly, in this section I briefly discuss several other non-white queercore artists who target racism in their works of imagined violence. This section serves as transition between the above one on Tribe 8 and the next, and final, one on terrorist chic, which also takes race/racism within queercore as a primary subject.

Examples of anti-racism in the art of Tribe 8 are not as abundant as examples of anti-sexism and anti-homophobia, but these examples do exist and are quite compelling. The Tribe 8 song, "People Hate Me," for example, starts with a strident rejection of heterosexuality and gender norms, shouted by lead singer Lynnee Breedlove:

> People hate me
> I make a lotta noise
> They're kind scared cus
> I don't need boys
> Whisker biscuit's what I likes to lick
> I ain't the kinda chick where they can stick their prick

But, the song continues with Mah suggesting the possibility of violent revenge against those who have racially oppressed her and her Asian ancestors:

> People hate me
> For the color of my skin and the shape of my eyes
> Cus I might take revenge for the lies their daddies told my kin
> I might take their life cuz they raped my mom
> I might have a knife or a gun or a bomb
> Or a machete

In this manner, the song slides from a rejection of gender norms and unwanted sexual advances from straight men to an imagined violent threat of retribution for racism and the offenses of America's political past. As Shoemaker notes, through the lyrics of "People Hate Me," and Mah's confrontational live performances of it, Mah "takes this cultural hatred of her racial and sexual difference and reinscribes it as a potent weapon of resistance" (254).

In addition to her role in Tribe 8, Mah has also contributed to the pantheon of imagined queer and racial violence in the short film *Shut Up White Boy* (Thu Ha, 2002). Gritty and black and white, *Shut Up White Boy* features an original punk soundtrack by the DragOn Ladies, a temporary band featuring Mah, Dorothy Wang and Tina Gordon, with a name that executes a playful reclamation of the stereotype of the devious and inscrutable Asian "dragon lady." As Roberta Uno explains Asian female stereotypes:

> When seen at all, [women of Asian descent in the popular media] are generally depicted as exotic prostitute or geisha, the quiet, submissive servant or peasant, the treacherous dragon lady or villain, the comic buffoon, or the industrious model minority. (qtd. in Shimakawa, 377)

Shut Up White Boy takes place in a diner run by punk Asian American dykes. One of the frequent visitors of the diner is a twenty-something white man, Philip, who is on a date with an attractive Filipina woman. Philip is a cliché of white racism. Adhering to the stereotype that "all Asians are the same," he mistakes his date for Chinese, and fetishistically tells her that "our children are going to be stunning." Loud and inconsiderate, he arrogantly tells the diner staff not to put MSG in his food because it's "too oriental for me" (they, of course, retaliate by making sure his food is loaded with MSG). As Mah, who plays one of the wait staff observes, Philip is a "fucking yellow fever jerk." And, in response, she and the other diner employees drift into fantasies of creative revenge. Mah dreams of chaining Philip around the neck and dragging him across the diner floor, while laughing maniacally. Another member of the wait staff imagines making out with Philip's date in the bathroom. And a collective fantasy depicts all of the women ganging up on Philip in a back alley behind the restaurant, where they kick, push and beat him into submission. Accordingly, *Shut Up White Boy* enacts a double-illusion of imagined violence, with the diegetic characters dreaming of racialized revenge, just as the film itself conjures a fantasy of racialized vengeance for its audience.

That this example of imagined violence features Asian Americans is not out of the ordinary. Asian Americans had a small but visible presence within 1990s queercore, especially via a series of performances, collectively entitled "Full-On Asian Action," that highlighted the cultural productions of queer Asian Americans. In much of this work, queer racial rage and imagined violence played a key role. For instance, a flyer for a Full-On Asian Action show, which took place in San Francisco on February 3rd, 1995, and featured such artists as Kicking Giant (with singer Tae Won Yu), Sta-Prest (with

singer Iraya Robles), Justin Chin, Kevin Chen, and Mari Kono, contains the following tale of anger over the white gay male fetishization and objectification of Asian men:

> On a warm Chicago summer night, the whiteboy with the ripped jeans who had been cruising me followed me into a dark alley. When I looked around, he looked nervous. "I have these Mishima fantasies," he said. Well, I said, I'm afraid I'm Chinese and can't help you with that. But, if you would like to disembowel yourself, why don't you do it by the gutter so they don't have to hose down the alley tomorrow? Can I watch?

As evidenced by this flyer, the artists involved in Full-On Asian (including Mah) are what Eve Oishi would knowingly refer to as "bad Asians": "directly confrontational, politically charged, and assertive in ways that take apart the common image of Asians and Asian Americans as the quiet, conservative 'model minority'" (224). Accordingly, instances of Asian American imagined violence can be said to be doubly disruptive, as they not only dislodge notions of homosexual weakness and frivolity, but also notions of Asian American submission and passivity.

Also relevant here is the long-running queercore zine *Bamboo Girl* edited by Filipina American Margarita Alcantara, featuring an array of mostly queer and Asian contributors. Similar to Mah, Alcantara was attracted to punk as someone who already felt different from the mainstream on account of her Filipina race:

> It was because I was growing up in Pittsburgh, where they don't have many minorities in the first place and all the minorities that were there were trying to be white, so I was trying to find out how I fit in and everything; and then, I guess because I felt so different and flaunted it, in a way. But at the same time, it also kept me safe in a way to flaunt it, so the music I started to listen to was because of girlfriends who felt the same way. Then, once I graduated from college pretty much, I just let myself go. (qtd. in Alcantara, et al., 216)

"Flaunting it" in the pages of *Bamboo Girl* has involved: drawings and first-person stories concerning racial and sexual politics; accounts of anti-queer Asian violence; true life stories about being involuntarily checked into a mental institution; interviews with notable queer Asian luminaries; tongue-in-cheek "horrorscopes" and letters to the editor. Illustrative of *Bamboo Girl*'s ideological angle is one of Alcantara's drawings in issue #6 entitled "You Know What I'm Sick Of?," which depicts a number of her grievances, including "Being the only girl of color [at parties] invited to satisfy the 'status quo'" and "Knowing that Filipinas and other women of color are <u>still</u> expected to bow, even in this day and age, to bullshit – their invalidation of their choices, bodies, ethnicities and beliefs!" (9). Alongside cultural artifacts like those discussed above, *Bamboo Girl* thus functions to validate queer of color voices and to express a "productive rage" against racism, both within and without the LGBTQIA community.

This iteration of racialized imagined violence is expressed visually in *Bamboo Girls* threatening and confrontational zine covers. For example, the cover of the "Summer from Hell/Canada Issue" features a female Asian superhero, with a half-shaved head and a nose ring, flying through the air. This heroine grips a dagger in her right hand, while her left hand is balled into a fist and extended toward the reader, as if she is about to punch him/her, an impression emphasized by a bold-lettered "Karang!!" immediately under her fist. Likewise, on the cover of *Bamboo Girl* issue #4, an androgynous woman of indeterminate race stands towering over the corpse of white Nazi skinhead (identifiable by the swastika on his forehead, as well as his suspenders and combat boots), her left booted-foot perched on his stomach. The woman holds a knife in her teeth, which she has apparently used to tear out the heart of the skinhead, as she holds

his heart in her right hand, while caustically inquiring, "Rat's meat, anyone?" Through such imagery, Alcantara, like Mah, not only threatens heterosexual patriarchy by placing unruly female rage center stage, but threatens racial hierarchies by furiously "talking back" to (white) power – talking back being an act of speech that bell hooks claims "is no mere gesture of empty words, but the expression of our movement [as feminist women of color] from object to subject – the liberated voice" (*Talking Back*, 9).

Sadly, however, such instances of racialized imagined violence, while quite powerful, can be difficult to find within queercore, bringing to light the dominant whiteness of the subculture and its failure to pay as close attention to matters of race and ethnicity, as those of gender and sexuality. Indeed, *Shut Up White Boy* is the only cinematic example from queercore that I have located. And, as indicated, most of these instances are Asian American, as opposed to African or Latino/a American. This perhaps suggests that imagined violence, despite Halberstam's examples of Ice-T and June Jordan, is not a tactic that is as readily available to African and Latino/a American artists, since displaying rage for these individuals runs the risk of reinforcing deeply entrenched stereotypes of the "scary" and "out of control" Black/Latino/a. For women, this stereotype is encapsulated by the colonizing image of the "angry black woman," which, according to Melissa Harris-Perry in *Sister Citizen* continues to be one of the most pervasive stereotypes faced by black women in modern American society, and one that "renders sisters both invisible and mute" (88). Accordingly, the tactic of imagined violence may have some very serious limitations for black and Latino/a men and women and may truly benefit only white and Asian American artists, as they are not hemmed in by racist discourse which pigeonholes them as already frighteningly uncontained.

This being said, examples of black and Latino/a racialized imagined violence are indeed visible within queercore's sister movement of "homo hop" (queer hip hop that, like queercore, follows a DIY ethos and often favors an angry approach). This is perhaps not surprising given the racialized divisions of music production and fandom in the U.S. (i.e., the rooted affiliation between whiteness and punk and blackness/Latinoness and hip hop). For example, one can point to a song like "No Fags Allowed," by Latino homo hop artist Deadlee, which forcefully claims that a "fag" is not "an effeminate acting guy," but "anybody that's got something to hide," such as "George Bush for sending the soldiers, even though there's no evidence to support what they told us." In true imagined violence style, the chorus of "No Fags Allowed" depicts the violent retribution Deadlee imagines for these "fags":

> Pop you, pound you, slap you around
> Who's the punk now?
> No fags allowed
> Stomp you, clown you, beat your ass down
> Who's the punk now?
> No fags allowed

While this creative reversal of the "fag" of homophobic and mainstream punk and hip-hop discourse does not target white power directly, it does confront racism within the black/Latino/a community, chastising African American DJs "for playing homophobic hip hop and reggae," and taunting "down-low[18] faggots on the run" with claims that Deadlee is "fucking niggas like crazy." "No Fags Allowed," in its potentially

[18] Down-low is a slang term, primarily associated with African Americans, that refers to a subculture of men who usually identify as heterosexual, but who have sex with men. Down-low has been viewed as "a type of impression management that some of the informants use to present themselves in a manner that is consistent with perceived norms about masculine attribute, attitudes and behavior" (Fields 203).

empowering release of sexual and racial anger, is thus an instructive instance of the possibilities of imagined violence from a non-Asian queer of color perspective. But, the fact that this example exists on the outskirts of queercore raises an important criticism of the subculture and its racial confines. Whether future queercore works will be more attuned to race and ethnicity, will be more inclusive of all queers of color, and will be able to effectively employ imagined violence as a means to express racial hostility from multiple standpoints remains to be seen.

V. **Terrorist Chic**

Loosely related to Halberstam's "imagined violence," emerging as its potential and potentially questionable "next of kin," is the concept of "radical chic" (a.k.a., "terrorist chic"), which I discuss here as a cautionary footnote to the use of imagined violence within queercore. The concept of "radical chic" was coined by journalist Tom Wolfe in a 1970 article entitled "Radical Chic: That Party at Lenny's." Responding to a fundraising party thrown by composer Leonard Bernstein for the militant anti-racist Black Panther Party, Wolfe satirized the event by cheekily remarking upon the absurdity of Bernstein, a member of the bourgeois white elite, supporting an organization whose politics were anathema to his own lifestyle. As Michael Bracewell states in the on-line essay, "Molotov Cocktails":

> [Wolfe's] subject is how culture's patrician classes – the wealthy, fashionable intimates of high society – have sought to luxuriate in both a vicarious glamour and a monopoly on virtue through their public espousal of street politics: a politics, moreover, of minorities so removed from their sphere of experience and so absurdly, diametrically, opposed to the islands of privilege on which the cultural aristocracy maintain their isolation, that

> the whole basis of their relationship is wildly out of kilter from the start. ... In short, Radical Chic is described as a form of highly developed decadence; and its greatest fear is to be seen not as prejudiced or unaware, but as middle-class. (n.p.)

Radical chic (from this point forward referred to as "terrorist chic," as this has become the favored term in recent years) has thus come to denote individuals who endorse leftist radicalism merely to affect worldliness, assuage bourgeois white guilt, and/or to garner prestige, rather than to affirm genuine political convictions. Post-9/11, terrorist chic has taken on renewed force with the popularity of such things as keffiyefs, Arab cotton scarves, traditionally worn as a headdress, adopted outside the Arab world as a stylish accouterment, and musical artist M.I.A., a techno-rapper who openly celebrates the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Tamil independence movement, among other revolutionary groups, in her visual art and music.

The concept of terrorist chic as formulated by Wolfe and others serves as a reminder that radical causes are sometimes embraced, not out of dedication, but out of a desire to be fashionable, trendy and cool. While the artists discussed in this chapter thus far are artists who, by and large, use imagined violence as a way of asserting their sincere queer political investments, queercore artists and consumers can also, at times, be accused of a more frivolous terrorist chic. This accusation is most apropos to those queercore artists that appropriate the images and rhetoric of political individuals and organizations that are only loosely, if at all, related to queerness (and, hence, their own identities). While it can be said that terrorist chic often relies on depictions of real folks (like Angela Davis, discussed below) who have been linked to actual violence – unlike imagined violence, which exists purely within the realm of the fictional – it is also true

that depictions of terrorist chic rely on glorified and invented ideas of "terrorist" individuals and practices. In this regard, terrorist chic is not all that dissimilar from the concept of imagined violence.

Punk and terrorist chic have long been intertwined. In a cantankerous tome *Terrorist Chic: An Exploration of Violence in the Seventies*, Michael Selzer claims terrorism is the template for understanding the violence that was "infecting" popular culture in the 1970s via such things as punk. For Selzer, punk and terrorism share a similar impulse: to forcefully grab our attention and make a startling impact on us, as Benjamin's concept of "shock effect" would have it. Likewise, he claims both punk and terrorism result from boredom and a lack of affect, with terrorist chic/punk havoc being unleashed in order to alleviate these symptoms (xiv). Whether one agrees, punk and terrorist chic can also be aligned more directly in relation to the history of punk artists who have appropriated the radical political symbols and slogans of militant organizations. For example, in the 1970s, British punk band The Clash forged their own "Red Brigade" image through an amalgamation of the uniforms and symbols of such insurgent left-wing groups as Italy's Marxist-Leninist terrorist outfit, Brigate Rosse, and Germany's anti-imperialist, urban-guerilla group, The Red Army Faction. And, earlier, at the height of the Vietnam War, Malcolm McLaren drew upon the menacing cache of Communism (and, incidentally, homosexuality) in order to style his musical protégés, the proto-punk, cross-dressing outfit The New York Dolls. As he colorfully elaborates in a 2004 article in *The Guardian* entitled "Dirty Pretty Things":

> I decided to set sail for the US, to engage, belong, harness, dominate and ultimately, I thought, control the New York Dolls. I decided to make them

> look not like girls, but worse, like Communist dolls. Red, patent leather Communist dolls. I had a fondness for all that Chinese stuff. Drugs and alcohol had seeped into their lifestyle and they were already past their shelf life. The music industry paid no attention to anyone who liked the New York Dolls, dismissing them mistakenly as homosexuals. It now continued to deteriorate even further.
>
> The Vietnam War was just about to end and for me, red was the colour and I thought it needed to be their colour. Their lyrics, I felt, should have the word "red" in them at least six times. I wanted a chance to have just one affair, one moment, and persuaded them to let me make a show. I found a venue, hung a lipstick logo'd flag outside, and designed a backdrop - a banner with a hammer and sickle on stage. I wrote a press release - a manifesto of sorts that declared the politics of boredom: "Better red than dead." The Dolls came on stage soaked in a ray of red light. David waved Chairman Mao's Little Red Book. Everyone drank red-coloured cocktails and sat on red upholstered chairs.

This type of casual and trivial appropriation of radicalism, evidenced by the reduction of a complicated politics of class and nationalism to a series of stock consumer objects and red colored decorations, also happens within queercore. Although, the problem of terrorist chic is also something to which certain queercore artists are consciously attuned. In the previous chapter, I considered Bruce LaBruce's film *The Raspberry Reich*, a film that draws from the theoretical writings of Herbert Marcuse and William Reich to tell the tale of a contemporary terrorist group bent on continuing the work of the Red Army Faction, largely through the "anti-bourgeois" practice of man-on-man sex. A complex text, *The Raspberry Reich* is at once a tribute to the left-wing radicals that LaBruce admires and a critique of the empty fetishization of leftist politics: As mentioned, the film ends with Gundrun, the leader of the hardline anti-normative/anti-patriarchal/anti-bourgeois terrorist gang, pushing a baby carriage down the street reciting to her newborn the history of class struggle, in what is a clear send-up of individuals who don't practice what they preach. Beginning as it does with an intimate black-and-white

image of an Arab man praying, *The Raspberry Reich* also places its commentary on terrorist chic within a post-9/11 world in which racist discourse positions "terrorist" and "Arab" as synonyms.[19]

Another recent and complex example is the experimental short *Rebels Rule* (2002) by Will Munro. An artist and club promoter, Munro was part of the second generation of queercore practitioners in Toronto, who, unfortunately, died of cancer in 2010 at the young age of thirty-five.[20] Accompanied by "The International M.M.A. (The Mild Mannered Army" by a queer folk rock band, The Hidden Cameras, *Rebels Rule* depicts a ragtag cadre of sexually ambiguous punk youths as they rehearse various terrorist practices (e.g., throwing Molotov cocktails and testing each other's hand-to-hand combatting skills) within a desolate, rocky cityscape. Set entirely to music, and without dialogue to articulate any clear political stance, the film runs the risk of reducing leftist politics to a series of postures and styles. Radicalism is evoked solely by the "terrorist practices" in which the youths engage and their costuming, including underwear, which features a hodgepodge of emblems, from the anarchy symbol, to the raised fist of radical feminism.[21] Yet, the short is also a clever re-imagining of terrorist violence, as it ends not with the bloody battle that one expects, but with the youths hitting the streets of Toronto

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[19] In "A Title Does Not Ask, but Demands That You Make a Choice," Eugenie Brinkema opines that this opening image is the most shocking and moving in all of Bruce LaBruce's corpus, and that "everything it signifies only three years after an unprecedented national and cultural trauma – horror, fear, loathing, anger, shame, guilt, arousal, wonder, sadness, indifference, apathy – is subsequently forced onto the scene of desire that the later cinematic and pornographic workings visibly enact" (122).

[20] As a testament to Will Munro's influence on the queer scene in Toronto, Bruce LaBruce made the following statement upon his death: "As we all know, Toronto can be a cruel and unforgiving city. What makes Will Munro so extraordinary as an artist and as a person is that he has not only remained true to such a harsh mistress, but that he has also contributed so substantially to the fabric and heft of this often maleficent metropolis. His dedication to community work (including volunteering for a decade at an LGBTQIA youth crisis hotline) and to creating social and sexual stimulation for the queer community outside the decaying gay ghetto (namely, his wonderfully raunchy club night, Vazaleen, and his participation as a founding partner in revitalizing the Beaver Café) is unmatched" (46).

[21] As an artist, Will Munro was known for designing underwear and creating wearable art.

in black ski masks, only to remove their facial coverings in order to kiss one another in various polymorphous pairs, much to the surprise of passersby (and in perhaps a nod to the kiss-in protests that were popularized by Queer Nation). Here it is the open display of queer eroticism, and not violence, that becomes the act of terrorism par excellence.

In addition to these lone examples, queercore has a noteworthy history of deploying terrorist chic via the figure of activist, scholar and author Angela Davis. In August of 1970, Davis garnered the national spotlight after she fled authorities and charges of murder, conspiracy and kidnapping in connection with the failed attempt to free Black Panther prisoner George Jackson and the Soledad Brothers (charges for which she was later acquitted). The media frenzy surrounding the hunt for Davis, as well as her subsequent trial, transformed her into a media icon, specifically via a widely disseminated photograph in which she was depicted with her soon-to-be-trademark Afro and stern expression. This photograph even appeared on the front cover of *Time* magazine and resulted in Davis becoming one of the primary visual symbols of 1970s black radicalism. Then and now, this appropriated image, as Davis herself maintains, was read differently depending on the political sympathies of its audience. While for some her image signified a "conspiratorial and monstrous Communist (that is, Anti-American) whose unruly natural hairdo symbolized black militancy (that is, antiwhiteness)" for others it signified "a charismatic and raucous revolutionary ready to lead the masses into battle" (39). Neither of these interpretations has done justice to Davis: Both have flattened her into a one-dimensional caricature and kept her frozen in a particular time and place (i.e., California in the 1970s as a militant member of the black power movement), despite the fact that Davis, who is still very much alive and politically

active, was subsequently a respected Professor in the History of Consciousness program at the University of Santa Cruz and the founder of Critical Resistance, an organization dedicated to abolishing the prison-industrial complex.

The appeal of Davis within the ranks of queercore seems to be her difference as an African American woman within the realm of 1970s far leftist politics, which was, outside of the radical feminist movement, largely male-dominated and, outside of the Black Panther Party, largely white. In 1997, in the pages of *Out* magazine, Davis also revealed that she is a lesbian, solidifying her appeal to queercore enthusiasts. The most obvious example of Davis's iconicity within queercore is her status as the source of inspiration for genderqueer multi-talented performing artist, Vaginal Davis, whose name is a play on the activist's own. As Vaginal Davis explains in an interview with Tommy Gear and Mike Glass in the magazine *aRude*:

> It [my name] came from Angela Davis – I named myself as a salute to her because I was really into the whole late '60's and early '70's militant black era . . . I was the first one in my family to go to college – I got militant. That's when I started reading about Angela and the Panthers, and that's when Vaginal emerged as a filtering of Angela through humor. That led to my early 1980's a capella performance entity, Vaginal Davis and the Afro Sisters (who were two white girls with Afro wigs). We did a show called "we're taking over" where we portrayed the Sexualese Liberation Front which decides to kidnap all the heads of white corporate America so we could put big black dildos up their lily white buttholes and hold them for ransom. It really freaked out a lot of the middle-class post-punk crowd – they didn't get the campy element of it but I didn't really care. (42)

Vaginal Davis came to prominence within the early 1990s queercore movement through her irreverent zines *Fertile LaToyah Jackson*, titled after a drag queen of the same name, and *Shrimp*, a slang word for a sexual act involving feet. Vaginal Davis is

also a musician, being a founding member of Pedro, Muriel and Esther (PME) as well as Cholita!, with Alice Bag of the seminal 1970's punk band The Bags. Currently, Vaginal Davis performs in a Berlin band named Ruth Fischer, after the co-founder of the Austrian Communist Party. In addition, Vaginal Davis is an actress known for her one-woman shows and performances in the films of Bruce LaBruce, Rick Castro, and G.B. Jones.

In *Disidentifications*, José Esteban Muñoz labels Vaginal Davis's art "terrorist drag," because it expresses a "guerilla style" that "functions as a ground level cultural terrorism that fiercely skewers both straight culture and reactionary components of gay culture" (100; 102). Muñoz is specifically interested in Davis's show "The White to Be Angry," in which she inhabits the persona of Clarence, a backwoods, racist, white militiaman. According to Muñoz, this performance involves a tactical disidentification[22] in which "aspects of the self that are toxic to the militiaman – blackness, gayness, and transvestism – are grafted onto this particularly militaristic script of masculinity" such that Vaginal Davis in her role as Clarence, "inhabits and undermines the militiaman with a fierce sense of parody" (106). In other words, through texts like "The White to Be Angry," Vaginal Davis draws from histories of racial and gender terrorism to enact a critique of white heterosexual supremacy, much as the "real" Davis does, only Vaginal Davis uses more overtly performative and parodic means.

Angela Davis shows up elsewhere within queercore as well. *No Skin Off My Ass*, LaBruce's story of an unlikely romance that develops between a hairdresser and a skinhead, discussed in the previous chapter, includes an extended sequence in which the skin's sister, Jonesy, and three of her female friends listen silently to a Davis radio

[22] According to Muñoz, marginal populations often "disidentify" or negotiate with popular culture, adapting and reworking popular culture to meet their own needs and desires.

interview. In the interview Davis rails against the politics of non-violence, equating it with suicide for racial minorities:

> If I see a friend or a comrade being attacked by the pigs, with machine guns or with dynamite, you can't ask me to go up and be moderate and simply ask the pig to please hold off for a minute until I decide how I am to deal with that. This whole question of non-violence is something that has really confused the minds of the people in this country. Whenever I contemplate that whole question of non-violence I inevitably come up with the conclusion that anybody who accepts non-violence as a doctrine is saying that he embraces the philosophy of suicide.

This speech continues on the soundtrack as Jonesy picks up her camera, suggestively referring to it as her machine gun, and informs her companions, as well as her skinhead brother who has since joined the group, "Oh, this is Angela Davis, by the way. Remember when she was on the cover *Life* magazine and the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List, all in the same week? That should inspire you." This statement leads into an impromptu screen test for Jonesy's film *Girls of the SLA*, in which the skin undresses and tries, to no avail, to seduce the women, who are now symbolically refigured as members of the 1970s urban terrorist group The Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA). This scene thus confounds the spectator with a strange combination of radical anti-racist political sincerity and terrorist dress-up, indicating how easily political investment can slide into depoliticized play.

Angela Davis shows up yet again in the *Itty Bitty Titty Committee*. This 2007 film, directed by Jamie Babbit, focuses on the underground activities of a dykecore/riot grrrl inspired radical feminist collective known as Clits in Action (C.I.A.). These C.I.A. protagonists commit numerous acts of vandalism to bring attention to women's rights,

from spray painting "A Woman is More Than Her Parts" on a plastic surgery center to taking over a television station to protest the phallocentrism of the Washington Monument. One of their most attention-getting pranks involves constructing a life size model of Angela Davis and placing it in the park. Donned in prototypical Afro, sunglasses and a leather jacket, with her fist raised in the air, the statue is situated next to a sign that reads, "Angela Davis never got the props she deserves. Thank you Angela! Women like you changed the world." This captures the attention of a local newspaper which, as audiences of terrorist chic often do, misses the political point: "If you visit the park before the authorities take care of it, be sure to check out the newest installation: a six-foot tall statue of legendary feminist and Black Panther, Angela Davis. Though no one knows who put the statue on display, most are placing the blame on a feminist micro-group who call themselves the GIA [sic]. It probably won't be there long, so catch it while you can!"

In both of these films, Davis serves as a source of inspiration for hip, activist-minded and predominately white punks. In *No Skin Off My* Ass, the words of Angela Davis are buffered in-between a narrative that, as discussed in the previous chapter, flirts with, although ultimately unhinges, the fascist iconography of the skinhead. This creates an unlikely juxtaposition between the words of a radical black female activist and the quasi-racist connotations of masculinist skinhead culture, reducing Davis to a marker of radicalism and irony within the text. And, in *Itty Bitty Titty Committee*, Davis merely serves as a symbol of hardcore activism alongside a host of all-white militants (from Emma Goldman to riot grrrl bands like Bikini Kill and Heaven's to Betsy, which heavily populate the soundtrack).

Herein lies an example of the problem with terrorist chic. While both films pay homage to Davis, they both situate her as a decontextualized voice/model from the past, cut off from her connections to the wider black community and Black Power movement and her continued status as an activist-intellectual. What's more, in playing into the image of Davis as a magnetic and indomitable insurrectionary, both films ultimately uphold the media's fabrication of Davis as caricature. Davis has herself asserted that while the interpretations of her 1970s image as "conspiratorial and monstrous" were damaging, so were the more "sympathetic" interpretations of her image as tough and cool: "Since I considered myself neither monstrous nor charismatic, I felt fundamentally betrayed on both accounts: violated on the first account and deficient on the second" (39). Davis goes on to state that the "broader and more subtle effect" of her media image was the way it "served as generic images of Black women who wore their hair 'natural'" resulting in "hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of Afro-wearing Black women" being "accosted, harassed, and arrested by police, FBI, and immigration agents during the two months I spent underground" (42). In this regard, however celebratory the intent of films like *No Skin Off My Ass* or *Itty Bitty Titty Committee*, the (in the case of the latter, literal) cardboard re-presentation of Davis's iconic 1970s image/voice cannot, and should not, be separated from the painful history to which it is attached.

Accordingly, the danger of terrorist chic is this: the minimalization of people and politics to a vague aura of dangerous cool detached from past and present day realities. Representations of imagined violence within queercore that bleed into the realm of terrorist chic are entering treacherous waters that may detract from their subversive intent. That is, imagining violent revenge against one's oppressors can have a therapeutic

effect and can potentially even scare the opposition into changing their ways. But, couching this imagined violent revenge in a flattened and decontextualized package of terrorist chic risks turning the entire project into a counterproductive farce.

VI. **Conclusion**

At the onset of this chapter, I praised Halberstam for her provocative theory of "imagined violence," while also suggesting that her application of this theory fell short in its failure to engage the queer(core) works that her theory seemed to hail. This chapter was written with the intention of rectifying this misstep, while also uncovering one of the major animating themes of queercore: anti-normative rage. This anti-normative rage is perhaps one of the most misunderstood and underappreciated aspects of queercore, which is part of a larger problematic in which anger is commonly dismissed in our culture as "irrational," "out of control" and "counterproductive." Cliché sayings like "you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar" and "anger destroys more than it repairs," reveal the ideological presumption that anger is a futile emotion that yields little to no positive results. Women, in particular, are chastised for their anger, with aggression being commonly understood as "unbecoming" and "unladylike" (the popular press has, in fact, dismissed many punk female bands as "angry girl bands"). And yet, anger can unite oppressed individuals, provide a liberating sense of release for the downtrodden and grab the attention of people who might otherwise ignore a more even keeled approach. As John Lydon, former lead singer of iconic punk band the Sex Pistols, shouts in the Public Image Ltd song "Rise," "anger is an energy!" (a phrase that theorist Neil Nehring borrows for the subtitle of his book *Popular Music, Gender and Post-modernism*, a book

that points, albeit obliquely, toward the use of anger and emotion in rock music as politically effective tools). All of this is to say that the concept of imagined violence is vital, particularly in relation to queercore and other radical queer cultural forms, insofar as provides a much needed theory of the generative potentialities of (illusory) anger.

On this subject, one of the most generative things about imagined violence is that it is indeed imagined, rather than real, which means that it is a strategy open to everyone, regardless of physical ability and resources. All one needs is a creative mind. That is, the concept of imagined violence upholds the radical power of the imagination, troubling the notion that theory needs to be put into practice to be effective. For, as Halberstam, referencing the words of queer artist-activist David Wojnarowicz, asserts toward the end of "Imagined Violence/Queer Violence:

> Hell is a place on earth and heaven is a place in your head and I believe that "one of the last frontiers left for the radical gesture is the imagination." I believe that it is by imagining violence that we can harness the force of fantasy and transform it into productive fear. (195)

The queercore cultural artifacts explored in this chapter rely on this envisioning (rather than actualization) of violence and, arguably, at their most successful, enable the transformation from fantasy to "productive fear" that Halberstam advocates. The zines of Johnny Noxzema and Rex Boy challenge heterosexuals and homosexuals alike with the possibility of "bashing back." Texts like Gregg Araki's *The Living End* powerfully visualize the militant ACT-UP slogan "Act up! Fight back! Fight AIDS!" The music and on-stage performances of Tribe 8 threaten heteropatriarchy with the very sexual humiliation and abuse that women the world over experience daily. And, the artworks of

Leslie Mah, Margarita Alcantara and the Full-On Asian Action collective confront racism with the frightening prospect of retribution. Together these works offer a warning to normative wrongdoers of potential retribution to come as well as a hope to sexual (and racial) minorities for a different, more empowered future. While none of these works may actually directly alter the heteronormative status quo, as queercore seeks to do, they provide sustenance to the subculture's participants, as they work through the pain and humiliation of life in a homophobic, sexist and racist society.

Chapter 4: Queercore Bodies

In the previous chapters, queercore has been identified as a space for the misfits and malcontents of the LGBTQIA community: individuals whose punk fandom and radical politics have placed them out of step with the straight and gay and lesbian establishments, and whose affinities with sexual subversion and revengeful imagining have supplied queercore with two of its main themes. More than just non-normative in terms of fandom and politics, however, queercore's adherents are, on the whole, non-normative when it comes to bodily appearance and identity. In this regard, queercore follows in the footsteps of a wider history of alternative body politics within radical queer politics and punk.

Alternative body politics and radical queer politics have aligned via the work of activists, like Dragonsani Renteria, a long-time LGBT and deaf rights advocate who published the first magazine about queer deaf people, *Coming Together News*, in 1991 and established the National Deaf Queer Archives (NDQA) in San Francisco in 1994, and Sylvia Rivera, a transgender agitator, Stonewall participator and founding member of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), who in 1970 co-founded STAR (Street Transgender Action Revolutionaries), a groundbreaking New York City group dedicated to helping homeless street drag queens and transwomen. Their work has been continued by organizations like The Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf, Not Dead Yet (a militant, mostly queer disabled rights group that opposes assisted suicide because it devalues the lives of those with disabilities) and GenderPAC (a not-for-profit organization dedicated to trans/gender equality). There has also been a long and enduring history of queer fat activism that

dates back to at least 1976 and the formation of Girth and Mirth in San Francisco, an activist/social organization that advocated "wide pride" for large men and held regular conventions in San Francisco, Chicago and New York City. Over the years, numerous organizations and social groups – mostly lesbian and/or feminist in bent – have continued this legacy, from the Fat Underground (formed in New York City), to the Maxi Mermaids (a fat/queer positive swim group in San Francisco), to Robust and Rowdy (a fat/queer positive dance group in Oakland, California). Likewise, queer (and, again, mostly female) fat writers and zinesters, from Elana Dykewoman (*The Real Fat Woman Poems*), to Marilyn Wann (*Fat? So?*), to Nomy Lamm (*i'm so fucking beautiful*), to Charlotte Cooper (*Fat and Proud*), have played a vital role in publicizing messages of queer fat empowerment to the masses.

Alternative body politics, particularly within the domain of style, have also been persistently intertwined with punk. For instance, in *Subculture*: *The Meaning of Style*, Hebdige discusses the startling nonconformity of early British punk hairstyles, makeup and fashion, which offered a symbolic critique of consumer/beauty culture. According to Hebdige, in salvaging the refuse of domestic working-class life – the common safety pin, the drab plastic trash bag, the grimy rubber stopper and chain from the bathroom sink – and combining these items with vulgar hairstyles (e.g., twelve-inch high green and purple Mohawks) and garish makeup (e.g., hot pink eye-shadow smeared across the face), punks created a "revolting style" that projected "noise" and "chaos" and "offered self-conscious commentaries on the notions of modernity and taste" (107). This is true, even if, as Hebdige also argues, the threat of punk style was (and continues to be) incorporated into, and therefore diffused by, the very consumer/beauty culture it sought to disrupt.

Taking their cue from their punk predecessors, queercore punks regularly dress in ways that defy societal standards, revisiting standard punk fashion elements like Mohawks and tattoos, making sure that these fashion statements continue to read as extreme. For instance, as Deanna Shoemaker contends, although tattoos have become increasing prevalent "even among sorority girls on college campuses," the abundant and highly visible tattoos of queercore artists, like Tribe 8 guitarist Leslie Mah, "read differently from someone who has one or two tattoos that can be more easily covered up" (253). This "different reading" is bolstered by such things as thrift store clothing and jeans, which conjure working-class associations (in opposition to the more expensive and clean-cut clothes stereotypically associated with "sorority girl types"). To be clear, not all queercore performers/fans dress in punk styles, but the punk influence continues to be discernible via the ripped shirts, body piercings and brightly colored hair depicted in queercore representation as well as via the actual bodies on stage and in the seats at queercore performances and events.

In addition, it should be said that the "revolting," "noisy" and "chaotic" style of punk has made punk subculture particularly adaptable to unconventional corporeal displays of gender and sexuality (although, as already established, actual sexual and gender minorities have not always felt welcomed within punk). Lucy O'Brien argues in "The Woman Punk Made Me" that as hippie fashion, with its emphasis on freedom and experimentation (e.g., going barefoot and bra-less), became commodified and diluted in the 1970s, punk emerged as a new option for women wanting to rebel against oppressive beauty norms:

> To find fresh meanings as a woman [during this time of hippie fashion's incorporation] it was necessary to overturn the pastel shades of post-60s femininity and make an overt statement on a newly emerging, more aggressive understanding of female sexuality. Punk provided the perfect opportunity. (188)

By way of example, O'Brien goes on to cite women like fashion designer Vivienne Westwood who challenged traditional notions of female beauty (and the hippie emphasis on a no-fuss "natural" look) with "confrontational rubberwear, ripped slogan-daubed T-shirts and the famous bondage trousers" (189). Punk has also provided a space for LGBTQIA artists wanting to *queer* dominant norms of appearance. Consider, for example, Divine, the rotund, imposing and intentionally revolting drag queen star of the films of John Waters known for her outrageous outfits and make-up, Gary Floyd, the otherwise large, butch and intimidating lead singer of queer punk band The Dicks who occasionally wore bright floral-patterned dresses on stage, or Lynnee Breedlove the lead singer of queercore outfit Tribe 8 who, as discussed in the previous chapter, sometimes performed bare-breasted while also wearing a strap-on dildo. Such bodily performances have created a queer confusion of male/female, gay/straight that has built upon and extended punk's already subversive style.

Queer punk styles and bodily performances, such as those just mentioned, are fascinating and creatively vital in all of their variations, but in this chapter my primary concern is with those that spring from particular marginalized identities: Here I analyze the work of queercore artists who proudly self-define as "fat," "disabled" and/or "transgender," and who create works that critically engage these abject subject positions. The artists highlighted in this chapter – singer Beth Ditto of The Gossip, zinester and theatrical performer Nomy Lamm and filmmaker (and former Tribe 8 guitarist) Silas

Howard – foreground their marginalized identities via work that challenges the lack of visibility and degradation of their bodies within the straight and gay and lesbian cultural mainstreams.

This is not to suggest that sizeism, ableism and transphobia (not to mention sexism, racism and ageism) do not exist within queercore. Indeed, examples of these types of queercore prejudice, like the fat-phobic Pansy Division song "I Can't Sleep," have already been brought to light (see Chapter 2). Rather, this is to say that queercore is a subculture that has boasted some of the most influential, provocative and noteworthy work dealing with issues of size, gender expression and ability in the queer community and beyond. The fact that this work is being produced within queercore is significant given the fact that fat, disabled and transgender bodies are often excluded and/or ridiculed within a larger queer culture that is, by and large, appearance obsessed. As Dawn Atkins opines in the anthology, *Looking Queer*, internalized homophobia has generated an unhealthy amount of pressure to "look good" within the gay and lesbian community: Told that they are "unnatural" by a phobic society, LGBTQIA people often rely on conventional markers of attractiveness to prove their self worth. What's more, as Atkins also notes, most LGBTQIA interaction occurs in bars, "a competitive environment where looks and money are the only things you can judge about people" (xxx). These factors have contributed to a kind of "body fascism" within the gay and lesbian community, where being accepted and admired often requires looking as skinny, buff, healthy and conventionally beautiful as possible. Ironically, gender norms are also reinforced within the queer community, with masculine men and feminine women being time and again privileged above all others, much as they are in heterosexual society.

Such "body fascism" finds its reflection in the gay popular press with its abundance of images and advertisements of well-tanned, unblemished, eternally youthful, thin/muscular, "appropriately" gendered and perfectly coiffed bodies.

The mainstream media has also tended to focus on (relatively) normative LGBTQIA bodies, unless in the service of a degrading humor (e.g., the obese, genderless character of Pat from the *Saturday Night Live* sketch "Its Pat" and subsequent film). For example, as Ann Ciasullo observes in "Making Her (In)visible," the bulk of mainstream representations of lesbians in the 1990s (think *Chasing Amy*, *Mad About You* and Melissa Etheridge) were of femmes who were white and conventionally attractive, leaving butch, non-white and non-conventionally attractive women out of the picture. These well-circulated images of the lesbian femme functioned to make lesbianism less threatening (i.e., less queer) to the general public and easier for straight audiences to consume. As Ciasullo explains:

> The mainstream lesbian [femme] body is at once sexualized and desexualized: on the one hand, she is made into an object of desire for straight audiences through her heterosexualization, a process achieved by representing the lesbian as embodying a hegemonic femininity and thus, for mainstream audiences, as looking "just like" conventionally attractive straight women; on the other hand, because the representation of desire between two women is usually suppressed in these images, she is de-homosexualized. (578)

Today, things are perhaps not quite as bleak as when Ciasullo penned this essay in 2001, as folks like the stocky Rosie O'Donnell and the portly female-to-male Chaz Bono are now more visible within the public sphere. In the 2000's O'Donnell served as moderator for *The View* and host of *The Rosie Show*, and Bono recently appeared on the dance show

competition *Dancing with the Stars*. However, these are rare examples and one needs to only think of the popularity of recent shows like the *L Word* – with its bevy of modelesque, mostly femme, white and thin stars – or the bourgeois, relatively thin, and white lesbian couple at the heart of *The Kids Are All Right* (Lisa Cholodenko, 2010) to realize that things have also not changed that much.

Similarly, current mainstream representations of gay men evince a certain degree of body diversity that includes, for example, the gender-bending and often non-white drag queen stars of *RuPaul's Drag Race* and the plump gay character Cameron Tucker (played by Eric Stonestreet) on popular sitcom *Modern Family*. Again, however, popular television shows like *Glee* and *The New Normal*, as well as films like *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005) and *G.B.F.* (Darren Stein, 2013), with their predictably attractive leads, remind us that representations of young, thin, white, conventionally handsome gay men are still dominant. In addition, gay men are often positioned in mainstream media as ideological gatekeepers, responsible for ensuring that the men and women under their consultation conform to hegemonic fashion trends, standard beauty norms and consumerist ideals. This positioning of gay men can be observed in the history of Hollywood cinema, which often presents hairdressers, costume designers and interior designers as gay – think for example of the effeminate interior decorators in *Pillow Talk* (Michael Gordon, 1959) starring Doris Day and Rock Hudson, and in the Jane Fonda vehicle *Any Wednesday* (Robert Ellis Miller, 1966). Likewise, consider the gay fashion consultants Clinton Kelly from *What Not to Wear* and Gok Wan from *How to Look Good Naked*. The popular early-2000s show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, in which five gay "experts" offered an overall transformation to a hapless straight man each

week, is also exemplary in this regard. While *Queer Eye* challenged uncouth, brute straight masculinity with its queer makeover theme, it did so in the service of heteronormativity and consumerism. As Irén Annus explains:

> In the course of re-tailoring the straight messy guy, they [the hosts of *Queer Eye*] teach him self-reflexivity, transform experiences in the boutique or the hairdresser's from being emasculating to liberating, in the process of which they are also creating an educated consumer. The straight subject is trained to embrace proper – in this context, middle-class – style and taste and to engage in social and cultural etiquette and propriety . . . The straight guy is re-programmed as a good consumer and re-born as a fashionable, nicely groomed, sexy, gentle man, especially appealing to women as well as pleasing to everyone else around him. (n.p.)

Queercore is not immune to reinforcing the same tyrannical beauty, class and consumer values that popular shows like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* perpetuate. Queercore has, at times, also worshipped at the throne of the thin, the white, the young, and the nubile. This is especially true when it comes to queercore's men. Witness, for example, the drawings of sexy, skinny young punks that fill the pages of *J.D.s* and the films of Bruce LaBruce, or the already discussed "twink boy" album covers for which Pansy Division is well known. At the same time, queercore has, on occasion, carved out spaces for alternative bodies – in 1996, for example, the Dirty Bird Queercore Festival, which was held in San Francisco, hosted a fat activist workshop for attendees. Likewise, folks whose size, ability, and gender identities have excluded them from mainstream straight and gay representation have found a highly visible home within queercore. Building on the history of queer alternative body politics and the intentional rejection of "proper" appearance within the wider punk movement in which beauty and fashion

norms are contravened through an emphasis on the "freakish" and the "outlandish," these queercore artists reject the media supported notion that the good queer body is the body that is thin, able and cisgender.[1] In the pages that follow, I examine the work of those queercore artists – the previously mentioned Ditto, Lamm and Howard – who embrace bodily difference in their art and labor to salvage the non-normative body from its conventional capitulation as repulsive, diseased and debased. Before honing in on these artists, however, I begin with a brief overview of scholarship on the "grotesque" and "unruly" body in order to place my subsequent analysis within an appropriate, larger theoretical framework.

I. **The Grotesque and The Unruly**

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I employed Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of "the carnivalesque" to explore the sexual play evident in the lyrics and on-stage performances of queercore band Pansy Division. To remind readers, the carnivalesque refers to the conditions in which social and cultural hierarchies are inverted and/or debased, albeit only provisionally. In Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, the medieval carnival functions as the central example of such anti-hierarchical conditions. The carnival is a place in which: pecking orders are upended (i.e., within the playful and parodic space of the carnival, fools and peasants become revered and royalty become deified); vulgarity, bodily excess and carnal pleasures (especially those related to eating and copulation) are tolerated and encouraged; and spectacle and laughter reign (7). According to Bakhtin, the carnival offered commoners an escape from the rules, regulations and power

[1] Someone who is cisgender has a gender identity that conforms to their socially recognized biological sex.

structures of the everyday. But, importantly, this escape was only temporary and was sanctioned by those in charge: The carnival provided a bounded field for anti-normative behavior, with the assurance that once participants left the time and space of the carnival, life, with all its constrictions and inequalities, would continue unabated. Thus, the disruptive activities of the carnival did not ultimately lend themselves to revolution, but to the contrary, served to keep the peasantry happy and docile in their enslavement (7).

Another component of Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque that I did not previously examine, but that is especially relevant to this chapter, is his description of the "grotesque body": the body on which rests much of the carnival's seditious appeal. Bakhtin's grotesque body is hysterically exaggerated, improper, profane and obsessively focused on food and other carnal delights. The grotesque body encompasses the excessively fat body (303), the body with monstrous bulges and horrific protrusions (320), the body that is part animal and part human (316), and the body that emit fluids that are simultaneously gratifying and deadly. The grotesque body can sometimes be violent, participating in acts of "devouring, swallowing and tearing to pieces" (331). But, the grotesque body is, more often than not, comedic, its unsavory corporeal functions like digestion, fornication, flatulation, sneezing and childbirth producing laughter, which Bakhtin claims temporarily conquers fear (335). The grotesque body is also one that is always "in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed," defying classical notions of the body as a stable, coherent and contained entity (317).

While Bakhtin's grotesque body is rooted in analyses of class and taste, subsequent thinkers have expanded this concept to more fully consider its gendered implications. In *The Female Grotesque*, Mary Russo observes that, within the

carnivalesque, "the detritus of the body that is separated out and placed with terror and revulsion" is most often "on the side of the feminine" (think menstruation and the bodily fluids emitted during childbirth) (10, 58). In line with this assertion, throughout her book Russo reads gender into Bakhtin's grotesque in order to recuperate and reconsider the uncontained female body. Russo is especially interested in moments when the grotesque female body transcends its purely denigrated status by defiantly embracing "the strange, the risky, the minoritarian, the excessive, the outlawed, and the alien" (vii). Specifically, in the context of a patriarchal society in which women are continually objectified and scrutinized, Russo sees great feminist potential in "making a spectacle of oneself": displaying oneself in a flagrant, exaggerated manner that makes a mockery of society's spectacularization of women. This turns the patriarchal system of the gaze on its head: in "making a spectacle of oneself," it is the spectacle, not the spectator, who has agency. As Lucy Green notes of display in musical performance, "the displayer is in the active position, and has the power of the lure, of spectacularity, the possibility of playing with the mask [i.e., the performance] from that point of view" (22). According to Russo, "making a spectacle of oneself" points to the "specifically feminine danger . . . of exposure," where what is "exposed" are the high stakes involved in female "misbehavior" (213). Such moments of the grotesque create a liminal space existing somewhere between anxiety and hope that allows women to imagine profound societal transformation (vii-ix).

Closely related to the grotesque female body and the idea of "making a spectacle of oneself" is the model of the "unruly woman." First identified by social historian Natalie Zemon Davis in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, and further

conceived by media scholar Kathleen Rowe, the unruly woman "reverberates whenever women, especially women's bodies, are considered excessive – too fat, too mouthy, too old, too dirty, too pregnant, too sexual (or not sexual enough) for the norms of conventional gender representation" (76). According to Rowe, the unruly woman revels in overindulgence and unrefined humor, and uses her unwieldy body to grind down patriarchal standards and authority. As a primary example, Rowe cites Roseanne Barr, the real-life foul-mouthed comedienne and fictional brash working-class matriarch of the Connor family on the late 1980's/early 1990's television sitcom *Roseanne*:

> Roseanne-the-person who tattooed her buttocks and mooned her fans, Roseanne-the-character for who farting and nose-picking are as much a reality as dirty dishes and obnoxious boy bosses. Both in body and speech, Roseanne is defined by *excess* and by *looseness* – qualities that mark her in opposition to bourgeois standards of decorum. (78)

For Rowe, the unruly woman offers a space to act out and visualize the dilemmas of femininity, and while Rowe is quick to point out that the unruly woman is always in danger of being contained by her relegation to the purely comedic, Rowe also insists on the oppositional potential of female unruliness, insofar as it pushes the boundaries of acceptable female behavior (77, 82).

The individuals analyzed in this chapter – two of whom are female – share much in common with the grotesque and unruly woman, as performed by figures like Barr, and theorized by Russo and Rowe. And, here I would like to take note of the female centeredness of the concepts just discussed: concepts that are articulated by female scholars and focused on female bodies. Congruently, it is no mere coincidence that two of the three figures discussed in this dissertation chapter are women (the third is a female-

to-male transgender). This suggests the degree to which such things as fatness and disability have been constructed as "women's issues/problems." There is some truth to this construction, as women are generally held to higher standards of appearance than men and, as a consequence, are more apt to appreciate tactics of bodily subversion. Indeed, tactics of bodily subversion are crucial to queercore's sister subculture riot grrrl, the female/feminist punk movement that has a long history of engaging discourses of "female history and role models, female pride/affirmation, and female beauty standards and body image" (Kearney 137). For example, the riot grrrl zine *FaT GiRL*, which prefigures the work of Beth Ditto analyzed in this chapter, boldly addressed issues around body image, sexuality, and politics in a direct and often irreverent fashion with, for example, cover images depicting plump naked women in the throes of eating. On this note, and partially because of the bodily subversive work they do, all of the artists discussed in this chapter are associated with both queercore and riot grrrl.

It should also be noted that concepts like unruliness do not signify equally across the sexes: It is fairly acceptable for men to be loud, brash, vulgar and uncontained, making the "unruly man" somewhat of a redundancy. The closest thing to the figure of the grotesque and unruly man within gay culture is the "bear," a large, heavyset, hirsute (and usually white) gay man who projects an image of rough and tumble masculinity (queer punk singer Gary Floyd of The Dicks is an example of a bear). Bears can be said to reify masculine ideals of bodily prowess and roughness, but they also, as Jerry Mosher points out in "Setting Free the Bears," challenge predominant gay images of young and thin "twinks" (186). Likewise, bear culture routinely, and in opposition to the

mainstream, presents fat men as icons of desire (184). Bears aside, however, radical queer body politics are largely the province of women, as this chapter makes clear.

In addition, subversive bodily strategies based on the unruly and the grotesque are not necessarily available to women (or men) of all races and ethnicities, and here the reader should take note that all of the artists discussed in this chapter are white. Similar to my discussion of imagined violence in Chapter 2, within hegemonic discourse, Black and Latina women and men are pigeonholed in Western culture as wild, monstrous, out of control, excessive and debased, and are routinely disparaged and discriminated against based on these stereotypes. Accordingly, the strategies discussed in this chapter may do very little to empower Black and Latino women and men, and may only serve to confirm harmful racial/ethnic constructions. On this topic, I am reminded of Gayle Wald's essay "One of the Boys?: Whiteness, Gender and Popular Music Studies," in which she makes the point that the transgressive pleasures of female rock performance and rebellion are not equally available to white and black women. As Wald explains the reason for this racialized differentiation:

> The work of black feminist intellectuals provides insight into the relation between women's assigned place in the dominant social order and their ability to draw on cultural symbols to stage their critique of social norms, including conventions of gender. As nineteenth-century black women repeatedly pointed out in a variety of contexts, middle-class white women – that is, those women who tend to benefit the most from social discourses of race and class – are, by virtue of their position, accorded the greatest access to prevailing notions of "womanhood." Hence, and in a patriarchal context in which women's social value is conflated with their sexuality and sexual conformity, middle-class white women are deemed "naturally" virtuous, whereas black women, especially poor black women, are deemed "naturally" degraded or corrupt or are removed from the realm of adult sexuality all together. (154-5)

It is with these stipulations in mind (i.e., the white and female specificity of strategies of the grotesque and the unruly) that I now turn my attention to Beth Ditto, perhaps the most well known and potent example of grotesque and unruly femininity within queercore, and hence an example that I will explore in some depth.

II. Beth Ditto, The Gossip and the Fat Queer Body

Beth Ditto is the lead singer of the Gossip, a Portland, Oregon-based rock band comprised of herself, guitarist Brace Paine and drummer, and fellow lesbian, Hannah Blilie. The bands five full-length studio albums – *That's Not What I Heard* (2001), *Movement* (2003), *Standing in the Way of Control* (2006), *Music for Men* (2009) and the recently released *A Joyful Noise* (2012) – combine the rhythmic tempo of dance music with the raw energy and confrontational posturing of punk. Signed to Kill Rock Stars, an independent record label specializing in antiestablishment feminist and queer music, the Gossip is an "out" gay band with clear ties to both the queercore and riot grrrl scenes.

Standing at just over five feet and weighing approximately two-hundred and ten pounds, Ditto's large frame is at odds with the sleek and slender bodies that have dominated contemporary lesbian representation according to Ciasullo. In fact, as a self-identified "fat dyke," Ditto has received unprecedented acclaim in the popular press (www.divamag.com). In 2006, for example, independent music magazine *NME* named Beth Ditto the "Coolest Person in Rock" ("The Cool List 2006," www.nme.com). Ditto has placed such publicity in the service of the fat activist project of promoting fat visibility and the queer project of reclaiming and revaluing stigmatized bodies. That is, as elucidated below, through her songs, performances, videos, public comments and

magazine cover appearances, Ditto has actively sought to challenge dominant conceptualizations of beauty, gender and sexuality. Through a variety of strategies of resignification, Ditto has staged a critique of normative iterations of the body in an attempt to rescue fatness from its representation as something inherently revolting and worthless. She has done this, first, by embracing her body in its current form, thus serving as an example of what I term "embodied corpulence." Embodied corpulence is about taking pride in the fat body in its existing state and refusing to change, shrink or disappear. Second, Ditto has been a key figure in the struggle to reclaim "fat" as a term of positive self-identification, taking away its power to oppress. Third and finally, by foregrounding her various identities as fat, lesbian and femme, Ditto has brought attention to the potential commonalities between these identities, including that all three can, under certain conditions, be contested via performative acts that disrupt their fixity and recast them as sites of strength, complexity and renewal.

In the spirit of queercore's principled politics, Ditto is upfront and unapologetic about her sexuality in both her music and public life. She also adheres to queercore's oppositionality to both hetero- and homo-normativity. Ditto has expressed disagreement with the narrow-minded views of straight society through such anti-homophobia numbers as "Standing in the Way of Control," a song written by Ditto about homophobia in the era of George Bush and the "Defense of Marriage Act."[2] She has also, on occasion, confronted the gay and lesbian majority. For example, she recently accused gay men within the fashion industry of placing undue pressure on women to be skinny, stating,

[2] The Defense of Marriage Act is a United States federal statute signed into law by President Bill Clinton on September 21, 1996 whereby the federal government defines marriage as a legal union between one man and one woman. Under the law, no state (or other political subdivision within the United States) may be required to recognize as a marriage a same-sex relationship considered a marriage in another state.

“"If there's anyone to blame for size zero, it's not women. Blame gay men who work in the fashion industry and want these women as dolls” (“Beth Ditto Blames,” n.p.). Such statements place a new spin on queercore’s critical appraisal of mainstream gay and lesbian society, adding a critique of the community’s hegemonic beauty norms to the usual complaints of assimilation and segregation.

What’s more, Ditto’s lesbianism, which puts her at odds with the male-dominated punk scene, and her fatness, which puts her at odds with the image-obsessed gay and lesbian and straight community, has made her an ultimate figure of identification for misfit-loving queercore audiences who are attracted to her readily identifiable outsider status. This outside status is further solidified by Ditto’s childhood as a Southern, working-class “redneck” from Arkansas. Ditto credits this childhood with teaching her to be independent and to create things for herself, including clothes, which set her on the path to becoming a D.I.Y. artist (“Meet Beth Ditto,” n.p.). In addition, the tales that Ditto weaves of her underprivileged upbringing greatly contribute to her unconventional allure. Take, for example, the following anecdote about eating squirrels:

> I remember this one time, I was 13 and had been smoking pot with my cousin for the first time. He got the munchies so bad that he just took out his BB gun and started shooting at them [squirrels] out the window, and then he just skinned them and fried them, and ate them just like chicken. We used to play with the tails afterwards. (qtd. in “Meet Beth Ditto,” n.p.)

This is an instructive anecdote, not only because it reveals the hardship of Ditto’s youth, but also because it creates a suggestive chain of signification between Ditto’s multiple identities as both working-class and fat. In her chapter, “Life in the Fat Lane” from *Bound and Gagged*, Laura Kipnis notes that, despite the fact that the poor are the

least able to over-consume in our society and have sometimes been depicted as emaciated (think, for example, of photographs from the Great Depression), within the popular imagination poverty and fatness are also firmly linked by way of stereotypical images of welfare mothers receiving more than their fair share and working-class families gorging themselves on fast food. As such, "the phobia of fat and the phobia of the poor are heavily cross-coded" and "the fear of an out-of-control body is not unrelated to the fear of out of control [working-class] masses" (101). Accordingly, Ditto's tale of improper working-class consumption, which incorporates the suggestion of overeating due to drug (ab)use (getting "the munchies"), is capable of evoking not only the "horrors" of working-class life, but of fatness as well. Ditto's working-class and fat identities cannot easily be separated within a culture that sees the two as mutually implicated. Perhaps even more to the point, the way in which Ditto so bluntly recounts this tale of "redneck" consumption, including her provocative reference to playing with squirrel tails, is similar to the way in which she has brazenly highlighted her fatness and gastronomical practices in her music, performances, videos and interviews.

As previously hinted, Ditto's brazenness has made her a favorite of the queercore crowd. As evidence of Ditto's sway among queercore fans, she is the most prominently featured performer in *Queercore*, a documentary about the movement made by *Queer Youth TV* in 2007, which also features Martin Sorrondeguay from Limp Wrist and Hunx from Gravy Train!!!!. Ditto and the Gossip's fan base reaches beyond the queercore scene, however, making them one of the subculture's few crossover successes. The band has obtained a modicum of mainstream popularity, particularly in the United Kingdom where their second to last album peaked at #22 in the charts. Ditto has also been a source

of praise and fascination among independent music fans and media critics of all stripes, who have compared her powerful vocals and high-octane performances to everyone from rhythm and blues legends Tina Turner and Aretha Franklin to punk icon Poly Styrene of the band X-Ray Spex (a singer that Ditto herself has cited as a source of inspiration). But, above all, Ditto has been celebrated for her unrepentant bodily performances and public repudiations of fat shame.

Ditto's decidedly present embodiment has been made possible by the history of fat activism previously referenced. That is, since the 1970s, fat activists have attempted to render fat bodies visible and welcome within the public sphere: to bring fatness out of the shadows and into the realm of societal respectability. However, over the same period of time, there has been a nationwide movement, partially, and self-servingly, propelled by the multi-billion dollar diet and fitness industries, to rid the world of fat and, by extension, fat people. In contemporary popular culture, as evidenced by countless magazine articles and talk show episodes dedicated to the "problem of obesity," fat has become a social affliction worthy of profound contempt. Obesity rates are indeed on the rise: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) "there was a dramatic increase in obesity in the United States from 1990 through 2010," and as of 2013 "more than one-third of U.S. adults (35.7%) are obese" (www.cdc.gov). However, sexist, sizeist, and classist thinking cloud cultural understandings of what these numbers mean. Within this prejudicial cultural climate, fat people are told to make a choice: get rid of your excessive body or face a life of shame, unhappiness and certain premature death. As evidence of this fat-phobic cultural climate, it is worth taking into account that as obesity number have risen in the U.S., so have rates of anorexia and bulimia, with an

estimated 8 million Americans (7 million woman, and 1 million men) currently suffering from eating disorders. Eating disorders also "have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness" (www.state.sc.us). As these numbers attest, the pressure to be thin in U.S. society has lead to very real and very deadly consequences.

In other words, despite the inroads of fat liberation, there is little room for fatness in today's cultural domain. Le'A Kent has argued that within dominant representation, the fat body functions as the abject: that which must be expelled in order for the good (i.e., thin) body to be set free. In this way, the fat body is rarely allowed to be embodied and present, as it is continually represented as either false (the body that is in the process of becoming thin) or past (the body that has been left behind) (136). This discursive containment of the fat body is observable in the before and after pictures of weight loss advertisements, which are especially prevalent in women's magazines:

> In this scenario the self, the person, is presumptively thin, and cruelly jailed in a fat body. The self is never fat. To put it bluntly, there is no such thing as a fat *person*. The before-and-after scenario both consigns the fat body to an eternal past and makes it bear the full horror of embodiment, situating it as that which must be cast aside for the self to truly come into being. (Kent 135)

This "casting aside" of the fat body can also be witnessed on weight loss television programs such as *The Biggest Loser*, in which fat bodies are made skinny over the course of the show. On programs such as these, the fat body is done away with only to return

later in the form of flashback images that merely serve to remind the viewer of what has been erased.[3]

As Kent argues, this media-encouraged bodily abjection has an effect on the way in which fat people live their lives: as connected to bodies believed to be without value in the present (131). Yet, not all fat people have surrendered themselves to this negative self-image or acquiesced to the demand for body disavowal and body shame. In opposition to the view of fat as something to be exterminated, female-led fat liberation groups such as the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance and the (now defunct) Fat Underground have demanded that fat bodies be affirmed, not as entities in the process of becoming thin and, therefore, valuable, but as powerful and desirable in the present tense. While some (including, undoubtedly, members of the queercore subculture) have criticized proponents of the fat acceptance movement for ignoring health issues that have been linked to obesity and/or for immorally reveling in gluttony, these organizations have done much to change anti-fat bias in social attitudes, and especially biases against fat women.

Ditto has continued this activist project of recuperating the fat body within representation, rather than in the streets. As an example of "embodied corpulence," in contradistinction to the contestants on *The Biggest Loser*, who regularly speak of the disgust they feel for their flesh, in interviews, Ditto regularly expresses contentment with her body, confidently asserting that she accepts herself the way she is and is "not trying to change" ("Hot Gossip," n.p.). Ditto also publicly rejects the pressure to alter her body through dieting, through such bold means as wearing a t-shirt with "Punk Will Never

[3] In the summer of 2009, another weight loss show premiered on the Oxygen channel called "Dance Your Ass Off." The title of this program is illuminating, as it quite literally denotes the theme of bodily erasure at the heart of weight loss reality shows.

Diet!" scrawled across it in permanent black marker for a *Diva* magazine photo shoot. These actions have made Ditto a model for many within the fat liberation movement, as Ditto's acceptance of her here-and-now body has produced a rupture in a representational regime that has continually portrayed fat women as either grossly unhappy or happily on their way to becoming thin. To use Kent's words, by rejecting the process of abjection, Ditto has found "a way of representing the self that is not body-neutral or disembodied (and therefore presumptively thin), but intimately connected with the body in a new vision of embodiment that no longer disdains the flesh" (130-1).

In addition to rejecting fat abjection and taking pleasure in her present-tense body, Ditto has challenged discursive constructions of fat as ugly, disgusting, obscene, funny, unclean, and anything but desirable. Like fat embodiment, this challenge has its roots in fat activism. Fat advocacy groups have long contested hegemonic understandings of fat by insisting on fat visibility in opposition to the representations of fatness constructed by the media, thus, forcing "the spectacle of fat *as* fat, rather than as an array of [negative] connotations" (Kipnis 121). In other words, against the taboo of silence, fat activists have claimed the right to speak of their experiences, and in terms not culled from the language of fat phobia. The use of the word "fat" within an emancipatory framework has itself been crucial to this project of connotative reinscription. Sari Dworkin maintains that, "Part of fat pride is reclaiming the word 'fat' . . . in the same way that lesbians have reclaimed the word 'dyke'" (34). This act of reclamation means not only embracing a once derogatory term, but also endowing it with new meanings. As Kate Harding contends:

> Thin women don't tell their fat friends 'You're not fat' because they're confused about the dictionary definition of the word, or their eyes are broken, or they were raised on planets where size 24 is the average for women. They don't say it because it's the truth. They say it because fat does not mean just fat in this culture. It can also mean any or all of the following: ugly, unhealthy, smelly, lazy, ignorant, undisciplined, unlovable, burdensome, embarrassing, unfashionable, mean, angry, socially inept, just plain icky. So when they say 'You're not fat,' what they really mean is 'You're not a dozen nasty things I associate with the word fat.' (170)

Thus, Harding makes a deliberate decision to use the word "fat" to describe herself – rather than euphemisms like "plus-sized," "big-boned" or "voluptuous," which obscure the fat body under a pall of politesse. As a course of action, this gives new life to the term and envisions a different social reality in which "fat" is no longer a dirty word. As Harding asserts, "I am a kindhearted, intelligent, attractive, person, and *I am fat*. There is no paradox there" (170).

Importantly, Ditto has also participated in this strategy of connotative reinscription by consistently using the word "fat" as a term of positive self-identification on stage and in interviews. In using "fat" to describe herself, an artist known for her considerable talent, Ditto furthers the project of attaching positive meanings to the word. In addition, Ditto has time and again used her artistic platform to break the persistent link between fatness and unhealthiness and, by extension, skinniness and health. As she asserts in an interview with *Contactmusic.com*, the belief that fat people are unwell is an assumption derived from prejudice rather than fact:

> I'm not an unhealthy person and I feel like one of the most tiring parts of being fat and being proud of it is…you do a lot of proving yourself all the time. It's really interesting to me that people will look at a thin person and go, "That's a healthy person." I want to go, "Come open my refrigerator

> and look and then let's talk about what you think is so bad." To be thin and to stay really thin, sometimes… some people literally do coke all the time. Some people smoke cigarettes instead of eating. That's crazy. But that's 'okay' because you look healthier. (qtd. in "Ditto Slams," n.p.)

Ditto's comment about "staying thin by doing coke all the time" also calls to mind the image of "heroin chic": "a current trend toward dark-eyed makeup and ashen skin [that] paints a gaunt, burned-out look" (Scheerer, n.p.). In recent years, heroin chic has become popular in the fashion world via such pale and seemingly emaciated models as Kate Moss, and has been a staple of rock culture since the late 1960s (think of folks from Patti Smith to Fiona Apple). This places Ditto's bodily critique in opposition to not only gender norms, but those of fashion/rock culture as well, suggesting the entrenched obstacles Ditto is up against as well as the degree to which she is a special, and especially brave, case. One need only be reminded of other fat female singers, like Mama Cass of the Mamas and the Papas, who was publicly derided for her weight (indeed, jokes about Mama Cass dying from "chocking on a chicken bone" still proliferate), and undoubtedly found it extremely difficult to attain empowerment on or off stage. More recently, fat-phobic comments have been leveled against pop chanteuse Adele, which she has, like Ditto, railed against. For instance, fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld recently tweeted that Adele "is a little too fat," to which the singer responded, "I've never wanted to look like models on the cover of magazines. I represent the majority of women and I'm very proud of that" ("Adele Responds," n.p.).

Moreover, as a fat *lesbian* producing cultural objects that play on both of these identities, Ditto faces, and plays upon, this double trouble. Her creative output provides an interesting opportunity to think through some of the ways in which queerness and

fatness intersect, as well as how the queer practice of subversion through performativity might be usefully applied to the deconstruction and refiguring of fat. To begin, there are several parallels that can be drawn between queerness and fatness. For one, many early fat liberation groups, such as the Fat Underground, not only shared members with early queer liberation groups, such as Queer Nation and the Lesbian Avengers, but shared a penchant for turning political issues into spectacles: Both fat and queer liberation groups have strategically broadcast their scorned (sexual and gastronomical) practices in public acts of defiance. Examples include the "fat-in" staged in New York City's Central Park in 1967, in which fat activists ate, carried picket signs and burned diet books, and Queer Nation's highly visible, media-oriented actions, such as same-sex kiss-ins at shopping malls. Furthermore, as LeBesco notes, coming out is a process central to both queer and fat existence (*Revolting Bodies*, 92). For lesbians and gay men, coming out means making an invisible identity visible, whereas for fat people, coming out means letting go of denial, refusing to be interpellated by the disingenuous "you're not fat" comments from friends and family members, and proudly acknowledging the body in its actuality (which, it should be said, requires a great deal of pride and self-esteem).

There are three different categories of "out" fat individuals according to LeBesco: the "out and about" (i.e., those who "publicly acknowledge their own fatness and typically embrace it"); the "silent types" (i.e., those who "typically fail to acknowledge their size or the politics of fatness"); and "traitors" (those whose "drastic dieting efforts or experience with weight-loss surgery front a devastatingly negative view of fatness") (*Revolting Bodies*, 92-3). LeBesco identifies former talk show host and lesbian comedienne Rosie O'Donnell as an example of an "out and about" figure. In her public

life, O'Donnell has exhibited little interest in, and at times outright disdain for, faddish dieting and exercise, and has continually asserted her right to be who she is as both as a lesbian and a fat person. Moreover, O'Donnell has been openly critical of fat "traitors," like former *The View* co-host Star Jones, who in 2006 lost a significant amount of weight, which she deceitfully attributed to diet and exercise, rather than the gastric bypass surgery that she had in fact undergone.[4]

O'Donnell, perhaps the first "out" fat lesbian within U.S. popular culture, is an important precursor to Ditto. Both are "out and about figures" and both have been upfront about their identities and outspoken in their beliefs.[5] Likewise, these two women share a passion for progressive politics. Which is to say that, like O'Donnell, Ditto not only is a proponent of fat empowerment, but she is also an avowed feminist and LGBTQIA rights advocate. Ditto's progressive politics are perhaps most apparent in the lyrics to "Standing in the Way of Control," written by Ditto, and the Gossip's most commercially successful song to-date. "Standing in the Way of Control" is a fiery, albeit dance-club-friendly, response to the anti-gay marriage stance of former president George W. Bush. While the pro-marriage message of the song is at odds with queercore's general disdain for conventional institutions, it is also a reflection of changing times: The increase in conservative vitriol against gay marriage, instigated by a series of state ballot initiatives to legalize gay marriage in the 2000s, has caused many, even radical queers, to

[4] Although Star Jones initially denied having gastric bypass surgery, in 2007 she admitted to having the procedure in an interview with *Glamour* magazine.

[5] For her outspoken views and unapologetic fatness, O'Donnell has frequently found herself the target of public derision, most famously from billionaire business tycoon Donald Trump who in 2006 referred to O'Donnell as a "fat, ugly slob" on an installment of *Entertainment Tonight*. Although the word "dyke" was absent from Trump's vitriolic attack, given that "fat," "ugly" and "dyke" are frequently collapsed into a readily identifiable chain of signification, it was easy to read the "dyke" as implied. Whether or not Ditto will face the same kind of hostility as she moves further into the public spotlight remains to be seen.

take up the pro-marriage cause. As Ditto explains, "Standing in the Way of Control" is about:

> [G]ay men and lesbians waiting decades to show their commitment to each other and then having their marriages annulled. Nobody in the [United] States was that surprised or shocked by what Bush did, but it made everyone I know feel helpless and cheated. I wrote the chorus to try and encourage people not to give up and let one man take control of our lives. It's a scary time for civil rights, but I really believe the only way to survive is to stick together and keep fighting. (qtd. in "Hot Gossip," n.p.)

It is telling that Ditto envisions this fight for marriage equality as "*standing* in the way of control." On a figurative level, the "standing" of the song's title (and repeated chorus) is a call to arms, an inspirational evocation of queer power. But, on a more literal level, Ditto's use of "standing" suggests that the (upright) body is itself crucial to acts of queer resistance. This latter reading is especially apropos considering that, within the popular imagination, queer bodies are often expected to be, first and foremost, sexual bodies – that is, always lying down. Ditto's evocation of the standing queer body is, therefore, disruptive in more ways than one.

Their is another way in which the queer and the fat collide in Ditto's oeuvre: Through her artistry, both Ditto's gender and fat identities have become the object of performative reinscription, or what might be called revision, through "queer performativity," as defined by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*. In this key queer theory text, Butler argues that, rather than being something innate or natural, gender is an act that patriarchal society compels us to perform. That is, according to Butler, we are coerced into performing gender reiteratively through an array of "acts, gestures and desires" and that these "acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the

illusion of an interior and organizing gender core." In other words, through reiterative acts, gender and, in turn, sex categories become naturalized such that they appear to be stable and foundational, when they are "in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices [and] discourses" (xxix).

However, Butler also suggests that these categories can be destabilized through stylized performances that expose sex and gender as "regulatory fictions" that uphold "regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression" (43). For example, Butler points to drag as a practice that, through exaggerated performance, calls attention to the fact that gender is an unnatural construct that requires a great deal of work to sustain (174-5). In addition, drag performances enable their audience to think about gender differently, as they displace settled conceptions of male/female and masculine/feminine, provoking productive uncertainties about their status as natural and normal.

As LeBesco has observed, Butler's ideas are useful for thinking about the ways in which fatness, like gender, is a fabricated identity and one that can also be disrupted and queried via performative acts (including the everyday variety) that allow us to view fatness anew. She notes that, like gender identity, fat identity is "open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and…hyperbolic exhibitions of 'the natural,'" and that through playful performances, fatness can be "repositioned in the cultural imaginary" ("Queering Fat Bodies/Politics," 79; 83). Ditto provides one such example of the "repositioning of fat" through performance, and one that is particularly relevant to Butler's arguments, as Ditto's work not only seeks to rewrite the fat body, but the gendered body as well. To say this another way, in her stage performances and in her music videos, Ditto performs her identities in ways that strive to undo the meanings normally ascribed to them.

For example, in opposition to the previously discussed dominant representations of fat bodies as false (the body in the process of becoming thin) and past (the body that has been left behind), Ditto's performances foreground her body as delightfully, and even confrontationally, present. In her energetic stage performances, Ditto confidently struts and dances across the stage, defiantly taking up space and challenging the prevailing view of fat bodies as sedentary, weak and lacking confidence. When she is not wearing tight-fitting outfits that call attention to the largeness of her frame, and especially her sizeable breasts and buttocks, Ditto is stripping down to her underwear, exposing her hairy crotch and armpits,[6] and otherwise transgressing the boundaries of acceptable female behavior by flagrantly offering up her soft flesh and flabby stomach to the gaze of her admiring audience.[7] Much like Roseanne, as discussed by Rowe, this bodily deployment flies in the face of conventional notions of how women are supposed to inhabit their bodies:

> Modern American standards require that the ideal feminine body be small. A woman is taught early to contain herself, to keep arms and legs close to her body and take up as little space as possible. This model of femininity suggests that real women are thin, nearly invisible. (Hartley 61)

In distinction to this "invisible woman" of ideal femininity, Ditto delights in making an "unruly" "spectacle of herself," as Russo and Rowe would have it, and in the process

[6] Ditto customarily does not wear deodorant or shave her armpits. This is an example of how Ditto's violation of bodily norms often goes beyond just her size.

[7] When Ditto is not half-naked, she is often dressed in ultra-hip outfits designed by her personal stylist Johnny Blue Eyes. In making a conscious effort to be fashion forward, Ditto demonstrates that fat girls are not the slobs that they are stereotyped to be, and that plus-size women can be style icons just as easily as skinny girls. In fact, it is worth noting that Johnny Blue Eyes is, perhaps ironically, also a stylist for super svelte model Kate Moss, which means that the clothes the two fashionistas wear share some similarities. Of course, having a personal stylist is an enormous privilege that indicates Ditto's upward mobility (i.e., she's not working-class anymore) as well as the degree to which her subversive body politics is enabled by wealth and fame.

troubles the boundaries of appropriate female behavior and the imposed limitations of the fat body.

This same type of performative reinscription can be observed in the Gossip's music video for "Listen Up!"[8] At the onset of this video, Ditto sits on a couch engaging in a stereotypical female pursuit, crocheting, that has also become a standard activity within third wave feminist crafting cultures (think *Bust*). This image of tranquil domesticity gives Ditto a maternal and domestic air, but one that does not ultimately last. That is, midway through the video, Ditto puts down her crochet needle and picks up some friend chicken, which she proceeds to scarf down in an "unladylike" fashion.[9] This theme of voracious consumption continues into the subsequent shots, which include images of Ditto rhythmically swaying back and forth in a hallway while holding a take-out pizza box and, later, passionately dancing with/eating a slice of pizza, which she uses to fan herself in-between bites. In other words, rather than hiding her illicit eating practices, Ditto places them in full view, confronting the notion that a large appetite, especially on the part of women, is something disgraceful. Ditto foregrounds her excessive and unfeminine practices of consumption, combining them with images of stereotypical/third wave femininity, forging a sensual amalgamation of bodily and culinary pleasure that prohibits any simple or fixed reading of Ditto and her embodiment.

Everything that I have discussed thus far concerning embodied corpulence and the resignification of fat and gender through performativity is observable in the now

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[8] Note: The Gossip have two videos for the song "Listen Up!" The one that I am describing is their first video, which they made in 2006. The second video, made in 2007, features a woman and man, both dressed in drag, who walk around Portland, Oregon before meeting at a nightclub and sharing a dance. This second video demonstrates the Gossip's interest in queer modes of gender play.

[9] I do not mean to suggest that this action implies a rejection of crocheting. In fact, Ditto is an avid fan of the craft. Rather, I am arguing that this act undercuts a straightforward reading of Ditto as "taking up" stereotypical femininity. In this way, we might say that crocheting aroused her appetite.

infamous June 2, 2007 *NME* magazine cover that features a taboo-busting, full-body image of Ditto in the nude. Identified as the "Queen of Cool," Ditto stands with her right side facing the viewer, her left hand cupping her right breast and her right arm positioned seductively on her right buttock. The folds in Ditto's flesh are clearly visible, as is her protruding stomach, the roundness of her buttocks and the hair from her unshaved armpit. On her right thigh is a pair of painted-on bright red lips that match the lipstick and nail polish that also adorn her. Ditto identifies as a femme, and these cosmetic embellishments mark her as such. The accompanying text in bold ransom-note style lettering exclaims, "Kiss My Ass!," which can be read, in a gesture that is decidedly queercore, as either a statement of enmity or a sexual come-on, a fact that is reinforced by Ditto's facial expression, which appears both alluring and vaguely threatening.

In this image, Ditto is an example of embodied corpulence: unashamed, in touch with her body and with no mention of dieting or the "problem of obesity" in sight. What's more, in her placement on the front cover of the magazine, Ditto takes up a space normally reserved for thin and perfectly air-brushed models, rock stars and celebrities. Yet, Ditto is anything but your typical cover girl and, as such, the *NME* cover subversively deconstructs dominant traditions of gendered representation. It utilizes the image of Ditto's big and beautiful body to modify norms of magazine-style attractiveness and to situate the fat body as a new object of desire. Or, rather, as both an *object* of desire and as an *agent* of desire, Ditto's sexual agency being demonstrated by her seductive gaze at the viewer and the sexual innuendo of the phrase, "Kiss My Ass!" This construction of Ditto as a desiring subject is significant given that fatness is commonly viewed as a "form of physical protection against sexual demands," a perspective that

suggests that all fat women are fleeing from sexuality (LeBesco, *Revolting Bodies*, 86). On this cover, Ditto is anything but fleeing from her sexuality, even if she is figured alone, leaving more concrete expressions of her sexuality to our imaginations, and potentially even furthering notions of fat female loneliness.

The reaction to the *NME* cover has been mixed. For example, the on-line response has included such derisive comments as "thats eww. She should totally cover that up. Being fat is not ok," and, "i hope that is some kind of sick joke. seriously who gives a shit if she's proud of her body just do us all a favour and keep it hidden" (qtd. in Kelley, n.p.). These comments demonstrate the type of intense sexism and fat phobia that Ditto so bravely opposes. They also make it clear that not everyone's opinions will be changed by Ditto's art and activism. But, the reaction has not been completely negative. In fact, in 2008, the *NME* cover was nominated by Magazineweek.net for the honor of "Best Magazine Cover of All Time," and in early 2009, new style magazine *Love* decided to mimic *NME* by featuring another naked photo of Ditto on its front page, accompanied by the quote, "Icon of Our Generation." Other magazines have followed suit (*Dazed*, *Urb*, *On Our Backs*, *Diva*), suggesting that Ditto, despite the criticism, is having a positive effect on media representations of fatness. Indeed, this may be the first time in history that a queer fat body has been so highly coveted by both the mainstream (*NME*) and alternative (*On Our Backs*) magazine industries and their advertisers. Of course, in all of these instances, decisions to place Ditto on the front cover are influenced by considerations of commerce and "shock value" as much as, if not much more than, activism. But while the system may very well be using Ditto, she is also using it, and her

presence and performances have expanded the limits of acceptable female representation and performance in the public arena.

III. **Nomy Lamm and the Disabled Queer Body**

Representations of disability have also found a space, however limited, within queercore. As with fatness, disability and queerness hold common theoretical ground. In *Crip Theory*, Robert McRuer delineates this intersection, asserting that while the congruence between queer theory and disability has been previously remarked (by Carrie Sandahl, for example, referenced later in this section), the congruence between heterosexuality and able-bodiedness has been overlooked (1). McRuer thus draws a connection between compulsory heterosexuality as delineated by Adrienne Rich – the patriarchal notion that all people, regardless of sexual preference, must adopt heterosexuality – and what he terms "compulsory able-bodiedness" (2). Compulsory able-bodiedness positions able-bodies as both normative and coveted: "A system of compulsory able-bodiedness repeatedly demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the question, 'Yes, but in the end, wouldn't you rather be more like me?'" (9). As McRuer avers, the manner in which compulsory able-bodiedness produces the notion of the pitifully disabled body is similar to the way in which compulsory heterosexuality produces the notion of the disgraceful queer body (2). Accordingly, he advocates a "critically queer" stance toward disability that refuses to capitulate to bodily norms and works to weaken them (30). This stance embraces the work of the disability rights movement, resists compulsory able-bodiedness, and demands a public sphere in which full participation is not dependent on ability (30). For McRuer,

one of the ways in which this can be accomplished is through "cripping," which is similar to the act of "queering" (i.e., revisiting mainstream representations in order to uncover their latent queer subtexts). Cripping insists that able-bodiedness is not the norm and creatively re-imagines bodies, desires and practices that fit beyond this system (32). Cripping also makes a verb of the word "cripple" (sometimes shortened to the more offensive "crip"), and, thus, like "queer" and "fat" indicates a reclamation of a previously despised word in the hopes of lessening its power to injure.

McRuer's analysis in *Crip Theory* remains mostly within the theoretical realm, but queerness and disability also align in more concrete ways. In "Calling All Restroom Revolutionaries," Simone Chess, Alison Kafer, Jessi Quizar and Mattie (now Matt) Richardson discuss their involvement with PISSAR (People in Search of Safe and Accessible Restrooms), a student activist organization on the University of California at Santa Barbara campus dedicated to securing safe and accessible bathrooms for people with disabilities and those who transgress gender norms. As the authors assert, bathrooms are commonly built with able and cisgender bodies (male and female) in mind and, thus, are often sites of anxiety, embarrassment and frustration for both the disabled and the genderqueer. Those individuals whose physical and/or psychic identities do not match the male and female markers on the bathroom door are often targets of harassment and ridicule in the public bathroom, while the disabled must contend with the difficulties and inconveniences of locating bathrooms in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. As a consequence, those individuals who are both disabled and genderqueer have a nearly impossible situation with which to contend. Yet, from a more positive angle, the bathroom is an environment in which commonalities between the

genderqueer and the disabled can be ascertained and drawn upon in the spirit of coalition politics. That is, bathroom activism has the potential to bring together the disabled and the genderqueer, as well as feminists, single parents, and a variety of other people whose bathroom needs frequently go unmet (192).

In the realm of queercore, the intersection of queerness and disability has also been engaged, perhaps most notably in the work of Nomy Lamm, a multimedia artist who describes herself as a "bad ass, fat ass, Jew, dyke amputee" (qtd. in "The Lady in Pink," n.p.). A native of Olympia, Washington, a major location in the development of riot grrrl and queercore, Lamm is a multimedia artist known for her punk albums *Anthem* and *Effigy*, queercore zines, involvement in musical theater productions like *The Transfused,* fat activist lectures (which earned her a nomination for *Ms*. magazine's "Woman of the Year" award in 1997), and regular column in *Punk Planet* (a popular punk magazine based in Chicago that was created in 1994 in response to the perception that *MaximumRocknRoll* was becoming increasing elitist).

Lamm first came to prominence through her fat-positive riot grrrl zine *i'm so fucking beautiful*. Inspired by *Shadows on a Tightrope*, a feminist anthology on fat oppression, Lamm wrote three issues of the zine in 1991 detailing the anger she felt as a large woman in a fat oppressive society. This anger was stirred not just by society in general, but Olympia's punk scene in particular, which professed progressiveness and inclusivity, but sometimes fell short of its ideals. As Lamm recounts:

> [A]t the first YoYo AGoGo [subcultural music festival held annually in Olympia in the 1990s], I really wanted to believe there was a space [for fat activism]. That I was creating a space that was going to be good for fat people, that we could be in and accept our bodies and be radical about it. I

> went to this comedy event and this one woman told all these jokes about this fat babysitter. And it was all the stupid fat jokes you could think of, like her hand was always in the bag of Fritos and she never got off the couch and she had a bunch of chins. So stupid. And nobody was really laughing. But also, no one was interrupting it. I was in this culture of people who were going to call shit out, and I've seen some shit get called. And nobody did anything. And it was this awareness that if anyone was going to do this, it was going to have to be me . . . Then later we were at a show, a punk show, at the Capitol Theater. Kicking Giant was playing. People were being really disrespectful in the pit. This was something that was happening in the scene where guys were used to being like "Wah, I don't give a fuck, I'm basically going to beat you up in the pit and that's what you like" . . . So that was happening around me and it was feeling really dangerous, it felt like there were people in the pit that wanted to hurt people . . . I tried to get it to stop then I heard this person be like, "It's because you're so fat and lazy you don't want to really be in the pit, so why don't you get out of here," or something like that. And there's something about "fat and lazy" directed towards me but also towards other people. And I couldn't fucking stand it and I was trying to talk to Tae [from Kicking Giant] who was on the stage, being like 'blah blah blah blah' he was like, "What? Why don't you come up here?" So I got on the stage, and it was one of those moments, who fucking knows what I said, my heart was [racing] standing in front of 800 people, probably, "Fat oppression is real and you need to take responsibility for it, everybody here needs to take responsibility for it, it's not just my job." That was basically the message. It was crazy. Then I got off the stage and couldn't be in the space any more, the vibration was so intense. (Personal Interview)

In *Girl Zines*, Alison Piepmeir describes *i'm so fucking beautiful* as "fierce and unapologetic" with Lamm's social frustration being expressed through "profanity and phrases that are fully capitalized" (59). But, Piepmeir also notes that the size of the zine – barely three by four inches – and the introspective drawings contained within conflict with its furious tone: "Although she [Lamm] presents herself as powerful, a woman not to be messed with, her zine's visual components and its forms do suggest vulnerability" (62). For example, in *i'm so beautiful #2.5*, assertive, capitalized statements such as "YOU NEED TO BE TALKING TO OTHER SKINNY/NON-FAT PEOPLE ABOUT

YOUR PRIVILEGE!," exist alongside drawings of women's faces, their eyes closed or downturned in expressions of sorrow and anguish, with words like "empty" and "shame" scrawled next to them. This indicates the extent to which, although a politics of bodily subversion relies on certain degree of self-confidence, subversive body politics are often expressed by folks who have been traumatized by an image conscious society and who continue to wrestle with feelings of insecurity, even as they defiantly confront the body normative world.

This balance between ferocity and tenderness, confidence and insecurity, is also observable in Lamm's work dealing with the intersection of her sexuality and her disability. Lamm's leg was amputated at age three to treat a bone growth disorder, and as she states in "The Right Amount of Space," she has long felt marginalized within the predominately able-bodied gay and lesbian community. This essay centers on her experience at a queer meditation retreat, where she was excluded from the daily "walking meditations" in which the able-bodied attendees freely participated:

> As a person with a disability in this community, I want to be a part of things, to connect to my body, the land, the other creatures, the sunshine, the wind and yes, the people. I have already faced frustration with the feeling of being caged – like everyone else gets to explore the land on the narrow winding hilly paths, while I have to stay in areas that are paved and wide enough for the scooter. (n.p.)

Occurrences such as this have caused a lot of pain for Lamm, and her art has become an outlet for releasing the distress that she has endured. This story, along with the previous one about the fat discrimination Lamm experienced at punk shows, also suggests the quadruple discrimination Lamm faces as a queer, disabled, fat woman in a homophobic, ableist, sizeist and sexist society. There are few spaces in existence in which all four of

Lamm's identities are equally understood, valued and respected, and few audience members who are able to entirely relate, making her art, which insists on expressing all of these subject positions simultaneously, so challenging (in both senses of the term), no matter where, or to whom, she performs.

This is especially true of the art she has made for Sins Invalid, a multimedia organization for disabled artists that are queer or of color: "Sins Invalid is a performance project that incubates and celebrates artists with disabilities, centralizing artists of color and queer and gender-variant artists as communities who have been historically marginalized" (www.sinsinvalid.com). The name "Sins Invalid" also produces a clever slippage between the "sin" of sex and the "sin" of being disabled, connotatively indicating the queer disabled politics that are showcased within the performance series. Over the years, such artists as Leah Lakshmi, Maria Palacios, Antoine Hunter, Lee Williams and Seeley Quest have all performed at Sins Invalid.

Lamm has also participated in Sins Invalid for the past several years as both an artist and organizer. Her art at Sins Invalid consists of a series of multimedia live performances. For example, in a video of an untitled performance from 2009, Lamm, adorned in yellow and grey feathers, sits atop a nest fashioned from discarded legs comprised of cloth and stuffing, her large frame filling the nest. These legs speak to the one that Lamm lost as a child and conjure both the idea of loss and the promise of abundance through creative recuperation. While perched in the nest of legs, Lamm begins to weave a (presumably personal, if not quite factual) tale about waking up in a hospital as a child with "something missing," a reference to both her leg and to her mother who, as Lamm's subsequent narrative reveals, abandoned her upon becoming

aware of her daughter's malady. Lamm goes on to identify herself as a "baby bird left tiny and scared," but one resolute in the hope that "the energy of pure love will come back to me at some point, if I just stay alive long enough, and keep working on my bird song." These words lead into an eight-minute "bird song vocalization," consisting of repeated, melodic sounds and occasional declarations of "I am so beautiful/ I am waiting for you/Me and my bird song," which refer to Lamm's/the bird's will for survival in the face of abandonment and despair. This song thus touches on the theme of isolation, a theme resonant for both queers and the disabled, for, as Sandahl reminds us, "Queers and cripples often experience profound isolation while growing up, since they are rarely born into queer or crip families, much less communities" (37). There is also something queer about Lamm's performance as a bird, as this crossing of the border between the human and the animal is, according to queer scholar Carmen Dell'Aversano, a violation of one of "the most entrenched identitarian barriers upheld by all human societies in the whole course of history" (73).

It should also be said that the powerful and emotionally resonant vocalizations in this untitled performance are an absent-presence. Like all sounds, they fill the room while remaining immaterial, just as Lamm's missing leg is an absence that nevertheless carries much emotional weight. For Lamm such bold vocalizations are also a means of coming into personal power and connecting with others. As she explains:

> I teach voice lessons and I've been teaching this workshop. I'm going to teach one in Olympia in a couple of weeks, called Singing As Social Justice. I teach voice lessons, so I teach people how to access their authentic voice, which is a combination of breathing and stretching and being in your body. Then really noticing, creating a space around yourself to make sounds and see what you do, and develop based on that. That is,

> instead of coming at it [one's voice] from this really critical place, coming at it from a place of curiosity. The things that get created in those spaces are so amazing. It's such intense intimacy between people. The reason that I think of it as a seed for social justice is because of the ways that we take up space in the world, whether it's coming into a space and taking it over or not having any idea of how to enter a space . . . I feel like that kind of practice of observing your voice in relation to other people actually helps you see how you energetically relate to other people and make choices around it. So that's the seed of what I'm doing with my music in general. I feel like I'm in a different place. For so long I was pushing things out. Like, "Get out of here. Get out here. Fuck you. Fuck you." But, the point isn't just keeping everything out, the point is to create something inside that has space and can't be attacked all the time. And within that there's room for all emotions. There's rage, joy, silliness, intensity and everything. (Personal Interview)

Thus, through voice, Lamm endeavors to do what queercore seeks to do more generally: to create an alternative space of community, interconnectivity and potentiality. As this quote attests, in order to accomplish this, Lamm has increasingly rejected the stereotypical angry queercore/punk attitude of "fuck you" in favor of a more varied emotional spectrum. This evokes the possibility of queercore practice and expression beyond simply the confrontational and the brash, a possibility which Lamm fulfills through her art: Lamm is an acknowledged member of queercore subculture, but while her music is radically queer and D.I.Y. and, therefore, queercore, it is also more moody, melodic, and experimental than most queercore music, effectively expanding the boundaries of what queercore is and can be.

In another piece for Sins Invalid entitled, "Walls of Fire," Lamm again uses her voice to "take up space" and to access highly personal emotions, this time in layers of live and recorded vocalizations. As these layered sounds fill the room, Lamm removes her prosthetic leg, using it as a drum, re-presenting the disabled body as both useful and artistically productive. Lamm's removal of her leg (an action which she repeated, I

believe intentionally, during my interview with her) is also a bold act of "coming out" that is akin to the same ritual within queer culture. Sandahl avows the bravery of this theatrical practice on the part of queer disabled performers:

> Flaunting their bodies onstage while discussing their impairments, solo crip performers make their difference visible on their own terms. Doing so violates the cultural law dictating that disabled people engage in what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson calls "stigma management," or the effort to put the nondisabled at ease by hiding or minimizing the appearance and impact of impairments. (40)

In her performance of "Walls of Fire," Lamm does anything but minimize the appearance and impact of her impairment, her prosthetic leg literally making a resounding impact on the drum, as she sensuously and triumphantly sings the repeated line, "We're so afraid of getting burned, but if we become the fire, then we won't get hurt." The combined visual and sonic elements of this performance thus represent an embrace of the disabled body and its voice as powerful, creative and erotic entities.

Lamm's disabled body is also, of course, a queer body, although the former is what is most overtly accentuated in this and other performances. This has something to do with the fact that disability is generally more visible than queerness, which, on the one hand, places the burden on queer disabled individuals to continually assert their identities as non-straight, and, on the other hand, denies them the potential to pass in queer (and straight) society as able-bodied in order to survive and navigate an ableist world. While Lamm eschews the tactic of passing, choosing to rebelliously foregrounds her disabled body instead, she also eschews the "responsibility" to continually announce her

queerness. Lamm is queer and disabled, but the onus is on the audience to make these connections.

On the whole, through her performances, Lamm puts "cripping," as outlined by McRuer and Sandahl, into practice. Through her haunting lyrics, forceful vocalizations and imaginative corporal repurposings, Lamm (re-)imagines bodies and desires that exist beyond the system of compulsory able-bodiedness, therefore challenging "the ongoing consolidation of heterosexual, able-bodied hegemony" (McRuer, 19). Sandahl associates this practice of cripping with humor and queer camp: "Both queering and cripping expose the arbitrary delineation between normal and defective and the negative social ramifications of attempts to homogenize humanity, and both disarm what is painful with wicked humor, including camp" (37). However, Lamm's version of cripping is, largely, serious and sad in tone. As such, her art avoids the imperative that disabled people be funny and disarming in the interest of putting nondisabled people at ease: "disabled people must use charm, intimidation, ardor, deference, humor, or entertainment to relieve nondisabled people of their discomfort. Those of us with disabilities are supplicants and minstrels." (Garland-Tomson, 69). Lamm's art denies this comfort to her audience, and foregoes the cushioning effect of jokes and niceties.

This makes Lamm's art all the more revolutionary and, indeed, all the more queercore: confrontational in a queer punk vein, despite the melodic and experimental qualities of her music, as previously mentioned. Lamm's queer disabled art is present, but still rare, within queercore, which makes it clear that queercore still has a long way to go in order to be truly inclusive. Lamm's work stands out as a singular exception, and the fact that she has not received the same notoriety or attention within the subculture

(and beyond) as her bodily-subversive compadre Beth Ditto demonstrates the immense barriers that still exist for queer disabled artists. At the same time, this makes Lamm's work all the more prescient and necessary, as the brave act of getting on stage and demanding attention and respect as a (queer and fat) disabled person not only rejects stereotypes of disabled individuals as helpless charity cases, but also shows the queercore subculture (and beyond) exactly what they've been missing.

IV. **Silas Howard and the Transgender Body**

The transgender body cannot be discussed in quite the same manner that I have been discussing the fat or disabled body. Whereas my argument is that there is a sense of empowerment that accompanies the veneration of the fat and/or disabled body in its present form, the transgendered body is, by definition, a body of transformation and evolution. This notion of identity as a process echoes Stuart Hall's post-structuralist understanding of "identity as becoming": identity as belonging to the future as much as the past and in a constant state of transformation (225). The transgendered body is the body that the transgender individual has chosen or envisions for themselves. It is not the body that they have been biologically given, but the one that they feel most comfortable inhabiting. As such, when it comes to the transgender body the goal is not to accept the "as is" body, as in fat and disabled activism, but to seek the body that one wants, despite societal prohibitions and admonitions otherwise. Whereas fat and disabled activism connects the "as is" body to the desired body – that is embraces the disabled/fat body as the desired body – transgender activism creates a rupture between these poles.

There are similarities between fat, disabled and transgendered bodies, however. Namely, they are all bodies that are scorned and subjugated. This is something that is tacitly acknowledged in another work by Nomy Lamm: the punk rock opera *The Transfused*, which Lamm created along with queercore band The Need. Performed in Olympia in the early 2000's, *The Transfused* takes place one hundred years after the fall of the American Empire. The world has become an industrial wasteland ruled by the capitalist greed of "The Corporation." Slaves to this new terrifying order are the Transfused, a group of "punk-ass-gender-freaky animal-people" who work in the oppressive and oxy-moronic Fat-Free Fat Factory. The Transfused are a mix of identities – queer, transgendered, disabled and fat – linked in their shared abjection and, eventually, joined in battle against The Corporation. As the play progresses, the Transfused collectively stage an uprising and overthrow their capitalist tormentors. The message being clear: On account of their shared bodily oppression, queer and transgendered, disabled and fat folks have reason to unite and, if they ever do, the results have potential to be revolutionary. In this sense, *The Transfused* is a fantastic example of a play that engenders the "utopian performative" as delineated by Jill Dolan (and referenced in the previous chapter), with the "hopeful feeling" generated by *The Transfused* being of a world in which various abjected bodies have risen in unity to claim power and pleasure.

Within the realm of queercore, one of the most interesting texts dealing with the transgender body specifically is the low-budget "loveable loser" film *By Hook or By Crook* (2001), directed by two transgender artists: Silas Howard, the former guitarist of queercore band Tribe 8, and performance artist Harry Dodge. *By Hook* is a loosely plotted narrative about the developing friendship between two trans butches in San

Francisco, Shy (Howard) and Valentine (Dodge). After the death of zer father, Shy arrives in the city where ze encounters Valentine, a quirky genderqueer adoptee in search of zer birth mother. The pair, who both have a penchant for outlaw aesthetics, become fast friends and are quickly entangled in a series of, mostly failed, attempts at petty crime, from robbing a convenience store to using Super Soakers to flood change out of a Coke vending machine. Less a film about crime, and more of a film about being an outsider, the focus in *By Hook* is on the eccentricities of its two main characters and their unconventional and often poetic conversations about their hopes and fears.

In *In a Queer Time and Place*, Judith Halberstam identifies *By Hook* as "a real turning point for queer and transgender cinema" (92), a claim that she makes based on the film's incorporation of what she terms the "transgender look." That is, according to Halberstam, most films prior to *By Hook* have either presented the transgender body as something to be salaciously exposed via the narrative climax (think of the unmasking of the trans character, Dil, in the dramatic apex of the film *The Crying Game*) or as something to be gawked at, scrutinized, questioned and even pitied (think of the tragic character of Brandon Teena in Kimberly Pierce's *Boys Don't Cry*). *By Hook*, however, solicits audience identification with its transgender characters by associating "butchness and gender innovation with wit, humor, and style" (93). Rather than making the trans body strange or pathetic, *By Hook* seduces audiences into immersing themselves in the world of gender deviance and entreats them to simply go with the flow.

Which is to say that *By Hook* refuses the expectation that transgenderism must be explained and/or justified. The "gender peculiarities" of its protagonists are never elucidated. Even though others occasionally question their gender identities, such as a

young girl who early in the film asks Shy, "Are you a girl or a boy?," no answer is ever supplied. *By Hook* avoids simple answers and clarity in favor of deliberate, and exciting, ambiguity and confusion. Such ambiguity and confusion prevents audiences from gaining mastery over the transgender body. It also indicates the degree to which Howard and Dodge are uninterested in teaching uninformed audiences about transgenderism. In other words, *By Hook* places the burden of understanding on the audience: This is not an educational film, but a playful tale of gender-rebel friendship and camaraderie.

What's more, in *By Hook*, the actual transgender body is kept hidden from view. Although the film contains two sex scenes, the bodies of the two leads remain covered in both. Valentine's girlfriend, for example, disrobes entirely during their erotic interlude, while Valentine remains fully clothed. This indicates not so much a denial of the transgender body, but a privileging of the chosen body over the biological one. In this instance, the clothes do indeed make the man, and the outward personas that Shy and Valentine have created for themselves are the only ones that matters. For Howard and Dodge, the body is a site of performance and possibility not (biological) proscription. As Howard explains the naming of *By Hook*:

> The title refers to what is involved in inventing your own world – when you don't see anything that represents you out there, how can you seize upon that absence as an opportunity to make something, out of nothing, by hook or by crook. We take gender ambiguity, for example, and we don't explain it, dilute it or apologize for it – we represent it for what it is – something confusing and lovely! (qtd. in Halberstam, 96)

This theme of "inventing one's own world," which repeats the do-it-yourself ethos of punk and queercore, runs throughout *By Hook*. Both Shy and Valentine spin

imaginative tales about their lives and pasts. Shy tells lies about zer working-class father's background, telling whomever will listen that he was an astronaut, an opera aficionado or a chemical engineer. Valentine conjures tales about having an orgy with a group of nurses while in a mental institution and of the things that ze and Shy did together when they were kids (although, the pair have only recently met for the first time as adults). Both use pop culture icons to reinvent their identities, as when the pair pose with guns in front of a mirror in a reference to Robert DeNiro's famous scene from *Taxi Driver*.[10] And, in a standout scene the pair scam a hardware store employee by pretending to be construction workers returning a drill. They have in fact never paid for this drill, and have just grabbed it from the store shelves a few moments prior. While Shy and Valentine refer to themselves using male pronouns for most of the film, in this scene they, tellingly, switch to female pronouns, as Valentine fumbles through zis wallet looking for the sales receipt that does not exist. This pronoun switch seems to be motivated by the momentary need to play up a stereotypical female helplessness for their own advantage, and suggests the way in which Shy and Valentine treat identity as something changeable and situational; something to be switched at will when it is beneficial to do so, even when this means reproducing gender stereotypes, as this instance does.

However, Shy and Valentine are not fakers, but inventors. For them, inline with Hall's view of the body as always in the process of "becoming," the self in *By Hook* is less something made than something forever in the making. As Hall maintains, identity,

[10] This is reminiscent of another queercore moving image artist, Sadie Benning, who often used pop culture imagery culled from music, newspapers, television and film in her experimental Pixel-vision films as a way to symbolically express her young dyke identity while simultaneously parodying pop culture. For more on Benning and her artistic practices, see Mia Carter's "The Politics of Pleasure: Cross-Cultural Autobiographic Performance in the Video Works of Sadie Benning."

including gender identity, is not true or essential, but is an unstable nodal point embedded within larger discourses of history and culture (213). Accordingly, in possession of fluxional identities, Shy and Valentine, and the scenes in which they appear, become open to possibility and surprise. Viewers are asked to let go of their preconceived notions of gender categories, to stop focusing on assumed particularities of the body, and to bathe in the gender confusion. In this way, *By Hook* is an all-too-rare example of a transgender film that productively unsettles more than it simplifies/educates, and one that has found a particularly strong following among transgender audiences. This following is evidenced by Howard receiving the "Trans Luminary Award" at the 5th Annual Los Angeles Transgender Film Festival in 2013, in conjunction with a special centerpiece screening of *By Hook*.

By Hook is a standout film in which Howard and Dodge present the transgender body as something "confusing and lovely," but Howard and Dodge are not the only artists within queercore to engage genderquerness in a provocative manner. In the last chapter, drag performer Vaginal Davis was briefly mentioned. Davis is an originator of a type of drag that José Esteban Muñoz identifies as "terrorist drag": Drag that expresses a "guerilla style" that "functions as a ground level cultural terrorism that fiercely skewers both straight culture and reactionary components of gay culture" (100; 102). Vaginal Davis is a central figure within queercore whose songs (e.g., "Queens Make the World Go Round") and performances (e.g., his role as a transgender top who anally penetrates Bruce LaBruce in *Super 8 ½*) productively and playfully engage questions of gender, racial and sexual identity. Queercore is filled with other "drag terrorists" and gender-bending artists from the already-mentioned "macha femme" Tribe 8 guitarist, Leslie Mah

who conjures an aggressive femininity in her songs and on-stage performances, to the bisexual, androgynous electropunk singer Peaches known for polymorphously perverse and shockingly sexually explicit songs, to the controversial gender-indeterminate "sexually infused sewer rat of vile shamelessness" Christeene, an Austin based musical performer who combines elements of punk and hip hop in zer lyrics and is known for performing on-stage wearing women's panties (as a bra) and pillowcase dresses, which ze lifts up from time to time to show zis penis (www.christeenemusic.com).

JD Samson of the electroqueer punk bands Le Tigre and MEN is another especially noteworthy figure in this lineage. Samson forcefully foregrounds the body in zis song in a manner that resonates with the other queercore bodily performers discussed in this chapter. For example, in the Le Tigre song "Viz," written by Samson, queer unity and empowerment is achieved through movement and bodily freedom:

> There's a slap
> On my back
> I find another butch, hat cocked
>
> We put out our hands
> In the crowd
> And over and over we jump up and down
>
> They call it climbing, and we call it visibility
> They call it coolness, and we call it visibility
> They call it way too rowdy, we call it finally free

Likewise, in the MEN song "Who Am I to Feel So Free?," the band laments *not* using the body ("fingers in ass") as a weapon to fight against homophobic/transphobic authorities:

> Sky and earth, earth appear to meet, meet

On which horizon do we plan our retreat?
On our way
Stopped and frisked
Government asks, "Are you a fucking risk?"

On the corner we got booked
Paper says its because of the look
Running around, stopped and harassed
Instead of fighting fingers in ass

This attunement to the body as a potential tool of sedition links the genderqueer bodies evoked by Le Tigre/Men with the fat body evoked by Ditto in songs like "Standing in the Way of Control" and the disabled body evoked by Lamm in "Wall of Fire." Such a "community of songs," much like Lamm's *The Transfused*, intimates the power of abjected bodies coming together in protest across identity differences and in the service of unseating dominant norms of beauty and identity.

V. Conclusion

This chapter has provided just a small window into some of the ways in which unconventional bodies are given space and respect within queercore. I do not wish to overstate this case, however. At the beginning of this chapter, I noted that the queercore performers spotlighted in this chapter are extraordinary in the sense that they are making incredible artworks that stand out in terms of their powerful corporeal critiques, but also in the sense that they are unique cases: Within queercore fat, disabled and transgender bodies are the exception to the rule. Indeed, even within her very own band, Ditto is the lone explicitly rendered fat activist.

Nevertheless, Ditto, Lamm, and Howard are all important artists within queercore. Drawing from histories of radical queer politics and outrageous punk styles, they all

"make spectacles of themselves" in order to counteract oppressive norms of beauty, gender and sexuality. As Russo claims, the practice of "making a spectacle of oneself" "has to do with a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries" – it is a violation of proper bodily containment (221). Inline with this definition, Ditto flouts the restrictions placed on fat bodies, flamboyantly proving that queer fat woman can be active, political, sexual and strong, just as Lamm disregards the restrictions placed on disabled bodies, demonstrating that queer fat disabled women can be powerful and productive as well. Similarly, Howard refuses expectations of fixed, stable and clearly defined bodies in her artistic output, like the film *By Hook or By Crook*. Together these artists invoke a world of bodily diversity, equality and acceptance, affirming what a more inclusive queercore subculture (and world at large) might look like.

Chapter 5: Queercore Archives

While previous chapters have centered on the main themes at the very core of queercore, this chapter takes a step back to discuss the importance of recording and preserving the history of this subculture. That is, this chapter concerns the theory and practice of archiving queercore. An archive is traditionally defined as "an institution that acquires, preserves, and diffuses discourse, primarily from one physical space" (Barriault 224). This definition is especially apropos to the material queercore archives that exist within libraries, community centers and grassroots locales, but these archives can be found also in the realms of the digital (on-line collections) and the cinematic (documentary films and videos) – all of which will be explored in the pages to come.[1] To the above list I would also add this dissertation itself, which has been conceived with the goals of preserving and publicizing queercore very much in mind.

Due to anti-queer and anti-punk prejudices within the sociocultural mainstream, queercore archival efforts are not just a matter of preservation, but also a matter of politics. As Mary Stevens notes, given the realities of minority exclusion and marginalization within the public sphere, minority archival practice is "not just a solitary reflective endeavor," but also "an act of collective rebellion" (272). The queercore archives considered in this chapter should, therefore, be viewed as part of a defiant process of rescuing what others – homophobes, conservative gays and lesbians, and elitists – would deem unworthy of conservation. As media scholar Alexandra Juhasz

[1] Zines and live recordings also count as queercore archives, although they will not be explored in this chapter.

evocatively contends, this type of "queer archive activism" is a "practice that adds love and hope to time and technology" (326).

Homophobes, conservatives and elitists are not the only things standing in the way of queercore's preservation, however. Queercore is difficult to archive in its own right. This is largely due to the short-lived nature of many of its objects: zines that were created in limited quantities, mixtapes that have been lost over time, flyers and handbills that were thrown away, live performances that were never recorded, films that were screened once and forgotten, art works that have suffered at the hands of environmental factors (e.g., floods, fires, hungry dogs), and so on and so forth. The fact that so many queercore items have been neglected, misplaced and mishandled, or were immaterial to begin with, means that queercore requires what José Esteban Muñoz has termed "an archive of the ephemeral" (10). As Judith Halberstam elaborates, "we need to theorize the concept of the archive, and consider new models of queer memory and queer history capable of recording and tracing subterranean scenes, fly-by-night clubs, and fleeting trends" (161). Such a demand for retention is partially motivated by a sense of nostalgia and a desire to hold onto a rapidly disappearing past. In this regard, readers should take note that many of the folks at the forefront of queercore archival practice (e.g., Matt Wobensmith and Christopher Wilde, both discussed below) are older adults who have long been members of this scene and whose archival efforts are, undoubtedly, partially motivated by a longing to hold on to the "glory days."

Due to the impermanency of many queercore documents, the queercore archive exists, to a significant extent, within the memory of those who have participated in, and engaged with, the subculture. This is, indeed, a primary reason why I conducted personal

interviews with queercore practitioners for this dissertation. Which is to say that personal interviews have been one of the few means of getting at the traces of vanished queercore objects and performances. In conjuring, recording and recuperating queercore's past, personal interviews/oral histories confirm Stevens' notion of the queer archive as something that is not solely material, but that is also "an intensely social practice, part of the process of fostering a shared memory that emerges only through dialogue" (272). In this way, the queercore archive can be invoked through encounters between archivists/interviewers and narrators/interviewees in which both parties play an active role in the construction of queercore knowledge. Alessandro Portelli explains the collaborative and dialogic nature of oral histories as follows:

> Oral sources are generated in a dialogic exchange – an *interview* -- literally a looking at each other, an exchange of gazes. In this exchange questions and answers do not necessarily go in one direction only. The historian's agenda must meet the agenda of the narrator; what the historian wishes to know may not necessarily coincide with what the narrator wishes to tell. As a consequence, the whole agenda of the research may be radically revised. (n.p.)

Accordingly, this particular archival practice is one that is thrillingly embodied, unpredictable, lively and spontaneous, and in a fashion that echoes the volatility and dynamism of punk performance itself, as well as the emphasis on non-capitalistic sharing and mutual exchange within punk subcultures (i.e., the hand-to-hand trade of zines and mixtapes common to punk culture). This is true even if the eventual product of the archivist-narrator exchange is a written text that is inevitably a disappointing monologic account of the original vibrant dialogic "performance" (Portelli, n.p.).

It should also be said that in addition to aiding in the resurrection of forgotten and disappeared queercore stories/objects/performances, interviews have also served to capture the affect attached to them. Queercore performances and live events, in particular, are as much about the emotional responses of their audiences as the on-stage details of the performance itself. For, as recent queer scholarship attests, there is an emotional power attached to the collective experience of watching a performance. In *Utopia and Performance,* Jill Dolan writes of the theater as "a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world" (2). That is, as Dolan understands, the theater is a space for the building of temporary affective communities united in their desire for the kind of utopian future toward which theater sometimes gestures. Similarly, in "Stages: Queers, Punks and the Utopian Performative," Muñoz, drawing from his own experiences as teenage punk rock concert-goer, writes of the feelings of (minoritarian) connection and sociality elicited by the anticipation for, and attendance of, live shows: "The real force of performance is its ability to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging" (99). Such emotions of utopian longing and minoritarian belonging, discussed by Dolan and Muñoz and engendered by queercore performances and community events, deserve a place in the queercore archives. So do the more personal pleasures of queercore consumption, such as listening to a queercore album or reading a queercore zine in the privacy of one's bedroom, and the affective dimensions of queercore *production*: the joys and pains of doing-it-yourself within a capitalist culture that would rather have its subjects remain passive subjects of a

technocratic elite. Interviews, again, are a key means through which to get at these emotive facets of queercore.

Accordingly, a successful archive must not only compile its documents, but must also take stock of, and reproduce, the feelings that have been woven into and around them. This is something that Ann Cvetkovich famously advocates in *An Archive of Feelings*, a book that champions the idea of "cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the context of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception" (7). Thus, a "useful archive" according to Cvetkovich is one that "must preserve and produce not just knowledge, but feeling" (241). At their best, interviews are able to record and preserve feeling and so are archival artifacts, like the documentaries discussed at the end of this chapter.

In accordance with this idea of the "useful archive," in the pages that follow I explore the conventional and unconventional forms that queercore archives have taken, paying particular attention to their relative "pros" and "cons." As I shall discuss in the next section, while queercore artifacts have been, on rare occasion, housed within the traditional settings of universities and community centers, they have also, and more regularly, been preserved within the alternative spaces of personal collections, on-line blogs and documentary films. Such alternative archives are, to varying degrees, more successful in sustaining the affective and ephemeral components of queercore, as well as making queercore artifacts more accessible to the general public. While my dissertation, embedded as it is within the academy, is inevitably attached to the institutional side of the queercore archive, my hope is that this chapter, as well as my dissertation as a whole, will encourage readers to seek out the more unorthodox spaces of queercore's maintenance. It

is in these unorthodox spaces that the reader can truly experience the tactile and emotional thrills of queercore's discovery.

I. **Material Archives: Institutional, Professional and Grassroots**

One of the most prominent institutional archives that houses queercore materials is the Fales Library and Special Collections at New York University (NYU). Comprised of 200,000 volumes, Fales includes collections dedicated to rare books and manuscripts in English and American literature, food and cookery, and, most relevant to this dissertation, riot grrrl. Launched in the fall of 2010, the "Riot Grrrl Collection" documents the early years of the movement (1989-1996), primarily through the personal papers and ephemera of its feminist pioneers. The Kathleen Hanna Papers, for example, assembles flyers, posters, zines/zine masters, notebooks, magazines, photographs, newspaper clippings, academic writing, and legal and financial records donated by the famed frontwoman of riot grrrl/queercore bands Bikini Kill and Le Tigre. While most of the holdings in the Riot Girl Collection specifically pertain to riot grrrl (rather than queercore per se), the Fales collection also includes a subset entitled "Outpunk Archive," which is an accumulation of items related to *Outpunk*, the queercore zine and record label formed by Matt Wobensmith in the early 1990s. The items in "Outpunk Archive" include all of the *Outpunk* zines produced between 1992 and 1998 and most of their original masters, as well as audio recordings of, and documentation and ephemera related to, various *Outpunk* bands (t-shirts, band photos, flyers, posters, etc.).

Like most university-housed archives, the chief function of the Fales Library is to provide academic scholars with access to artifacts for research purposes. That is, the

overarching mission of the Fales Library is "to acquire, preserve, and provide access to a wide range of primary research materials in their original format . . . in support of the educational and research activities of our various constituencies" (www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/ research/fales/). The more specific mission of the "Riot Grrrl Collection" is to "provide primary resources for scholars who are interested in feminism, punk activism, queer theory, gender theory, DIY culture, and music history" (ibid.). In keeping with these academic objectives, admission to the holdings at Fales, including the "Riot Grrrl Collection," is limited to those officially affiliated with NYU, as well as "qualified alumni, researchers, and scholars from other institutions throughout the US and abroad" (ibid.). Appointments are necessary for visitors, and it is a closed stack system, meaning that materials cannot be retrieved by patrons themselves, but will, on request, be brought to a reading room by a staff member.

The advantage of institutional archives like Fales is the emphasis that they place on systematic organization (e.g., Fales organizes its materials under established Library of Congress headings) and on the protection of archival materials from overuse and harm (hence the closed stack system). The disadvantage of institutional archives like Fales is their inaccessibility, especially to a public that might have a more casual (i.e., non-academic) interest in something like riot grrrl/queercore. For, as K.J. Rawson argues in "Accessing Transgender//Desiring Queer(er?) Archival Logics," institutional archives are largely undemocratic and rigid, premised as they are on a logic of limited access and organizational systems that follow strict professional guidelines for finding aids, content standards, Library of Congress headings and patron handling (136). Accordingly, as Rawson notes, institutional archives advance a distant relation between patron and

archive, archival materials being kept tightly monitored and remote from patrons, outside of their immediate reach. In addition, institutional archives require a certain degree of specialized knowledge on the part of visitors, who must be able to comprehend the logic and language of finding aids and Library of Congress headings. They also require the foresight of visitors to pre-plan, as visitors must know in advance what they will request to see: casual browsing is not facilitated or encouraged by the closed stack system. Finally, institutional archives are not all that common, which means that most folks interested in visiting them will have to travel and, thus, spend money.

Grassroots archives follow an opposite logic, according to Rawson. They tend to forego the professional standards of comprehensive, well-organized lists and searchable databases in favor of a "focus on discovery" (136). For example, the Sexual Minorities Archive in Northhampton, Massachusetts, a residential LGBTQIA archival collection that includes a scattering of queercore materials (pins, flyers, books, etc.), encourages patrons to dig into indiscriminately organized boxes with the expectation that they will stumble upon something useful or exciting (136). While this type of archive can be frustrating to users wanting to find something in particular and to find it quickly, Rawson maintains that grassroots archives such as the Sexual Minorities Archive follow a "queerer logic" than institutional ones. That is, through their emphasis on spontaneous browsing and their placement of materials in direct proximity to patrons, they permit the "tactile experience of touching the past," and stimulate disorderly and unobstructed exploration as well as a creative interplay between materials and patrons (138).

In this manner, grassroots archives encourage a more irreverent attitude toward archival materials than institutional archives. This irreverent attitude echoes the stance

that queers and punks have taken toward dominant/high culture via deliberately low-brow, "trashy" aesthetics and crass re-workings of popular culture items. In theoretical terms, this calls to mind Walter Benjamin's concept of "aura," which he obscurely defines as, "A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be." In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Benjamin rebukes traditional nineteenth century art as inaccessible and elusive: as preserving its high status elitism by remaining deceptive and out of reach. This is as opposed to modern art forms, like photography and film, that elicit more active responses from viewers, that can more easily be reproduced, thus threatening their exclusivity and authenticity, and that encourage collective experiences from the masses. For Benjamin, film especially "burst this prison-world [of the inaccessible and elusive art work] asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling" (*Illuminations*, 236). To bring this back to the world of archives, whereas institutional archives preserve the precious "aura" of the objects they house, grassroots archives disturb this "aura," encouraging visitors to "calmly and adventurously go traveling."

Between the contrasting poles of "institutional" and "grassroots" archives, Rawson places the "professional" archive: archives run by historical societies and other non-profit organizations. According to Rawson, professional archives tend to have a mixed focus on efficiency and discovery, such that while stacks in professional archives are often closed, as they are in institutional archives, they also allow for the browsing associated with grassroots archives (136). An example of a professional archive that possesses queercore materials is the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives in Toronto

(CGLA). CGLA has an assemblage of queercore zines, films, posters and other ephemera from queercore's original adherents. Queercore co-founder G.B. Jones, for example, has donated much of her personal collection of zines to CGLA.[2] Founded in 1973, and now the second largest LGBTQIA archive in the world with collections of books, films, audiotapes, photographs and other artifacts, the CGLA has a mandate to "acquire, preserve, organize, and give public access to information and materials in any medium, by and about LGBTQIA people, primarily produced in or concerning Canada" (www.clga.ca). Unlike the more exclusive model of Fales, CGLA is open on select evenings to "anyone with an interest in LGBT history," and no appointment for visiting is necessary. This encourages community, rather than just academic, participation in CGLA's archives as do regularly scheduled tours that are open to all, and a meeting room that can be rented out by LGBTQIA, and LGBTQIA friendly, organizations.

The GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco is another professional archive that houses queercore materials. Launched in the mid-1980s, when founder Willie Walker, a nurse, realized that gay history was dying along with victims of the AIDS epidemic, the GLBT Historical Society is also one of the largest LGBTQIA archives in the United States, with 600 manuscript collections, 3,000 periodical titles, 75,000 photographs, over 2,000 imprinted t-shirts; and 400 oral histories; as well as extensive holdings of film and video, historic textiles, posters, works of fine and graphic arts, and

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[2] As Jones explained in interview, she donated her zine collection to CGLA after her home was flooded several times, ruining some of the zines, and making her realize that she wanted to preserve this history: "I had to give a lot of mine away too, because I had five floods and everything. Some of them did get damaged, and I thought, 'Oh my god, I just can't take the chance that I'm going to have another flood and the rest of them are just going to get wrecked and lost forever. I want to make sure that people can still read them in the future.' Otherwise I would have held on to them, but it was just too much of a chance. And besides I had such a huge collection – like thousands." (Personal Interview).

other miscellaneous artifacts. The GLBT Historical Society's queercore holdings encompass numerous zines (e.g., *Homocore, Bimbox*, *Fembot*, and *Outpunk*) as well as the papers of Deke Nihilson, creator of *Homocore*. Like CGLA, the GLBT Historical Society permits visits from the general populace (it has open hours on Saturdays) and engages with the wider community through a public GLBT history museum that is the "first full-scale, stand-alone museum of its kind in the United States" (www.glbthistory.org).

While these professional archives are more democratic in execution than Fales, they are not as immediately emotionally invested in queercore as are the more grassroots archives. Take, for example, San Francisco's Goteblud, one of the most impressive grassroots queercore archives. Part zine store and part zine archive, Goteblud is managed by Matt Wobensmith, the previously mentioned creator of the zine *Outpunk* and the founder of Outpunk records, the first music label dedicated entirely to queer punk music. Pansy Division, Bikini Kill, God is My Co-Pilot, Tribe 8, Sta-Prest, Behead the Prophet, No Lord Shall Live, and others, appeared on the Outpunk label at one time or another. One of the major movers and shakers within the queercore music scene in the early 1990s, by the end of the decade, Wobensmith had grown weary of queer punk music, which he found increasingly derivative and lackluster:

> I decided I had to focus on my career and put the music thing to bed . . . I needed to do more with my brain and I didn't want to be stuck in this scene forever. There were other people taking up the cause of the whole queer punk thing and I'm not necessarily criticizing anybody but I was really disappointed by it cause they were just joiners. They were looking for a scene to drop themselves in, they wanted to do the superficial aspects of it and say, "look at me!" They thought it was flattering to be a part of something, but to me they didn't really understand the best way to flatter

> me is to come up with your own thing that's completely unique and to challenge me and inspire me. (Personal Interview)

Following the demise of *Outpunk* (both the zine and the record label) in the late 1990s, Wobensmith started two other record labels, Queercorps and A.C.R.O.N.Y.M., both of which specialized in queer hip hop music (aka, "homo-hop"). But, within a couple of years, Wobensmith became disillusioned once again – this time with the competitive, rather than collaborative, nature of the homo-hop scene, which, according to him, exceeded the usual competition intrinsic to (sub)cultures, by becoming "downright toxic" (Personal Interview). As a result, Wobensmith left the music business all together for a more conventional job in information technology. But, Wobensmith never lost his love for underground (queer) culture, and in the mid-2000s began to bandy about the idea of operating a zine store.

> You sit around sometimes and you come up with ideas and your friend says, "what if we did this?" and you're like, "oh, that's fucking funny," and you come up with all these crazy ideas: "What if we made a sculpture out of lard? What if we sewed two cats' anuses together?" You come up with stupid ideas and you say "what if I created a vintage zine store where you buy old zines?" And of course it's like, "what a stupid idea!" and everyone said "you're crazy!" and they're right. But at that point I had run into a friend who told me they had thrown away three boxes of zines, and I'm saving all my zines: "Why would you throw them away? Give them to me!" So I kept saving people's zine collections and pretty soon I was saying, "I don't know what I'm doing, but I'm going to keep doing this and instead of just passively waiting for people to give me zines I'm gonna start asking people." So I started asking around and started getting more and more zines. Buying them on *eBay*, buying them on *Craigslist*, talking to friends, friends of friends. And like any other collector, when you start getting things you're like, "oh, I've got every one except this one, gotta find that one now." (Personal Interview)

As the enthusiasm encapsulated in the above anecdote suggests, Goteblud is not just a store for profit, but is also an archive built from Wobensmith's personal passion and love for subcultural productions. Wobensmith is a natural archivist. Previously, he dabbled in a kind of archivism by producing: *There's A Dyke in the Pit*, a 7" single compilation featuring Bikini Kill, Lucy Stoners, 7 Year Bitch and Tribe 8; *Outpunk Dance Party*, a CD compilation of queercore bands (e.g., Mukilteo Fairies, Power Snatch, CWA, Pansy Division, Tribe 8) and by publishing *Outpunk #6*, a collection of "greatest zine hits" that highlighted the best in queercore and riot grrrl zines (e.g., *Bamboo Girl*, *Bikini Kill*, *Bimbox*, *Double Bill*, *FaT GiRL*, *Fembot*, *Girl Germs*, *Jane Gets a Divorce*, *Shrimp*). Wobensmith produced these compilations out of a desire to preserve and highlight the underground work that he admired, and the same dedication to sustaining subversive art is at the center of Goteblud. Which is to say that Wobensmith is less concerned with making a profit than in rescuing and sharing important relics of underground history:[3]

> Zines are important to me. Basically I have people throwing zines away; they're trashing them and to me it's like, "wow, you're taking something and trashing it and it has some value so I'm going to step into that process and I'm going to try to sell them," and that's what I did . . . But, I honestly don't care if people buy stuff. I don't want them to, to be honest with you. I feel sad to see things go. I'm more in the mood of buying stuff than selling stuff these days. I'm trying to acquire as much as I can before it gets thrown away . . . I definitely started out doing the zine thing, the zine business as a really fucking weird creative business idea that seemed fun. There was no tradition of a zine store, so I got to basically make it anyway I wanted to . . . But, I'm realizing more and more that I'm providing a service which is actively not just saving, buying and selling, but I am archiving thousands, and thousands of zines in all kinds of genres.

[3] As additional evidence of his lack of interest in profit and his continued adherence to punk ethics, Matt Wobensmith also honors the zine barter system, allowing his customers to trade zines with him rather than paying for them with cash.

> Ultimately, you'll wind up finding them in the library [presumably Fales], so I am doing a service by saving these zines. (Personal Interview)

Also contributing to the archival feel of Goteblud is the multitude of boxes of zines in the store, many of them from the early queercore days, which are not available for sale. Some of these may eventually find their way into library archives (like those Wobensmith donated to Fales), but, for now, they operate as a de facto archive that Wobensmith is more than happy to share with visitors to the store, as he reminisces about their histories and weaves colorful tales of his participation in '90s underground culture. This simultaneous sharing of zines and stories creates a bond between Wobensmith and his visitors that is hard to come by in more institutionalized archives in which archivists likely have little to no first-hand knowledge of queer punk culture. It also fulfills a need for Wobensmith who started Goteblud partly out of a desire to connect with old and new friends:

> It [Goteblud] also gives me an opportunity to connect and reconnect with people. I don't socialize a lot so this is a central place where a lot of old and new friends can come find me. So they come to me, which is really nice because I'm not good at going out to shows or people's parties. (Personal Interview)

As Goteblud is open only on weekends, and Wobensmith works the small, one-room store alone, it has a very intimate feel that is hard to come by in institutional, and even professional, archives. To enter the store, patrons have to be buzzed in by Wobensmith, after which they inevitably receive a warm greeting from a man whose affable nature belies his large frame and intimidating catalogue of tattoos. Wobensmith delights in assisting his patrons to find their coveted zines, and is always on-hand to relay

the hidden histories of particular zines or to open one of his rare, not-for-sale zine boxes. Wobensmith makes patrons feel that they are being welcomed into a secret world of past and present creativity, and his zeal for zine culture is impossible to miss. Wobensmith's preservation of not only zines, but the joys of their production and hand-to-hand distribution, has fostered an "archive of feeling" in a multifaceted, authentic sense.

Wobensmith is not alone in his affective archival efforts to preserve and share queercore. Fellow San Franciscan and queer zine publisher Larry-Bob Roberts has also taken immense strides in order to keep queercore culture documented and emotionally resonant. Although Roberts does not run a public archive, he is an undisputed source of queercore knowledge whose house is cluttered with boxes of queercore artifacts, and who, like Wobensmith, is more than willing to share his subcultural treasures and copious knowledge with curious visitors. Indeed, in starting this project, Roberts was the first person that I interviewed, and he was an extremely helpful resource for finding queercore documents and contacting other queercore practitioners. Roberts also regularly publishes *Queer Zine Explosion*, a queercore zine information guide, and manages an on-line list-serve at www.holytitclamps.com, which keeps subscribers updated on upcoming queercore-related events. Although Roberts does not consider himself an archivist per se, stating that he sees himself as "communicating in the moment" rather than having "some historic sense about things," like Wobensmith, Roberts has constructed a place for queercore's continuance that is born from passionate investment, and which is as much an archive of queercore pleasures as an archive of queercore objects (Personal Interview).

II. Digital Archives

Today, queercore and its archives have embraced digitality (although "hard copy" queercore media still very much exists). Queercore zines are now manufactured and sold on-line, queercore music is available for download on select websites, and some queercore films can even be streamed on pay sites like *Netflix* and video-sharing sites like *YouTube*. In the past few years, on-line archives that chronicle queercore, such as *Soul Ponies* and the *Queer Zine Archive Project* (*QZAP*) have also emerged, raising new possibilities and problems for the promotion and dissemination of queercore materials.

Soul Ponies, "a home for lost and wayward riot grrrl and queercore music," is a website managed by Stacy Konkiel, an avid riot grrrl/queercore enthusiast who is also one of the youngest queercore archivists mentioned in this chapter. Konkiel is currently in her early 30s. Konkiel who was "too young to experience [the early years of] either riot grrrl or queercore firsthand" created the site out of a desire to connect with an idealized past (www.soulponies.com). Konkiel also created *Soul Ponies* with the desire to educate younger queers and feminists about their radical musical heritage, a radical musical heritage that is slowly fading away due to independent music label closures and community neglect:

> *Soul Ponies* officially came into being a couple of years ago when I was lamenting with my friend Aaron about the fact that queers who are just a few years younger than us are so assimilated. She had just been to a Rock Band (the video game) night at a local lesbian bar and a younger dyke who had joined her "band" didn't know who Bikini Kill was when they were choosing their next song to play. We lived in Northampton—possibly the most lesbian city in America—and we kept having these interactions with the Smithies [students at Smith College] and Mount Holyoke undergrads we were meeting. We just couldn't understand why! At some point while we were complaining about "kids these days," we talked about the need

> for a site that would introduce bands like The Moves, Tami Hart, The Haggard, Fagatron, etc., to folks who otherwise wouldn't get to hear them, since so much queer music has gone out of print over the years. And so, *Soul Ponies* was born. (Personal Interview)

Accordingly, with the intention of "introducing" queercore bands to an uninformed but potentially enthusiastic audience, on *Soul Ponies*, Konkiel posts out of print and hard-to-find queercore/riot grrrl albums and tracks. Often, these albums/tracks are accompanied by visuals, lyrics and information pertaining to the bands and their music. Users can view these items and listen to and/or download the albums/tracks either by scrolling through the sites pages or by performing a search by category (e.g., "agitprop," "Miranda July," or "San Francisco"). Also included on *Soul Ponies* is an extensive list of links to blogs, collectives, events, record labels, and zines potentially of interest to the site's audience. This is all accomplished under a "Manifesta" written by Konkiel herself that specifies the politically charged and recuperative reasons for *Soul Ponies* existence:

> Because independent record labels are dying off and are being sold to megacorporations more and more often;
>
> Because queer independent record labels, by their "niche" nature, are especially susceptible to closing;
>
> Because we often lose the work of amazing LGBTQ artists to the dollar discount bin of the used record store when queer record labels go under;
>
> Because we wish to preserve the legacies of important riot grrrl and queercore musicians for present and future generations to appreciate their work;
>
> Because fucking kids these days think that "gay music" is Lady fucking Gaga and the Scissor Sisters, and because they've never heard of Bikini Kill or Excuse 17.

This "Manifesta" invokes, in both language and style, the infamous "Riot Grrrl Manifesto" written by Kathleen Hanna that first appeared in issue #2 of her zine *Bikini Kill* in the summer of 1991. This manifesto contained such lines as "BECAUSE we hate capitalism in all its forms and see our main goal as sharing information and staying alive, instead of making profits off being cool according to traditional standards," and "BECAUSE we are angry at a society that tells us Girl = Dumb, Girl = Bad, Girl = Weak." By artistically referencing this earlier riot grrrl work, Konkiel not only forges continuity between her blog and the past, but situates her blog as symbolically aligned with this subculture and governed by the same rules and ethics.

QZAP (Queer Zine Archive Project) is another on-line zine archive, and one that business and romantic partners Milo Miller and Christopher Wilde launched in 2003. The genesis of the site was the pair's political involvement with Queeruption, a biannual, international radical queer festival held in various cities across the globe (most recently Manchester), where alternative, disenfranchised queers exchange information, network, organize, self-represent, and challenge mainstream society with D.I.Y. ethics and art. For Miller and Wilde, an archive of queer zines presented a way to disseminate the unconventional, leftist ideologies of Queeruption to a wider public, since the ideologies of groups like Queeruption are also embodied in many queer punk zines. As Miller explains:

> QZAP got conceptualized when Chris and I were working on organizing Queeruption 3 in San Francisco in the early fall of 2001. We had just moved in together, and were talking about the event, and all of the knowledge that had come before for radical and queer punk organizing. At some point in the discussion Chris busted out a box of about 300 zines

> that he had collected over the years. I had another 50 or 60 that I'd acquired. We vaguely talked about how cool it would be to be able to preserve and present them to the world. Fast-forward two years. I was working with some very talented web developers and geeks, and mentioned to one that we were thinking of starting to put our zine collection online. He was super into punk, and had run a pirate radio station out of his bedroom closet at one point, and was ultimately super into the idea. He helped us get the site set up initially, and has continued to provide moral support and the occasional tech know-how since. The site went live on November 3 of 2003 with an initial offering of seventeen zines (out of our collection of 350 or so). Today we've got 350 plus zines online in the archive, and upwards of 1,200 in the collection. (Personal Interview)

QZAP's mission is "to establish a 'living history' archive of past and present queer zines and to encourage current and emerging zine publishers to continue to create" (www.qzap.org). To fulfill this mission, *QZAP* provides users with a searchable database of several hundred queer zines (including such titles as *JDs*, *Anonymous Boy* and *I Heart Amy Carter*). These zines are available to view on the site or to download electronically. In addition, the *QZAP* site features queer zine-related posts and updates from Miller and Wilde as well as links to other pertinent websites (e.g., on-line zine sites such as those for *Homocore* and *Bamboo Girl*). *QZAP* also occasionally elicits essays on queer zine history and culture from the public, which are then incorporated into *QZAP*'s analog "zine about zines," *QZAP Meta* (now in its fifth issue).

Sites like *Soul Ponies* and *QZAP* play a vital role in salvaging queer(core) history and in bringing attention to forgotten queer(core) artists. Additionally, these sites provide scholars and the general public with resources that would be extremely time consuming, if not impossible, to locate elsewhere, on account of their obscurity and lack of commercial availability. Indeed, this researcher owes a great debt to each of these sites

for putting me in contact with many queercore artifacts that I was unable to find otherwise. Accessibility is the raison d'être of both of these sites, and in a queerphobic world, insisting on saving, showcasing and circulating radical queer art is no less than an activist act. As Wilde vehemently asserts:

> The advantage of uploading zines to the Internet is accessibility. We're still in a world where people, evil people, conspire to deny queer folks their own freedom of expression and bar them from a spot at the table of humanity. Every zine we upload says to the world that all queers, no matter who they are, what language they speak, to what degree they are able, no matter their heritage that they are valuable, loved and deserve to have their voices heard. (Personal Interview)

To this, Miller adds the democratic impulse behind the work that *QZAP* performs, a democratic impulse that sets sites like *QZAP* apart from the more exclusive archives of places like Fales and the GLBT Historical Society. Which is to say that *QZAP* and its holdings are instantly available to anyone with access to a computer and an Internet connection:

> The advantage of putting zines online is that we provide access to the archive regardless of economics and geography. Folks don't have to be in our city or to have a special library card to use our collection. (Personal Interview)

Of course this wrongly assumes universal access to computer technology and the Internet, as well as the disposable time necessary to be able to surf the Web, but the accessibility of on-line archives may still be greater than the accessibility of institutional and professional archives for the reasons stated above.

The community service accomplished by *Soul Ponies* and *QZAP* should not be underestimated. However, these on-line sites have also brought to the fore a set of contentious issues related to the particulars of archiving in the digital age. For example, in thinking through the act of posting queercore/riot grrrl music online, Konkiel acknowledges:

> "Authority" of the digital record can be called into question—when you have two MP3s from different sources with different track names ascribed and no hardcopy proof of what the original recording was called, how do you determine what's right? And, the tactile aspect of music fandom is lost, with no records to dust off, no liner notes to pore over, and most importantly no hard copy of recordings should your computer crash. (Personal Interview)

In other words, for queercore music, the move from the analog to the digital realm may lead to the loss of information/supplementary materials that can better contextualize or authenticate a particular recording. Likewise, by placing queercore music online, fans lose out on the pleasures of physically interacting with the music object, and as Konkiel points out, fans may lose the music object all together if their computer suffers from some sort of technological malfunction. This latter point – the loss of tactile pleasures in the digital age – is relevant to all queercore media formats. That is, a similar critique can be leveled against the placement of queercore zines and publications on-line, where they inevitably lose the interactive joys of touch, as well as the old-fashioned, friendship-building magic of hand-to-hand exchange. Likewise, queercore films that have been uploaded to sites like *YouTube* are often degraded in quality and are also less capable of generating an experience of embodied community: They are less likely to be screened in front of a live audience who can collectively enjoy and discuss them face-to-face.

On-line archives also present a set of problems related to ownership rights. The dissemination of an artist's work, especially without their expressed permission, can have implications for the artist's future ability to profit financially and socially. That is, artists may lose potential monies on account of their work already being available for free on-line. Artists may also miss out on potential community relationships on account of no longer having direct access to their audience and/or control over who gets to see their work and under what conditions. Digital queercore archivists, like Konkiel, therefore, risk being accused of cheating artists out of their financial and social due (particularly by those artists who have no knowledge that their work is being showcased on-line at no cost). As a defense, digital queercore archivists have asserted that they themselves are not making a profit from their sites and that their freedom to spread information about queercore should be protected. As Konkiel notes:

> Ownership rights are definitely an issue—I try to be as sensitive as possible to the rights of the artist when choosing what to place online—but I am a firm believer in the Richard Stallman school of thought, that information wants to be free. I'm putting this stuff up online in order to spread the word about important queer artists, to make sure that queer culture is recorded, not to make money for myself. (Personal Interview)

As an additional defense, and in an effort to be considerate to the artists she spotlights, Konkiel states on the homepage of *Soul Ponies* that she will take down the music of anyone that does not want to be featured on the site. In a similar vein, on the *QZAP* website, Miller and Wilde defend their posting of queercore zines by appealing to "Fair Use" under the Copyright Act of 1976 (the full text of which is posted on *QZAP*'s

homepage). And, like Konkiel, they encourage artists to contact them if they want their work removed.

The issue of ownership is not just about money or community, however. Some queercore artists would rather not have their work displayed on the Internet because it is such a public forum and/or because, as web pages are by their nature integrated into the World Wide Web as a whole, anything placed on-line is ultimately inseparable from a capitalist, and therefore contaminated, cultural mainstream (not to mention from the military-industrial complex, which is responsible for the Web's invention). Queercore works, which are generally controversial by design, may produce negative consequences for their creators in such a public forum as the Internet. For example, queercore producers may suffer loss of employment or backlash from community and/or family members on account of the inflammatory content of their work. This is a problem that is heightened for individuals who no longer espouse the ideologies represented in work that they made years (or even decades) earlier. Wilde himself recognizes this dilemma:

> Queer folks write about dangerous things, make unique observations about the world around them and the people who inhabit the world. Sometimes in our haste, we create things we want to take back and make disappear. Sometimes we marvel at how something we thought was so obscure and irrelevant suddenly bursts out into something beyond our control and into its own entity. Luckily for us, those are rare occasions that people want their work to vanish. We do have a few file folders in the physical collection labeled "Do Not Upload" as a reminder. However, the response to inclusion on *QZAP* is usually one of joy, awe and respect. (Personal Interview)

"Joy," "awe" and "respect" are not always the reactions, however, and some artists and community members have taken offense at the practices of sites like *QZAP*. In fact,

Wilde had a notorious run-in with Matt Wobensmith over this very issue of ownership rights and the potential for causing artists harm through the publication of their work online. As Wobensmith explains his beef with *QZAP*:

> I've known Chris [Wilde] when we lived in San Francisco and Milo [Miller]. Couple months ago I met Chris when he came out for the PeaceOUT Festival. He mentioned doing *QZAP* and putting zines online. They're digitizing some of my zines and putting them online and etc. I said, "Chris, are you getting permission from people to do this?" He said, "No we're not necessarily." I said, "Can you do that legally, put someone's zine out there?" He said, "We can do it under fair use because we're not making any money, so sure." I said, "Don't you feel that's a little bit weird? Cause it's weird. I don't know how I felt about it." But, I didn't get into it with him then. Then I had floated the idea on my blog, which is mostly private, which has a bunch of friends, that this was happening. And a lot of people on my blog are people who used to do zines in the early 90s. People freaked out. They're like, "If I find somebody putting my zine online of shit that I wrote, personal shit from 15 years ago, I'm going to find them, rip off their legs and beat them with it." I had all these people freaking out. I realized this is really serious. I wrote Chris an email and told him all of this. "I don't want my zines up there and I really think what you're doing you need to reconsider." He didn't write me back and I didn't write my letter in such a way that was constructive; it was full of incendiary language. I realized I probably hurt people's feelings. I didn't mean to hurt their feelings, but the idea of putting zines online is dangerous. I didn't say it was impossible, I just think it has a lot of problems and some of the defenses they have put in place saying we put it up as a bitmap and pdf so it can't be spidered by search engines, etc., unfortunately they're not enough. If these people had known their work was going to be indexed in such a way that if you Google them today it will come up with their zine potentially, they would have never done those zines in the first place and put themselves out there. I certainly would have changed my message a lot if I had known it was going to be so available. Yes, I did put it out there in 1992, 1993, 1994, but I did not know the Internet was going to exist. (Personal Interview)

This calls to mind fears that have recently been expressed in regard to social networking sites, like Facebook.com and MySpace.com, where a comment or picture that an individual posts today may come back to haunt them down the line, if a family member,

future employer, school administrator, or some other authority figure, comes across it and takes issue.[4] While not addressing the above confrontation specifically, Wilde admits that there has been a learning curve for him and Miller in terms of executing their website in such a manner that it is both useful to the public and respectful to artists and their entitlements:

> We [Wilde and Miller] learn by degrees and also need to think fast on our feet. At first, we were just two queer punk kids with a dream and some basic middle class resources. As we diligently scanned zines, attended zine fests to meet zinesters and fans alike and hear their stories, gave interviews with independent press from around the world, and we learned what people want in terms of preserving queer zines. We've also learned about some of the bad things, too, like work that doesn't represent the person today versus the person they were when the work was created. We've also learned important lessons in how to ask for permission to share zines with a wider world. (Personal Interview)

Whether future digital archives will learn from the mistakes and experimentations of Wilde, Miller, Konkiel and others remains to be seen. But, what is certain is that digital queercore archives offer a mixed blessing to fans and researchers, providing as they do, immediate access to rare queercore artifacts and a defiant response to homophobes and queer punk naysayers, while at the same time causing problems for artists who would rather not have their work exhibited on-line, for reasons either of finance, privacy or artistic and political conviction. Perhaps this is, at its heart a generational issue, as a younger group of queercore enthusiasts raised on a diet of blogs and social networking sites, like Facebook.com, with ideologies of "live your life

[4] It is worth noting that social networking sites can also be used as spaces for the preservation of queercore and/or can serve to direct users to archival sites that exist elsewhere. Indeed, all of the archives mentioned in this chapter have their own Facebook.com pages. The former mostly happens in very informal ways. For example, Johnny Noxzema's personal Facebook.com profile includes a collection of images and essays that he created for *Bimbox* and *SCAB*.

publically" find themselves at odds with an older group of queercore artists accustomed to creating work outside of mainstream surveillance, and who are used to having restricted exhibition spaces open solely to like-minded individuals. For this older contingent, there may in fact be a freedom (from incorporation and censure) in having no archive at all, and the temporality of queercore and its products and performances may to them be a great advantage, rather than a weakness (a subject that I return to at the end of this chapter). Yet, while the Internet may be lessening queercore's ability to stay private and oppositional, its archives are also extending its reach and welcoming new members into its fold.

III. **Documentary Archives**

Physical and digital spaces that contain various types of artifacts are the most obvious archival forms, but there are others that are worth mentioning. Namely queercore artworks, which can themselves be repositories for queercore history and knowledge. For example, I've already mentioned the records (*There's a Dyke in the Pit* and *Outpunk Dance Party*) and zine anthology (*Outpunk #6*) that Wobensmith compiled, and which serve as great examples of queercore artifacts that are both art and archive. In this section, however, I examine queercore documentary films and videos as an additional example, and one deserving particular attention due to the unique ability of documentary to not only record and widely publicize history, but to visualize and elicit affect and emotion. In *An Archive of Feelings*, Ann Cvetkovich identifies documentary film and video as functioning to "extend the material and conceptual reach of the traditional archive, collating and making accessible documents that might otherwise remain obscure

except to those doing specialized research" (244). In addition, Cvetkovich notes that, "in its ability to make vivid the centrality of feelings to the archive," documentary film and video "has much to offer museums and libraries" (251). Accordingly, in this section, I analyze two documentaries – *Queercore: A Punk-u-mentary* (Scott Treleaven, 1996) and *She's Real (Worse than Queer)* (Lucy Thane, 1997) – that contribute to the expansion of the queercore archives, including its affective dimension.

There are other documentaries that deal with specific artists within queercore, including *Rise Above: A Tribe 8 Documentary* (Tracy Flannigan, 2004) (mentioned in Chapter Three of this dissertation), *Pansy Division: Life in a Gay Rock Band* (Michael Carmona, 2008), the recent documentary on Bruce LaBruce, *The Advocate for Fagdom* (Angelique Bosio, 2011) and *She Said Boom* a documentary on proto-queercore band Fifth Column (Kevin Hegge, 2012). But, the two documentaries that I review here are unusually significant in their attempt to capture the queercore movement as a whole, rather than particular artists. This gives them a wider scope that is more in line with the other types of archives I am exploring in this chapter. In spotlighting community rather than individuals, these documentaries provide viewers with a connection not only to multiple queercore documents, but also to collective queercore feelings.

It should also be noted that both documentaries were filmed by young adults that were participating in queercore at the time of their creation. In this respect, documentary is a more immediate archival form that seems to be engaged by younger folks in the moment. As a result, these works reflect a youthful/eager sensibility. This is as opposed to the material and digital archives explored earlier in this chapter, which, as mentioned, tend to be produced by older adults looking back in time. As a result of their own growth

and development, these older adults now see themselves as historical subjects, causing their work to reflect a more nostalgic sensibility.

Queercore: A Punk-u-mentary is directed by Scott Treleaven, a native of Toronto known for his visual art, which combines homoeroticism with images of the occult and for his queercore zine *The Salivation Army*, published in the mid-1990s, which mixed punk, goth, pagan and industrial music aesthetics, alongside homages to queer iconoclasts, like William Burroughs and Derek Jarman. *Queercore* is the first known documentary on queercore subculture and was produced by Treleaven with the intent of familiarizing the uninitiated with the pleasures and politics of queer punk subculture. It was also made with the hopes of growing queercore's ranks. As Treleaven explains:

> I made *Queercore* . . . in 1996. As a teenager I subsisted on punk, goth and post-punk influenced culture, and generally found punks far more socially enlightened than anyone else I associated with. So finding out that there was a homocore movement was an added revelation. *Queercore* . . . was the first film ever to document the gay punk scene, as well as being a documentary about how subcultures are created and sustained. I deliberately tried to make it less of a who's who in the scene, and more of a manifesto with a practical purpose: I knew that whenever and wherever in the world it screened, all kinds of people would emerge. People that might not know each other, yet who might be sympathetic to the content. It was intended to unite these people and generate new scenes rather than simply document them. And it worked. (www.buffalozine.com)

This statement reveals some of what is at stake politically when it comes to queer(core) documentary. First, queer(core) documentary labors against the misinformation of, and erasures enacted by, the mainstream: As Chris Holmlund and Cynthia Fuchs assert in the introduction to *Between the Sheets, In the Streets: Gay and Lesbian Documentary*, in a homophobic world in which LGBTQIA people continually find themselves under attack,

and in which "truth" and "reality" are implicitly constructed as heterosexual, queer documentaries are always political, as they provide a source of counterinformation to the heterosexist media mainstream (4). Second, as the above quote from Treleaven attests, queer(core) documentary serves a community building function. That is, as Alexandra Juhasz reminds us, the production of alternative documentaries "is a political act that allows people who need to scream with pain or anger, or who want to say, 'I'm here, I count' . . . to make their opinions public and join with others in this act of resistance" (3). In addition, Juhasz maintains that the viewing of alternative media is "always an invitation to join a politicized community" (3). While Juhasz makes these comments in reference to HIV/AIDS activist videos specifically – that is, alternative media in which the political stakes are literally a matter of life and death – queercore documentary films and videos also allow members of a marginalized community to forcefully assert their anti-normative existences/pleasures and to discover like-minded souls via the viewing experience.

Queercore opens with a series of gritty black and white Super 8 images set to Mukilteo Fairies short and punchy punk anthem, "Queer Enough for You?" These fuzzy, abstract images of a woman walking down a city street, carrying a sign that reads "homocore; homopunk; outpunk; queercore" and posting another sign that exclaims "punk as fuck," are spliced together in a rapid-fire explosion, paying homage to the black and white cinematic aesthetics of queercore's founders, Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones, as well as the gritty and aggressive realism of punk D.I.Y. more generally. These images are followed by a close-up of a Mohawked punk accompanied by a woman's voice-over, ruminating on the long-standing alliance between punks and queers. The identity of the

woman is not specified, and neither, until the closing credits, are the identities of any of the other talking heads and disembodied voices featured throughout the film. As such *Queercore*, in true punk fashion, eschews a star system, choosing to instead emphasize the thoughts of its participants, rather than their titles or accomplishments. The interviewees are situated as one of us, and are to be judged only by what they say, rather than who they are, even if some of them are recognizable to a knowing audience (e.g., Chris Freeman and Jon Ginoli from Pansy Division, Anita Smith of Fifth Column, zinester Larry-Bob Roberts, and filmmaker Bruce LaBruce).

Topics discussed by *Queercore's* interviewees include civil disobedience, social alienation, the principles of D.I.Y. ethics, and *SPEW*, the first queercore zine convention. The interviewees, when embodied on screen, are filmed in seemingly spontaneous moments: smoking a cigarette on a sidewalk facing away from the camera, walking hurriedly down the street on the way to somewhere important, or playing drums in the darkened corner of a room. Likewise, they speak in a stream of consciousness that suggests (punk) spontaneity and immediacy.

Throughout the film, Treleaven highlights queercore's visual and oral objects. Zines (*JDs*, Double *Bill*, *Outpunk*, *Holy Titclamps*, etc.) are strategically placed so as to showcase their covers or significant writings embedded within. Music from such bands as Sta-Prest, Fifth Column, Team Dresch, Warpath and Bratmobile plays on the soundtrack. And clips from queercore films like *No Skin Off My Ass* (Bruce LaBruce, 1991) are included alongside the live performances of Pansy Division and Los Crudos. Via these artifacts, *Queercore* preserves the subculture's visual and aural representations at a time that the subculture was at its creative peak. Hurried monologues and quick

editing lend an urgency to these representations and capture the excitement of a movement on the brink. *Queercore* thus serves as a record of the subculture's objects, people and ideas as well as the feelings of anticipation that accompanied its development, and is made with the clear desire to inspire those feelings in its viewers.

She's Real (Worse than Queer) is directed by British documentary filmmaker Lucy Thane, who, several years prior to filming *She's Real*, made the riot grrrl documentary *It Changed My Life: Bikini Kill in the UK* (1993). Unlike *Queercore*, the focus in *She's Real* is on the oft-overlooked women within the queercore scene. As no men appear in the documentary, the women literally take center stage and exist as the voices of authority on the subculture, as well as on dykecore (the lesbian iteration of queercore) and riot grrrl. Like *Queercore*, *She's Real* features interviews with various queercore artists (e.g., Lynnee Breedlove and Leslie Mah of Tribe 8, Donna Dresch of Team Dresch and G.B. Jones). However, in *She's Real*, the interviewees are identified from the start. Like *Queercore*, *She's Real* also spotlights, and thus archives, queercore artifacts: *She's Real* includes excerpts from G.B Jones's *The Yo-Yo Gang* (1992) and Tammy Ray Carland's *Lady Outlaws and Faggot Wannabes* (1995), as well as images from female-centered zines, like *Chainsaw* and *Chop Suey Spex*.

The main focus in *She's Real* is on the dynamic live performances of such musical acts as the CeCe Barnes Band, Cypher in the Snow, Fifth Column, Sister George, Third Sex and Tribe 8. Viewers are placed in the front row and given access to these live shows, which, without Thane, would have been completely lost to time: Thane had the foresight to record queercore's most ephemeral artistic form, and *She's Real* thus stands as one of queercore's most significant archival memories. These live performances are

juxtaposed with comments by band members about such things as the importance of women making media, sexism and racism within punk culture and small town homophobia. In placing the performances alongside such overtly political discourse, Thane situates *She's Real* in its proper queer context and also conjures a sense of communal passion and collective anger that transcends any one particular band or show.

Both of these documentaries do not just function as tools of information, but also serve to keep the affect and immediacy of queercore in play, something that more conventional archives cannot easily achieve. In *An Archive of Feelings*, Cvetkovich focuses on the potential of documentary to chronicle the pathos of queer communities, noting that "documentary produces the unusual emotional archive necessary to record the often traumatic history of gay and lesbian culture" (244). As evinced by *Queercore* and *She's Real*, documentaries also have the potential to chronicle the *pleasures* of queer communities and to produce the emotional archive necessary to record the often *joyful* and *restorativ*e history of gay and lesbian culture. This pleasure comes through in the enthusiastic commentary by early queercore practitioners in *Queercore*. It also comes through in the rapidly edited flurry of queercore images that Treleaven compiles, which symbolically demonstrate his own in-the-moment excitement and investment in this subculture. As far as *She's Real* is concerned, this pleasure is conveyed through the film's atmosphere of friendship and collective passion, as the women chat, swap stories and perform together (this type of congenial atmosphere is rarely seen in the mainstream media, which tends to favor representations of female competition and animosity via films like *Bridesmaids* and television shows like the *Real Housewives* series). Accordingly, these documentaries not only serve as records of queercore history, but also

function to effectively and affectively maintain the gratifications associated with queercore discovery, artistic creation and community bonding. This being said, they do not have the same potential to reach a sizable audience: Whereas *She's Real* can be watched for free on Vimeo.com, and thus is viewable by anyone with a computer and Internet access, *Queercore* is only available for purchase through VTape, a Canadian distribution company for experimental films. *Queercore*'s relative inaccessibility is unfortunate, as it is an impediment to film's original purpose to spread the word about queercore.

V. **Conclusion**

As this chapter reveals, queercore subculture has increasingly found itself the beneficiary of archival efforts. These archival efforts have taken many forms, from institutional, professional and grassroots archives, to online archives and documentaries. Each of these forms carries particular possibilities and limitations. Institutional archives are big on organization but low on access. Professional and grassroots archives allow for greater access and the thrill of discovery, but are often disorganized to the point of frustrating some patrons. Online archives are a convenient, user-friendly resource, but present a problem to queercore artists who would rather keep their work off-line for reasons of profit, privacy, sociality and/or control. Documentaries provide emotion-laden records of otherwise lost queercore performances, objects and interviews, but offer no possibilities for interaction beyond the viewing context and are sometimes inaccessible.

While the archives discussed in this chapter are significant and exciting first steps in the preservation of this vital subculture, there is still much more archival work to be

done. This work also needs to be done quickly, that is, before more queercore artifacts disappear and before those who have participated in the subculture are no longer around to remember the details of their involvement. Of course, not everyone who has participated in queercore is interested in remembering or retaining the "good old times." Bruce LaBruce, for example, has stated that endeavors to archive queercore are a betrayal of the subculture's anti-sentimentality and its intrinsic pleasures of immediacy: "Queercore fanzines aren't supposed to be catalogued and historicized and analyzed to death for Christsake. They're supposed to be disposable. That's the whole point. Throw your fanzines away right now. Go ahead" (193). Such anti-archival sentiments are often motivated by a fear that archiving is tantamount to institutionalization, assimilation and the loss of authenticity. These sentiments are also inflected by a queer rejection of "reproductive futurity." As Lee Edelman explains in *No Future*, reproductive futurity is a pervasive heteronormative ideology that suggests that children are the embodiment of the future and its possibilities. Edelman argues that the ideology of reproductive futurity has lead to an infantilization of politics and human interaction, causing adult needs and desires to be continually set aside and sacrificed in the interest of the rhetorical "good of the children." In response, Edelman encourages queers to take pride in their nonreproductivity and the threat it poses to the orderly continuance of the status quo. Accordingly, there is something that is perhaps radically anti-heteronormative about queer cultures "living in the moment" and refusing to retain and preserve for the future.

Yet, these critiques aside, if radical queer culture is to be maintained, it is necessary that future radical queer generations have access to the work that preceded them. From this perspective, the queercore archive is a powerful weapon of radical

preservation and continuance. By saving queercore's past, archives ensure queercore's future. My hope is that this dissertation itself will serve to keep queercore alive for future generations, and that these future generations will be inspired to create some queer trouble of their own.

Conclusion: Reflections on Queercore and Radical Queer Culture

It is fitting that the last chapter of this dissertation was about archiving, as from the start, this dissertation has been motivated by a desire to revisit and retain the past. I've always felt a keen sense, undoubtedly inflected by idealized and nostalgic imaginings of "times gone by," that I missed out on the best moments in queer history. Born at the end of 1976, I was not yet alive during the early days of gay liberation, but colorful images of fed-up queers flinging Molotov Cocktails at homophobic cops outside the Stonewall Inn, and joining arms to chant "Gay Power!" while defiantly marching down the streets of New York City and San Francisco have long filled my queer boy dreams. Of course, these dreams do not take into account the full extent to which those were more blatantly homophobic times, overflowing with daunting volcanoes of oppression, shame and legalized persecution: living as a gay man, lesbian or transperson during the early days of gay liberation was not all passionate protest and frolicking fun, but was also a time of startling realities from police harassment to job discrimination. Still, there is something to be said for an era in which so many LGBT folks traded complacency for activism and became intensely invested in jus nott living comfortable lives, but in fundamentally changing a heteronormative, racist, sexist and classist system. I hunger for such a profound politicized queer landscape, which has always seemed to be slipping further and further into history, and always pitifully inadequate in the present day.

Being born in 1976 also means that, for as long as I can remember, HIV/AIDS, and consequently safer sex and condoms, have been a reality of my (sexual) existence. I'm jealous of the gay men, women and transfolk who came before me who were able to

fuck with relative erotic abandon. Rose-colored notions of sexual freedom and a selfish sexual hedonism admittedly inform this jealousy. But, I also cannot help but feel disappointed that I missed out on the sexual revolution and the world-making pleasures that this revolution possibly entailed. I am left wondering what kind of generativity and generosity accompanies the temporary but close communions allowed by unsafe sex with multiple members of one's community, especially since sex has always seemed to be a space in which human vulnerability and unguarded honesty can come to the surface – a space infused with possibilities for connection, empathy, understanding and compassion.

And then there is queercore, the subject of this dissertation, and another queer moment whose peak that I mostly missed. As this dissertation has maintained, queercore still exists today, and is evident in the work of contemporary artists like Courtney Trouble and Beth Ditto. At the same time, queercore's heyday was, without question, the early 1990s, when queercore zines, films and records were being produced in abundance and new queer punk bands were being formed seemingly everyday. In the intervening years, queercore has become more amorphous, diffused and unpopular than in those initial years of heightened activity and attention. During the time of queercore's heyday, I was a high school student in small town Massachusetts facing daily physical and psychological abuse from classmates who did not understand or want the "faggot" in their midst. There was no public transportation in my hometown, giving me very limited exposure to the outside world and few chances to escape. This was also in the days before the Internet, and I had very little knowledge about LGBTQIA culture, let alone something like queercore. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, I did, however, happen upon, and buy, a Pansy Division album while shopping in a record

store. This is the same record that my mother stomped to pieces in a fit of homophobic anger a few days later. When I interviewed Jon Ginoli for this dissertation, I told him this story. He smiled and gave me a hug. This is one of the best gifts this dissertation has given me, that is, the fact that I am now friends with so many of the folks that I discuss in these pages and who have long been sources of inspiration.

All of these feelings, and especially this sense of "missing out," are central to the inception, creation and ultimate completion of this dissertation. I have a strong desire to understand, record and relive the queer(core) radical past. Throughout the dissertation writing process I have been motivated by this hunger: a hunger to better understand what it was like to be part of a radical queercore community, what its anti-normative politics and punk pleasures mean, and what is so appealing about this subculture, still, almost thirty years after it began. The topics that have become central chapters of this dissertation – sex, (imagined) violence and (unruly) bodies – speak to the subversive politics/pleasures and sustaining community energies that first attracted me to this radical queer subculture, and that continue to drive my enthusiasm for it.

In Chapter 2, I examined various queercore approaches to sex via the work of Pansy Division, Bruce LaBruce, G.B. Jones and Courtney Trouble. I observed that in line with Mikhail Bahktin's theory of the carnvialesque, Pansy Division creates a wild but temporary space for sexual play through their song lyrics, on-stage performance, and album art. Bruce LaBruce presents sex as a transformative political force in his films, and in a manner that echoes the theories of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse. G.B. Jones, in her films and drawings, provides a Foucaultian critique of power, patriarchy and surveillance and the perverting influence they exert on sex and sexual expression, while

also offering D.I.Y. practice as a possible solution to this conundrum. And, Courtney Trouble draws inspiration from all of these different philosophical and artistic strands in her unconventional queer punk pornography. My point here is that queercore is not a monolithic entity and that different individuals in the subculture have approached the topic of sex in very distinct ways. But, the point is also that, within queercore, sex and sexual expression are always central and never absented from the artistic conversation, as they often are in the gay and lesbian mainstream – that is, outside of the exploitations and body fascist representations of the commercial gay and lesbian porn industries.

In Chapter 3 I surveyed some of the ways in which queercore artists have utilized "imagined violence" in their work, as symbolic expressions of aggression on the part of minority subjects in resistance to powerful white, straight, male, bourgeois hegemony. Johnny Noxzema attacks hetero- and homo-normativity through zines that cheekily advocate the destruction of homonormativity and the "complete annihilation of breeding." Gregg Araki challenges HIV/AIDS apathy and stigma in the *Living End*, a film that imagines what might happen if two HIV+ individuals set out on the road with a mission to "fuck society." Tribe 8 confronts sexism, homophobia and transphobia through lyrics and on-stage performances in which straight men experience sexual disempowerment and mock castrations serve a cathartic function. Meanwhile, racial minorities like Leslie Mah and Margarita Alcantara enact symbolic revenge against racist oppressors via films like *Shut Up White Boy* and zines like *Bamboo Girl*. Together, these works assert the potential of imagined violence as a tool for producing queer(core) empowerment and for scaring dominant society onto the path of progress.

In Chapter 4 I spotlighted the bodily subversive work being produced within queercore by artists speaking from positions of fat, disabled and transgender identities. Specifically, I discussed: Beth Ditto's fat activist music and performances that seek to rescue fat from its associations with laziness, ugliness and the abject; Nomy Lamm's theatrical performances, which call attention to the disabled body and its ability to take up space through performance and voice; and Silas Howard's film *By Hook or By Crook*, which conjures a world in which the transgender body is decidedly commonplace, playfully malleable, and situated beyond scrutiny and critique. Although these artists are well-regarded and popular within queercore, the body types that they represent, as themselves and in their work, are still marginalized within the subculture as a whole. Still, these artists have made an enormous, body-positive impact on queercore, and increasingly have, if Ditto's notoriety is any indication, successfully brought their revolutionary messages of body diversity to the masses.

As suggested at the start of this conclusion, sex, imagined violence and anti-normative bodies "drive my queercore enthusiasm." These are the elements I also find lacking and/or unjustly maligned within mainline gay and lesbian culture. By way of example, I can point to the recent controversy surrounding the non-inclusivity and political timidity of Pride in Austin, TX. In 2009, two sexually ambiguous genderqueer members of the Austin community were marching shirtless in the Pride parade and, as they recounted to me, were approached by a middle-aged, white lesbian who asked them to "put their shirts back on," because there were "families watching." That same year a local contingent of sadomasochistic enthusiasts was told that they could not march in the parade while wearing leather gear, as this "aggressive" sexual practice and its signifiers

were out of step with the "family-friendly" atmosphere that Pride wished to cultivate. Pride's message was clear: Certain marginalized bodies and sexual expressions, especially those that defy gender norms and/or play out "violent" fantasies, are not welcome at Pride, as they might get in the way of gay and lesbian assimilation into "normal" society. That is, sex, imagined violence and anti-normative bodily displays are exactly what Pride viewed as standing between them and the power and privilege of the mainstream.

In response, the following year, an alternative LGBTQIA rally and procession was formed by folks in Austin who felt excluded by Pride's conservatism and commercialism: Queerbomb. Queerbomb, now entering its fourth year, has a mission statement that reads:

> Queerbomb is a family of LGBTQIA individuals gathering to support our unique and collective pride. Our purpose is to provide a space to celebrate each and every member of our community and encourage all to embrace the manifold ways we contribute to building a beautiful and diverse society. We reclaim the radical, carnal and transgressive lineage of our ever-changing community in our ongoing fight for equal justice and the right to express ourselves in whatever way we see fit.
>
> Each June, the month of Stonewall, we stand together to embrace our sexuality, bodies, personalities, art, music, literature and politics, while recapturing pride from corporate sponsorship. We strive for a pride that refuses to put rules on what you can and can't be proud of, that says every expression, from the spirit to the flesh, is worthy.

> QueerBomb does not apologize. QueerBomb does not make excuses. QueerBomb is free for all. QueerBomb stands proud, and so should you. (www.queerbomb.org)

It is clear from this mission statement that queercore and Queerbomb share much in common, including an emphasis on sex and the pleasures of the "flesh," as well as a celebration of "bodies" and the "right to express ourselves in whatever way we see fit." What's more, both eschew the deadening and distorting effects of corporate capitalism (i.e., "recapturing pride from corporate sponsorship"). The name Queerbomb itself raises the specter of imagined violence in its evocation of a "radical, carnal and transgressive" queerness on the brink of explosion. Queerbomb, thus, and despite my nostalgic yearnings for the past, demonstrates that queercore-style radicalism is still alive and well in the United States.

I relay these stories to give the reader a greater sense of my motivations, investments and pleasures in writing this dissertation. Of course, there have been difficulties along the way as well. First, I had to make impossible decisions regarding which artists/artworks to include in this dissertation and which artists/artworks to leave out. Ultimately, I decided to picks examples that I felt were particularly salient or (relatively) well-known, but in the end there was a degree of arbitrariness that went into making these selections. Second, throughout the writing process, I struggled with the boundaries of queercore: When did queercore properly begin? Has queercore ended or is it still going on? What makes an artist a queercore artist? Does an artist have to state their affinity with queercore to be considered a part of this subculture? All of these questions have swirled around my head from day one, and while I have not arrived at

definitive answers, I have tried to leave the boundaries of queercore as open and unrestrictive as possible without straying from the subculture's fundamental values and aesthetics. Finally, it has been hard to reconcile my own queercore fandom with my critical lens as a media scholar. I enjoy the work of all of the artists mentioned in this dissertation and, as a result, and in spite of efforts to the contrary, I have perhaps been too quick to celebrate the potency or revolutionary potential of their work. I realize that this is problem, especially since many folks will not find this work as empowering or interesting as I do. This distinction in taste may also be inflected by important differences of gender, sexuality and especially race, class, nationality and age.

These questions and self-critiques point toward future queercore work still to be done. Other queercore films (e.g., *Green Pubes, Malaqueerche*, *She Said Boom*), bands and musicians (e.g., Justin Vivian Bond, Gretchen Philips, Le Tigre, Huggy Bear, Limp Wrist, Sta-Prest, Cypher in the Snow, The Need), and zines (e.g., *Holy Titclamps*, *Dildo Machine*, *Homocore*) deserve more attention and analysis than they have received here – as do events like Spew and Homo-a-go-go that have showcased queercore work, and different queercore mediums like radio and blogs. Likewise, now that I have laid some comprehensive groundwork, I would love to see queercore scholarship take a more focused approach to the subculture, perhaps concentrating on specific time periods, community scenes or forms of art, allowing for more nuanced and in-depth analysis of these particulars. Finally, there is still a great deal of room to employ different critical methods in relation to queercore, from the psychoanalytic to the Marxist.

At its best, this dissertation could mark a new beginning for queercore scholarship, ensuring that as time moves further away from queercore's halcyon days,

that the subculture that will not be forgotten. Queercore has so much to teach us about: the thrill of challenging norms of proper behavior, expression and identity; the beauty of creating communities and artworks with like-minded outsiders; the benefit of doing-it-yourself in a culture that wants us to remain passive consumers of the mainstream; and the power of asserting radical queer ideas and identities in a hegemonic society that wants to keep those ideas and identities silenced. My wish is that this dissertation will do for readers – especially younger LGBTQIA readers – what that first Pansy Division record did for me. I hope that it introduces them to new perspectives and visions. I hope that it encourages them to seek out additional queercore artifacts. I hope that it intoxicates them with the possibilities of refusal and rebellion. I hope that is makes them feel less alone. I hope that it inspires them to make some queer(core) mischief of their own.

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