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The Conditions of Praxis

Theory and Practice in Activism and Academia



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Maya Nitis's forthcoming dissertation, *Languages of Resistance*, addresses the chiasmic intertwining of language and action in performative terms, forging a path away from the collapse of language into violence. For an abstract see: www.ethnographyofflight.blogspot.com. After her defence this summer, she is also hoping to participate in starting an independent theoretical praxis zine in Berlin.

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Marianna Szczygielska is a PhD Candidate in the Gender Studies Department of the Central European University in Budapest. Her background is in philosophy and gender studies and she is interested in posthumanism, animals studies, queer theory and the philosophy of science. Her current project, entitled 'Queer(ing) Naturecultures: The Study of Zoo Animals', examines how the concepts of nature, animality, and humanness have been and continue to be constructed in relation to sexuality through the specific site of the modern zoological garden. Apart from her academic work Marianna is also a queer-feminist activist and performer involved in various groups.

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Editorial

The Conditions of Praxis: Theory and Practice in Activism and Academia

Whitney Stark, Marianna Szczygalska and Maya Nitis

Whitney: After the 8th European Feminist Research Conference ‘The Politics of Location: Revisited’ held in the summer of 2012 at Central European University in Budapest, Hungary, Maya, Marianna and I began the process of creating this special edition of the *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, ‘The Conditions of Praxis: Theory and Practice in Activism and Academia’.

Marianna: Echoing the talk given by Adrienne Rich in 1984 at the Conference on Women, Feminist Identity and Society in Utrecht (see Rich in Díaz Diocaretz and Zavala 1985), the 2012 Budapest conference aimed at revisiting the concept of the politics of location. As a transnational meeting of feminist scholars it was an opportunity to revisit some of the idealized notions of dismantling oppressive categories via theoretical tools often taken up in a purely academic environment. While some were seated in the conference rooms discussing gender

dimensions of recent revolutionary protests in different parts of the world or the global economic crisis and the impact of austerity measures on the condition of feminist movements, others joined local activists on the streets of Budapest in bringing attention to the current political situation in Hungary.

Maya: In this edition we (if I might speak of a tentative editorial, activist, and/or thinking and writing ‘we’) wanted to address the ways in which theory and practice are intertwined, and whose division is constantly assumed and affected with great stakes. To work and live, to speak and write, in ways which honor the existing interconnections of theory and practice, and to strengthen these connections against the insinuations of their separation thus undermines neoliberal co-optation of the very fabric of everyday life.

Whitney: The conference seemed to be an opportunity to discuss the

locatings of academic work in, with and from activist and feminist practices and positionings. While the conference connected a network of feminist-oriented academic professionals, it seemed to have some structural models (the cost of the conference, the represented groups participating) which heavily prioritized particularized academic standards and practices with strong ties to hierarchies which so many feminists in attendance, and surely organizing, actively work to destabilize. With this recognition, we felt it was important to try and address the sites of praxis between the often oppressively divided ideas of academia/theory and activism, to trouble the often co-optive, neoliberal practices by privileged groups (i.e. academia) which structurally de-politicize and domesticate the tools, groups, ideas and politics which feminist academics/activists so much wish to nourish, embrace and ally with.

Marianna: Oftentimes scholarly interest in emerging social movements and political activism is done in pursuit of grounding theories of power relations and identity formation in the models and methodologies developed in social and political practice. This canonization later becomes a substrate for scientific knowledge production. On the other hand, various groups, collectives and movements also utilize radical theoretical ideas in everyday activ-

ism, giving new meanings to what we might term anti-oppression academic research. It is important to locate this dynamic relationship within the context of shifting epistemological, ontological and ethical boundaries that delineate hierarchies inscribed into the capitalist mode of knowledge production.

Maya: It seems to me that the apparent, oft bemoaned split of theory and practice, activism and academia, is crucial for maintaining neoliberalism as a political ideology. In this context, my experience at the 8th European Feminist Research Conference was multifaceted. On the one hand, I was excited about the organizers' concern with inclusivity, reflected in solidarity grants and the sheer size of the conference in Budapest. On the other hand, the quality of the exchanges was endangered by allotting speakers less time than expected, which often gave even seasoned scholars too little time (15 minutes) to turn a thought, so to speak. So, I would agree that not only were some typical academic hierarchies reproduced, but the very structure of the event suggested a neoliberal smorgasbord, where all thought could be tasted without swallowing; contacts exchanged, yet little else shared ... Even if, hopefully, there were exceptions to this rush that has pursued every discipline including feminism, in its academic dash.

Marianna: One of the structural models perpetuated in the institutionalized academic setting of a research conference was the lack of transparency of the location of the meeting itself, where the socio-economic and political context in which it was held was rendered almost invisible. Paraphrasing Adrienne Rich, maybe what is needed is a closer understanding of the embodied *politics of location* applied also to the feminist academic setting, so that any attempt to destabilize the centre does not automatically reproduce another periphery:

My body
Nador Street 9, a lecture hall of
the Central European University
Budapest
Hungary
The continent of Europe
The Western Hemisphere
The Earth
The Solar System
The Universe¹

Whitney: The insidiousness of so many of these assumed ways of operating, naturalizations, the things overlooked (too often structural violences and oppressive hierarchies) even in movements with feminist and anti-oppression goals, is often disheartening, to say the least. Checking these assumed systems of values and offering and taking critique is a dear part of the critical reflexivity needed for any collective, accountable coalition based on

building solidarity and alliance, rather than co-option and consumption. In this kind of discussion, we hope to open up differing understandings of connection (praxis), disrupting the binary divides that keep groups, strategies, tools and structures as if separate, thus disallowing them from understanding and working together.

Marianna: We have invited scholars and activists to create this special issue as a platform for exchanging experiences and sharing knowledges on the tensions and potentialities of border-crossing political engagement. It might seem contradictory that this space is envisioned and realized in what is ultimately an academic journal, but we believe that with the variety of topics covered in this issue we managed to open up critical debates that are needed in scholarly endeavors. From queer-feminist punk countercultures, Occupy politics, student rallies and genderless utopias to DIY cultures, the topics of the essays in this special edition reflexively bridge the junctures emerging along the lines of activist practices.

Maya: I wonder if exploring the interconnections of theory and practice in activism and academia would only pose a contradiction through its apparent location in an 'academic journal' to the extent that the journal remains academic. Whereas, the way I understand our work here, is

precisely as an attempt to open up this 'academic' textual space for encounters that question the erection of academic towers by working on the borders that are supposed to keep activists and academics divided.

Contents

The article opening this edition shakes up a hierarchical division often made between academia, art, and activism. In **'Do We Scare Ya' Cuz, We're Not Afraid To Fuck?': Queer-feminist Punk Countercultures, Theory, Art and Action**, Katharina Wiedlack explores the important role contemporary punk countercultures play in feminist critique and queer theory by resisting the appropriation of queerness into the neoliberal capitalist model of knowledge production. By analyzing lyrics, music, zine-writing, performances, cultural settings, d.i.y. aesthetics, and the engagement of queer-feminist punks in various projects that practically apply queer politics, Wiedlack argues that countercultural actors not only form a political movement, but also actively produce queer-feminist theory. She coins a term *artivism* to highlight the artistic aspects of queer-feminist punk rock, as well as the revolutionary method lying behind these creative, playful and daring forms of anti-oppression action and meaning-making. In her article Wiedlack offers an in-depth analysis of the complicated entanglements between academic accounts of anti-

social queer politics and the radically political models of liveable and lived queer activism.

In ***Gender as a Category of Analysis: Reconciling Feminist Theory with Feminist Methodology***, Charlotte Wu discusses gender theory-based analysis. She posits this analysis as consistently politically rooting, and, through a discussion of the 'non-human person', as enabling openings to question the more latent assumptions of 'human subjectivity'.

The holistic view reconciling the division between theory and praxis is presented by Marco Briziarelli in his ***(Re-)Occupy Critique! The Condition of Theory and Praxis in Contemporary American Academia***. Coming from the perspective of communication studies, the author offers an analysis of the narratives on the Occupy Wall Street movement and argues that the prevalent focus on the discursive performativity of this social phenomenon in theoretical commentaries reduces its agency and fails to account for the material aspects of this political action. According to Briziarelli, the New Social Movement's take on the OWS, heavily informed by the post-structuralist insistence on the discursive determination of social change, does not engage in the class politics and the material conditions of the critique itself. The article is guided by an analysis of the figure of the

intellectual and her/his positioning in the process of political change. Following Gramscian theorization of hegemony and his organic intellectual figure, Briziarelli proposes a materialist intervention into the field of social critique and academic theorization of social movements that, similarly to activism, needs to take into account the economic, political and ideological conditions of theoretical knowledge production.

Leon Sealey-Huggins and André Pusey analyze the ongoing changes in student organizing against the co-optation of education in *Neoliberalism and Depoliticisation in the Academy: Understanding the 'New Student Rebellions'*. Reflecting on participatory-research methodology affecting many activist-academics in this edition and beyond, in *Researching DIY Cultures: Towards a Situated Ethical Practice for Activist-Academia* Julia Downes, Maddie Breeze and Naomi Griffin probe the risks and advances of engaged activist-academics who do not perch above their so-called subject matter. Harriet Cooper, in *Defamiliarising Passivity with the Disabled Subject: Activism, Academia and the Lived Experience of Impairment*, proposes to reevaluate passivity as a potential model for academia.

We close this edition with *Investigating Genderless Utopias: Ex-*

posing the Sexual Harassment of Female Protestors in the Egyptian Uprisings of 2011, in which, by utilizing the writing piece as example, Emily Miles shows how (often academic) feminist analysis can participate with and in political uprisings in ways that help challenge the limits of both, and enact better methods toward social transformation. Miles specifically discusses sexual violence against women in the actions at Tahrir Square and the lack of a gendered politic in 'democratic mobilizations' in order to place activism and feminism as politically accountable to each other and with potential for transformative alliance.

The book review section of this special issue presents three publications that cover a wide range of topics connected to activism and theoretical accounts of issues such as queerness, conflict studies, racial discrimination and equality policies from differently situated views of Central-Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the United Kingdom.

The post-conference anthology *IMPORT – EXPORT – TRANS-PORT. Queer Theory, Queer Critique and Activism in Motion* (Mesquita, Wiedlack and Lasthofer eds. 2012), reviewed by Evelien Geerts, offers a polyvocal, de-centralizing perspective on queer theory and praxis outside of the Anglo-American context.

Judith Butler's new book *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (2012) is reviewed by Maya Nitis. Butler discusses the living trauma of the Shoah and historical tragedy, asking difficult questions regarding collective memory.

In her latest book *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012), Sara Ahmed applies phenomenological method to an analysis of the effects of institutional procedures and policies on the materiality of its subjects. In Anna Kuslits' review, the interrelations between the bodies, spaces, documents and institutions, brought forward in the book in connection to anti-discrimination/diversity/equality policies in the UK, are presented in a critical way that bridges the tensions between theory and practice.

Whitney: We understand the complicated practice of utilizing an academic journal-setting to discuss these needs for accountability, shared methodology and the destabilization of hierarchies of legitimacy, and it is important to note that no matter our intention as editors to destabilize traditional presentation and division and to welcome differing practices, there are areas where this is successful, and areas where this is not.

Maya: Yet if the exploration of these interconnections was closed with academic articles, then we will

indeed have failed in challenging the continually reinstated borders in thinking, as much as the apparent division of language and practice which enables the co-optation of academic work for the perpetuation of structural injustice. We are thus forced to hope that the words do not remain on the pages assigned to them but spring from their academic and textual limits and spill into our lives where they might strengthen modes of resistance required to challenge the neoliberal global order.

Marianna: To conclude, we hope that this edition will offer not only an insightful and thought-provoking collection of essays that will inspire our readers to explore further tension between academia and activism, but will also result in a practical engagement in the topics brought here by our authors. We warmly welcome comments and reflections on these issues from our readers in any form (written, visual, sound, etc.). Please contact us through the general editor's email address: editors@gjss.org.

We would like to sincerely thank the editors of GJSS, Alexa Athelstan and Rose Deller, for their guidance, help and for allowing us to collaborate on this special edition. We would also like to thank the rest of the GJSS staff and all of our peer reviewers who have helped to put this edition together.

Endnotes

¹ See Rich. 1985. Notes Towards a Politics of Location: 8.

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‘Do We Scare Ya’ Cuz, We’re Not Afraid To Fuck?’¹: Queer-feminist Punk Countercultures, Theory, Art and Action

Katharina Wiedlack

The article investigates areas of knowledge production in contemporary queer-feminist punk countercultures in/from the US and draws a connection from countercultural accounts to academic anti-social queer theory. Based on the thesis that queer-feminist punk–countercultures, bands, musicians, writers and organizers—can be understood as a political movement, their productions—lyrics, writing, sound and performances—will be seen as a form of queer-feminist activism and agency. The main argument developed in the article is that queer-feminist punk countercultural agents do not only engage with queer and feminist politics, as well as academic theory, but also produce queer-feminist political theory—a more or less coherent set of ideas to analyze, explain and counter oppressive social structures, as well as explicit and open violence and oppression.

Queer-feminist punk musicians combine decolonial and antiracist accounts with their specific punk philosophy of anti-social queerness or queer negativity. Lyrical content, and writing will be analyzed to show examples of queer-feminist anti-social accounts of punk music. Relating such queer-feminist punk negativity to academic concepts and scholarly work, it will be shown how punk rock is capable of negotiating and communicating academic queer-feminist theoretical positions in a non-academic setting. Moreover, it will be proven that queer-feminist punk does not only negotiate, translate and appropriate academic accounts, but also produces similar negative and repoliticized queer-feminist theories without any direct inspiration through academic discourses. Furthermore, it will be proposed that queer-feminist punk communities accomplish what academic queer theory following the anti-social turn often does not: they transform their radically anti-social queer positions into (models for) liveable activism/artivism.

Keywords: Anti-social Queer Theory, Punk Rock, Riot Grrrl, Queercore, Queer-feminism, Artivism, Radical Theory, Music, Activism.

This article seeks to challenge contemporary cultural discourses of the relationship between counter-cultural activism, art and academia. To be more precise, it questions the popular hierarchical view that academia is the place of theory production, whereas art and activism ideally rework or appropriate (academic) theory for their specific purposes. Against this view, I claim that counter-cultural spheres and protagonists have not only inspired academia by providing subjects/objects for academic analysis, but have also contributed to the field of queer studies with their autonomous queer-feminist theories. In other words, I argue that counter-cultural spaces are important places of theory production and that the theories they produce are often transferred to and incorporated by academia only retroactively.

The counter-cultural field or subject my article is going to question for its relationship to (academic) queer theory is contemporary *queer-feminist punk* in/from the US. The theoretical discourse – which arguably can be found in queer-feminist punk rock predating or paralleling their academic hype – is *anti-social* queer theory. The term queer-feminist punk subsumes North-American (including Canadian) countercultures, as well as individual bands, musicians, writers and organizers, their politics and productions that promote queer, trans, inter and/or feminist politics. They emerged between 1985 and

today, and are mostly known as *queercore*, *homocore* or *dykecore*, as well as *riot grrrl*. Although bands and individuals use different labels and self-identifications, strong connections between the individual protagonists, scenes, as well as their artistic and political discourses can easily be found. Accordingly, it can be argued that queer-feminist punk countercultures belong to or form a political movement and that their productions – lyrics, writing, sound and performances – are their form of queer-feminist activism and agency. Following this line of thought, I want to stress my argument again that queer-feminist punk countercultural agents do not only engage with queer and feminist politics, as well as academic theory, but also produce queer-feminist political theory – a more or less coherent set of ideas and practices to analyze, explain and counter oppressive social structures, as well as explicit, open violence and oppression.

The usage of the terminology of *queer-feminist politics* – rather than queer politics – is inspired by the queer and feminist punk musicians, who account for the still prevalent sexism, misogyny and oppression against ‘women’ in mainstream cultures, as well as punk and queer movements, by foregrounding the feminist aspects of their queer politics. Their usage of *queer feminist* or *queer-feminist* falls into line with the practice of many activist collectives all over the world who understand

that feminism is 'not just about women('s issues), [but] it is [also] a gendered power sensitive perspective on all aspects of life as developed in various ideas and practices that need to be addressed again and again' (The Feminist Salon. Flyer. Amsterdam. April 2007, quoted in Baumgartinger 2009, 48). More recently, similar politics have found their way into academic accounts, for example through the work of Mimi Marinucci (2010), José Muñoz (1999; 2009), Judith Jack Halberstam (2005; 2011b), and others. Such activist, queer-feminist punk and academic accounts conceptualize their queer politics as a continuation of feminist movements and theory rather than as a revolutionary break from it. Furthermore, such accounts seek a dialogue between lesbian and gay movements, second wave feminists and the diverse range of queer movements to build alliances and forms of solidarity.

Although I want to emphasize the political aspects of queer-feminist punk rock, as well as academic theory, the artistic aspect of the countercultural movement should not be forgotten. Queer-feminist punk rock is not imaginable without punk music, punk aesthetic and style. It inhabits the transparent and shifting borders between activism, art and theory production. However, queer-feminist punk rock is also a movement that foregrounds d.i.y. politics, distinguishes itself strongly from

'high art' and uses very 'unartsy' methods (besides a very 'unacademic' language). Hence, queer-feminist punk rarely gets labeled as art. I want to challenge the concept of art by stressing the artistic aspects of punk rock. To appropriately account for the art as well as activist aspects of queer-feminist punk rock I will proceed to use the label *artivism*.

The term *artivism* nicely describes the close entanglement between creativity and protest, style and meaning, action and experience. Additionally, it offers a usage or appropriation of the word art that accounts for a form of art that is not as serious and sophisticated but is instead playful, whilst nonetheless important and full of meaning. Moreover, the term is strongly connected to the *Dream Act* movement in the US, as well as to *Occupy* movements all over the world, to issues of migration, citizenship, and international Latina/o and Chicana solidarity in general. Accordingly, it is a reminder of the important issues often ignored in reference to queer-feminist punk rock, and queer art and activism in general, especially under the assumption that queerness as well as punk rock is exclusively a 'white' subcultural thing. Contrary to this ignorance, I want to stress that queer-feminist punk countercultures are strongly involved in all these movements. So far, the term *artivism* again is used to perforate the imagination of countercultural

borders that do not account for lived collaborations.

One theoretical discourse of queer-feminist punk countercultures which seems to be shared among many, if not most musicians, groups and circles centers queerness as something destructive, anti-social and radically political. In the following, I analyze lyrical content, writing, music, sound, performances and countercultural settings to show examples of anti-social queer-feminist punk theory, starting with a brief description of an anti-social punk understanding of queer and queerness. Next, I will show how queer-feminist punks theorize anti-social queerness using and reframing anarchist philosophy. Moreover, I show how queer-feminist punk musicians combine 'decolonial' and antiracist accounts with their specific punk philosophy of anti-social queerness or queer negativity. By relating such queer-feminist punk negativity to academic concepts and scholarly work, I show how punk rock negotiates, creates and communicates queer-feminist theoretical positions in a non-academic setting. Taking queer-feminist punk countercultural discourses seriously, I argue further that queer-feminist punk communities accomplish what academic queer theory following the anti-social turn often does not: they transform their radically anti-social queer positions into models for livable activism/artivism.

'Raise 'em high / Let it hang / Clinch your fist / And sissy, Dang:'² Radically Queer

Considering contemporary usages of the term *queer* within theory as well as institutionalized queer politics, I claim that queer-feminist punk offers a perspective on queerness as well as models for queer and feminist critique and social activism able to counter the ongoing inclusion of queerness into neoliberal capitalism. Such politics are able to reactivate the radical potential the term and concept queer used to have in earlier times.

The line 'Raise 'em high / Let it hang / Clinch your fist / And sissy, Dang', which I used as subheading, is from the song 'Sissy Dang' by the contemporary queer-feminist punk band Agatha from Seattle, Washington. The song is a very good example of the attempt to re-radicalize and re-politicize queerness within US-based activist and punk discourses and beyond. It is a call to arms against 'Assimilation [which] wears out the soul,' as the song states. Queerness is seen as the weapon itself, the 'armor [which] is so fucking beautiful / It keeps you safe from this fucked up world' (Agatha 2012).

In their song 'Not gay as in happy, but queer as in fuck you' (2009), Agatha emphasize that the term queer from a historical perspective emerged on the landscape of US-based political discourse and activ-

ism in the 1990s as intervention. It was a term of resistance against oppression and a statement for radical social change:

[Q]ueer, unlike the rather polite categories of gay and lesbian, revels in the discourse of the loathsome, the outcast, the idiomatically-proscribed position of same-sex desire. Unlike petitions for civil rights, queer rebels constitute a kind of activism that attacks the dominant notion of the natural. The un-natural sense of the queer was, of course, first constituted as a negative category by dominant social practices, which homosexuals later embrace as a form of activism (Case 1997, 383).

Agatha's song is a reminder in a relatively unencrypted way of some of the negative connotations queerness used to have, and in some US-regions and cultural environments, that it still has. The first line of the song, which is 'Not gay as in happy, but queer as in fuck you,' indicates the negative connotations of *queer* through the particular usage of the words 'fuck you' as insult. This negativity corresponds with the punk aesthetic of the music and performance (shouting, high volume, and speed). Although 'fuck' is clearly used as an insult, Agatha additionally hold on to the meaning of 'fuck' as sexual activity, which is signaled through lines like 'Your legs are wide and

I'm inside.' The first line's relatively undirected or unspecific display of rejection – the 'fuck you' – becomes a very concrete criticism or rejection of mainstream lesbian and gay politics through the next line – 'I'm gonna fuck about queer liberation.' It addresses liberation efforts like the Human Rights Campaign, which is the largest non-profit gay and lesbian organization in the US today. During the last couple of years, the Human Rights Campaign focused almost exclusively on the level of legislation, for example on marriage, healthcare benefits and adoption rights for same-sex couples. Very recently, they concentrated their money and energy in lobbying for the repeal of the *Don't Ask Don't Tell* law, which barred gay and lesbian people from serving openly in the US military until it was abandoned in September 2011. Many queers, gays, lesbians and transgender criticized the Human Rights Campaign for their single-sided approach, arguing that marriage and serving openly in the military were the least of their concerns. They argued that the Human Rights Campaign only represents the aims and needs of a small, privileged, white and male minority and ignores the rest of queers and other sexually and gender deviant people – a view and critique Agatha address with their song.

The lines 'we'll take these scraps of faith, and well make / a feast and stuff our face' which follow 'I'm gon-

na fuck about queer liberation’, establish a connection between such gay rights politics and consumer culture, which Agatha repudiate. Moreover, through their combined meanings the lines question the gay rights model of sexual freedom. It seems as if Agatha is asking if freedom – and accordingly gay liberation activism – can be limited to individual sexual freedom. Additionally, the song seems to criticize gay liberation politics for their single issued politics and exclusive focus on sexuality. Agatha, contrary to gay rights groups like the Human Rights Campaign, are calling for a more radical liberation movement that is not only intersectional in its approaches and analysis, but also more rigorous in its rejection of the socio-political and economic system.

Agatha theorize the term *queer* as negative position, as challenge to hetero- as well as homo-normativity. When theorists imported queer as a theoretical concept into the academy in the 1990s, they aimed for a similar effect – to challenge norms. Teresa de Lauretis was the first documented scholar to use the term queer theory in an academic setting in February of 1990. David Halperin recalls de Lauretis’ intention for her usage of queer in his article ‘The Normalization of Queer Theory’ as ‘deliberately disruptive’ and intentional ‘provocation’ meant ‘to unsettle the complacency of “lesbian and gay studies”’ (Halperin 2003, 340).

He suggests that de Lauretis used queer theory to reject dominant gay and lesbian identity politics, as well as academic approaches that focus on sexuality as a stable identity category. His article indicates furthermore that queer theory was once seen as a promising and radical political intervention into the production of knowledge and meaning, into social structures and into institutions.

Shortly after the annexation of queer in academia however, a de-radicalization of the term *queer* became visible and *queer* became normalized within the academic landscape. The incorporation of queer theory into gender studies programmes and the numerous queer studies, as well as queer theory book series by commercial publishing companies mark such processes of absorption and de-radicalization of queer within the mainstream academic field. Even more unsettling to many activists and artists was the successful incorporation of the term queer into the language of capitalism. The corporate media increasingly included representations of gays and lesbians for the promotion of life-style products and commercial entertainment through the late 1990s and 2000s, and created mainstream perceptions of queerness as non-threatening, successful, beautiful and predominantly white and, most importantly, compliant with capitalist consumer logics.

Resisting that end, songs like the aforementioned 'Queer as in fuck you' by Agatha aim to 'find ways of renewing [queer's] radical potential' (Halperin 2003, 343), to borrow Halperin's words again. I argue that the appropriation and usage of queer within queer-feminist punk rock in general is an approach that has the radical potential to resist the ongoing inclusion of gay and lesbian identities in mainstream discourses and consumer culture, and the transformation of gay and lesbian identification into a lifestyle choice as well as legal category. Moreover, queer-feminist punk rock uses the term *queer* to counter the process of queerness becoming an identity category itself. A validation of counter-cultural queer theory, as in my example of queer-feminist punk rock, within academic discourses could halt the process of academic queer theory becoming normative. It could participate in developing 'a renewed queer theory' (Eng et al. 2005, 1) – a queer theory, which necessarily needs to understand sexuality as 'intersectional, not extraneous to other modes of difference, and calibrated to a firm understanding of queer as a political metaphor without a fixed referent' (Eng and al. 2005, 1).

Resist And Exist:³ Counter-cultural Theory and Practice

I want to emphasize again that queer-feminist punk countercultures produce queer-feminist theory that is neither less sophisticated nor

less valuable than academic approaches. Such accounts offer a version of queer that still has the political potential to irritate and resist neoliberal incorporation, and reject oppression. Additionally, the queer-feminist punk movement presents countercultural concepts 'for different ways of being in the world and being in relation to one another than those already prescribed for the liberal and consumer subjects,' as Halberstam puts it in his recent book *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011, 2). Thus, the theoretical approaches developed within the queer-feminist punk movement have a strong connection to the everyday life of its participants, in contrast to much of academic theory. Within the counter-cultural sphere of queer-feminist punk rock, 'the divisions between life and art, practice and theory, thinking and doing' are not clear-cut, but are fluid or "chaotic",' according to Halberstam (2011b, 2). Accordingly, theory is not just a product of cognitive and emotional processes, but the processes themselves must also be understood as theory. Following anarchists among queer activists and scholars, such as Benjamin Shepard, theory does not only influence practices, but practices and theory are inseparable within queer activism (2010, 515). Theory is a doing, a practice and 'the understanding of human practice,' that becomes 'directly lived,' as Guy Debord emphasizes in *The Society of the Spectacle* (quoted in Eanelli

2011, 428). To account for both, the processes and products of knowledge production and distribution, as well as the term and concept of theory itself need to be reworked.

The band Agatha is one of many examples for the ways in which queer-feminist punk theory, socio-political analysis, music/art and practice/activism are inseparably entangled. Agatha theorize queer approaches within their songs and other forms of writing, and offer models for intersectional analysis that account for oppressive power structures like class, ethnicity, age, color, gender and sexuality. Moreover, they are involved in a range of projects including a free rock camp for queer youth, community bike projects, a radical marching band, a radical farming project and a collectively run anarchist bookstore. Additionally, they are connected to the broader queer-feminist anarchist punk movement in the US and beyond, exchanging ideas with other groups and touring the country. In August 2012, they also participated in the *New Direction Fest: From Anger to Action*, in Olympia, WA. During the three-day 'think tank'-like festival, through music concerts and other art projects, as well as workshops and presentations, power structures inside and outside the punk movement were analyzed and criticized, while models for emancipatory, solidary, anti-racist, queer-feminist and anti-ableist action be-

came negotiated.

Before moving on to a more detailed discussion of anti-social queer theory and punk countercultures, I want to briefly describe another band that participated in the *New Direction Fest*, namely Wretched of the Earth. The band-members of Wretched of the Earth identify as persons of colour or their allies. Furthermore, they aim at:

liberating [their] identities, empowering [their] communities, deconstructing internal oppression and outward privilege and power dynamics. [They] support struggles for autonomy, sovereignty, self determination and independence [and] believe liberation necessitates the destruction of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. [They] strive to contribute individually and collectively towards these ends.⁴

The songs of Wretched of the Earth are good examples for intersectional queer-feminist punk theorizations. 'For Gender Self-Determination' (Wretched of the Earth 2012), for example, explains the interplay of language, recognition, social structures and knowledge in the process of forming a gender identity. The lines 'right from wrong written by another's hand / spectrums smashed for the power of heirs' name cultural knowledge and the power dynamics at play for

recognition. It explains that gender identification is first of all a performative act, a labeling process that has little to do with biology or the subject itself. The lines 'defining a child / subjected. Assigned' as well as 'in identifying the boy / who never got the chance / to decide' mark the potential of language and categorization to oppress, harm and violate. 'We must understand beyond binary / we must not be the men / we were told,' is a political call for action. It is a call to recognize the flexibility of gender identification, the recognition of transgender, and also a call for a critical analysis of gender roles, especially male roles and behaviour. This aspect is a crucial point within the punk scenes within the US, where male dominance is still an issue. If the lyrics of 'For Gender Self-Determination' are understood as theory, interesting parallels can be drawn to Judith Butler's works *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997) and *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005). In both books – especially the latter – Butler analyses the formation of the subject, as well as the limits of self-knowledge/knowledge of the self. Furthermore, she theorizes the subject in relation to the social and the condition of that subject's formation, particularly focusing on those aspects beyond the control of the subject it forms. In other words, she (like *Wretched of the Earth*) questions the terms and conditions under

which a subject becomes recognizable as human being.

In the following passage, I want to pick up the question again of what is so radically queer about radical queer-feminist punk theory. Radical queer theories – which can be found in both academia and counter-cultures – are theories that refuse and reject complicity in neoliberal consumer, homo- and heteronormative cultures. Moreover, they are irritating, disturbing, and unsettling and understand action as a necessary part of theory and vice versa. Such radical theoretical accounts and actions are dedicated to dismantling oppressive power structures in their full complexity, as already indicated, and can be related to academic queer theory.

Queer-feminist punk rock uses anti-social queer politics that parallel in interesting ways recent developments in queer theory, which have become known as anti-social queer theory. Moreover, the embrace of negativity connected to the word queer within punk rock anticipated queer as anti-social even before academia 'jump[ed] on the negativity bandwagon' (Eanelli 2011, 428), as queer anarchist Tegan Eanelli (2011), and queer theorists, such as Halberstam (2006; 2008; 2011), Nyong'o (2008), or Muñoz (1999) indicate. Although radical queer-feminist activists such as Eanelli disdain academic anti-social queer theory, I see potential for the radical

irritation of hegemonic discourses in the corpus of academic queer theory that Halberstam framed as the 'Anti-Social Turn in Queer Theory' (Eanelli 2011, 140–156).

'I kill kids / better keep hid:'⁵
Anti-social Punk Theory

As a theoretical concept, the anti-social turn is informed by psychoanalytical – mostly Lacanian – concepts of sexuality. Following queer psychoanalytical approaches, such as those of Leo Bersani (1995), sex is understood as anti-communicative, destructive, and anti-identitarian. American literary scholar Lee Edelman posits that sexuality in our symbolic order marks the irritation of the self as in-control, whole and autonomous in his book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004). In other words, sexuality and sexual acts irritate the constant construction of identity and autonomous agency. To integrate sexuality successfully into the illusion of an autonomous self, it must be attached to the purpose of reproduction. Consequently, queerness in this logic can only signify the opposite of creation and reproduction or 'the place of the social order's death drive' (Edelman 2004, 3). Queerness may appear in the form of identity, but this is just an illusion produced by its attachment to a specific object or end. Moreover, queer sexuality, as Edelman suggests, re-makes identity as illusion and impossibility visible. Within the

logic of the social order, queerness must then be understood as the ultimate threat, because it would reject the future (which is symbolized through the Child, with capital 'C') and therefore put an end to society (as we know it). Queer-feminist punk music alludes to the threat of queerness as a danger to society more often than as a threat to the coherence of the self. The 1990s band God Is My Co-Pilot were one of the first displaying a version of queerness opposed to the imaginary Child, the symbol for the future as society knows it. Queerness and queers in God Is My Co-Pilot's songs, album titles and zines are strongly connected to negativity, but with an ironic undertone. Besides connoting fears, for example in the title of their 1993 7" vinyl, *My Sinister Hidden Agenda*, queerness is positioned as precisely opposed to the future and the imaginary Child. In 1995, for example, they released the album *Sex Is for Making Babies* (DSA). The title song consists only of one line: 'Sex is for making babies 1000000 times.' On their EP *How I Got Over* (1992), they feature the song 'I Kill Kids' – a threat they picked up again in 'Queer Disco Anthem':

We're here we're queer we're going to fuck your children
 Privacy is a punishment / Privacy is not a reward
 Publicity is a human right
 Live in the light / don't die by a word
 Speak up / Don't put

up with it I came out upside down and they had to turn me around [...] We're here we're queer we're going to fuck your children (God Is My Co-Pilot 1992).

God Is My Co-Pilot connect the term *queer* to right-wing hate speech against queers, through the lines 'we're going to fuck your children,' which addresses prejudices, combined with 'don't die by a word,' addressing those with queer desires. They refer to the subordination of queers in the dominant hegemony and embrace the negative symbolic position, through enjoying themselves in articulating it. They mark discourse on the public/private dichotomy as an oppressive system; the references to coming out narratives with phrases like 'Speak up' and 'live in the light' are drawing on the historic lesbian and gay civil rights movement. By putting such references next to the well-known and too often commercialized slogan 'We're here we're queer,' they position themselves in a history of political movements. God Is My Co-Pilot take a critical stance to that self-positioning and additionally criticize the politics of those movements by turning the phrase 'We're here we're queer get used to it' into 'We're here we're queer we're going to fuck your children.' Thus, God Is My Co-Pilot anticipate what Edelman suggests in *No Future*, which was published in 2004. Yet, the queer-feminist punk band does not propose to take

the symbolic place of queerness, its negativity, literally (Edelman 2004, 5). In contrast to Edelman, God Is My Co-Pilot do not reject politics per se.

Academic anti-social queer theory – especially Lee Edelman's account, however potentially radical or dismantling his theory is – forecloses any possibility of political activism. Moreover, Edelman argues that queerness is not only the opposite of society's future, but also the opposite of every form of politics. Many queer scholars criticized this aspect of anti-social queer theory and reworked anti-social psychoanalytical accounts as politics. Halberstam (2008), Elizabeth Povinelli (2002), Nyong'o (2008) and Muñoz (1999), for example, hold on to the political potential in anti-social queerness. They criticize Edelman's account for its 'inability to recognize the alternative sexual practices, intimacies, logics, and politics that exist outside the sightlines of cosmopolitan gay white male urban culture' (Rodríguez 2011, 333), as Juana María Rodríguez points out.

Queer-feminist punk theory, in contrast to Edelman, manages to hold on to the political while theorizing queerness as negativity. It does so by taking not only psychoanalytical concepts of queer sexuality as negativity into account, but by also considering a much broader repertoire of academic and activist works to criticize and resist hegemony. Many queer-feminist punks com-

bine and extend anti-social queerness with black feminists' theorization of anger, especially bell hooks (1995) and Audre Lorde (1984). Such references allow contemporary queer-feminist punks like Osa Atoe (musician, author and creator of Shotgun Seamstress Zine), Mimi Thi Nguyen (creator of Race Riot), Anna Vo (activist, writer, and founder of An Out Records) and Miriam Bastani (writer, musician, activist, and *MaximumRockNRoll* coordinator) to think through the anti-social and queer at the intersection of racialization. Moreover, a focus on anger enables them to extend the analyses of the realm of symbolic meaning to the realms of the corporeal and the affective: action, feelings, experience and the body.

Anger and negativity are almost always part of queer-feminist punk discourses. Additionally, however, queer-feminist punks do not shy away from more positive emotions and relationality as well as their theorization. An example is the song 'The Rain' by the band Agatha that quotes Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). In the liner notes to the song, author and singer Kaelen explains that she wanted to account for the anti-social aspects of queerness, to mark and reject oppressive power structures and ideologies like religion for their participation in genocide, racism and the policing of sex, gender and sexuality. Additionally, however, she was in-

trigued by feminist spiritualism, like Anzaldúa's, because such accounts enabled a different view on the ontological status of being and belonging (Kaelen in the liner notes to 'The Rain' 2011). On a meta-level, Kaelen's reference to feminist spiritualism is in line with punks' tendency to engage with minoritized positions, theories and discourses.

Queer-feminist punks draw a relation between the very unspecific punk tradition of 'celebrati[ng] the degenerate (as Hitler termed Jewish art), the sick [...], and the alienated [...], not to mention the socially outrageous [...],' as the Jewish punk researcher Steven Beeber has it (2006, 8), with the very specific and directed focus on oppressed feminist, anti-racist and queer knowledge. This focus on the borderlands of theory is one additional reason for queer-feminist punks to engage with and rework anarchist theory and politics. A very exhaustive theorization of a queer-feminist anarchist anti-social punk theory can be found in the zine *Anarcho Homocore Night Club* from about 1992.

**'Hitler was right, – Homosexuals ARE enemies of the state:'⁶
Queer-feminist Politics of
Negativity and Anarchism**

In *Anarcho Homocore Night Club*, Toronto-based author Robynski draws attention to the common belief in Western society that anarchists are chaotic, destructive and negative. Using the example of the

public outcry that the Sex Pistols' song 'Anarchy in the UK' (1976) provoked, he argues for a strong 'cultural connection' (Robynski 1992, 11) between punk and anarchism. This connection is the negative stereotype mainstream society offers for both movements. Conservatives, mainstream newspapers, commentators and politicians used anarchism frequently as a derogatory term in 1976 when the Sex Pistols introduced their song, and they continue to use anarchism in that way (Squibb 2011, 175). Journalist and theorist Stephen Squibb argues that until today '[t]he charge of anarchism has always been a filthy smear on the lips of the ruling class' (Squibb 2011, 175).

Queer-feminist punk Robynski points to this 'cultural', or symbolic, negativity and anti-social meaning of anarchism. Moreover, he makes a connection to the symbolic meaning of punk rock, arguing that punk was associated with similar negativity and anti-social meanings. Although he stresses the fact that the negativity of punk and anarchism is a stereotype or structural rather than empirical, he nevertheless refers to them, because he understands that stereotypes are one form of symbolic meanings and influence verbal and social discourses as well as the formation of the inner psyche.

Robynski emphasizes that the symbolic meanings of punk and anarchism both pose a threat to what he calls 'the establishment' (1992,

11). The establishment in this context can be understood as cultural norms, social structures, as well as political institutions. Pointing out the connections between the symbolic meanings of punk and anarchism again, he draws a further connection to the symbolic meaning of queerness:

Army-booted, leather jacketed, black-clad, crude, rude, lewd and tattooed, broken-toothed, pierced, foul-mouthed, poor, unwashed, ragged, matted, stubled and safety-pinned, antisocial, Nihilistic and violent, the Punk has almost every feature of the stereotyped Anarchist – only the proverbial bomb is missing. Add gaudy make-up and androgyny and there you have the stereotyped image of the Queer (as any Punk who has been bashed can painfully testify) (Robynski 1992, 11).

Like Edelman in his book *No Future*, Robynski points to the symbolic meaning of queerness. He refers to the negative place of queerness within the symbolic order that Edelman describes so pointedly, and to the violence this symbolic meaning can lead to. He sees this cultural meaning of negativity and the anti-social displayed in queer-feminist punk lyrics and other forms of writings, for instance in the seminal *MaximumRockNRoll* article 'Don't be gay, or, how I learned to stop worrying and fuck punk up

the ass' by G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce (1989). Following Jones, LaBruce and numerous other queer-feminist punks, Robynski embraces the negative or anti-social meaning of queerness as signifying the cultural location of queer-identified people. Like Halberstam (2008), and in contrast to Edelman (2004), he sees the negativity of queerness directly interlinked with the negative meaning of punk. Robynski embraces queerness, as well as punk's structural negativity, as the rejection of futurity. In other words, such queer-feminist punk writings understand queerness and punk as negative forces that have the potential, if embraced, to reject, irritate and finally destroy '[t]he Law, [...] the fundamental principles which underlie all social relations' (Evans 1996, 98) in psychoanalytical terms. Moreover, Robynski understands queer-feminist punk performances, and the production of meaning, as political activism that is able to reject the society's ideologies and aims, and resist what Edelman calls futurity. Edelman rejects punk as 'punk pugilism,' a 'pose of negativity,' or 'abiding negativity that accounts for political antagonism with the simpler act of negating particular political positions' (Edelman 2006, 822). Robynski's article proves, however, that queer-feminist punks draw on punk and queerness as symbolically negative on a much broader level than just political opposition.

Interestingly, Robynski sees

the same potential in the term anarchism (Robynski 1992, 11–12). He analyses the terms queer, anarchism and punk on the level of symbolic meaning, as already explained. Moreover, he addresses the political concept of anarchism and suggests that such strategies are useful for queer-feminist punk activism. Thereby, Robynski shifts his focus for queer-feminist activism from irritating 'the Law' in terms of meanings and social relations to state laws and other political instruments of realpolitik of regulation and normalization. Again, in contrast to Edelman, Robynski does not understand this real-political aspect of punk, anarchism and queerness as 'the seeds of potential renewal' (Edelman 2006, 822) of heteronormative structures or a reaffirmation of the ideology of futurity. Robynski does not outline a definite future he wants to achieve with his anarcho-queer punk: 'The point is not to achieve anarchism as a state or as a final form for the political organization of society,' to use Butler's words (quoted in Heckert 2011, 93). 'It is a disorganizing effect which takes power, exercises power, under conditions where state violence and legal violence are profoundly interconnected. In this sense, it always has an object, and a provisional condition, but it is not a way of life or an "end" in itself' (Butler in Heckert 2011, 93).

Robynski emphasizes the destructive qualities of queerness,

punk and anarchy. The school or version of anarchy he refers to is mostly influenced by the Russian revolutionary and theorist of collectivist anarchism Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin. Bakunin and his alleged lover Sergei Gennadyevich Nechayev understood destruction and violence as often unpleasant, though necessary, aspects of the revolutionary liberation of the oppressed. In *The Catechism of a Revolutionary*⁷ they argued that rather than reform, only a radical abolition of the state and the revolutionary overthrow of the class system could free people from their subordinated status. Many theorists understood *The Catechism of a Revolutionary* as ‘a horrifying credo of the revolutionary as nihilist, a cold-blooded individual who has severed all the personal ties and human feelings binding him to conventional society the better to destroy it’ (Shatz 2002, xxiv).

By re-reading *The Catechism of a Revolutionary*⁸ (Robynski 1992, 16–18), Robynski develops his concept of queer-feminist anarchism as equally nihilistic. Moreover, it is exactly within the nihilistic and destructive aspect of Bakunin’s and Nechayev’s anarchism that Robynski identifies the connection to queer-feminism. ‘For Bakunin,’ he argues, ‘anarchy could only [mean that] the current social order and all of its institutions – physical, cultural, ethical, spiritual – [need to be] completely and utterly destroyed’

(Robynski 1992, 13). Robynski thereby makes the argument that the homophobia within anarchist circles during the 20th century as well as their diversion from anarchism’s original nihilism were both fatal concessions to established heteronormative systems. He emphasises that:

[t]he document is less a list of rules for radicals, however, than a testament of rage, hatred and bitter alienation from the entire established social order. Here we have the pure Nihilism of original Anarchy, expressing all the destructive sentiments of Punk (indeed, some band should set it to music), only strategically targeted in a specific direction (Robynski 1992, 12).

Robynski suggests an appropriation of the nihilistic meaning of anarchism as a strategy for queer-feminist punk. Additionally, a reference to Bakunin and Nechayev allows Robynski to understand anarchism as a movement, rather than exclusively as a theory. ‘It was left to Nechayev and Bakunin,’ he writes, ‘to begin the network of conspiratorial cells, working to overthrow the government by violent means, to found Anarchism as a Social-Revolutionary movement based on activism’ (Robynski 1992, 13). The emphasis on anarchism as activism, in contrast to theory, is interesting, because it supports Robynski’s

argument of the cultural activity of punk rock as anarchist activity. He, like myself, understands queer-feminist punk rock as political activism/artivism. Moreover, he implies that successful queer-feminist politics need to be shaped as revolution. Referring to Nechayev in *The Catechism of the Revolutionary*, Robynski states that a revolution can only be made to happen through revolutionary action, not through words alone. Nechayev argued that '[t]he word is of significance only when the deed is sensed behind it and follows immediately on it' (quoted in Confino 1973, 28). Similarly, Robynski explains that '[p]unks always gave greater weight to action, thus maintaining the [relation between theory and action] that Nechayev and Bakunin indicated, and sharing the two men's Nihilistic obsession with "merciless destruction"' (Robynski 1992, 23).

Robynski emphasizes the process of irritating or deconstructing social power relations and meanings rather than envisioning a concrete future in his theorization of queer-feminist punk anarchism. Nevertheless, like the scholars Halberstam (2008; 2011) and Muñoz (1999), he does not reject futurity per se. Quoting work on Bakunin's anarchism, Robynski points out that '[t]he passion for destruction is a creative passion too!' (Sam Dolgoff quoted in Robynski 1992, 13). He suggests that a politics of negativity might have a sur-

plus value. Such value, I want to argue, with scholars like Halberstam (2011) or Povinelli (2011) could be the formation of different social relations. In other words, the surplus effect of queer-feminist punk rock lies in the new meanings and social bonds created in the liminality between the rejection of futurity and society as it is today, and the realization or creation of a different future through anarcho-queer punk politics. Accordingly, the negativity of queer-feminist punk is understood as politically productive, insofar as it potentially deconstructs heteronormativity and other systems of oppression, while at the same time establishing a queer social sphere, which differs from heteronormativity, racism, classism and ableism in its meanings and power-structures.

The contemporary band Rape Revenge from Calgary, Alberta, elaborates the importance of action in contrast to theorization in a slightly more explicit language than Robynski in their song 'When The Meeting Ends' (2012). 'Surrounded by selfish fucks,' they scream towards their audience, 'I'm done with giving myself to cause / that doesn't exist outside of books. Don't you get it? Your inability to live equally doesn't exist outside of your fight against inequality.'

Queer-feminist punks' emphasis on action within anarchism and punk activism is important to understand the simultaneity of anti-social discourses and the creation

and maintenance of queer social bonds. Robynski emphasizes in his discussion of *The Catechism of the Revolutionary* that anarchism must be leaderless, though it needs facilitators who provide the movement with the necessary infrastructure and organization. He suggests that punk communities reflect this ideal of leaderlessness with their rejection of the star cult, as well as any other form of (social) authority, and their do-it-yourself ethos. Again, Robynski's point is translated into a more drastic punk-language through the queer-feminist antiracist anarchist band Rape Revenge. In their song 'Lawful Of Shit' (2012), they call on their fellow punks for action: 'Waiting in endless lines for permission to resist. Egypt, Greece and Wall Street would fucking laugh at these permit seeking half-ass attempts at social unrest.'

The references to prior punks – like the Sex Pistols – as well as activists, feminists – like Anzaldúa – and thinkers – like Bakunin – within queer-feminist punk counter-cultures, accordingly has to be understood as reference to role models, not leaders, that is nevertheless always critical. It is a validation of prior efforts and, at the same time, a reflection on hegemonies and social power relations. Moreover, Robynski suggests that queer-feminist punks should broaden their view by looking for role models in spheres that are not necessarily related to punk or queerness. He

argues that queer-feminist punks should look for role models among all oppressed racial and sexual minorities, the 'déclassé intellectuals, the insane, prisoners, street people, squatters, sex-trade workers, "out-laws" and antisocial elements, the so-called criminal class' as well as in 'the underclass below the working class who were not "producers", [...] the unemployed and the unemployable, unskilled and poor workers, poor peasant proprietors, landless [...]' (Robynski 1992, 24). Moreover, queer-feminist punks should try to build alliances with those who are oppressed. He emphasizes that such new alliances need to be built under the condition that queer-feminist punks reflect on their own privileges and take responsibility for their entanglement with hegemonic power structures. 'They need to reflect on their own entanglement in oppression themselves,' Robynski emphasizes, 'to successfully deconstruct existing hegemonies' (Robynski 1992, 24).

In their song 'Herbivore' (2012), Rape Revenge equally ask their community members to face their privileges as well as their entanglement in oppression and hegemony. They ask:

Tell me how you find nourishment
in the horrors you can't face. [...] Your
palate is built upon a lie you tell
yourself. There's no reason to base
your survival on the torture of
someone else. If it's not in you

to murder, if you can't look them in the eye as you take their life.

The song from the vegan queer-feminist Rape Revenge addresses the issue of veganism. It questions how queer-feminist punks can argue against human exploitation, war and the death penalty on the one hand, and exploit, torture and eat animals on the other. Rape Revenge reject prioritization of their political agendas and subjects for their solidarity. They fight for the communities they belong to – females queers, people of color, Native people etc. – with the same enthusiasm as for other people and species.

Moreover, through their accounts they ask queer-feminist punks to support the broader community according to their needs and wishes, rather than act out of compassion or benevolence. This position, again, draws queer-feminist punks to anarchist theory, where solidary support and action are defined as facilitation. Queer-feminist punk projects often show such facilitating activism. These projects include *Rock 4 Choice* and the *Calgary Zine Library*, and *Food Not Bombs* – all projects Rape Revenge are currently active in – as well as the *Girls Rock Camps* all over the US, which support young girls and women in making music, or the *Home Alive* project in Seattle that teaches women and queers self-defense skills. Additionally, festivals like *Ladyfest*, or *Queerruption* can be seen as fa-

ilitating projects, because they offer musicians and music fans platforms for their activism.

To sustain anarchist projects, however, queer-feminists like zine-writer Robynski, argue that queer-feminist punks have to resist the cooptation of their movement by their oppressors, (1992, 24). Resistance against cooptation can only be established if the violent aspect or destructiveness of anarchism and punk are preserved. 'The downfall of Anarchism,' Robynski writes, 'was that it became intellectually respectable; the downfall of Punk was that it became aesthetically respectable' (Robynski 1992, 27). Rape Revenge similarly argue against cooptation and for confrontation and violence in their song 'The Messiah Effect' (2012). 'Fuck this feel good bullshit,'; they reject the language of consumer culture parroted by punks; and continue offensively with 'Ghandi was a puppet, peace is a cop out. I hope you choke on your reformist fucking bullshit. As I burn your pacifist empire to the ground.'

Violence as the means of self-defense and rejection, 'chaos and disorder' (Robynski 1992, 30) are necessary to escape the constant perpetuation of a system that denies them. As a consequence, the aim of queer-feminist punk activism cannot be social integration or even peace with society as it is today. Once queers were aiming at social integration, queerness became structurally integrated into systems

of law, and (at least partially) socially accepted. 'Gone are the days when perverts were perverts – the most hated of the hated, the lowest of the low. Now Queers are fine, upstanding, moral citizens [...]' (Robynski 1992, 30). Robynski argues that the assimilation of white male queers, and to a lesser extent white lesbians, into hegemonic orders, did not only deradicalize the potential of the term queer, but shifted the line of social unacceptability to different groups. 'The cost of assimilation, has been borne by those who are still perverts, the Queer lumpenproletariat,'⁹ to quote him again:

sex-trade workers, drag queens, S/Mists, leather and other fetishists, fist-fuckers, and Boy-lovers. As with Anarchism, a dichotomy has been created, separating the 'good' Queers from the 'bad' Queers, with the 'bad' Queers taking all the heat because they threaten establishment moral values and prevent assimilation. The very fact that Punk, Anarchy and Queers have the capacity to be assimilated is testimony to [the fact that] that Capitalism has an almost limitless ability to adapt itself to the demands of any given situation (Robynski 1992, 30).

Like the band Rape Revenge or Agatha, Robynski points to the complicity of gay culture in capitalism and marks the pitfalls of contemporary gay politics. He argues that

an effective queer-feminist punk anarchism, should be '[i]ntellectually disrespectful, immoral, [...] and anti-bourgeois, Nihilistic and passionate,' 'anti-liberal' and 'lawless' (Robynski 1992, 30). The only way to resist assimilation and the cooptation into capitalism, he concludes, is to appropriate the:

stereotype, because it is a caricature painted by the establishment of what threatens it most [...]. It has been possible to show a cultural continuity between Classical Anarchism and Punk only because I have been deliberately stereotyping. By equating it with Nihilism, [...] I have so severely marginalized Anarchy that it can only fall together with other marginals, [...] with whom it shares identical stereotyped attributes (Robynski 1992, 30).

Again, Robynski emphasizes the anti-social meanings of punk, queer and anarchism as crucial for queer-feminist resistance. Moreover, he points to the intersectionality of classism, gender binaries, racialization, ableism and cultural and economic oppression.

Conclusion

To conclude my article, I want to emphasize again that queer-feminist punks produce radical anti-social queer theory through their activism through lyrics, music, zine-writing, workshops and other gath-

erings. The theory they produce, as I have shown, is neither less sophisticated nor less complex than academic anti-social queer theory, and is often actually in dialogue with academic knowledge. Noticeably different to the latter – in most, but not all cases – is the language in use. Queer-feminist punks use a decidedly offensive and confrontational language from which most theorists restrain themselves. Moreover, punks avoid complicated grammatical constructions and other markers of bourgeois or institutionalized language. Additionally, their rejection of any borders of academic schools or fields, as well as political tribes, is divergent from academic anti-social queer theory. This flexibility allows for an anti-social queer theory that is not only intersectional, but also relational. In other words, queer-feminist punk theory offers queer-feminist punks a tool for analyzing oppressive power structures and concepts for activism against them. Additionally, it also offers the possibility of creating new ways for relating to each other and forming a solidary community.

As my brief examples have shown, countercultural spaces are indeed important places of theory production. The theories they produce are often retroactively transferred to and incorporated by academia. Those transfers are often facilitated by countercultural protagonists or former members of countercultures themselves. In the

case of punks or ex-punks, it is not only since Zack Furness' most recent publication *Punkademics: The Basement Show in the Ivory Tower* that we know that 'colleges and universities function as some of the places where people with "punk" values can [...] potentially put their ethics and ideas into practice' (2012, 19). Numerous queer theorists, like Halberstam, Muñoz and Nguyen have given accounts of their punk history and it can be presumed that the politics and theories of their communities have influenced their work, even if they do not make this explicit. More obvious incorporations of queer-feminist punk knowledge can be seen in the recent opening of the Riot Grrrl Collection of the Fales Library at New York University, which contains tons of original Riot Grrrl and queercore materials, fanzines, records, letters, flyers etc. from the 1990s to today. To name more of such incorporations and analyze them would clearly go beyond the space constraints of this article. At this point, these few examples, as problematic as a detailed analysis might discover them to be, can be read as proof of the relevance queer-feminist punk theory has for the environment of academia.

Endnotes

- ¹ Agatha. 2012. *Cut The String*. Self-titled. LP. Self-release: Seattle.
- ² Agatha. 2012. *Sissy Dang*. *Self-titled*. LP. Self-release: Seattle.
- ³ I use the name of the peace punk band from Los Angeles, California, Resist And

Exist, here, because it appropriately summarizes the – mostly unbalanced – relationship between political idealism, political ambition and everyday life. Although I do not write about Resist And Exist, I want to emphasize that they have participated in much activism and organizing around the anti-war movement, animal rights, solidarity work with political prisoners and the Black Panther Party since the 1990s. They are therefore a good example for political punk activism.

- ⁴ According to their band description on the festival homepage, available at <http://newdirectionfest.net>. [Accessed 17 October 2012].
- ⁵ God Is My Co-Pilot. 1992. I Kill Kids. *How I Got Over*. EP. Ajax Records.
- ⁶ Dreher, Mark. 1989. Hitler was right, – Homosexuals ARE enemies of the state! J.D.s 5 42.
- ⁷ *The Catechism of a Revolutionary* is a guideline for the formation of secret societies published in the Government Herald in July 1871 as the manifesto of the Narodnaya Rasprava. Historians agree that it is co-written by Bakunin and Nechayev, although the degree to which Bakunin contributed is heatedly discussed among the experts. *The Catechism*, besides defining some anarchist values and beliefs, most importantly outlines important general rules of revolutionary organizing.
- ⁸ Robynski emphasizes that *The Catechism of a Revolutionary* was a foundational text for the anarchist movement. He argues that '[i]ts continuing relevance is attested to by the fact that, a century after it was written, it was republished by The Black Panther Party [...], which used it as their model of revolutionary organization. Panthers Eldridge Cleaver, George L. Jackson, and Huey Newton all sang its praises (which is ironic in Cleaver's case, considering his virulent homophobia; [...]). It was, as well, the basis for the Italian revolutionary Renato Curcio's organization, Brigade Rosse (Red Brigades)

in October, 1970' (Robynski 1992, 12).

- ⁹ The term lumpenproletariat was first defined by socialist Karl Marx, meaning a vicious underclass or low working class. Marx saw no political or revolutionary potential within this part of the population. Bakunin opposed Marx's view. He defined the lumpenproletariat as the 'educated unemployed youth, assorted marginals from all classes, brigands, robbers, the impoverished masses, and those on the margins of society who have escaped, been excluded from, or not yet subsumed in the discipline of emerging industrial work' (Thoburn 2005). Within this group he saw the most potential for a socialist revolution (see also Thoburn 2002).

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Gender as a Category of Analysis: Reconciling Feminist Theory with Feminist Methodology

Charlotte Wu

Gender theory is not exactly feminist theory, but in many ways it builds directly upon its assumptions and innovations. This essay explores the ways in which the category of analysis 'gender' reconciles its heritage of political consciousness and activism with its place in a more scientific or philosophical discourse, and attempts to demonstrate how it can remain indispensable as a political and ethical tool. To do this, it discusses and challenges competing narratives of oppression and postmodernist accounts of social reality. Through a discussion of the 'non-human person', this article concludes by questioning the value of the 'human' as a productive category of analysis, and argues that the destabilising of disciplines which the study of 'gender' provokes may also serve to unmask inherited assumptions about the analytical concept of the individual subject.

Keywords: Gender, Feminism, Animals, Persons, Oppression.

The questions an oppressed group wants answered are rarely requests for so-called pure truth. Instead, they are queries about how to change its conditions how its world is shaped by forces beyond it; how to win over, defeat or neutralise those forces arrayed against its emancipation, growth, or development; and so forth.

– Sandra Harding (1987)

The need to let suffering speak is a condition of all truth

– Theodor Adorno (1973)

Introduction

In this paper, I argue that while gender theory builds directly upon the innovations and methodological assumptions of feminist theory, it is distinct in ways which are important to our understanding of gender-based analyses. I suggest that there needs to be closer examination of the shift from the practising of 'feminist theory' to the employment of 'the analytical category of gender' within the academy. This is essentially because while the former was politically motivated, 'wrestl[ing] with

the question of how one can use the knowledge we create in the interest of social transformation' (Risman 2004, 446), it is not obvious whether the concept of 'gender' – envisioned as locating these issues more comprehensively in the relations between men and women – inherently upholds those priorities of feminist research. I therefore explore how practitioners using this category of analysis must struggle to reconcile its heritage of political consciousness and activism with its place in a more scientific or philosophical discourse. This will lead me to demonstrate how 'gender' can remain indispensable as a political and ethical tool, in the face of competing narratives of oppression and post-modernist accounts of social reality and the 'human'.

The 'first wave' of feminist academics sought to refute the concept of universal, absolute truth as naive and inevitably biased by the traditional male exclusivity of academia. This exclusivity affected the topics and categories considered worthy of academic study themselves. Resistance to the 'god-trick' (Haraway 1988) made it evident that research may be conducted differently, depending on a researcher's moral allegiances and personal feelings of responsibility (or lack thereof) towards the issue at hand. In challenging the universal masculine view of truth, feminist thinkers stressed the importance of acknowledging one's situated, and

thus limited, subjectivity when pursuing knowledge.

However, the increased intellectual authority of 'gender' in the last decades of the twentieth century (see Haig 2004) problematised this emphasis on perspective. Joan W. Scott observes that 'the use of "gender" is meant to denote the scholarly seriousness of a work, for "gender" has a more neutral and objective sound than does "women"' (Scott 1986, 1056), implying a potential methodological regression into that empiricist, dispassionate and 'implicitly value-free' role of social scientists who study gender merely to satisfy intellectual curiosity' (Risman 2004, 445). Within the discipline, I argue, gender as an analytical category, and as a potentially non-political tool, is implicitly juxtaposed with feminist theory. When used to analyse and argue a specifically feminist agenda, there are therefore latent contradictions which this article will aim to elucidate.

Gender is a category which is critically bound up with personal identity. As a result, the researcher of gender will inevitably have an emotional investment which is at odds with the intellectually neutral (if not gender-neutral), professional ideals for analysis. More perhaps than in other areas of research, tensions between one's theoretical convictions (and disciplinary training) and one's ethical convictions (and personal knowledge) make it possible to theorise contra one's

own intellectual standards in favour of another kind of methodology, or belief as to 'how research does or should proceed' (Harding 1987, 3). With this in mind, it seems clear that utilising gender as an analytical category produces certain difficulties. Whether these difficulties ought to be seen as primarily methodological or moral, however, is not so easy to ascertain. I argue that this is in part because gender scholarship is self-reflective in a way which cultivates the unmasking of disciplinary assumptions, occasioning apprehensions about the 'master's tools' (Lorde 1984) available to academics.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Gender

Despite its ubiquitous usage in an assortment of academic discourses, there is no universally shared definition of the term 'gender'. Ingrid Robeyns suggests that:

the concept of gender can be theorised in many different ways, and the usefulness of any such conceptualisation depends to some extent on which purposes one wants to use the concept for, and in which intellectual traditions one wants to introduce it (Robeyns 2007, 56).

However, this means that whichever intellectual tradition one is working in, some of its assumptions will be imported into one's

analysis, along with that tradition's own methodological disputes. In part, such imprecision results from gender's over-investment of meaning and ensuing openness to interpretation. Each permutation of its definition therefore becomes invested with diverse academic values and allegiances. Since the various academic disciplines continue to cultivate a certain degree of self-sufficiency, identifying a singular 'category' of gender seems problematic. Robeyns' description of the theorist's 'purposes' as separate from 'intellectual traditions' also raises the possibility that the conceptualisation of gender employed will not necessarily be selected for its congruity with the discipline into which it is being introduced. It follows that the two may indeed be fundamentally incompatible, even leaving open the possibility of a researcher creating this dissonance intentionally in order to devalue the argument of one (the discipline) or the other (the definition of gender).

The closest consensus as to what 'gender' means among scholars is perhaps 'something like "the social meaning given to biological differences between the sexes"' (Lawson 2007, 137). Poststructuralist writers such as Judith Butler (1990) however eschewed this definition, which she saw as heteronormative, dualistic and thus reifying conceptions of masculinity and femininity, in favour of a more subversive reimagination of gender and gendered identity as

non-coherent, unstable and malleable. (Again, both interpretations are now widely cited, with no guarantee that the term translates precisely from work to work). Yet I contend that it is problematic to use a term originally intended to describe the phallogocentric, socially constructed and hierarchical dichotomy of 'male' and 'female', in the purpose of indicating a more fluid and liberating conception of gendered identities.

The latter conception of 'gender' as a construction which can be altered and reimagined is useful, in that it allows for theoretical deconstruction and reconfiguration. Nevertheless, scholars who use it must always be limited by its theoretical nature. After all, once 'gender' ceases to have a concretely observable referent in lived reality, its *function* as an analytical category comes into question. Catherine MacKinnon reminds gender scholars that:

Gender was not created in our minds after reading philosophy books other people wrote; it was not a Truth that we set out to establish to end academic debates or to create a field or niche so we could get jobs. It was what was found there, by women, in women's lives. Piece by bloody piece [...] in trying to make women's status *be* different than it *was*, a theory of the status of women was forged, and with it a theory of the

method that could be adequate to it; *how* we had to know in order to know *this* (MacKinnon 2006, 151 (original emphasis)).

In this statement, MacKinnon ranks methodology as secondary to lived experience; it is a means towards achieving a different reality, rather than ensuring the most accurate means of uncovering the reality (or 'Truth') that is the target of epistemological objectivity. For feminist scholars, methodology should be concerned not only with what can be known or what gets to count as knowledge, but what can be done with this knowledge; there is no use establishing alternative ways of knowing reality if that imperfect reality itself is unaffected. Despite the attraction of moving beyond gender dichotomies, some scholars caution that to annihilate sexual difference before achieving equality between the sexes would be inexpedient and politically premature.

This stance, sometimes referred to as 'strategic essentialism' (see Spivak 1987), is an approach which relinquishes one's intellectually nuanced understandings of 'gender' in favour of a cruder binary definition of 'the sexes', as they exist in law and general understanding, to achieve more immediate improvements in women's lived conditions. It is seen as disingenuous to argue the finer points of a theoretical gender-free utopia when real suffering continues to exist unimpeded. In

this spirit, Barbara Risman proposes that since:

Much time and energy can be wasted trying to validate which dimension is more central to inequality or social change [...] the feminist project is better served by finding empirical answers to particular questions and by identifying how particular processes explain outcomes in need of change (Risman 2004, 435).

However, when initiating deliberately normative or essentialist definitions of gender in the spirit of activism, Michel Foucault's warning that the ramifications of power can never be anticipated or controlled may provide cause for caution. According to his account, 'liberation in the name of "truth" could only be the substitution of another system of power for this one' (Taylor 1986, 178). Knowledge is not owned by those who 'generate' it, but is instead distributed throughout complex and dynamic social networks, and is transformed in the process with unpredictable and perhaps unpalatable results. Progress can therefore bring with it new problems for feminists to grapple with, for example, 'the feminisation of poverty, sexual harassment at the workplace, and women's double day of paid and unpaid labour' (Deutsch 2007, 118), or the way that 'Margaret Sanger's birth control movement played an important and unfortunate role in

eugenics policy' (Harding 1987, 5).

Another unanticipated consequence of early feminist theory was what was *not* talked about in discussions of gender. Its emancipatory motives were undermined by its disregard for racial and class diversity among women, which meant it was seen as reproducing the hegemonic and distorting worldview which it professed to challenge. In responding to the moral and cultural imperative to expose systematic gender injustice, feminist theorists were criticised for assuming it to be the primary site of oppression, neglecting the effects of intersectionality and failing to interrogate their own complicity in perpetuating other forms of oppression. (For example the middle-class demographic of early feminist academics and writers may have contributed to displacing the effects of gender oppression disproportionately onto poorer women and women of colour). As a result, feminism became split into feminisms, and the idea that any woman could speak for the cause of all women was called into question.

Gender research today therefore takes into account the ways in which women's subordination differs within ethnic communities or is constructed within class dynamics to a far greater extent (further ensuring its interweaving with other disciplines). Nevertheless, the expectation that gender scholars should now collectively be able – through mindful self-reflectiveness and cultural

sensitivity alone – to overcome their own positionality and ethnocentrism ‘remains’, in Susan Bordo’s words, ‘animated by its own fantasies of attaining an epistemological perspective free of the locatedness and limitations of embodied existence’ (Bordo 1993, 217–8). Meanwhile, the answer to competing narratives of oppression cannot simply be to add in more and more categories, as if this were to get us closer and closer to an elusive and illusive reality. Even if a study attends dutifully to ‘the mismatched *troika* of race, class and gender’ (Fields 1989, 1), not only is there no guarantee of seriously nuanced engagement with these positions, but many other variables will continue to suffer neglect – sexuality, age, disability, nationality, religion, caste, to name only a few – and, ‘how many axes can one include and still preserve analytical focus or argument?’ (Bordo 1993, 139)

Writing Feminism in the ‘Master’s House’

The challenge raised by Bordo’s question demonstrates how those who employ the analytical category of gender may expect it to fulfil intellectual ideals of method which conflict with its methodological origins. That is to say, gender scholars continue to write syllogistic essays which must by definition identify a focus of study and ignore aspects considered irrelevant. Yet, they must at the same time avoid intellectual

practices which are hegemonic and exclusionary – Butler refers to this as the ‘internal imperative’ (1993) – or risk ‘invalidating’ their own protestations against oppression, as they would then be ‘no better’ than those whom they claim to criticise, regardless of the intellectual or emancipatory quality of their argument.

This represents an impossible double bind, which offers as its sole escape route the adoption of a different discourse (we might think of Nietzsche’s aphoristic, anti-philosophical style or Luce Irigaray’s *écriture féminine*). Yet that alternative risks the exclusion of one’s own work and voice from journals or by publishers, and the alienation of all those outside of academic circles due to its perceived abstruseness. (One might even add, outside of *feminist* academic circles, for the study of gender remains a relatively marginalised discourse in many disciplines).

I find it pertinent to return here to the point that the analytical category of gender may be brought to bear not only upon material within a discipline, but to criticise the discipline itself. Sally Haslanger, for example, writes that ‘[a]cademic feminists, for the most part, view metaphysics as a dubious intellectual project, certainly irrelevant and probably worse’ (Haslanger 2000, 107), while Irigaray calls into question the gendered (and thus restrictive) nature of language itself. I argue that such analyses are likely to trigger what

we might call methodological existential fears; however compelling the argument, the intellectual traditions which they seek to deracinate will be sites of high personal, professional, emotional, ideological – and of course, financial – investment. The category of ‘gender’ therefore signifies not only an ‘other’ way of producing knowledge but also an antagonistic one, threatening to undermine whole intellectual canons through its gaze. This ‘threat’ may be implicit, or it may be stated candidly: Cindi Katz for instance writes that her work ‘is part of a broader project to change the nature and meaning of our academic “home”’ (Katz 1996, 497).

For the practitioner of gender analysis, the hostility with which his/her work may therefore be received is complicated by the difficulty of sustaining such a fundamental destabilising of traditional discourses, while remaining intelligible and influential. Katz, elaborating on this dilemma, illustrates how the twin methodological projects of theory and activism are ultimately symbiotic:

Those working in new ways are caught in the middle – knowing, as Audre Lorde advised, that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’, but struggling to dismantle it anyway and to rebuild an alternative with a different set of tools. All the while, the ‘master’ barely notices. Then again, if we are so right, why do

we care whether or not the master notices? Is it not alright that he trudge on in his old ways while the world passes him by? I do not think so. The theoretical twists and turns – cultural and otherwise – of the last few years are as much about power and authority as about the production of theory and the constitution of knowledge. And the stakes are not just academic (Katz 1981, 99).

Theorising with the analytical category of gender therefore involves not only highlighting issues which require political action, but a very personal vigilance against what Audre Lorde (1984) calls ‘that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within us’ (Lorde 1984, 123). The very foundations upon which language, epistemology, research practices and so on have been built can be interpreted as insidiously gendered. With these foundations being inescapably internalised to some extent by all who work with them, it becomes necessary to continuously interrogate the presuppositions of one’s work, even its most apparently emancipatory qualities.

Bordo, for instance, questions whether the ‘endless debates about method, reflections about how feminist scholarship should proceed and where it has gone astray’ which characterised the postmodern era perhaps served ‘not the empowerment of diverse cultural voices and styles, but the academic hegemony

[...] of detached, metatheoretical discourse' (Bordo 1993, 225). After all, if gender theory is conceptualised as 'analytical' work, that is, as breaking down a complex reality into more intelligible (and thus more controllable) parts, then logically the individual should be a useful site for study. However, not only does the parallel between this growing significance of individualism within the academy, and the increasing capitalist atomisation of contemporary society suggest that this poststructuralist obsession may be in thrall as much to economic as to theoretical developments, it also leaves the model of the autonomous individual itself problematically uninterrogated. Feminist moral philosophers, among other thinkers, have long questioned the validity of the very existence of a 'space between two individuals', as this presumes the possibility of defining a self-sufficient, unified and coherent subject, omitting interpersonal and internal frictions in a way which is 'at best, incomplete, and at worst, fundamentally misleading' (Meyers 1997, 2).

I want to draw out the convergences between identity politics' breakdown of oppressions into individually experienced, specific permutations of suffering and Foucault's Panopticon. In Foucault's reading (1979), each individual is imprisoned in identically designed but differently situated cells; in this isolated state no sense of shared suffering is visible, except from the position of the oppressor, seated

in the centre. Sandra Lee Bartky's comment that '[i]n the perpetual self-surveillance of the inmate lies the genesis of the celebrated "individualism" and heightened self-consciousness which are hallmarks of modern times' (Bartky 1990, 95) offers an insight into the self-defeating character of the postmodern approach taken to its logical conclusion, for to recognise that structures of power act on each of us in the most personal and unique ways is only to recognise what power is structured to do. That is, theorising in this way misdirects our energy by reproducing the disciplining barriers which make us inaccessible to one another.

Several thinkers working on gender have therefore suggested alternative challenges to essentialism which do not 'delegitimize *a priori* the exploration of experiential continuity and structural common ground among women' (Bordo 1993, 142) or among other oppressed groups. Mariana Szapuová (2001) for example proposes the articulation of a network of overlapping Wittgensteinian 'family resemblances', while Katz advocates tracing a 'counter-topography' that also allows for generalisation without total homogenisation, involving:

a particular precision and specificity that connects distant places and in so doing enables the inference of connection in uncharted places in between. As with contour lines, the measurement of

elevation at select sites enables a line to be drawn without measuring every spot on earth. (Katz 1996, 1229)

A conception of oppressions which concentrates on their commonalities would be able to appreciate their points of intersection without inter-category impugning, instead promoting an intellectual solidarity where any work directed at lessening genuine oppression would be seen as part of a collective effort rather than a competing claim. It is easy enough to note, as does Bartky,¹ that 'even though a liberatory note is sounded in Foucault's critique of power, his analysis as a whole reproduces the sexism which is endemic throughout Western political theory' (Bartky 1990, 65). Important as it is to maintain critical alertness to such pernicious reproductions, it would be perhaps more productive to place the emphasis on how every 'liberatory note' struck by fellow thinkers can be utilised in tandem with one's own liberatory objectives, particularly when one can never be sure which endemic and historically situated views one's own work is reproducing. Carol J. Adams admonishes that '[f]eminist theorists' use of language should describe and challenge oppression by recognising the extent to which these oppressions are culturally analogous and interdependent' (Adams 1990, 90).

If this is the case, challenging

any form of oppression will also serve to lessen that of others suffering under power, for this is what Karen Warren (2008) calls the 'logic of domination' which is perpetrated within each system of prejudice, be it based on categories such as gender, race, class, and so on. Surely, therefore, striking a blow at any one facet of the 'mythical norm' (Lorde 1984) will help diminish its overall power, even if the attack does not target them all simultaneously. Just as the experience of oppression builds up for a lesbian woman of colour, for example, the privileges of domination build up for a white heterosexual man, so long as each of these facets retains its cultural supremacy. We could continue the metaphor to argue that should every resistance to oppression attempt to fight simultaneously on every front, their power and momentum would be much reduced.

The Future of Gender as a Category

While the conceptions explored above offer valuable routes for potentially disenthraling feminist scholars from their troublesome poststructuralist impasse, the study of gender still needs to be reflective about its historical limits and perpetually experimental in spirit. If gender analysis seeks to uncover patterns of domination in social reality in order to change them, the goal of the analytical work is in some ways to make its own obser-

vations obsolete. Therefore it must be what MacKinnon describes as 'a constantly provisional analysis' (MacKinnon 2006, 51), for discovering timeless or essential truths about social reality is the very reverse of what it hopes to achieve. While the category of gender is, currently, vital for demonstrating the wider political implications of issues such as domestic violence, rape or femicide and their basis in hegemonic masculinity, the researchers who use it would surely be glad to see it become irrelevant. In this sense, I envisage gender scholars as needing to simultaneously and imaginatively look ahead to a social reality in which other moral concerns are pressing: concerns which today are invisible to us, or even concerns which our well-intentioned emancipatory work helps to silence.

Sometimes, this looking forward can be achieved by looking back. Lorde reminds us of a lack of consideration of past generations that might be conceived as the oppression called 'ageism'. Important as critique and revision are for identifying the blind spots or institutional prejudices of previous theories, this 'generation gap', she writes, also functions as:

an important social tool for any repressive society. If the younger members of a community view the older members as contemptible or suspect or excess [...] We find ourselves having to repeat

and relearn the same old lessons over and over that our mothers did because we do not pass on what we have learned, or because we are unable to listen (Lorde 1984, 117).

For example, the current aversion towards the perceived essentialism – 'that obscure philosophical swear word', as MacKinnon wryly calls it (MacKinnon 2006, 51) – of the previous generation of 'difference' theorists² may arise from a dread of the social construction (and degradation) of 'nature' as regressive, uncivilised and culturally insignificant. The attempt to distance women from [what are felt to be] accusations that they are in any way determined by nature may therefore be itself reproducing sexist, misrepresentative or colonising conceptions of nature. Butler (1993) notes that the 'sex/gender distinction has come under criticism in more recent years for degrading the natural as that which is "before" intelligibility, in need of the mark, if not the mar, of the social to signify, to be known, to acquire value' (Butler 1993, 4).

To recall an earlier point, we might see this as an unpredictable and unfortunate consequence of what we could call 'strategic anti-essentialism'. While necessary at a particular historical juncture to complicate a picture of gender which excluded transgender identities, differences of sexuality and bidirectional negotiations of the gender binary,

this approach may have reified an idea of 'sex' as dualistically opposed to the social, ultimately harming the larger, long-term emancipatory project. Without sufficient circumspection, sex may [have] become 'to gender what feminine is to masculine' (Butler 1993, xiv), that is, falsely constructed against a concept which we assume to be supreme.

My question at this point is: if we can understand both 'sex' and 'gender' as social meanings given to human differences, in what can be seen as problematic ways, shouldn't we interrogate their reliance on the category of 'human'? Martha Nussbaum, for example, invites us to '[b]egin with the human being' as the best hope for achieving gender equality and ethical treatment of the woman (Nussbaum 1995, 61). However, the appeal of common humanity is a notion which has been historically abused precisely in order to exclude other persons. One of the slogans of the suffragettes, for example, compared women's position in society to that of 'paupers, lunatics and criminals', not in solidarity with all those denied the vote but to strengthen their own membership of a circle of deserving citizens. As bell hooks and others have reminded us, not all members of the *homo sapiens* species have always been considered persons – indeed, this has been one of the primary ways in which oppression has been institutionalised.³ Recently, certain bio-ethical studies and pub-

lic policies have also raised issues surrounding what we consider to be the minimum requirements for human life: for instance, in problematic forms of existence where sensation and consciousness have been irretrievably lost. Such considerations prompt further questions. Is 'human' or even 'human nature' a term functioning within a (gendered) binary of opposition and dominance, and to what extent is it socially created and controlled? Is gender a 'human' construction or can we understand other species as socially interpreting their reproductive roles? Does working to end gender oppression on the grounds of 'human' rights make us complicit in other oppressions and practices of othering by making 'humanness' the normative condition?

Scholars of race and gender, Margaret Spiegel and Carol J. Adams, argue that the rights of the human cannot be upheld without seriously reconsidering the 'arbitrary' distinction between human beings and non-human beings, and confronting the tyranny of the former over the latter which this justifies and conceals. Spiegel draws parallels between the treatment of animals in captivity with the slave trade,⁴ while Adams exposes 'the absent referent' that prevents us from making these connections by creating a dialectic of absence and presence: 'what is absent refers back to one oppressed group while defining another' (Adams 1990, 55).

She therefore sees as problematic the co-opting of metaphors of animal violation (e.g. phrases such as ‘I felt like a piece of meat’ or ‘They treated us like animals’) as a means of furthering the ethical claims of women, for this constitutes a replication of exploitative structures. ‘What we require’, she writes, ‘is a theory that traces parallel trajectories: the common oppressions of women and animals’ (Adams 1990, 58).

Both theorists stress their view that the moral outrage with which we confront the systemic subjugation of persons on grounds of race and gender should be applied to the systemic subjugation and killing of animals, and argue that if we are capable of and willing to deconstruct the essentialist justifications of racist and anti-feminist beliefs, we need to apply the same heightening of consciousness to our practices of meat-eating and animal captivity. This moral claim is gaining intensity: at the 2012 annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, a group of scientists and ethicists proposed a declaration of rights for dolphins and whales, whom they deem to be sufficiently intelligent and self-aware to be classed as ‘non-human persons’ (Sample 2012). In several nations, certain primates already have legal rights on similar grounds; rights which recognise them as members of the moral community and testify to our moral obligation not to treat

them as our resources (Francione 2008).

It is nevertheless noticeable that in these cases, the emphasis is on the cognitive abilities of the animals concerned, and not the philosophy of universal respect for others’ lives. I argue that this reproduces the Cartesian privileging of mind over body, of knowing over feeling. The commercial (thus systematic) killing of cetaceans is deemed unjustifiable on the basis of their similarity to us (or what we consider makes us most human⁵) rather than on our similarity to them, our animal nature. We too are mammals: embodied, mortal, sentient, capable of experiencing pain and forming kinships. Perhaps MacKinnon would comment that these are not the grounds upon which we award rights to humans either: ‘Legally’, she writes, ‘one is less than human when one’s violations do not violate the human rights that are recognised [...] Being a woman is not yet a way of being human’ (MacKinnon 2006, 3). What sense can feminist or gender analysis make of the ‘non-human person’, or of accusations that it constitutes this living being as the abject outsider, the non-ethical subject?

The same tension remains that however intellectually or abstractly compelling these arguments are, when we return to the sphere of ‘real life’, where ‘real women’ are suffering from gender-based injustices, those other moral claims may seem to take precedence. It may be

that awarding the right of life to any being deemed sentient becomes particularly problematic for feminists (among scholars of oppression), because of the way such arguments have been used against the reproductive rights of women. In the abortion debate, the moral dilemma is often framed in terms of two competing subject's rights embodied in one individual, which in certain arguments allows for the silencing of the pregnant woman.

However, I want to recall my observation at the start of the article that one's moral investments, loyalties or conscience/consciousness may contrast prohibitively with other ethical understandings and ways of approaching knowledge. If we allow it to do its work, the analytical category of gender can help us to unmask all kinds of domination-based logic. Our current, Enlightenment-influenced imagination of physical singularity is in fact revealed to be particularly misleading by many of the concerns of gender research, not least the politics of abortion and other practices such as transsexual technologies or Assisted Reproductive Technologies, which threaten the stability of the category. In this sense, the destabilising of disciplines which the study of 'gender' provokes also challenges the concept of the individual subject. I find this to be a vital point, because many of the ways in which feminist or gender analysis can find itself unable to fulfil its own logic may be a

result of an urgent need for reformulated analytical tools of other kinds, including a 'philosophical and legal reconceptualisation of the human subject' (Browne 2007, 9) itself. In this article, I have argued that this need may be partially obscured by the inherent contradictions which scholars of gender have inherited and failed to sufficiently examine. As a result, energies are expended upon internal frustrations that might be more productively directed elsewhere.

Conclusion

Having had as its 'chief intellectual imperative' the need to '*listen... a greater humility and greater attentiveness to what one did not know*' (Bordo 1993, 220), some forty years later, when gender 'has become a growth industry in the academy' (Risman 2004, 429), how can it – as a category of analysis – reconcile what it still does not know with what it has learned? It is certainly too soon to eradicate gender from our critical and political vocabularies, and indeed, this may not even be ultimately desirable. The inevitability of some form of gender system in culture is impossible to determine *a priori*; as Marilyn Frye points out, 'No human is free of social structures, nor (perhaps) would happiness consist in such freedom' (Frye 2000, 13). Therefore, while the use of 'gender' as a category of analysis has been – and should continue to be – problematised to ensure that it

does not involuntarily perpetuate or normalise difference, its instability as a category needs to be viewed in the context of challenges to other academic concepts which are considered, erroneously, to be more sturdily established. The 'identity crisis' within feminist and gender theory thus might be seen as in need not of resolution, but wider dissemination – which, in turn, can be facilitated through a gender analysis that questions the unity of a discipline's convictions.

Endnotes

- ¹ To choose an arbitrary example.
- ² This suspicion applies also to biologists working on gender; yet, as Jude Browne (2007) notes, 'New theories from the natural sciences and the field of evolutionary psychology are emerging to confront the late twentieth-century view [...] demanding instead that we revisit the possibility that "gendered behaviour" is biologically derived' (Browne 2007, 2).
- ³ Nussbaum comments: 'Acknowledging the other person as a member of the very same kind would have generated a sense of affiliation and a set of moral and educational duties. That is why, to those bent on shoring up their own power, the stratagem of splitting the other off from one's own species seems so urgent and seductive' (Nussbaum 1995, 96).
- ⁴ Alice Walker's preface to *The Dreaded Companion: Human and Animal Slavery* (Spiegel 1996) asserts that '[t]he animals of this world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for whites or women for men' (Walker in Spiegel 1996, 14).
- ⁵ As Bernard Williams remarks, 'If one approached without preconceptions the question of finding characteristics which

differentiate men from other animals, one could as well, on these principles, end up with a morality which exhorted men to spend as much time in making fire [...] having sexual intercourse without regard to season; or despoiling the environment and upsetting the balance of nature, or killing things for fun' (Williams 1976, 64).

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(Re-)Occupy Critique! The Condition of Theory and Praxis in Contemporary American Academia

Marco Briziarelli

Political activism should not be taken for granted in academia; it is a project that requires the creation of an adequate environment for critique and action. That is because, rephrasing Gramsci's recommendation (Gramsci 1971, 175), social change needs both the practical 'optimism of the will' and the theoretical social diagnostics provided by the 'pessimism of the intellect.' Based on such assumptions, the paper points out the necessity, on the one hand, to go beyond an idealist conceptualization of the intellectual and instead to look materially at the field of action of academics, and, on the other, to problematize the currently dominant theoretical understanding of critique.

Keywords: Theory, Praxis, Critique, Post-Structuralism, Occupy Wall Street, Gramsci.

Material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates ad hominem, and it demonstrates ad hominem as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter (Marx 1970, ii).

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rephrasing Gramsci's recommendation (Gramsci 1971, 175), social change needs both the practical 'optimism of the will' and the theoretical social diagnostics provided by the 'pessimism of the intellect'. Based on such assumptions, the paper points out the necessity, on the one hand, of going beyond an idealist conceptualization of the intellectual and instead to materially look at the field of action of academics. On the other hand, it also problematizes the currently dominant theoretical understanding of critique.

First of all, this paper discusses the problems implied by the divi-

sion between manual and intellectual labor which produces an understanding of the intellectual as an ahistorical abstraction. Rejecting such an idealization, the paper tries to rematerialize the intellectual by drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's political economic analysis. The paper briefly examines the 'hegemonic' regime of (American) National Communication Association (NCA) in order to exemplify how material dynamics taking place in such a setting can potentially keep the critical spirit in check, caught between the contradictory twofold mechanisms of the political economy of academic production: the orthodox working within the framework of established paradigms and the heterodox striving or drive to produce intellectual novelty.

Second, the paper examines the kind of critique proliferating in the contemporary theoretical environment which functions more as a self-referential discourse of critique rather than a tool for practical activism. Accordingly, it argues how the adoption of specific readings – contextualized in the post-structuralist tradition – offer an understanding of social determination and signification that diminishes the history-making role of the subject. The goal here is not to dismiss post-structuralism as a whole, but to point out how some of its influential interpreters have significantly shaped the contemporary idea of political action. In contrast to such an approach, the

paper proposes an understanding of critique that 'thematizes and seeks to surpass the limits set by prevailing social relations' (Callinicos 2006, 6) because the present author assumes a steady and simultaneously dialectical link between consciousness and social reality.

Finally, in the third part, the paper utilizes the leading narratives depicting Occupy Wall Street (OWS) as a 'new' social movement in order to exemplify both the practical manifestations of such a theoretical trend and to advance an alternative framework which places the thought of Gramsci at its core. It will be argued that the possibility of intervention for social change is better served by a holistic and materialist conceptualization of hegemony. Such a project requires both going beyond the tendentially one-sided discursive dimension of social struggle found in the prevailing discourse on OWS and re-engaging instead with what Gramsci defines as the 'integral state': the state + civil society. Accordingly, the paper suggests revisiting the figure of the organic intellectual who, as a first step in his/her objective to be active in the public and political sphere, recognizes academia as a material sphere of production of social reality and therefore as a first site of praxis.

The Idealized and the Materialized Intellectual

Conceptualizations of 'the intellectual' abound in modern social

theory but they all seem to lack a straightforward definition. Max Weber (1958) describes intellectuals as functionaries, producers of ideas intrinsically committed to rationality. Karl Mannheim (1936) maintained that intellectuals are ideologues that constitute the world view of society. For Talcott Parsons (1969), intellectuals serve as cultural specialists in a society organized by the division of labor. Lewis Coser (1997) believed that they are people living for rather than living off ideas. Finally, Vladimir Lenin (1902) maintains that they constitute the avant-garde within a class struggle.

The problem of identifying intellectuals is not simply of a descriptive kind; it also overlaps with a normative idealist thrust. For instance, on the one hand, intellectuals may be regarded as seers of a better society; on the other, they are often blamed for having transformed the university into a site of privilege. Julien Benda (1928), several decades ago, illustrated the general social rapprochement against scholars who 'betrayed their duty, which is precisely to set up a corporation whose sole cult is that of justice and of truth' (Benda 1928, 57).

Why is the attempt to define the identity/function of intellectuals in contemporary Western societies so difficult? One possible explanation links such problems of definition to a tradition of thought that has produced over time a series of Cartesian dualisms separating ideas

from practice, consciousness from being, and the private from the public sphere. These dualisms presume that people can work either intellectually or manually, taking care of either their spiritual or their corporeal needs. Based on such assumptions, the goal of locating intellectuals in the social map is crippled by a tendency to understand such a category in the framework of the very social division of labor that consistently relegates them in the same ethereal province of ideas, therefore outside the sphere of material production.

Materializing the Intellectual in the Field of the Academia

The social and mental separation is, paradoxically, never clearer than in the attempts – often pathetic and ephemeral – to rejoin the real world, particularly through political commitments (Stalinism, Maoism, etc.) whose irresponsible utopianism and unrealistic radicality bear witness that they are still a way of denying the realities of the social world. (Bourdieu 2010, 41).

As already mentioned, the intellectual integrated inside the university system seems to be particularly exposed to social rapprochement because of privileges such as academic freedom: the right of inquiry, to teach and communicate ideas protected by the academic tenure. However, while certainly not absent,

academic freedom must be contextualized within the constraints of the political economy of universities. Failing to acknowledge the economic forces shaping such a field prevents a full comprehension of at least two fundamental aspects: it tends to provide an ahistorical definition of intellectuals based on theoretical abstractions rather than on the concrete analysis of their role in historic-specific social formations; second, it prevents an equally concrete examination of their practices, their labor, their field and the level of conditioning of material constraints.

A first important step towards a more material approach is provided by Bourdieu's (1988) sociological analysis of higher education. Bourdieu describes universities as a field in which class structure, power, and a specific form of intellectual habitus intersect each other. Social subjects continuously struggle for power, for scarce resources, and for the 'legitimation of particular definitions and classifications of the social world' (Bourdieu 1988, 23). Bourdieu's goal is to provide a framework that allows the intersection of the individual agency of intellectuals with structural dynamics of the field in order to identify 'the tendency of structures to reproduce themselves by producing agents endowed with the system of predispositions which is capable of engendering practices adapted to the structures and thereby contributing to the reproduction of the structures' (Bourdieu 1977, 487).

As intellectual operators, academics create a form of cultural capital that is subordinate to economic capital, but that allows them to control the 'language' of dominant culture in a society. The possession of such capital places intellectuals in a very specific sphere in the social structure: they belong to the dominant class insofar as they enjoy the privileges derived from the accumulation of cultural capital, while still depending on economic capital. Such a location implies a continuous negotiation for a better exchange rate between these two forms of capital. Both the composition and the amount of capital potentially possessed by agents stratify the field; hence, agents occupy alternatively dominant and subordinate positions.

Bourdieu claims that the monopoly of educational credentials held by academics allows them to both reproduce the value of cultural capital and the existing social structure:

Education is in fact one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a social gift treated as a natural one (Bourdieu 1974, 32).

Another important way in which cultural capital is reproduced is by the naturalization of its epistemological and ontological foundations by

producing *doxa* knowledge, 'an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident' (Bourdieu 1994, 160).

The production of *doxa* knowledge is never completely attained and entails both a level of contestation that Bourdieu defines as *heterodoxa* and its reactionary reaffirmation, defined as *orthodoxa*:

It is only when the dominated have the material and symbolic means of rejecting the definition of the real that is imposed on them through logical structures reproducing the social structures (i.e. the state of the power relations) and to lift the (institutionalized or internalized) censorships which it implies ... that the arbitrary principles of classification can appear as such and it therefore becomes necessary to undertake the work of conscious systematization and express rationalization which marks the passage from *doxa* to orthodoxy. Orthodoxy ... opinion, which aims, without ever entirely succeeding, at restoring the primal state of *doxa*, exists only in the objective relationship which opposes it to heterodoxy (Bourdieu 1977, 169).

The tension between *orthodoxa* and *heterodoxa* reflects the confrontation between established intellectuals who pursue methods of

conserving their positions and subvert intellectuals who challenge the power of the former through subversive strategies.

Furthermore, such a critical relationship between *orthodoxa* and *heterodoxa* also provides a politico-economic explanation related to my considerations on the conditional position of critique. In fact, un-established intellectuals in the field experience a fundamental tension between differentiation and legitimation that reveals the contradictory nature of cultural capital; cultural capital needs both to negate existing knowledge to become desirable (because novelty relates to the progress of knowledge, and because academia lives the enlightenment myth that the best idea will prevail through struggle, so 'novelty' sometimes uncritically translates into 'good'), but also needs validation *vis-à-vis* the established knowledge.

Critique, as scrutiny of the given conditions, tends to problematize the status quo, therefore establishing theories and paradigms dogmatized as *doxa* and reinforced as *orthodoxa*. Such an impasse materializes at the level of reproduction of academic labor and its reliance on accreditation through publications. For instance, in several American 'Research-1' universities, the possibility for a young scholar to attain material stability heavily depends on his/her capability to be tenured. At least in the North American media and communication field, the

area in which the present author moves, most of publications listed in the tenure review process are valued and hierarchically ordered according to a rather problematic criterion; the worthy publications are the ones provided by 'top tiers journals', which are the ones affiliated to the (American) National Communication Association (NCA) press.

The special authority and credit given to NCA publications not only reveal a rather overt ethnocentrism that lies in friction with the alleged universalist ideology of modern universities (*Magna Charta Universitatum* 1988) but also tends to reproduce a conservative dynamic. In fact, the popular argument supporting such an arrangement is that scholarly works 'capitalizable' towards the tenure review are considered significant when published in journals with the highest level rate of rejection. However, the higher rejection rate does not necessarily translate into higher scholarly/ intellectual authority, but it may reflect instead the systemic tendency of most American institutions to adopt the same criteria— i.e. only NCA journals count as top tiers for tenure review—and therefore most people, as workers seeking more stability through tenure or academic recognition, compete to publish in those journals.

Summing up, a first step to evaluate the possibility of intervention for the intellectual integrated in aca-

demia is to go beyond the idealized conceptualization of the university as a retreated-from-the-worldly sphere in which one can cultivate ideas based on pure vocation and disinterested ideals. Thus, the just mentioned example was meant to describe an environment in which the intellectual's capacity to perform social critique and intervention is highly conditioned by a politico-economic system which reproduces itself by *orthodoxa*. And critique, as critique of the given, tends to consistently conflict with such force.

In the following section, the paper will explore another important aspect affecting the capability of intervention and activism: the theoretical assumptions of critique. In fact, behind activism and intervention lie specific assumptions about a conception of history and a role of the subject, according to which the latter is assumed to actively act upon the former. In relation to that, the paper will shed light on how the adoption of specific epistemological and ontological positions substantially diminishes the role of the subject in making history, therefore bringing social change.

The Negation of the 'Historic Subject'

In the specific field of communication studies, the idealization of the intellectual manifests itself with the emergence of rhetoric of critique. That is a meta-discourse (Shugart 2003) that instead of exploring the

practical implications of critique, celebrates its own discourse. Such a discourse is inhabited by the exhortations of scholars such as Ramie Mckerrow (1989) advocating a critique of the discourse of the powerful, and Kent Ono and John Sloop (1995) encouraging greater focus on the discourse of the weak. One plausible reason for such a rhetorically-centered understanding of critique may be found in the specific elements of an ontological and epistemological framework that trades the agency of the historical subject for discursive determinations. Accordingly, in this section, I explore how the consistent embracement in the last decades (Cloud 2006) of the thought of specific post-structuralist authors, has importantly contributed to create a theoretical environment that prevents intervention because of how the relationship between the subject, meaning, and historical agency is conceived. For this reason, I first briefly describe how Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida conceptualize the subject. I then address articulation theory as a theory of signification and social determination, which I think exemplifies the impact of such a mode of thinking in critical cultural studies in general, and in communication more specifically.

From Representation to Signification

From a communication studies perspective, a significant portion of the post-structuralist tradition works

with the assumption that there is no direct relationship between signifier and signified and between linguistic representational power and the reality represented. It problematizes 'language' as a representation of both thought and reality, and thus rejects meaning as a given and describes meaning as the product of the different relations between signs. As William Riordan (2008) observes, signs do not connect a word to a material referent, but instead connect a concept to a language. Therefore, as a system of pure relations of difference, a sign signifies, rather than represents, reality. In this section, the paper offers a brief account of the consistent tendency to privilege the assumption that meaning resides in the structure or organization of language, as can be found in the positions of thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida and Stuart Hall.

Foucault (1972) understood discourse as a framework through which one can historicize powerful claims of truth such as the ontological foundation of the subject:

Discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined (Foucault 1972, 60).

Foucault tackles the status of the subject by both undermining a

teleological understanding of history and the possibility of an objective knowledge. One rather eloquent example appears in Foucault's (1973) account of the parricide case of Pierre Rivière by analysing documents from Rivière's trial as well as Rivière's personal reflections on his life. Foucault's conclusions focussed not so much on the historic subject (Pierre Rivière) but on the particular discursive practices that embodied the subject Rivière. Discourse constitutes, disciplines and enables Rivière, to the point that his story is not about the subject but a 'battle among discourse, through discourses' (Foucault 1973, *iii*). As a result, the individual becomes an empty region determined by the intersection of discourses.

Then, in his late work, Foucault shifts from linguistic to power determinism; the subject seems to acquire more agency, but only within the limits of the irreducible framework of power, as the concept of resistance demonstrates. Foucauldian power is so ubiquitous and all-encompassing that resistance can only take place in a framework of power: 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Foucault 1976, 95). Thus, as Anthony Giddens claims, for Foucault, power is the real subject of history (Giddens 1984, 80). However, such an anti-humanist approach does not necessarily annihilate the subject, but rather immobi-

lizes it. In fact, power and the subject operate in a dialectical relationship. '[T]he exercise of power continually transforms a diagram's mechanisms of power, yet is only possible through the utilization of those same pre-existing mechanisms' (Foucault 1976, 85). However, such dialectics does not move through positive syntheses as in the Marxist tradition but remains paralyzed in a stall.

If Foucault celebrates the death of the subject, Derrida radically decentres it through deconstruction as well as dismantles the ground on which people can meaningfully act. On the one hand, the subject comes under scrutiny as another grand narrative:

What differs? Who differs? What is *différance*? if we accepted this form of the question, in its meaning and its syntax ('What is?' 'Who is?' 'What is that?') we would have to conclude that *différance* has been derived, has happened, is to be mastered and governed on the basis of the point of a present being as a Subject, a who (Derrida 1991, 65).

On the other hand, Derrida carries out an important attack against the epistemological and ontological basis of action:

Within the metaphysics of presence, within philosophy as knowledge of the presence of the object, as the being-before-oneself of knowledge in consciousness

the history of being as presence, as self-presence in absolute knowledge, as consciousness of self in the infinity of parousia – this history is closed. The history of presence is closed, for history has never meant anything but the presentation [Gegenwärtigung] of being, the production and recollection of beings in presence, as knowledge and mastery (Derrida 1973, 102).

Derrida intends to replace ontological presence with 'hauntology,' an experience that is not open to the present, but is rather linked to the past or possibly the future; as he writes, 'No *différance* without alterity, no alterity without singularity, no singularity without the here-and-now' (Derrida 1994, 30). From such a perspective, Derrida criticizes the remnants of metaphysics in structuralism – the unifying principle as characterized within the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss. A closed, unified structure fixes meaning, according to original structuralist theory, but for Derrida, this structuring principle simply vanishes.

Within this system, the human agent remains incapable of discerning reality and acting upon given circumstances because any system of reference (such as language) 'is constituted "historically" as a weave of differences' (Derrida 1982, 12). In this sense, Derrida's thought seems much more concerned with the structural rules regulating the

ground of activity of the subject rather than the subject itself. Whereas the subject may have a place within the landscape of action, it is very difficult to determine what that role in terms of agency looks like. In fact, '*différance*' posits a moment of presence for the subject, in which the real appears to be accessed in the meaningful connection of the subject's action and the concrete repercussion in social reality. However, such presence is ultimately constantly deferred (Callinicos 2006).

To sum up, Foucault and Derrida have created a theoretical environment that deprives the subject of both knowledge and historical agency. The epistemological break initiated by such a tradition has affected, even more importantly, critical cultural studies through the theory of articulation. Articulation, one of the most generative concepts in contemporary critical cultural studies, refers to an epistemological theory that works as 'a way of thinking the structures of what we know as a play of correspondences, or correspondences and contradictions, as fragments in the constitution of what we take to be unities' (Slack 1996, 113).

Hall (1980) and Ernesto Laclau (1977) provide a contemporary theorization of articulation, but the idea possesses a lineage going back to Louis Althusser (1970), and further back to Marx's (1973) understanding of mediation but a considerable distance from the original conceptualization of articulation to its con-

temporary understanding remains in place. Marx, while describing how ideological mediation rules the subordinate class, refers to an 'articulated' model of social dominance and determinism (1973, 64); in contrast, Hall describes articulation as 'a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all times' (Hall 1986, 53).

Althusser (1970) and Laclau (1977) provide the theoretical mediation necessary for the transition between Marx's and Hall's understandings of the concept. Althusser conceptualized 'articulation' by replacing a linear causality with a complex network of contradictory correspondences. More significantly, he upgrades ideology from an epiphenomenal status to serving as the crucial site of social production; by shaping subjects through interpellation, ideology constrains the subject's autonomy and agency: 'Ideology interpellates individuals as Subjects' (Althusser 1970, 170). Althusser claims that the idea of oneself as a Subject, author of your own destiny, is an illusion fostered by ideology because history is a process without subject.

In this respect, Laclau (1977) builds on both Althusser's ideological turn and on an idealist understanding of Gramsci's concept of hegemony. He formulates a theory of articulation in which discourse becomes both the level in which class interests and class antagonism materialize themselves, and the ground upon which hegemony is construct-

ed, maintained, and contested. In other words, social reality does not exist independently from the way it is discursively constructed: 'the main consequence of a break with the discursive/extra discursive dichotomy is the abandonment of the thought/reality opposition' (110). Hegemony, for Laclau and Mouffe (1985), seems to be examined more for its openness, exposure to challenge and instability, than for its constitutive capability of reproducing an existing social order. In fact, both authors expand the Derridean deconstructive principle according to which reality never accomplishes 'closed and fully constituted totality' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 106) because such reality is consistently subverted by the inherent tendency of signification to transcend any semantic limitations.

Finally, Hall turns the metaphor of articulation almost into its negation (Slack 1996). As Shane Gunster underscores (Gunster 2005, 180), Hall jumps from the position of Raymond Williams (1977) and Edward Thompson (1964), which retains a strong sense of social determination between social practice and social position, to the post-structuralist paradigm, that sees the real as mediated by ideology with no required correspondence between the parts and the social whole:

the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not neces-

sary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? The so-called 'unity' of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary 'belongingness.' The 'unity' which matters is a linkage between the articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected (Hall 1996, 141).

Articulation as conceptualized by Hall's approach resonates with Derrida's signification. No required correspondence between the representation and the meaning of the fragment exists, because the latter can attach to any structure of signification, thus creating the articulation of a myriad of factors that interact in complicated and contradictory ways.

Concluding this section, the assessment of the relationship between theory and praxis for the sake of critique must include the problem of what a theory can and cannot do. Assuming that practical intervention requires the critical work of the intellect that determines 'what is to be done,' then what is required is an epistemology and ontology that can identify the real, a stable ground capable of guaranteeing a meaningful correspondence between our purposeful actions and their outcomes.

Instead, the authors just reviewed, with their discursive understanding of reality and its semantic indeterminacy, dissolve individual and social determination into open semiosis.

In order to exemplify the concrete implications of such a theoretical environment, I would like to discuss how, via the New Social Movements perspective, such a mode of doing critique understands Occupy Wall Street and its agency.

Post-structuralist Elements of 'Occupy' Social Mobilization

The current dominant discourse on social mobilization represents a concrete ground where the limitations of the aforementioned perspectives on envisioning transformative praxis become evident. Via the theoretical perspective popularly defined as New Social Movements, such a tradition has affected the way social movements and their agenda are conceptualized. After a brief contextualization of the New Social Movement approach, I provide the specific example of the existing narratives on Occupy Wall Street (OWS), and will show how the agency of the movement is reduced to strategies of discursive construction and interruption.

The discourse of newness of the so-called New Social Movements perspective derives from the assumption that in the last decades, capitalist societies have gone through drastic changes extensively affecting states, markets, civil so-

ciety and the way labor and value are conceptualized. For instance, post-structuralist thinkers such as Maurizio Lazzarato (1986), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) and Paolo Virno (2004) have shifted the analysis of contemporary capitalism from empirically grounded categories such as capital, labor and commodity-object, to cognitive capital, 'immaterial labor,' and the 'commodity-sign.'

Such a narrative of profound historic changes has stimulated a reconceptualization of the meaning of social movements, which started to be referred to as New Social Movements, a new paradigm for social action. The old paradigm is associated with movements identifiable as socio-economic groups, demanding economic growth and distribution of material resources; emphasizing freedom and equality; and assessing a political agenda through political party (Offe 1987). The new paradigm focuses on movements formed by diverse socio-economic strata (Klandermans and Oegema 1987); mobilized by symbolic and cultural factors appealing to what has been defined as 'identity politics' (Melucci 1989); tending to frame actions in terms of further democratization of society (Larana 1993); privileging informality and spontaneity; and emphasizing unsettled protest politics based on demands formulated predominantly in negative terms, without a clear ideological characterization

(Cohen 1985).

As a whole, the idea of New Social Movements relies on the assumption of an epistemological break often enabled by the post-structuralist emphasis on discursive practices which implies a turn from material concerns—such as labor and wellbeing—to symbolic ones (Swords 2007), and the adoption of language-based forms of contestation of codes in highly mediated societies (Gitlin 1980). This body of research is thus prevalently informed by social constructionist principles of the post-structuralist tradition which emphasizes the role that discursive processes play in producing our understandings of people, issues, and events (Edelman 1988).

Such a new perspective on social mobilization abandoned the emphasis on class structure analysis and the emphasis on categories such as labor or capital (Larana, Johnston and Gusfield 1994). It tends to assume a substantial and epochal difference between the historical context of 'old' and 'new' social movements. These scholars also place themselves in overt opposition to what they consider they alter: namely, orthodox Marxism. Thus, as David Plotke (1995) observes, this perspective develops by presenting an obliged choice between two poles: to embrace orthodox Marxism, or to reverse its terms completely.

More or less explicitly informed by such assumptions, several in-

tellectuals and commentators have recently intervened to endorse Occupy Wall Street (hereafter OWS). The movement started its 'occupation' on 17 September 2011, when a diffuse group of activists organized a protest called 'Occupy Wall Street' and camped in Zuccotti Park, a privately owned park in New York's financial district. Influenced by similar initiatives in Northern Africa and Western Europe (Kerton 2012; Castañeda 2012), 'Occupiers' were protesting against the corruption of the democratic process due to social inequality, corporate greed, and the erosion of life opportunities for the great majority of the population—as one of the most repeated group's slogans, 'we are the 99 per cent,' clearly asserted.

A brief survey of examples of commentaries about OWS provides a sense of the possibilities for agency in post-structuralist thought. Most of the recommendations, as Cloud (2006) suggests, can be defined as 'micro-strategies of discursive interruption' (Cloud 2006, 236) or of discursive construction. In other words, it is assumed that power is omnipresent, diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and regimes of truth, consistently under negotiation (Foucault 1991). Power is discursively constructed and can be discursively disrupted by the action 'of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time'

(Rabinow 1991, 75).

For instance, Judith Butler, on 2 October 2011, stated in front of OWS participants that 'we are assembling in public, we are coming together as bodies in alliance in the street and in the square, we're standing here together making democracy in acting the phrase, "We The People"' (quoted in Taylor and Gessen 2012, 193). What is exactly the level of realization of people's sovereignty represented by the expression, 'We the People' that Butler describes? In her book *Excitable Speech* (1997), Butler considers resistance to be the equivalent to the margins created by the instability of discourses; such margin can be capitalized through performative action.

Accordingly, Butler invites OWS to express the sovereignty of the people by the material and symbolic presence of their own bodies. But the materiality serves only the objective to reproduce a discourse of power. In line with such a position, in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997), drawing on Foucault, Butler claims that:

power imposes itself on us, and weakened by its force, we come to internalise or accept its terms. Power, that first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity. It is the internalisation of the "discourse" of power that cre-

ates the Subject. Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse (Butler 1997, 2).

Slavoj Žižek, several days before Butler's statement, compared Occupy to the 'Red Ink,' a metaphor to express the movement's capability to give voice to discontent:

'This is how we live. We have all the freedoms we want. But what we are missing is red ink: the language to articulate our non-freedom. The way we are taught to speak about freedom— war on terror and so on—falsifies freedom' (quoted in Taylor and Gesen 2012, 67).

Therefore, according to Žižek, the role of Occupy is understood as giving voice to discontent rather than acting upon the causes for such dissatisfaction. Both Butler's and Žižek's interventions exemplify an understanding of agency that is supposed to translate into social change in virtue of its discursive performativity. However, emancipation-from-domination and 'resistance' to it should not be conflated (Couzens-Hoy 2005); they are certainly linked but the former does not necessarily follow the latter.

Certainly, Butler and Žižek do not share the same notion of discursive performativity as they clearly expressed in their publication coauthored with Laclau (2000). However,

in the same publication they also reveal a convergence into a ground in which social movements such as OWS would be placed as disempowered historic subjects. On the one hand, Butler understands OWS's agency as Foucauldian resistance which is constituted and determined by power, therefore it cannot escape the reproductive logic of the latter. On the other hand, Žižek believes that action of social movement should act beyond existing power logic; however, as Laclau commented in the same publication, he never really specifies how radical action would materialize, leaving the promise of praxis unfulfilled.

Similar approaches can be found by looking at the blogs of the 'Occupy' section on the American news website *Huffington Post*. It is remarkable to observe how most commentators (including several scholars and activists) consistently frame OWS's agency and its victories in discursive terms. I report here some of the most significant examples. Greg Ruggiero, acknowledging the success of OWS (30 April 2012), claims that 'Occupy has changed the national conversation, and it is important to acknowledge all the people who camped out, marched or went to jail to help make it happen'. Max Berger (4 May 2012) argues that 'Occupy transformed the public debate by naming the problem – inequality of wealth and power – and the cause – the power of Wall Street.' Nicholas Mirzoeff (9

September 2012), communications scholar, defines OWS's agency as 'to walk asking questions. And it's ok to get lost.'

Rebecca Solnit (17 September 2012), scholar and activist, relativizes the idea of the goals of social transformation of the society by reducing them to subjective positions: 'What does success mean? Who decides? By what standards? Who decides success? Success has to be decided by those people in struggle, those who are fighting or organizing for something.' Lisa Boyle (26 September 2012) believes that 'Commentators who declare the Occupy movement a failure underestimate the value of protest in a democracy and fail to acknowledge how the Occupy movement has already influenced public and political discourse.'

The New Social Movements' emphasis on discourse as an independent agent of social change is facilitated by authors such as Foucault (1972) according to whom ideas can bring historical transformation, and discourse is the set of linguistic patterns through which these ideas are articulated. Given the assumed discursive nature of a given socio-cultural system, this framework opens up the possibility of conceiving of a social movement as a way to discursively challenge a given regime of truth as semantic and semiotic struggle. The assumption, for such New Social Movements, is that 'collective identity is a product of a

conscious action and the outcome of self-reflection' rather than due to structural factors such as class (Melucci 1992, 10).

The prevailing narrative of OWS reflects the limited conceptual breadth of post-structuralist agency which abandons, for instance, class politics for micro identity politics. The commentaries I reviewed so far express a reticence in engaging with the concrete implication of its own discourse of change. There is then a mismatch between the goals that those commentaries imply for OWS and the means employed to reach them which can be related to what I previously defined as post-structuralism's weak sense of social determination. In other words, it is highly unclear how exactly discourse concretely engages with coercive and violent state apparatus or a political economic system funded on endless capital accumulation.

Trying to give a response to those questions, in the next and final section, I provide the 'pars construens' of the paper by proposing to embrace Gramsci's materialist understanding of the political development of a group in a framework of hegemony, and to revisit the Gramscian figure of the organic intellectual.

Hegemony and the Organic Intellectual

Parallel to the idealization of intellectuals that implies their abstraction from the material production of life of academics, New Social

Movement perspectives tend to overlook the pivotal part that relations of production, class structure and labor theory of value still play in explaining the emergence of dissent and consent, coercion and emancipation. In the case of OWS, many intellectuals informed by post-structuralist principles tend to conceptualize experience of the movement, emphasizing the contingency and the reversibility of cultural practices through strategies of discursive construction, discursive interruption, and cultural re-signification; however, these never completely challenge the structural determinations and productive forces of capital.

Such an approach to transformative praxis should be evaluated at the level effectiveness of social action to enhance social change. Purposeful and practical activism requires an understanding of reality in which the existing correspondence of propositions to their objects and the internal coherence of propositions parallels a representational (rather than re-signifying) correspondence both between language and reality and a given element of such reality and the whole (Carrol 1996). In other words, the intellectual who purposefully orients his/her actions towards an objective such as social change should still assume a degree of social determinism.

Accordingly, informed by a realist framework, he/she assumes that beyond ideology, discourse, and Derridean 'differance' exists a

ground in which events are linked through stable relations of signification and causality. The determinability of signifying and acting has been demonized in much of current social critique as a modernist fairy tale, as a grand narrative, as a principle of oppressive and disciplining power. However, I believe it is a necessary condition in a framework of activism, in which praxis is assumed to be causally linked to given political objectives and that powerful shared meaning can produce a collective (revolutionary) consciousness.

The importance of maintaining a framework characterized by social determinism and causation is expressed by Alex Callinicos when he argues in favour of 'a theory that was simultaneously explanatory and critical' (Callinicos 2005, 247) and Sheila Benhabib when advancing a critique that entails both an 'explanatory-diagnostic and an anticipatory-Utopian moment' (Benhabib 1986, 143). Callinicos and Benhabib point to the importance of a knowledge produced by critical thinking which must address both 'understanding'— the interpretation of the meaning of a given social phenomenon— and 'explanation'— the speculation about the causes of such event. In other words, assuming a 'dialectical interaction between shared experience and interpretation of that experience' (Cloud 2006, 342).

Conversely, when, as per the principles previously mentioned, the subject is deprived of his/her histo-

ry-making role, the idea of activism loses significance. Such a collapsing of reality into discourse may attain/approach Derrida's goal of eliminating the metaphysics of presence (1976) but, in the process, it also dissolves the humanist presupposition that people make history as well as change it. I believe that the Gramscian concept of hegemony has the potential to rescue critique from such a dead end.

The Materialized Intervention

Despite the consistent usage of the concept, scholars have rarely taken advantage of the full range of possibilities of hegemony. In his seminal article, Perry Anderson (1976) pointed out the ambiguities of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* in defining hegemony, which cause its interpretation to move unevenly along the axes of 'force' and 'consent', and 'civil society' and 'state.' In my view, the reason for such lack of definition in relation to those elements may be explained by the fact that hegemony is treated as a specific characteristic of one of those elements, instead of being considered as a quality of the social whole. In this sense, my goal is to revive a holistic understanding that does not lend itself to binaries such as material/symbolic, force/consent, state/civil society (Martinez and Briziarelli 2012, 296).

Such a holistic understanding should be first of all distinguished from hegemony understood as

dominant ideology (Zompetti 1997, 2003). As Cox argues (in Chase-Dunn et al. 1994), ideology, in the general Marxist interpretation, accounts for a functional relationship between base and superstructure or as a relationship between the 'real' and the 'imaginary' (Althusser 1970). Instead, hegemony should be considered as a quality of the social whole, reconciling social existence and consciousness as can be seen in Gramsci's essay of 'Americanism and Fordism' (1971).

Most existing scholarship has prioritized one particular aspect of such a description. For instance, many works have emphasized 'consent' and 'resistance' (e.g., Burnham 1991; Cox 1983; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Martin-Barbero 1983; Zompetti 1997, 2008). Many others have emphasized the coercive aspects and structural limitations (e.g., Anderson 1977; Arrighi 1994; Aune 2004; Taylor 1996). Conversely, I understand hegemony as:

'the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production (Gramsci, 1971, 12).

Such a definition powerfully syn-

thetizes both force and consent, ideas and material existence.

In relation to the socially transformative aspirations of OWS and the privileging of the discursive perspective expressed by an allegedly post-structuralist sensibility, the objective in this paper is not to diminish the fundamental role played by discourse in producing/reproducing dominant narratives, regime of truths, and to ultimately close down the language of change and revolutions. It is rather to advance a view in which radical transformation is intrinsically tied to a wider and more holistic strategy consisting of the establishment of an alternative hegemonic order as Gramsci (1971) understood it.

Such a holistic understanding of hegemony may be beneficial to the way we approach a social movement such as OWS and the way intellectuals can contribute to envision and bring social change. Gramsci is convinced that a movement can radically transform a given society only by establishing an alternative hegemonic order which means acting both on its consensual and its coercive elements. Accordingly, he conceptualizes the political path of a group that seeks hegemony by the definition of a specific objective, the construction of a historic bloc, a 'synthesis of economic, political, intellectual, and moral leadership' (Gramsci 1971, 181).

Gramsci identifies three stages of political development for a group

that aims at the formation of a historic bloc. In the first stage, which he names 'economic-corporate,' people associate as a function of self-interest, recognizing that they need the support of others in order to retain their own security—as in the case of a trade union. In the second stage, 'Economic and social consciousness,' the group members become aware that there is a wider field of interests and that there are others who share certain interests with them and will continue to share those interests into the foreseeable future. It is at this stage that a sense of solidarity develops, but this 'solidarity' is still only on the basis of shared economic interests, and not on a common worldview. As Gramsci puts it, '... consciousness is reached of the solidarity of interests among all the members of a social class – but still in the purely economic field' (Gramsci 1971, 181).

However, consciousness of how they might benefit through the creation of a *new* system is still lacking. In the third, 'hegemonic' stage, the social group members become aware that their interests need to be extended beyond what they can do within the context of their own particular class. What is required to reach this more productive stage, argues Gramsci, is that other groups take the interests of this group as their own.

In relation to such vision of social mobilization, the commentaries I have examined tend to limit OWS to

the Gramscian intermediate stage in which the awareness of belonging to a similar situation (we are the 99%), i.e. an economic consciousness, is not followed by political consciousness: what Gramsci would define as 'a moment of superstructure built out of the base' (Gramsci 1971, 181). In other words, according to the commentaries, OWS should be feeling satisfied within the limits of an expression of discontent and resistance, without considering that resistance to a force does not necessarily translate into emancipation from it. According to Gramsci, such a political movement requires a double engagement at the level of civil society and the state.

For Gramsci, emancipation cannot only take place in the civil society, but requires emancipation from the state as well. Despite the popular belief among post-structuralist thinkers such as Hardt and Negri (2000) about the passing of the Westphalian system, states still represent the most powerful inertial system against social change. The modern state, for Gramsci, represents the coercive aspect of civil society, the powerful crystallization of class hegemony. For this reason, if the Gramscian idea of the 'war of position' (Gramsci 1971, 278) has the merit to discover the battleground of civil society, that does not imply at all the dismissal of the state as a terrain of confrontation. That is the state secures an inequality of production under the law of abstract equality (Bonefeld 2002, 129).

The confrontation I am suggesting with the state can be thought at two different levels: at the representative level of a political organization, and the level of agency of organic intellectuals. Due to the space constraints of the paper, I will concentrate more on the latter as it more directly concerns the subject of this paper: the praxis of intellectuals. As far as political organization is concerned, OWS would benefit from the creation of what Gramsci defines as 'Modern Prince' (Gramsci 1971, 253). The modern Prince represents a democratically-oriented central organization that could mediate different ideologies re-united under the 'historic bloc' represented by 'we are the 99%.'

Since, as Anderson claims, 'hegemony, although ethical-political, must be ultimately based on the economic function performed by the fundamental social group in production' (Anderson 1977, 19), the mediation of the 'Modern Prince' can intervene by bridging the sphere of production with the rest of social life. Similarly to the function of the proletarian public sphere (Negt and Kluge 1972), the 'Modern Prince' could mediate and articulate the different positions inside the vast ideological spectrum of the so-called '99%.' More concretely, in the case of OWS such structure could mediate between the structureless and leaderless associational forms of OWS (Gitlin 2012) and the highly hierarchized trade unions, allegedly their most proximate and relevant

ally. It could facilitate the 'chain of equivalence' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) between different groups and conceptually different concerns.

As already mentioned, the second level in which the state should be engaged involves more directly the possible intervention of academics who, once they are demystified of the role of the intellectual above the parts, and have acknowledged their condition as workers, could start operating as organic intellectuals.

Hall (1992), recalling the political commitment of British Cultural Studies, sheds light on the problem of re-contextualizing the Gramscian figure of the organic intellectual in different historical times: 'We were organic intellectuals without any organic point of reference; organic intellectuals with a nostalgia or will or hope [...] that at some point we would be prepared in intellectual work for that kind of relationship, if such a conjuncture ever appeared' (Hall 1992, 282).

So, what does it mean for an intellectual to be 'organic' in the current settings? Can we still conceptualize in the current division of labor and relations of production an intellectual defined by its class origin (Eyeman 1994; Karabel 1976; Said 1994; Sassoon 2000)? According to Gramsci (1971), the main difference between traditional and organic intellectuals is that the former aims at a universal and trans-historical knowledge and the latter at a socially grounded kind of knowledge.

In many ways, the idealized aspirations of intervention earlier mentioned reproduce the position of a traditional intellectual who, assuming to stand above society due to his/her moral virtue, comes down to intervene in human affairs as an Olympic god/dess. Conversely, the organic intellectual becomes the historic expression of a particular social group or strata because he/she embraces the awareness that theory is not for theory's sake but 'is always for someone and for some purpose' (Cox 1981, 128).

In this sense, within the context of the economic crisis, the contradiction that Bourdieu identified in being a 'dominated faction of the dominant class' may better underscore intellectuals' material condition as laborers more than idealized intellectuals and, in turn, help develop a more socially grounded critique because 'the starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is' (Gramsci 1971, 323). The fact that academics are entering the reserve army of labor (Chronicle of Higher Education 2010) and the precariousness of their working positions could foment the feeling of the historically situated unjust rather than the universal a-historic ideal of the traditional intellectual. Thus, replacing the paternalistic idea of intervention from a distance and from above, with intervention from within.

Such a realization could potentially lead to a revisiting of our own identity; instead of understanding ourselves in the liminal position

within the dominant class, academics could identify themselves as exploited knowledge workers (Fuchs 2010) belonging to the post-industrial working class: the multitude (Hardt and Negri 2004). Such a feeling and understanding of the subaltern may originate by what Henry Giroux (2002) describes as the task of taking a critical stance toward our own practice and the practice of others to engage in debate and inquiry. Accordingly, as suggested earlier, the practice of the intellectual inside academia must be materialized rather than idealized.

The organic intellectual operating in present times has several tasks. First of all, as a laborer, he/she needs to work harder than the traditional and orthodox intellectual in order to be at the forefront of theoretical work, because as I tried to show, theory matters as much as practice. Second, the intellectual should mediate consciousness and action. As Cloud (2006) suggests, the intellectual must function as the bridge between the inside and the outside of the university walls, a living mediation between the theoretical consciousness and the empirical grounded reality. Third, the organic intellectual could function similarly to what Gramsci defined as 'integral journalism' not only 'intended to satisfy the immediate needs of its public, but intended to create and develop those needs in order to extend gradually the area of interests of its public' (quoted in Buttigieg 1992, 24).

The public of academicians are certainly students, but also colleagues and neighbors. Therefore, the organic intellectual can operate more directly outside its most immediate sphere of action, namely academia, to mediate transformative praxis of political organization and social movements. Such a function, first of all, implies socializing his/her own cultural capital in order to provide people outside academia with the theoretical and conceptual framework to better understand reality beyond its surface. In fact, our liminal position, far away from the world of production (as traditionally understood) but still retaining the logic of accumulation of (cultural) capital does not simply cripple us, but also allows us to examine such a reality from an inappropriate distance, therefore allowing the moment of estrangement that Bertholt Brecht considered necessary for any ideological critique.

Conclusions

As James Aune points out:

One disturbing feature of academic discussions of ideology or hegemony is a lack of reflexivity. In other words, there is an implicit but unjustified assumption that the academic has somehow escaped the hegemonic processes that influence every-one else. For this reason, critical self-reflection is what I think is first of all needed to understand our won environ-

ment, what Bourdieu calls the 'skhole' (the school) (Aune 2011, 429).

In relation to that, the goal of the paper was to show how praxis inside academia is, on the one hand, conditioned by a political economy of academic production and publication. On the other hand, critique is also conditional upon the embracement of a kind of critique that fuses ideas and action together in the agency of the subject in making history. Rejecting both an idealist understanding of the intellectual and anti-humanist conceptualization of critique, the paper advanced a realist ontology and epistemology of praxis founded on Gramsci's thought.

First of all, by concretely engaging with the academic field and with the forces at play in such field, one can reconcile the intellectual and manual labor of academics. Bourdieu's analysis helped to uncover university intellectuals as subjects in need, operating in a regime of scarcity and asymmetrical power relations. In such an environment, the possibility for critique and intervention are materially constrained by conservative forces of reproduction of the field.

At the same time, critique and activism are also limited by what can and cannot be envisioned in intellectuals' field of thought. In this sense, I have shown how the literary fortune of specific critical approach-

es produce an anti-human ecology, a theoretical environment in which subjects are not guaranteed a collective sharing of the same meanings nor an affectivity of their action. As a consequence, the efforts directed towards purposeful actions get lost in an ever-changing forest of symbols. Such a perspective seems to explain why, when trying to make sense of OWS, many thinkers tend to frame the agency of the movement in ways that hardly touch the material and coercive reproductive system of the society which are dissolved into a discursive cosmology of signs.

Consequently, I argue that a radically holistic understanding of hegemony, dialectically reconciling dualisms, such as symbolic and material, consent and coercion and state and civil society, could potentially provide an adequate vision for radical social change. Such a change can be promoted both outside academia, as belonging to a political group organized in the civil society to form an historic bloc against the state, and as organic intellectuals who do not fight to preserve their cultural capital, but actually try to socialize it in the classroom by bridging abstract consciousness with an empirical one. Unfortunately, I am aware that this is not necessarily a recipe for a successful practice, but at least it offers a critical one: so let's try, let's fail, let's fail again and let's fail better!

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Neoliberalism and Depoliticisation in the Academy: Understanding the ‘New Student Rebellions’

Leon Sealey-Huggins and André Pusey

Since 2009 there has been an upsurge in political activity in and around the UK, as well as in some European and American universities. These ‘new student rebellions’ have displayed levels of radicalism and political activism seemingly unprecedented among recent generations of students. Broadly speaking, the intensification of this activity can be understood as being directly related to ongoing neoliberal reforms of education, a process intensified by the global financial crisis.

In this article we seek to consider some of the detail of the emergence of these rebellions, and argue that they can be interpreted as part of resistance to the neoliberal tendencies in contemporary social life. As such, we argue that a depoliticised tendency accompanies the introduction of, and resistance to, neoliberal mechanisms in Higher Education (HE). As activists in groups who have adopted more creative and explicitly politically antagonistic forms of activism, we suggest that such forms might be more productive arenas for our energies if we want to challenge the neoliberal and depoliticised root causes of these conflicts.

Keywords: Post-politics, Neoliberalism, Higher Education, NUS, Student Protest, Creative Resistance.

The image of the future is changing for the current generation of young people, haunted by the spectre of the ‘graduate with no future’ (Mason 2011, 2012; Gillespie and Habermehl 2012). Gone are the aspirational promises of post-university job security and social mobility. Instead, all that can be secured is a position of permanently repro-

duced precarity (Compagna 2013; Southwood 2011; Standing 2011). Young people are not the only ones facing increasingly precarious futures; current government austerity measures appear to have everyone but the very wealthy in their sights. Recent outbreaks of rioting up and down England appear to indicate a growing disquiet (Bauman 2011;

Harvey 2012; Milburn 2012). In this article, however, we focus mainly on the situation in and around Higher Education, as this is the sector in which we work and where we have had the most experience of recent struggles.

There has been much coverage of the 'new student rebellions' (Solomon and Palmeri 2011; Hancox 2011), with commentators focussing on, variously, 'the violence' of some of the demonstrations, or the new communication technologies being deployed by the activists coalescing around this struggle. In this article, we seek to consider some of the detail of the emergence of these rebellions, and argue that they can be interpreted as part of resistance to the neoliberal tendencies in contemporary social life. As such, we argue that a depoliticised tendency accompanies the introduction of, and resistance to, neoliberal mechanisms in higher education.

The processes of neoliberalisation have been widely discussed elsewhere in relation to different spheres of social life (for instance: climate change in Lohmann 2012; development in Motta and Nilsen 2011; and in terms of 'actually existing neoliberalism' rather than simply neoliberal ideology in Brenner and Theodore 2002a, 2002b). For the purposes of this article we align ourselves with David Harvey's definition of neoliberalism as 'a theory

of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade' (Harvey 2005, 3). Thus, it usually entails '[d]eregulation, privatization, and a withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision' (Harvey 2005, 3).

We begin, therefore, by outlining some of the mechanisms through which the neoliberalisation of UK Higher Education (HE) is occurring, a phenomenon we see as mirroring a wider neoliberalisation and depoliticisation of contemporary social life. We then discuss some of the prominent moments in the aforementioned wave of struggle and look at the role of England's National Union of Students (NUS) and 'student leaders' in furthering depoliticisation. We conclude by exploring some alternative forms of resistance than those which tend to dominate mainstream coverage: those which are based on experiments in trying to bring other forms of education, and society, into being. As participants in groups who have adopted more creative and explicitly politically antagonistic forms of activism, we argue that these might be more productive arenas for our energies if we want to challenge the neoliberal and depoliticised root causes of these conflicts.

Depoliticisation and Neoliberalism within the Academy

The past three years have seen an upsurge in political activity in and around UK universities, and educational institutions more generally. This activity has displayed levels of radicalism and political activism seemingly unprecedented among recent generations of students. Broadly speaking, the intensification of this activity can be understood as being directly related to ongoing neoliberal reforms of education, a process intensified by the global financial crisis.

Universities are currently facing economic instability, debt and an uncertain future. The once popular 'universal' education model is increasingly being undermined by neoliberal reforms aimed at ensuring that market values are better wedded to the working conditions and learning practices of the university (Molesworth et al. 2010), what some have termed 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter and Leslie 1999). Here in the UK, one of the ways this is occurring is through the intensification of metric systems aimed at measuring 'value', including research-auditing exercises such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) (De Angelis and Harvie 2009; Harvie 2000, 2004 and 2005; Gillespie et al. 2011). The REF is accompanied by teaching-auditing mechanisms such as the National Student Survey (NSS), which attempts to use metrics to measure 'the student experi-

ence' in order to enable students, as consumers, to choose the best university (and to discipline academics' teaching work). The neoliberal justification for these mechanisms of measurement is that they will 'drive up standards' and 'improve excellence' (Gillespie et al. 2011). Moreover, there are claims that market competition needs to be better unleashed on the HE sector in order to coerce floundering institutions, their 'dead weight' faculty, and unpopular, or rather unprofitable, subjects. Criticisms are also being voiced over the commodification of knowledge, especially through the various metrics systems such as the REF, and the enclosure of research within exclusive and expensive institutional libraries and publications, or behind electronic gateways such as Ingenta or Cambridge Scientific Abstracts.

The trend towards the implementation of neoliberal principles in HE is exacerbated by proposals outlined in the UK government's 2011 *White Paper on Higher Education* (Department for Business Innovation and Skills 2011). It aims to force competition in universities, with students remodelled as consumers, and unpopular or 'uncompetitive' courses and universities potentially forced into bankruptcy. Despite being filled with contradictions and inconsistencies, the *White Paper* intends to better entrench the neoliberal model of the academy, and in so doing 'is bound to reinforce existing social inequalities' (Colleni 2011).

The neoliberalisation of HE in the UK, and the rise of managerialism in the public sector in general, can be directly linked to the wider emergence of what has been termed the 'post-political', or 'depoliticised', condition of contemporary social life (Swyngedouw 2010; Žižek 2008). According to this thesis, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the disintegration of the Soviet Eastern Bloc, have resulted in a consensus that takes capitalist liberal democracy for granted as *the* legitimate form of social and political organisation. All this is perhaps best summed up by Francis Fukuyama's (1993) infamous 'end of history' claims. Political and ethical questions about how people should live are displaced in this depoliticised context by technocratic and managerial decisions shorn of their political content. As sociologist Slavoj Žižek writes, post-politics 'claims to leave behind ideological struggles and, instead, focus on expert management and administration' (Žižek 2008, 34). This serves to deny the existence of antagonistic social relations and different political interests, resulting in a censure of dissensus. Decisions are supposedly made on the claimed universal basis of efficiency and necessity, taking the market and liberal state for granted. A number of authors have explored the notion of the post-political in relation to climate change activism (see, for instance, Pusey and Russell 2010 and Schelmbach et al. 2012), but here we seek to explore

these ideas in relation to activism around UK Higher Education.

Evidence of the post-political or depoliticised condition is apparent in the claims made by all the major UK electoral parties that the budget deficit *must* be reduced, for instance, with the only disagreement centring on the technicalities of how and where the cuts fall. This then filters through to the HE sector where cuts play out in the culling of unprofitable, and often critical, subjects, a process presented as being driven by economic and administrative necessity rather than politics. This logic is not restricted to the challenges to the public university discussed above, but is even evident in those organisations and institutions apparently charged with resisting the neoliberal attack, such as the National Union of Students (NUS), as we explore further below.

The (Re)emergence of Student Radicalism: Resisting Neoliberal Reforms

The squeeze on HE is, like the crisis of capital itself, impacting upon a range of countries internationally. In Europe, for example, the standardisation of HE, known as the Bologna process, is undermining the sector's autonomy. Fortunately, however, the emerging resistance is similarly international. People as far apart as Chile and Italy are challenging the neoliberal model of the university (Do and Roggero 2009; Aguilera 2012; Zibechi 2012), which is increasingly focused on a

cynical notion of 'employability' and the production of 'skilled' workers to be put to use for the reproduction of capital. The double crisis of the economy and the university made some campuses once again sites of resistance, and it has been argued that the 'new student movement can be seen as the main organized response to the global financial crisis' (Caffentzis 2010). There are many examples globally of this resistance including militant protests and occupations in the United States (US), and in particular California; riots, occupations and blockades in Italy; and strikes and protests in Puerto Rico, more recently involving widespread rioting (After the Fall 2009; Do and Roggero 2009; Fritsch 2008).

Here in the UK, the eruption of dissent in and around campuses in late 2010 was directly linked to the publication of the Browne review into HE funding. The Browne review's publication coincided with the incoming Conservative and Liberal Democratic government's 'Corporate Spending Review' of public finances, which was a manifesto for widespread public sector cuts. This meant that Browne's conclusions – that the cap on tuition fees be raised from £3,300 to £9,000, and market competition further extended into HE – were accompanied by substantial, and arguably unsustainable, cuts to universities' teaching budgets. These changes were further compounded by the withdrawal of the Educational

Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for further education (FE) students. Such changes, combined with a number of key events and actions, have been crucial in the emergence of the 'new student rebellions', and it is to a summary of these that we shall now turn.

Millbank and the Rupturing of Student Apathy

In anticipation of the aforementioned cuts and tuition fee rises, on 10 November 2010 the NUS, jointly with the University and College Union (UCU), held a national demonstration, entitled 'DEMOLition'. The 'Millbank riot', as it was later referred to by some, has been pinpointed by many commentators as a pivotal moment in the re-emergence of radical student protest within the UK (Hansen 2010).

The demonstration had the potential to be just another A-B march in London, and for many, due to a police cordon around Parliament Square, it was. In the event, however, neither the NUS nor UCU were prepared for the scale of either the turnout or militancy on the day. Both of the latter meant that the protests received international coverage, a situation unlikely to have been achieved by a student march alone. A significant number of demonstrators diverged from the official route, ignored NUS stewards and made their way to Millbank Towers, where the Conservative Party headquarters is located. A series of iconic

images were repeated throughout corporate and alternative media outlets, depicting young people dancing and smashing windows, sometimes simultaneously. Hence the 10 November 2010 became infamous for the occupation and smashing up of the Millbank building. Perhaps though, this event at Millbank should be considered pivotal not for the broken windows, but for the apparent rupturing of student apathy, of which the broken plate glass was just a potent symbol.

Important to note is that almost as soon as protesters had entered the Millbank building, the then president of the NUS, Aaron Porter, had condemned them in no uncertain terms, describing the thousands that went to Millbank as 'rogue protesters' (NUS 2010). Although elements of the UCU leadership also criticised protesters – for example, General Secretary Sally Hunt stated that 'the actions of a mindless and totally unrepresentative minority should not distract from today's message' (UCU 2010) – others were supportive, with academics publishing letters in national newspapers supporting the students.¹

Previous to the DEMOLition demonstration, left-led groups, such as National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC)², had already called for a follow up day of action on 24 November 2010 in order to maintain momentum. Post-Millbank, however, the NUS refused to endorse this demonstration. Despite

this, and undeterred by the criminalisation and demonisation of student protesters, 25,000 people still turned out on the 24 November to participate in simultaneous protests in a number of cities across the country. Of particular significance were the walkouts staged by thousands of sixth form and FE college students, many of whom risked direct financial penalty for protesting through the removal of their EMA for that week. The participation of this new wave of young people positively shifted the dynamics of struggle, as had happened with the anti-war protests a decade earlier.

A demonstration was also called for 9 December 2010. It was dubbed Day X by some, as it was the day of the parliamentary vote on increasing university fees. Many of the twenty-seven university occupations were still ongoing, and a massive demonstration in London took place. Despite this, a 'yes' vote for increasing fees was returned in parliament; meanwhile, outside the police were 'kettling' demonstrators and charging them on horses.³

In considering the prospects and potential for the development of these rebellions against the further entrenchment of neoliberalism, it is crucial to consider the institutions that surround them, and in some instances, the attempts to contain them. Among those who might stand to benefit from the image of the student movement as a phenomenon limited to struggles about fees and

cuts, rather than about concerns with the form of education more generally, and whose actions partly serve to try and restrict it to such, are the NUS.

The NUS as a Depoliticised Institution

As we have already discussed above, Aaron Porter and the NUS leadership condemned the protesters at Millbank voraciously and this was met with a barrage of personal criticism of Porter, and the NUS more generally. The slogan 'Aaron Porter you don't represent me' began to circulate, and a campaign to remove him as the head of the NUS was begun. Porter made things worse when he made the statement in a *Guardian* newspaper interview that 'while I disagree with tuition fees, they are not the biggest evil in society' (Aitkenhead 2011), thus showing a distinct lack of empathy with the student struggle, a struggle that he was supposed to be heading as president of the NUS! It is hard to imagine the head of another Trade Union making a similar statement about redundancies or a decline in working conditions within its sector at any time during their leadership, let alone at a high point in struggle.

The NUS leadership seemed to have miscalculated the levels of anger and militancy among the constituent they supposedly represent. Perhaps this is itself suggestive of the fact that there are a consider-

able number of students who do not want to be represented by such an institution, or who merely see the NUS as largely irrelevant.

Failure to realise the capacity of one's own membership could be perceived as the NUS simply failing as an organisation in its relationship to the grassroots. However, there is a more deep rooted problem, with the NUS having been criticised from some quarters as being too close to the Labour party, and hence reluctant to organise any demonstrations against the implementation of fees when Labour were in office. Indeed, the 'DEMOLition' march was the first protest the NUS had organised against fees at any point in its history. Moreover, no national demonstrations were organised by the NUS after DEMOLition, showing a failure to build on the momentum of numbers and the energy of the day.

Apparently, then, the NUS aims to mobilise students to be politically active only up to a certain point, but not beyond that. Standing for student executive positions in elections and taking part in debates about issues affecting students and the world at large are to be encouraged. Hot topics on campus can range from whether bottled water / The Sun / Nestle products should be sold in Union shops, through to more self-interested concerns such as access to cheap laptops and cheaper drinks. However, as has been demonstrated by Aaron Porter's condemnation of militant

students, the NUS power structure is undermined if a self-organised, mobilised and militant student body is willing, able and empowered to take action outside of its limited and limiting parameters.

In an analysis echoing the aforementioned account of the depoliticised dimensions of neoliberal capitalist society, a Dublin-based group, the Provisional University (2010), have described students' unions as part of the university 'depoliticisation machine':

The Students' Unions monopolise politics within the universities leading to a general disgust with politics among students. The election campaigns for the unions are parodies of general elections; the candidates present the most depoliticised, technocratic image of politics possible. This administrative vision of politics reduces politics to a series of petty goals (open the library for 5 min longer etc). When they're finished trivialising politics through these petty demands, they organise (again U.S. style) discounts for students with 'leading brands' like Topman and Burger King.

This 'depoliticisation machine' can go further and actively undermine struggles on campus. Here at our own institution, the University of Leeds, the Leeds University Students' Union ran a campaign in early 2010 erroneously titled

'Education First', which encouraged students to email their tutors to apply pressure on them not to strike. This was all done with the aim of defending a narrowly defined 'student experience', which appeared to limit the interests of students to the largely exaggerated effects of strike action on students undergoing assessments that year, rather than the wider effects of cuts and restructuring on the long-term 'student experience' (for a contemporary report on this campaign from activists, see Eastman 2010).

The Trade Union Council (TUC) 'March for the Alternative' demonstration in March 2011, which included a large constituent of protesters who had been involved in the 'new student rebellions', was arguably another example of this depoliticisation. Reacting against the sterilised, anti-antagonistic imagery of the demo, the 'Deterritorial Support Group', who produce propaganda around anti-cuts themes, remarked that 'when creating their images for the march, the TUC chose to use imagery that was non-confrontational, apolitical and middle-of-the-road. The result was painful – two hands, palms outstretched in cynical, politically neutral colours, looking like a mugging victim desperately trying to defend their face' (Nesbit 2010). In response, the DSG produced their own amended imagery with much more confrontational slogans including 'strike for the alternative', 'occupy for the alternative', and

'kick off for the alternative'. These images went viral as people began to use them as profile pictures on

Facebook and other social networking sites.



Source:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:March_For_The_Alternative_logo.png



Source:
<http://deterritorialsupportgroup.wordpress.com/page/4/>

All of this is indicative of what we think is a broader, more widespread disillusionment with the depoliticising effects of neoliberalism on those organisations and institutions which claim to represent people. It can be argued that this sense of disillusionment goes beyond reformist organisations such as the NUS and extends to self-proclaimed radical and revolutionary organisations on the left. Commentator Laurie Penny hints at this in her comments that 'the old organisational structures of revolution – far-left parties, unions and splinter groups – are increasingly irrelevant to the movement that is building across Europe' (Penny quoted in Nesbit 2010). So too does BBC's *Newsnight* economics editor, Paul Mason (2011), who states that 'horizontalism has become endemic because technology makes it easy: it kills vertical hierarchies spontaneously, whereas before – and the quintessential experience of the 20th century – was the killing of dissent within movements, the channelling of movements and their bureaucratisation'.

Candidates for the student left did not fare well in union elections, yet students are taking part in politics through demonstrations on wider issues. All of this suggests that there is indeed a disconnect between the political sentiments of many students, and the depoliticised form which student unions can take. Indeed, this resurgence in student activism has had impacts

elsewhere. The aforementioned TUC 'March for the Alternative' contained a sizeable student contingent, for instance. It is also hard to imagine the actions of the popular anti-cuts group UK Uncut as having such a high resonance among wider publics had the skirmishes of the 'student movement' not taken place previously. Indeed, outside of the confines of depoliticised institutions, many students and other activists are taking part in creative, self-directed activities, both widening the parameters of the political debate *and* engaging in the co-creation of alternatives which attempt to bring other forms of education, and society, into being. It is to these experiments that we shall now turn our attention, considering whether their more explicitly political character might serve as an antidote to the depoliticised, depoliticising and disconnected institutions mentioned previously.

Creative Resistance and Experiments in Alternatives

Building on the rich history of radical pedagogical perspectives, experiments and practices (Freire 1996; Giroux 2011; Haworth 2012; hooks 1994; Illich 1995; Ranciere 1991; Rose 2010; Suisa 2010), and in contrast to the depoliticised approaches taken by the NUS, there are an increasing number of projects which display quite different ambitions. These are often aimed at challenging the underlying logics

of neoliberalism themselves (for example, Meyerhoff 2011; Motta 2011; Shantz 2009, 2011). In Leeds, for example, we have both been involved in a project called the 'Really Open University' (or ROU). The ROU both partly pre-empted, and emerged in response to, the attacks on public education outlined above. Hence the ROU was established simultaneously to resist cuts, critique the neoliberal model of education and engage in experiments in critical and participatory education (ROU 2010). One of the central aims of the ROU when it was established was to make the university a site of political antagonism once again. All of these aims expand well beyond those of institutional actors such as the NUS.

In addition to campaigning on campus, the ROU distributed critical analyses in the form of a newsletter entitled the *Sausage Factory*, kept a blog which drew together information about education struggles alongside analysis and critique, and facilitated events where participants were invited to critically question the forms education takes. The ROU was an attempt to break with the insularity of the university and student politics more generally. In asking 'what can a university do?', it therefore involved a more creative politics than the mere reactive position of being 'anti-cuts'. The group's byline 'strike, occupy, transform!' represented the desire for direct action taken not to preserve the existent,

but to act within the crisis to *transform* the existent (for a fuller analysis see Noterman and Pusey 2012; Pusey and Sealey-Huggins, forthcoming), to experiment with alternative educational forms to transform the ways in which education is conducted. One of the ways it did this was through the organisation of a three-day event entitled 'Reimagine the University', which combined a range of workshops and seminars held across both Leeds Metropolitan University and Leeds University on topics as diverse as 'gainful unemployment', academic metrics systems and student struggles in Italy. Another example was the Space Project, a six-month long project to take the pedagogical aims of the group outside the university, supported by funding gained by someone involved with the ROU to establish an educational space close to the city centre. The project incorporated a radical library; a collaboration with the Leeds International Film Festival running a fringe event showing radical films; and a wide range of talks and workshops, including the Marxist theorist John Holloway discussing his book *Crack Capitalism* (2010), an Egyptian anarchist journalist, Jano Charbell, talking about the Arab Spring, and Dave Douglass, a National Union of Minors delegate and participant in the 1984–5 miners' strike reflecting on his experiences of that struggle. There were also several on-going study and reading groups on eco-

conomic crises, radical pedagogy and a number of activists groups using the space for their own meetings, including Leeds Occupy.

Elsewhere, there are an encouragingly wide range of similar and related experiments with alternative forms of protest and education. These can be seen to coalesce around a deeper critique over the role and form universities and Higher Education take. This is apparent in the radical street theatre and reclaiming of space, or '*dé-tournement*', of the University of Strategic Optimism (USO), who have held lectures decrying the marketisation of Higher Education in places as diverse as banks and supermarkets. It was also apparent in the occupied spaces of the Really Free Skool in London, who gained notoriety in the right-wing press for squatting some high profile empty exclusive properties – most notably one of film director Guy Ritchie's houses – turning them over to self-organised pedagogical projects (BBC 2011). Meanwhile, in Dublin the Provisional University have begun a campaign to have disused property, which is under government ownership, turned over for use in a common educational project. Elsewhere, in Lincoln, a group have established a Social Science Centre, to be run along co-operative lines, describing it as 'a new model for higher and co-operative education' (Neary 2010; 2011a). Interesting things are also happen-

ing *within* the University of Lincoln. A project called 'Student as Producer' is being rolled out across the whole institution. The project transforms the undergraduate curriculum to be modelled on research-based and 'research-like' teaching, engaging students in collaborative learning with other students and academics (Neary and Winn 2009; Neary 2011b). In addition, the Occupy Wall Street protests that spread beyond the US included a strong pedagogical element, which was perhaps most explicit with the development of the 'Tent City University' at the St Pauls Cathedral camp in London (Occupy LSX). This temporary autonomous 'university' included talks from both activists and scholars, including Doreen Massey, John Holloway and Massimo De Angelis. Indeed, some commentators have suggested that this aspect of the protest was 'one of the most remarkable aspects of Occupy London' (Walker 2012). After the camp was evicted, this project continued to take new forms through projects such as the 'Bank of Ideas', involving the occupation of an empty Union Banks of Switzerland (UBS) office complex in the London borough of Hackney, and its transformation into an autonomous educational space.

Much of the frenetic activity taking place around university struggles in 2010 and Occupy protests of 2011 has subsided to some extent, at least within the UK. However, there has been a resurgence of

activity at the time of writing, with an eight-week occupation at the University of Sussex over privatisation and outsourcing. The occupation was evicted by a combination of over 100 police officers, private security and bailiffs (Jamieson and Malik 2012).

The key point to take from this is that there are people who recognise that the current institutionalised forms of education are severely limited by their competitiveness, and the individualisation, elitism, and inequality they reproduce. With the recent increase of fees here in the UK, the neoliberal model of the university, which produces at once 'skilled' and proletarianized workers to be employed in the reproduction of capital, needs to be challenged more than ever. For some of the reasons outlined above, organisations such as the NUS both seem too limited in their capacity and scope to be able to respond to these challenges.

Importantly, what many of the attempts at creative resistance and the creation of alternative pedagogical spaces have in common is their recognition of the systemic nature of the crises facing not just students, universities or the public sector in general, but the very 'commons' upon which life depends, and the failure of existing, depoliticised, institutions to combat this (see Springer 2011 for more on these kinds of activities). There is, therefore, a growing recognition

that the same neoliberal 'logics' which demand that education serve the needs of markets are fuelling socio-ecological degradation, precipitating global financial crises and excluding the majority of the world's population from participation in how the world is run. This kind of substantive analysis contrasts starkly with the depoliticised and top-down approaches of the NUS and others.

It is worth pointing out that we are not suggesting that taking part in organising demonstrations and strikes and resistance in the workplace is not important, but we do feel that critical questions must be asked of the role played by organisations such as students' unions, and the modes of struggle advocated by them. We would argue that tactics developed in industrial contexts need to be carefully re-examined in the context of post-industrial workplaces if they are going to be met with success (see ROU 2011).

Towards New Institutions?

In sum, we have seen how decisions and statements made by the NUS have perhaps aided the disillusionment of students with existing institutions that supposedly act in their favour. We therefore contend that the NUS has acted to delimit the possibilities for escalating the struggle in such a way as to constitute genuine challenges to both the more immediate issues of the introduction of fees and the removal of the EMA, and a wider struggle over

austerity measures, let alone a more anti-systemic challenge to the neo-liberal university. We also saw how this delimitation of struggle by students' unions is part of the university 'depoliticisation machine', reflecting a wider depoliticised context where politics is stripped of antagonism.

Our exploration of some of the groups seeking to experiment with alternative forms of education discussed some of the ways the critiques implicit within these groups are manifested through their practice. Moreover, many of these projects are engaging not just in a critique of the existing institutions we have, in particular the university, but are, arguably, engaged in the beginnings of the co-creation of new forms of institution, what some have labelled an 'institution of the common' (Neary 2012; Roggero 2011).

This project is fragmented, but it seems that the current crisis of education is producing movements *against* education cuts and increasing fees, *and* a desire to move beyond the current neoliberal model of the university; indeed Swain (2013) has gone as far as asking 'could the free university movement be the great new hope for education?', because, as the Provisional University (2010) state, 'we're not *at* the university, we *are* the university'.

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Endnotes

- ¹ See <http://teneleventen.wordpress.com/2010/11/11/sign-the-unity-statement/>.
- ² See <http://anticuts.com/>.
- ³ For more on police tactic of 'kettling' in this context, see Rowan (2010). For a fuller overview and analysis of these events, see Ibrahim (2011).

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Researching DIY Cultures: Towards a Situated Ethical Practice for Activist-Academia

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The empirical study of DIY culture and feminist cultural activism is a flourishing interdisciplinary research area particularly in the USA, Canada, Australia and UK. This has enabled a growth in participant-researchers doing research on their own DIY cultures and activist communities of belonging. Tensions occur here for the participant-researcher in relation to conventional data collection methods, ethical and moral decisions and modes of research dissemination. This article develops discussions of dilemmas experienced by the authors during doctoral research projects on DIY punk, roller derby and queer feminist music cultures. We detail the possibilities and tensions met when the participant-researcher encounters existing subcultural theories, ethical codes of practice, data collection methods and the dissemination of academic research. In addition we offer insights into the under-documented emotional impacts and moments of crisis the participant-researcher needs to attend to when carrying out research with/in personal and political communities of belonging. In conclusion, we offer a series of recommendations for a situated ethical practice for research with/in DIY cultures in relation to engaged data generation methods, flexible ethical thinking and communities of practice.

Keywords: DIY Culture, Feminist Cultural Activism, Research Ethics, Participant-Researcher, Activist-Academia.

Doing Activist-Academia: Key Dilemmas of the DIY Researcher-Participant

The academic study of 'DIY culture', 'cultural production', 'cultural activism' and 'cultural resistance' has become a burgeoning interdisciplinary area of interest across

anthropology (Mahon 2000), sociology (Moore 2007), media studies (Duncombe 1997; 2002), graphic design (Triggs 2006), cultural studies (McKay 1998) and popular music studies (Strachan 2007). In general these practices refer to 'culture that is used, consciously or uncon-

sciously, effectively or not, to resist and/or change the dominant political, economic or social structure' (Duncombe 2002, 5). Important feminist interventions in subcultural studies identified the problematic privileging of the public activities of boys and young men (McRobbie and Garber 1976; McRobbie 1980) and opened up attention to the cultural lives of girls and young women. This sub-discipline, often known as 'girls studies', seeks to affirm the political agency and cultural productivity of girls and young women as subjects of critical inquiry (Kearney 2009). Subsequent interest in feminist cultural activism has grown in the US, Canada, UK and Australia (Leonard 1998; Rosenberg and Garofalo 1998; Driscoll 2002; Morris 2008; Kearney 2006; Driver 2007; Downes 2008; Marcus 2010). The study of girls and young women's DIY cultural participations in fanzines and blogs (Zobl 2009; Sabin and Triggs 2000), grassroots sports such as roller derby and skateboarding (Carlson 2010, 2011; Pomerantz, Currie & Kelly 2004; Pavlidis 2012; Pavlidis and Fulagar 2012), and an array of music cultures including riot grrrl, punk, rock and hip hop (LeBlanc 1999; Schippers 2002; Pough 2004; Reddington 2007; Downes 2012) have made important theoretical contributions to the social construction of gender, sexuality and feminism in contemporary society.

This burgeoning academic legitimacy of DIY culture and the cultural

lives of girls and young women has run in parallel with the expansion of the UK higher education system. This has led to an influx of undergraduate and postgraduate students and the University as a space to document and critically interrogate radical lives, histories and cultural practices. Scholars of DIY cultures and radical social movements have acknowledged tensions and contradictions between academic (outsider) and activist (insider) positions (Halfacree 2004; Cresswell and Spandler 2012) and the academic treatment of subcultures has been critiqued by 'punkademics': punk cultural producers who later enter academic worlds (Furness 2012). Furthermore early career activist-academics have found that the conventions of neoliberal higher education institutions limit imagination for radical teaching, research and activism (SIGJ2 2012). However practical guidance or discussion of the ethical and moral dilemmas in making *personal* activist and radical cultures visible within academic structures is limited. In particular, little is currently known about the challenges of the *participant-researcher* of DIY feminist cultural activism: the researcher who conducts research in pre-existing social, personal and activist networks that they have been an active participant in before the opportunity of an academic research project arose. We are not suggesting that the participant-researcher represents a purer 'insider' position, able to access closed DIY

worlds suspicious of academic 'outsiders' and thereby provide more 'authentic' accounts. However the participant-researcher is more likely to encounter tensions in established data collection methods, ethical protocols and modes of research dissemination that arguably constrain accounts of the multiplicity, complexity and contestation at the heart of DIY cultural life.

Recently in the UK events such as 'A Carnival of Feminist Cultural Activism' held in March 2011 at the University of York, 'Researching Feminist Futures' conference held in September 2011 at the University of Edinburgh, and the 'Gender and Subcultures' symposium held in September 2012 at Northumbria University, have provided spaces within which to bring together researchers, academics and post-graduate students engaged in critical inquiries of feminist cultural activism. It is through these spaces that the authors of this article met. In particular, this paper develops on discussions between the authors at the 'Researching DIY Cultures' workshop held as a free event associated with the 'Gender and Subcultures' symposium at Northumbria University.

In accordance with a critical tradition that acknowledges the operation of power within knowledge production and an understanding of knowledge as situated, partial and located (Spivak 1988; Haraway 1988; Foucault 1970), we wish

to make our locations within DIY and academic worlds clear. Julia Downes has been involved in DIY feminist cultural activism since 2002 when she co-founded the DIY queer feminist Manifesta collective in Leeds, UK. This collective, and associated projects and collectives (e.g. Homocrime, Local Kid, FAG club, Ladyfest and Ladies Rock!), became the topic of her doctoral research from 2006–2009. Julia left Manifesta in May 2009 and completed her ESRC-funded doctorate on DIY queer feminist cultural resistance at the University of Leeds in 2010. She currently organises DIY queer feminist events in Newcastle upon Tyne as 'even clean hands cause damage' and works as a Research Associate at Durham University. Maddie Breeze's ESRC-funded doctoral research at the University of Edinburgh is an ethnographic exploration of creative, critical and collaborative practice in roller derby. Maddie's research grew out of her involvement with Edinburgh's roller derby league, which she co-founded in 2008. After long periods of recurrent injury Maddie stopped skating in 2011, and left the league in spring 2012. Naomi Griffin is currently undertaking her doctoral research into DIY punk in the North East of England at Northumbria University. Naomi has been involved in DIY punk to varying degrees for almost a decade. She co-founded the Equestrian Collective (a collective based in Durham City which

organises punk shows and other events), is involved in a DIY record label (Discount Horse records), and has been in several bands over the years.

We draw on our own experiences throughout the doctoral research process to discuss marginalised ethical issues, complexities and dilemmas involved in researching radical, underground, DIY cultures and communities of personal and political belonging. We aim to respond to current gaps in research guidance and doctoral supervision to critically examine the ethical, moral and practical dilemmas, possibilities and potentials of doing research with/in radical DIY cultures as a participant-researcher. We conclude with some constructive recommendations for future practice in relation to research ethics, engaged methods of data generation and communities of practice.

1. Confronting the Academic Study of DIY Cultures

For some of us, the first steps into academia can seem like a logical outcome of the critical thinking skills acquired in a life embedded in radical pedagogies and alternative knowledge production. However academic knowledge produced about DIY cultures and activist lives can feel stilted. For instance, in his introduction 'Attempted Education and Righteous Accusations', Zack Furness criticises the way that punk has become another 'object' or 'text'

of study analysed by scholars who 'seem to have a limited knowledge of punk music and DIY culture, and a level of engagement with punk scenes that is more akin to casual tourism than active participation' (Furness 2012, 12). The effect of this has meant that punk scholarship tends to be preoccupied with romantic, nostalgic and orthodox accounts that perpetuate dominant narratives about punk that marginalise women and girls, people of colour and queers from historical and contemporary accounts. Everyday punk practices and DIY cultural lives are displaced by a competition over definitions and dichotomous debates: is it a 'subculture' a 'neo-tribe', a 'post-subculture', a 'youth culture' or a 'scene'? Is it resistance or recuperation? Is it authentic or inauthentic? What are the identities that subcultures construct? In short, we concur with Zack Furness (2012) that 'outsider' academics who do not meaningfully engage with the DIY worlds they are researching can risk producing limited theories of radical DIY cultural practices. A DIY cultural participant who initially encounters this discipline in their undergraduate or postgraduate studies will inevitably find the area overwhelming and difficult to navigate. The scarcity of in-depth research with/in DIY cultures, its preoccupation with one-dimensional debates, and a paucity of dialogue among academic colleagues about DIY cultures creates a difficult milieu in which to carve

out space to explore the everyday practices, processes and power relations of DIY cultures. Impacts of this include struggling with previous research and theory that feels alienating and spending an inordinate amount of time (in presentations) and/or words (in writing) describing DIY culture as an 'object'.

Ambivalences of the Subcultural 'Object'

All authors have experienced the pressure to provide a coherent definition of our chosen DIY or subcultural 'object': riot grrrl, roller derby and punk. However in our experience our 'object' did not behave, stay still or remain in the boundaries of pre-established terms, debates and dominant media representations. The traditional focus of subcultures as examples of resistance to hegemonic power relations (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979) failed to account for the complexity and contradictions of DIY cultures. For example, researching roller derby requires defining a cluster of diverse, conflict-ridden but nevertheless converging practices: to make a statement about what roller derby is. However from the perspective of a participant-researcher, the meaning of roller derby is multiple, shifting and not necessarily *coherent* (see Law 2004; Mol 2002). Consensus as to what roller derby is occurs loosely and occasionally, changes over time and is contingent upon the specific location of those involved. In partic-

ular, there is ambivalence in defining roller derby as a *subcultural* and *feminist* practice, a meaning that has become dominant in academic research and media accounts, as roller derby participants increasingly legitimise roller derby as a *sport*. For instance, in previous research, links between roller derby and riot grrrl cultures have been made (Pavlidis 2012; Pavlidis and Fullagar 2012), and the supposed 'punk' or 'rockabilly' aesthetic of roller derby has become central to media accounts of roller derby, for instance:

Ordinary sportswomen these punks are not [...] Many of the female spectators have piercings and dyed black hair; some of their husbands have uncommonly long beards; and there is the occasional tot with a fun-sized Mohawk [...] In fact, the only people not pierced or tattooed (aside from the children) are two first-aiders from St John Ambulance, who look bemused but are ready to jump to action if and when necessary (Halgrave 2010, para. 3, 5, 6).

However many skaters are scathing of the focus on subcultural aesthetics and reject the notion of roller derby as an example of alternative or subversive culture, instead preferring roller derby to be represented simply as 'sport'. For instance, in discussion with the local news in 2010, 'The Beefcake'

was at pains to distance roller derby from such media caricatures, saying 'some people [who play roller derby] haven't even heard a punk band before' (Field notes, October 2010). In general a consensus develops that roller derby is more similar than different to other forms of sport.

Similarly much has been made of the potential for gender transgression and re-constructions of femininity in roller derby as a feminist practice (Finley 2010; Carlson 2010). However representations of roller derby as an example of gender and/or feminist activism are not necessarily justified by skaters' definitions of their own practice. For instance, during discussion in a film-making workshop in September 2011 BM argued:

I do always think that's kind of interesting, whenever you're talking about roller derby it always goes straight to the feminism issues, [mmm] whereas you know, which is, it can make sense, but at the same time it immediately also detracts from the sport [yeah] [mmm] you know it's not just about feminism [yeah, yeah] it's also about people that just really, really like proper sport and skating and working hard and training and that whole camaraderie team thing, just so if I were to make a roller derby movie, I would have something that focused on, girls being on a sports team and you know everything that goes with

it and then obviously you know you'd kind of have as a side line that this feminism thing comes up but not as a main focus because that's done all the time.

Representing roller derby as a 'real' sport is a contemporary concern of great importance, and many skaters would probably prefer an account of roller derby as 'just like any other sport'. The conscious effort to establish roller derby as an international sport (with a world cup, national governing bodies and official rankings), and the increasing irrelevance of 'subcultural capital' (Thornton 1995) among participants co-exists with an abundance of practices that mark roller derby as somewhat different to 'sport' (being DIY, being dominated by women, being a profusion of self-satire). This challenges a simplistic dichotomy in which resistance and recuperation are mutually exclusive entities. There is evidence that roller derby skaters actively agitate for their culture to become a legitimate 'mainstream' sport in the public sphere. Therefore a commitment to ontological multiplicity is helpful here: roller derby can be and is 'just a sport' at the same time as existing in many other confusing, wonderful, ridiculous and inspiring forms.

In summary, from a participant-researcher position initial encounters with academic accounts of DIY cultures can seem alienating, one-dimensional and simplistic.

However future research with/in DIY cultural activism from the position of the participant-researcher has the potential to develop academic thinking on DIY cultures and promote the critical exploration of everyday practices, processes, actions and power relations of DIY cultures. In the next section we focus on common fieldwork dilemmas that confront the participant-researcher that demand a more flexible and situated ethical practice that may require deviations from, and additions to, standard ethical protocols.

2. The Research Process: Ethical and Moral Dilemmas

In the 'Researching DIY Cultures' workshop we shared a number of ethical and moral dilemmas encountered throughout the research process. Doing research is not a matter of simply following rules, procedures and protocols but requires researchers to become 'ethical thinkers' capable of responding to unanticipated situations appropriately throughout the research process (Clark and Walker 2011). In the following, we explore four key dilemmas we encountered: anonymity and the use of pseudonyms, research with friends, meaningful informed consent, and the emotional impact of research with/in DIY cultures of belonging.

Anonymity and the Use of Pseudonyms

Some ethical guidelines consider discussion of gender and politics to

be sensitive topics. For instance, one social sciences postgraduate handbook stipulates that 'sensitive topics can include participants' sexual behaviour, their illegal or political behaviour, their experience of violence, their abuse or exploitation, their mental health, their gender or ethnic status'. Therefore it is often taken for granted that researchers should guarantee anonymity to research participants and use pseudonyms within reports and presentations to prevent the identification of participants. However research with/in queer communities and activists has found anonymity and pseudonyms problematic. For instance, Kath Browne (2003) characterised the negotiation of pseudonyms within her doctoral research of non-heterosexual women as an operation of micro-level power relations between the researcher and participant. She gives the example of a participant who wanted to be explicitly named in the research and when Browne refused she insisted on the pseudonym 'Pat Butcher'. This nickname had already been given to her by her friends and would nonetheless reveal the identities of her girlfriend, friends and family. Mark Cresswell and Helen Spandler describe this as a 'contradiction between seeing social movement [activists] as critical agents of change and gazing upon them "academically" as objects of research' (Cresswell and Spandler 2012, 11). They give the example of Kathryn Church's work with psychiatric survivors who 'felt ethically

bound to name her subjects of research “explicitly” (Cresswell and Spandler 2012, 22). Naming was felt to be an important strategy in a society that has not acknowledged the labour of activists in order to position research participants as public and critical agents of social change.

Consequently, naming became a common strategy for the authors in research with/in DIY cultures. For example, within an oral history of British riot grrrl the use of pseudonyms quickly became untenable. All participants wanted to be named. Furthermore the production of a history that changed all identifiable information would have further marginalised women’s labour in a moment of DIY feminist cultural activism that has arguably been distorted in previous histories (e.g. Reynolds and Press 1995). In short, the individuals, bands and projects involved wanted their activities and experiences to be made more visible and public. Therefore the focus shifted to provide each participant with a space for self-representation in the thesis itself. Each participant was given the opportunity to write their own (un-edited) biography for inclusion in the thesis (see Downes 2009). In keeping with alternative practices of knowledge production (i.e. the fanzine), participants could contextualise their contribution and represent their lives and riot grrrl involvement in a forum free from censorship. For example, Karren Ablaze chose to describe herself in the following biography:

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

Similarly the use of pseudonyms in research with roller derby became relatively unworkable. As research unfolded with a tight-knit group of skaters who intimately knew each other, guarantees of anonymity for participants became impossible. This meant that removing all identifiable information and use of pseudonyms became difficult as any ‘ethnographic information’ could easily identify skaters. Moreover, roller derby is a context where participants regularly go by multiple names, if not multiple identities. Most skaters in the league know each other by their derby name or skate name: a made up name adopted for the purpose of playing roller derby. Many skaters expressed that they were happy for their identity to be made explicit and

for quotes to be directly attributed to them. An atmosphere of playful name-taking and lack of concern for anonymity was made explicit when 'The Beefcake' and 'Aladdin' began using their pseudonyms to refer to themselves and each other in posts they made to the league's online forum discussion space, thus outing themselves and removing the possibility of anonymity in papers previously produced and disseminated.

From the position of the participant-researcher, the conventional use of pseudonyms and guarantees of anonymity can become unworkable. The practice of imposing pseudonyms and removing identifiable information can undermine participant labour, power and agency. The intimate bonds and knowledge between participants in tight-knit cultural groups and actions taken by participants to 'out' themselves challenge the possibilities and desirability of anonymity itself. This means that in research on DIY cultures the explicit naming of participants can become a moral and ethical obligation.

Friendships and Social Networks

Dydia DeLyser (2001) warns that researchers who are already close to their participants or research area can become 'overflowed with material' due to the amount of experiential and descriptive knowledge they hold. Being 'doubly located' as a friend and researcher was an issue that all authors found prob-

lematic. For instance, information that has accumulated about participants over years of friendship becomes particularly troubling. One key dilemma centred on the status of statements that could be hurtful or inflammatory if made public in research, even if these statements were made anonymously. The meanings of flippant, angry or funny comments shift when recorded and re-stated. Words appear again in contexts that were never intended, that were unimaginable when they were spoken. Nuance is subsumed in academic style. What is lost when rolled eyes, raised eyebrows, funny voices, raucous laughter, self-deprecating tones, hugs, smiles and spoken scare-quotes do not translate? In this case, anonymity in itself is an insufficient criterion for ethical research with/in DIY cultures. Participants said and did things that despite supposed guarantees of anonymity could be controversial or harmful if and when read back. In carrying out research on queer music culture with her friends in Brisbane, Jodie Taylor (2011) described the dilemmas in her position as an 'intimate insider'. She described needing to be an 'ethical friend':

Friendship (like research) has rules of engagement and being an ethical friend may mean not betraying confidence imparted. However, being an ethical friend may also at times compromise

one's research, particularly what you allow yourself to see as a researcher and what you choose to communicate with outsiders: that is, what you say and what you do not say (2011, 3).

Therefore it takes skill to negotiate what participants tell you as a friend and what they tell you as a researcher. In the pursuit of a situated ethical practice, empirical material considered potentially harmful was excluded. In a number of situations 'omission is political; it is tricky, yet it is often necessary' (Taylor 2011, 14). For example, in the following reflexive account one author describes the complexities of her double location as researcher and friend in her research with roller derby:

I share an office with six other post-grad students one of whom plays roller derby with the league I helped start and now research with. We first met in 2009, at the university through awkward and cringe-worthy institutional induction days and compulsory courses. I told her about roller derby and suggested she try it. I love her completely and without qualification. I can remember practicing hits and blocks with her, sweating and laughing, skating up and down in a small sports hall out of town. I think it was her first time practicing hits and I tried to help by talking through how to plant her shoulder square in my chest

with enough force to wind me, and how to skate into me with her hips to upset my centre of gravity and knock me off my feet.

A few days ago I needed a place to stay, and we had already made plans to eat dinner together that night at her flat near our university building and not for the first time she lets me crash in her bed. Just as we're falling asleep she says sorry: earlier in the week we'd been talking about whether or not the league – our league – was inclusive, she says that she feels like she's "aggressive and intolerant" talking about roller derby with me. My engagement in this previous conversation was almost entirely academic, perhaps I was hiding in some kind of supposed safe zone behind 'my role of researcher'. I had said "I don't think it's my job to say whether its inclusive or not", I wanted to convey how what I was interested in was how and why skaters celebrated the league's 'inclusivity', and what work this kind of talk does while exclusions are simultaneously enacted.

In bed that night we try to work it out, she says she's interested in what I think "as a person, not as a researcher" but when it comes to roller derby I feel like I'm both at the same time, just because I'm a researcher doesn't mean I'm not a person, surely? She says she has two ideas of me. The first is of someone who used to be so

heavily involved in roller derby that “the league is infused with you, there are all these little bits that are just you” but who steadily over time has become more distant so that “there are people in the league now who don’t know you” and I don’t know them. The second is “one of her best friends in the world”. She says she can’t think of these two people as the same person (Field notes, November 2012).

This account illustrates how conducting research with/in DIY culture and pre-existing friendships inevitably changes one’s relationship to the subject and people involved. The risks of carrying out academic research within pre-existing friendships, DIY cultures and activist networks of belonging needs more consideration in doctoral supervision and ethical training.

Meaningful Informed Consent

Typically researchers need to submit evidence of how they will guarantee each participant will give their informed consent before data collection will begin. This ‘contractual model’ of the ‘informed consent’ process usually consists of a participant information sheet and consent form that needs to be signed by the participant before data collection can commence. Viewing informed consent as a one-off contractual obligation became unworkable for the participant-researcher of DIY

culture. The informed consent form was useful for the more prominent or explicit moments of data generation, such as semi-structured interviews, oral histories, focus groups and film workshops. However, in ethnographic and auto-ethnographic projects it became difficult to guarantee meaningful informed consent in everyday situations that were not public. The boundary between personal life and the researcher role became blurred. For example, for one author presence at and participation in almost every event associated with the roller derby league was nothing out of the ordinary. For three years roller derby was everything; it infused almost every aspect of her life. In this way ‘doing research’ was not at the front of her mind or even in her consciousness for much of the time. It is often in retrospect that conversations and events began to become ‘data’. Similarly for another author, her presence and participation in band practices, meetings, hanging out, going dancing, putting on and/or playing at gigs seemed mundane. It often felt counter-intuitive to introduce informed consent forms in these everyday situations.

However membership of these communities had been established prior to the opportunity for a research project. In these situations it was productive to view informed consent as a dynamic, adaptive and situated process between the participant and participant-researcher. This meant, on top of the respon-

sibilities of being an 'ethical friend' (Taylor 2011), there was a responsibility to find new ways to make research activity explicit in ways that made sense for a given DIY culture. For example, one author started a thread on the roller derby league's online forum that detailed what she hoped to do, made it clear that anyone could opt out of being included, and invited questions, suggestions and comments. This acted as a kind of on-going space for discussion where monthly updates were posted to keep skaters informed. Another author continued to contribute to a queer feminist collective fanzine as a space to write and think about theory in relation to lived experiences of doing queer feminist activism with contributions on DIY burnout, men in feminism and living in an abusive relationship as a feminist activist. This practice of fanzine field notes became a key way to exercise self-reflexivity and dialogue in a space of comfort.

Another way to highlight the complexities of informed consent for the DIY participant-researcher is to foreground the negotiations that take place in the re-representation of everyday conversations within academic spaces. For instance, reflecting on her decision to include the conversation with LG above, Breeze writes:

In preparation for this paper I asked LG for her consent that I give an account of a conversation

we had, described above. Conversations had in someone's bed are different from conversations taking place in a pre-arranged recorded interview precluded by the signing of an informed consent form. I sent LG what I'd written and described the context and aims of the paper. She agreed that I could use the account but that she hadn't really had the chance to think about the issue properly. She also stated that after reading back my interpretation of the conversation it did not match up with what she was trying to convey.

Initially my response was that given the inadequate amount of time I'd allowed for LG to think through the issues I could not defend including my account of our conversation in this paper. The feeling that the gulf between intention and interpretations (I still didn't understand what she was saying) was verging on unbridgeable compounded my conviction that the only ethical course of action was to not write about the conversation, until there had been time and space for LG to consider it properly and for us both to work towards a more common understanding of what the conversation was about. And yet, not only do I re-present that conversation here but foreground the negotiations surrounding it.

My reason for doing so is simply that I think that honest engagement with these issues in a paper

such as this is one way among many to work towards situated ethical practice. Surely both the issue of researchers not insuring adequate time for participants to think through their consent and that of multiple interpretations and misunderstandings of words uttered are common to research practices out with my own? Informed consent forms do not so much guard against these twin risks as sweep them under the carpet. In attempting to lay bare the sordid details and shortcomings of my informed consent procedures here I hope to work towards developing a more rigorous ethical practice (Field notes, November 2012).

This example illustrates how reflective writing about dilemmas of interpretative dominance and negotiations of consent in diaries, personal journals and fanzines is essential for a participant-researcher of DIY culture that seeks to problematise power in knowledge production. Therefore, from the participant-researcher position conventional informed consent procedures i.e. a one-off contractual document is problematic. Instead, a situated and flexible approach towards negotiating meaningful informed consent in a way that makes sense within a specific DIY culture is more productive. This requires sophisticated ethical thinking to find ways to make research activity explicit, to negotiate

multiple interpretations and to be reflexive of the complex power dynamics and demands of academic research on participants as friends and cultural participants.

Affect and Emotional Life of Research

At the 'Researching DIY Cultures' workshop we discussed the affective life of research: the unexpected moments of discomfort, tension and anxiety. In particular, we focused on the impact of doing research on topics so close to us and how this could transform our relationship to the groups, scenes, communities and movements that we studied. We all shared experiences of being unaware, before we started our projects, of the emotional turmoil that could result from doing research within personal worlds. A key risk of – in some sense – turning your DIY life into work is that you risk losing your passion. During doctoral research our affective attachments within DIY cultural worlds changed. For example, an already ambivalent 'love-hate' relationship with DIY punk was intensified by doctoral research. Doctoral research requires negotiating the critical interrogation of the benefits and limitations of DIY punk scenes with defensive feelings of DIY culture when criticisms are made by 'outsiders'. For these reasons, acknowledging partiality and 'doubly located' positions requires a reflexive tactic. One strategy is the use of a research diary to document

and navigate these anxieties.

DIY cultural life and personal relationships can break down, shift and transform throughout the research project. For example, in doctoral research on queer feminist music cultures a moment of personal crisis and conflict led the researcher-participant to end her participation and paralysed the final year of writing up. However it was only by using theory and feminist history to make sense of this crisis that the participant-researcher was enabled to push beyond a one-dimensional account of DIY queer feminist culture to reveal problematic power relations within feminist activism across intersections of gender, sexuality, race and class. To illustrate, the problem of homophobia in the early stages of the collective was raised in an email interview:

When I was in [the collective] the first time round I had a lot of problems with not being supported [...] I was insecure because I didn't feel like I fitted in the threesome that directed all of [the collective], because I lacked musical knowledge, knowledge of riot grrrl history, and confidence. I was undermined and mocked increasingly frequently and my confidence went right down. When we had that meeting about [the feminist night club] and how people were coming down the stairs would just see a load of queers and it was putting people off and

what were we going to do about it and as their friends would I talk to them so they wouldn't go on the door I thankfully realised I couldn't be part of it anymore. But sadly nor could I speak out about it at the time. It was weird because the homophobia was becoming more overt and it just felt bad to me as a queer but I had no way of talking about it, and no 'resources', basically, and it didn't really occur to me to expect better from a feminist collective. And in those days although loads of people involved in [the feminist collective] events were queer there was no collective identity or unity or vocabulary at all.

This experience of homophobia within the collective highlighted the lack of a shared vocabulary and resource for the articulation of queer identities within a DIY feminist collective. The solution for this collective member was to remove herself from the feminist collective in 2004 and participate in queer events developed by a faction of the feminist collective, who created queer-orientated events. Therefore, these activities emerged as an innovative tactic to deal with the internal conflicts of the feminist collective. This eventually led to the development of an overtly queer agenda within the feminist collective as some involved in the feminist club night and the queer club night united in the co-production of the queer feminist

club night in 2006. In this sense, internal conflict led to the creation of a valuable queer feminist agenda that, in the long term, benefited a wider community in providing opportunities to challenge homophobia and produce awareness of the intersections of gender and sexual oppression. Nonetheless, as Carol Mueller warned, 'internal conflicts are almost invariably destructive of individuals' (Mueller 1995, 275) and there were considerable personal costs within this transition. As the one member from this situation who was still around, the participant-researcher was subject to personal 'trashing' within feminist and queer social circles, which once revealed, years after the event, led to her departure from the queer feminist collective in May 2009. Within her parting words in an email to the collective email list on 3 May 2009, the participant-researcher reflected on her frustrations with being 'trashed', and inability to work with, or trust, individuals who have taken part in the 'trashing':

I now find various people really difficult to work with and an uncritical use of space, language, gossip, resources and structure has really made me aware of how different my ideas and perspectives on queer feminist DIY culture are as well as how misrepresented I have been. I am, as far back as I can remember, deeply committed to the production of positive

and empowering creative spaces for women, queers and feminists to be visible, loud and heard. [...] Music making and queer feminist politics are both incredibly important parts of me, they feed into the majority of my everyday life in terms of my research, job, writing, thinking, bands, social life and teaching. [...] Despite the recent dips in energy, in the past [the feminist collective] has been an incredible space and community for me to explore ideas of queer feminist cultural production and has enabled me to figure out so much personally and politically. I will continue to produce and support these cultural spaces on my own terms not as part of [the feminist collective].

Therefore doing research on DIY queer feminist music cultures of belonging, embedded with personal investment, emotional labour and intimate friendships, can reveal harmful power relations. As Levinson (2010) warns, participant-researchers must be able to react appropriately to changes in the field. Therefore it is important to prepare for diverse possibilities including if the group, activity, or phenomena you are studying alters or stops, or if the knowledge you encounter causes personal distress.

In summary, the particular ethical and moral decisions faced by the participant-researcher can demand deviations, and additions to, exist-

ing ethical protocols. The complexities embedded in the position of the participant-researcher require conventional ethical practices of pseudonyms, anonymity and informed consent to be rethought. This may, if appropriate and with participants' consent, result in the explicit naming of research participants, the development of innovative tactics to make moments of research explicit to participants within everyday contexts and situations, and a developed awareness of how to be an 'ethical friend' and make informed judgements of what to include and exclude from research. The participant-researcher may also experience affective disturbance during the research process as attachments to friends, partners, DIY culture and political identity are scrutinised. The research process can also reveal harmful behaviours, alter friendships, undermine passion and enthusiasm, and even end DIY cultural participation. Current ethical training, procedures and doctoral supervision need to acknowledge and respond to the unique complexities of the participant-researcher position.

3. Doing Research Differently: Data Generation

One of the things we found the most challenging and confusing from the participant-researcher position was generating data through everyday activities and relationships that were already part of our lives. The

boundary between the participant and researcher collapses and the practice of filtering everyday activities for research data is uncomfortable. As one author recalls, 'a part of me just did not want to be thinking about or doing research when I was talking, dancing, laughing, crying, planning, organising and playing roller derby with my friends. Part of me revolted (was revolted) at doing research in this way.' In particular, we all found making field notes difficult. The performance of being a researcher visibly making field notes can contribute to a feeling of discomfort among participants aware of being researched. As participant-researchers come to the research process with a wealth of knowledge about the taken-for-granted practices of DIY life, alternative forms of note taking in the form of a 'scratch pad' were more useful to capture the basic details of what happened on particular dates, be it a gig, an interview, a social event or a roller derby bout.

Semi-structured interviews, audio-recorded conversations ordered around a series of pre-planned prompts, in cafes, pubs, kitchens and living rooms, were less ambiguous as moments of data generation. However, the participant-researcher may become acutely aware of their role within such encounters in the construction of DIY culture. For instance, on more than one occasion, when interviewing skaters who had joined the league only recently, the

participant-researcher often became the subject of their questioning:

Yeah so wait did you guys, did you like get together and just be like 'well let's try roller skating?' (FS, individual interview, May 2011).

In both these interviews, the participant-researcher's status as someone who was 'there from the beginning' becomes the occasion for 'interviewees' asking the 'interviewer' to give an account of what it used to be like and of how the league started. By answering and telling the story, the participant-researcher becomes aware of the ridiculousness of this research, and perhaps of research in general, the idea that you can ask people to express complicated things immediately in words (Gauntlett 2007, 3) but also a sense of just how impossible it would be to bracket off my role in literally creating this thing that I research. These tensions led participant-researchers to do research differently and create innovative moments of collaborative data generation centred on a practical task that complemented the everyday activities of a given DIY culture.

For example, in the case of roller derby, data was generated through a collaborative film-making project. A series of workshops was designed that moved through stages of planning, filming and editing a film about roller derby, the league and the skaters. Skaters who signed up to

the workshops took on the roles of designing and executing the production of a film, and the participant-researcher played the role of facilitator. The workshops were a method of data generation that was explicitly a research exercise, but was not limited exclusively to this function; the production of a film was a key rationale. The content of the workshops, in which skaters worked together creatively to respond to the question of how best to represent roller derby on film, was not that far removed from skater's daily roller derby practices, where questions of the design of posters, logos, bout names, merchandise and what to wear centre debates on representation. Thus, the workshops came to be an in-between compromise, a facilitated process that was evidently research and was bounded enough and explicit enough to overlap tightly with the research agenda, yet shared significant similarities with usual league business and ensured skaters led the way. This enabled participants to invest in the activity but also for research to be useful to the DIY culture.

In summary, the participant-researcher position can reveal the limits of conventional data collection methods of ethnographic field notes and interviews. The discomfort experienced in performing the researcher engaging participants in moments of thesis-orientated data collection using methods either marked as different or removed from

the everyday life of the DIY culture motivates a search for collaborative, engaged and situated data generation activities. The best solutions to this dilemma involve finding new ways to co-construct data in the everyday activities of what DIY cultures already do or aspire to do. In particular, facilitating the documentation and self-representation of DIY cultures in film, fanzines, art, music, archives, exhibitions and events offers an innovative avenue for future research with/in DIY cultures.

4. Research Dissemination: Conferences and Communities of Practice

A key requirement towards the end of the doctoral process involves disseminating research findings at a national and international level. The most commonly available forums for sharing and discussing research are academic conferences. Academic conferences can often disappoint expectations and collapse into a space that stifles rather than promotes critical discussion and debate. There have been positive attempts to rework the conference format and shift the atmosphere to promote discussion of radical and DIY feminist cultural activisms by including workshops, films, art projects (e.g. The Bad Art collective) and after parties with music. Nonetheless, conferences tend to take place within academic institutions that often charge a fee for admission and/or participation and

consist of a structured day of concurrent panel sessions consisting of 3–4 short (15–20 minutes) papers, delivered in a didactic fashion by a single speaker followed by a question and answer session. The effectiveness of academic conferences has been questioned by academic-activists:

At their best, such meetings are spaces for colleagues to form new friendships, exchange ideas, be inspired by new research, and wrestle with current debates in their chosen field. At their worst, they are a train wreck of ill-prepared and poorly delivered PowerPoint presentations with speakers talking way too fast and yet still managing to not finish in their allotted time. Of course such presentations produce another line on your vita, even if you gave your paper to five people, one of whom left halfway through (Haenfler 2012, 41).

We shared a sense of frustration at the amount of time and energy we spent defining and describing our DIY cultural object and its political, social and cultural significance in academic conferences. Although this is symptomatic of the marginal position that DIY feminist cultural activism inhabits across a range of academic disciplines, the repetitive experience of starting from basic terms curtails discussion of the complexities, contradictions and

power dynamics of DIY cultures. Furthermore, DIY cultures already consist of possibilities and spaces for alternative knowledge production including the theorisation of gender, sexuality, class, ability and race in everyday experiences of culture, power and activism. For example, in DIY feminist cultural activism, fanzines have long been established as a crucial resource for the radical theorisation of personal experience and transnational feminist knowledge production (Schilt 2003; Kearney 2006; Zobl 2009). In 'The Engaged Academic', Cresswell and Spandler (2012) discuss the 'lived contradictions' in the academic research of activist movements. In particular, they highlight the problematic assumption that theory is only produced within academia. They argue that the 'dynamic of theory and experience is one which historically occurs within activism anyway' (Cresswell and Spandler 2012, 12-13).

Therefore, greater acknowledgement of, and engagement with, alternative forms and forums of knowledge production is needed to disseminate and develop academic research with/in DIY culture. For example, at the very least researchers can recognise the legitimacy of activist knowledge by engaging with texts written by and for the cultural producers, activists and/or research participants. Research could also be disseminated and discussed in different formats including fan-

zines, blogs, online forums and free events held outside universities or within DIY cultures themselves. For example, one author co-organised and participated in a 'Long Table' discussion of riot grrrl histories with Cazz Blase, Red Chidgey, Teal Triggs and Rachel White at Ladyfest London 2008. The 'Long Table' format was originally developed by performer/professor Lois Weaver and within Ladyfest London context, which included a fanzine and paper tablecloth that could be written and drawn on with crayons, enabled a fluid discussion in which Ladyfest attendees, riot grrrl participants and those interested in riot grrrl histories could join and leave the table for an open and informal discussion.²

Finding communities of practice in which we can talk candidly but sensitively about the details of what doing research involves and what it looks like in practice have also been useful. This can be with other researchers working on a variety of projects and with participants in the DIY cultures we are researching. For one author, informal weekly meetings with a small group of postgraduate researchers with a shared interest in gender, queer and feminist research became a crucial space³. In this group postgraduate researchers tried out different ways of talking about and understanding research that seemed off-limits or unspeakable in supervisory meetings, formal seminars and tutorials. Sometimes the meetings had a con-

fessional tone with everyone detailing their troubles and failings. The atmosphere of the weekly meetings included a tangible absence of the pressure to appear to 'know it all' and express ideas and experience in academic terms. In communities of practice it becomes possible to negate the fear of making mistakes. In many respects, the 'Researching DIY Cultures' workshop represented an attempt to build a community of practice that we wanted to see consisting of researchers, activists and academics. The recent launch of the network 'Troublemakers: Queer//Feminist Academic-Activists in Cultural Theory & Activism' represents another attempt to fuse academic and activist spaces to create a community of practice that aims to involve academics, researchers, activists, feminists, punks and queers interested in the documentation and critical discussion of radical DIY cultures, practices and histories.⁴ The future development of critical academic research of DIY cultures is contingent on the expansion of forums and networks that promote engagement and dialogue between activists, academics and academic-activists outside academic institutions.

Conclusion: Towards a Situated Ethical Practice in Research on DIY Cultures

In conclusion, the position of the participant-researcher can illuminate the limitations of conventional

research ethics. But, more importantly, this position also offers new possibilities for a complex understanding of DIY cultures. From initial awkward encounters with academia to the completion of doctoral research and life as an early-career academic, it is crucial to work through tensions, address moral and ethical dilemmas, and consider personal obligations and questions of responsibility to DIY cultures, activism and academia. In this article, we have discussed the dilemmas that emerged as crucial moments in our respective doctoral research projects on riot grrrl, roller derby and punk. Building upon recent discussions that have highlighted the problem of limited subcultural participation in the development of academic theory and research on DIY cultures (Furness 2012), thinking from the position of the participant-researcher offers an important perspective on the complexities, contradictions and conflicts of DIY lives. In response to the gaps in practical guidance of doing research on DIY cultures of personal belonging, we offer recommendations for a situated ethical practice in three main areas: ethical thinking, data generation and research dissemination. It is our hope that these recommendations and insights will also be considered by academics and researchers who have no prior direct participation with/in DIY cultures in order to inform research design, ethics, methods and dissemination.

Firstly, participant-researchers who are carrying out research with/ in DIY cultures and communities of personal and political belonging can feel they have more distinct obligations and responsibilities to their chosen DIY culture. This has led us to adapt conventional ethical practices to suit the DIY cultures being studied. For instance, this may involve re-consideration of pseudonyms, learning to become an 'ethical friend', finding new ways to negotiate informed consent and developing strategies to cope with affective impacts, unanticipated conflicts and the sudden breakdown of DIY projects and collectives. Secondly, the participant-researcher may also struggle to feel comfortable with using conventional data collection methods, such as field notes and semi-structured interviews, to construct academic knowledge about DIY cultures. More productive data generation methods build upon what DIY cultures already do or would aspire to do. For instance, research projects that facilitate the self-representation of DIY cultures in film, fanzines, art, music, archives, exhibitions and events can generate vast amounts of data focused on how DIY cultures struggle to make sense of their practices. Finally, DIY cultures need to be recognised within a legacy of radical theorisation of everyday experiences of power, inequality and resistance. Therefore, academic knowledge of DIY cultures needs to engage with DIY cul-

tures to disseminate and discuss theory and research. Communities of practice are crucial ways in which participant-researchers alongside researchers, academics, activists, punks, feminists and queers (and many more) can change the ways in which we understand DIY cultures to produce research and theory that is critical, complex and contradictory. Therefore we crave theory and research that is closer to the energetic, chaotic and ramshackle worlds that excited us all in the first place.

Endnotes

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- ² The discussion was recorded, archived and is available to stream and download for free: <http://archive.org/details/riotlady>.
- ³ For more information on the FemJoy group at the University of Edinburgh, see <http://femreadinggroupjoy.wordpress.com>.
- ⁴ For more information on Troublemakers, see <http://wp.me/p1d4dR-aM>.

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Defamiliarising Passivity with the Disabled Subject: Activism, Academia and the Lived Experience of Impairment

Harriet Cooper

This paper explores the social construction of activism and academia in the contemporary UK context. Unlike activism, academia is not always regarded in mainstream culture as being politically engaged. The paper interrogates this state of affairs using Sara Ahmed's de-naturalisation of the terms 'active' and 'passive' (Ahmed 2010, 208-210). It also draws on insights from disability studies to reflect on the social significance of passivity. With reference to various sources, including my own experience of growing up with a physical impairment, I argue that the day-to-day lived experience of impairment defamiliarises the notions of activity and passivity. For many disabled people, a great deal of activity goes into those tiny, everyday tasks that are framed as the 'passive' ones we need to complete in order to reach the active, productive ones. I propose the term 'actively passive' to denote the conscious performance of actions which are undertaken unconsciously and spontaneously by most people. Politically engaged academia might also, I suggest, be described as 'actively passive' in that it labours to de-naturalise those positions and ideas that are taken for granted in mainstream culture. I propose that academia in the humanities and social sciences might both learn from the embodied experiences of the disabled subject and that, in its processes and practices, it can also be understood as being aligned and allied with this subject.

Keywords: Activism, Academia, Passive, Active, Disability.

If the activist is someone who protests and campaigns for change in the world, and the politically engaged academic is someone who researches and writes in order to

promote change in the world, then these two figures might be regarded as rather similar. In some instances, particularly in a field such as my own – disability studies – the two

identities are often embodied in the same person. Nevertheless, whilst both the activist and the academic have important political contributions to make, these contributions are, I will be arguing, different – and need to be valued in and for their differences. In the current age of austerity measures, discourses questioning the ‘impact’ of research in the humanities and social sciences risk constructing a hierarchical binary opposition between activism and academia, throwing the social value of academia into question. Mainstream culture tends to perceive activism as being, by its very nature, politically engaged, whereas academia has to fight for this accolade: it has to fight to demonstrate its value. In 2014, research undertaken by UK academics will be assessed, for the first time, in terms of its impact beyond the academy, as part of the new Research Excellence Framework.¹ This policy is referred to colloquially within the academy as the ‘impact agenda’. Yet measuring the ‘impact’ of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences is not a straightforward process. Since the outputs of research in these fields cannot always be evidenced in social and economic terms (or at least not immediately), such research risks being framed as a site of doubt and suspicion.² But perhaps the debate needs to be reframed. Indeed, Belfiore and Upchurch argue that ‘the impact discourse is problematic not because it demands too much

of [the arts and humanities] but because it demands *too little*’ (Belfiore and Upchurch 2012, Slide 19). By viewing the labour of the academic from a different angle, this paper will explore why the current conception of impact ‘demands *too little*’.

In this paper, drawing on Sara Ahmed’s revaluation of the terms ‘active’ and ‘passive’ (2010, 208–210), I argue that political engagement has come to be aligned with that which is ‘active’. By exploring the political and ethical possibilities of passivity – that is, by exploring what it might mean to be both politically engaged and *passive* – I seek to trouble the association between political engagement and activism and, in this way, to reframe the terms of the debate about impact in academia. This is not to devalue the important contribution of activism to politics, but rather to defend the contribution of academia as one which is political, though not necessarily according to conventional definitions of ‘the political’.

Drawing inspiration from Ahmed’s critical exposition of the preference for the active mode over the passive (Ahmed 2010, 208–217), I want to ask: who and what gets left behind when what we value is that which is deemed to be ‘active’?³ What if there is important work to be done which has no obvious corollary in activism? What if, as Martyn Hammersley puts it, ‘[t]here *is* a difference [between social science contributions and those from politicians and others],

but it is lost in translation, as social science findings are turned into public discourse[?]' (Hammersley 2012, Slide 26).

I view the question of the value of passivity through a particular lens: my paper examines how the embodied experience of being disabled – and thus of being deemed passive or unproductive by society – might speak to the call for political engagement in academia. Drawing on my own experience of growing up with a physical impairment, as well as on life writing and cultural theory, I will argue that the day-to-day lived experience of impairment dramatises, often in highly literal ways, the opposition between 'the passive' and 'the active'. Moreover, to view activity and passivity through the lens of disability studies is to defamiliarise these concepts. In the case studies I consider, the experience of impairment enables subjects to feel 'wonder and surprise' at the reproduction of 'forms' that are usually understood as 'familiar' and are, hence, unseen by most (Ahmed 2006, 82). Exploring this 'wonder and surprise', I will propose that academia in the humanities and social sciences might both *learn from* the 'passive' experiences of disabled subjects and might also *be aligned and allied with* these subjects.

Disability Studies

Before beginning my discussion of passivity, some important questions about identity and the body

need to be posed. Firstly, is it possible to speak of 'the disabled subject'? When discussing impairment, it is impossible to universalise: each experience of disability is particular to the individual concerned. I know how it feels to have a mild physical impairment but to pass as nondisabled; I do not know how it feels to be blind, or to be a wheelchair user. The term 'the disabled subject' thus cannot account for that which is particular about an individual's experience of disability. It must be used with caution. That said, the use of the term can be defended as a form of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak 1988 [1985]):⁴ it mobilises disabled subjectivity as a distinct identity for the purposes of political solidarity. Although Spivak has 'given up on' the term (though not on the 'project' itself), feeling that (mis)users of the term do not pay enough attention to the notion of 'strategy' (Darius and Jonsson 1993, 35; see also Spivak 1993 [1989]), in the context of this essay, the concept provides a strategy for exploring what a politics of passivity might look like. The term cannot, however, dissolve the universal/particular tension: a tension will always remain between an ethical stance on the one hand, which celebrates that which is particular to the individual's experience of disability, and a political stance on the other, which risks universalising in its search for common ground. Indeed, this tension pulls me in two different directions. My essay gener-

alises for the purposes of making an argument (as all argument-making tends to do), whilst simultaneously seeking to remain attentive to the ‘particular’ – to that which is distinct, unique and irreducible about each individual’s experience. My desire to stay with, but not to attempt to resolve, this tension is in keeping with my sense that one of the important roles of politically engaged academia is, in Les Back’s terms, to tolerate ‘moral complexity’ and to refuse to be reduced to a “‘sound bite’” (2007, 15; 16). As I shall argue, drawing on the work of Back (2007) and Hammersley (2012), these are some of the qualities that differentiate academic scholarship from party politics and from a cultural orientation towards the active, which might be termed ‘active-ism’.⁵ The political activity we call ‘activism’ is expected to perform itself using the active mode; this is necessary if its demands are to be recognised and heard by those with political power.⁶ Academia, on the other hand, has the opportunity to speak in different terms, though this can of course mean that its voice gets ‘lost in translation’ (Hammersley 2012, Slide 26).

If I intend to refer, however cautiously, to an experience of disabled subjecthood, what do I mean by disability? And who defines embodiment as ‘disabled’? These questions have been much debated both inside and outside the academy. To answer them in full, it would be nec-

essary to map the history of disability activism and disability studies, which is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I will refer briefly to some models of embodiment which have influenced my own thinking on disability. One of the founding concepts of disability activism in the UK context was the social model of disability, which separated ‘impairment’ as a term denoting embodiment and ‘disability’ as a function of social barriers to participation (UPIAS and The Disability Alliance 1976). The model is helpful in that it avoids casting disability as a problem of the individual, which medical models have tended to do (Oliver 1983). The social model has been subject to much critique within disability studies for oversimplifying the mechanics of oppression, as well as for both reifying the concept of impairment and for downplaying issues of embodiment (see for example: Reeve 2008, 28–31; Tremain 2006; and Thomas 1999). Broadly speaking, in this essay, I use the terms ‘disability’ and ‘impairment’ in the senses intended by the social model, but I also seek to move beyond this model.

One of the most interesting theories of embodiment to emerge in the field in recent years – and one which moves beyond the social model – has been Robert McRuer’s application of Adrienne Rich’s notion of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ to the experience of disabled embodiment (Rich 1981, 4; McRuer

2010 [2006]). Whereas heterosexual ideology would frame lesbian identity as an “‘alternative life-style’” (Rich 1981, 4), Rich argues that lesbianism is in fact pathologised in order to naturalise heterosexuality (Rich 1981, 24): marginal identities are thus employed to maintain the status of ‘dominant identities’ as ‘the natural order of things’, to use McRuer’s terms (2010 [2006], 383). McRuer introduces the parallel term ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’, observing that ‘[a] system of compulsory able-bodiedness repeatedly demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the unspoken question, ‘Yes, but in the end, wouldn’t you rather be more like me?’ (2010 [2006], 386). For McRuer, the notion of ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’ is particularly cogent in a capitalist dominant order where ‘free to sell one’s labor but not free to do anything else’ could be translated as ‘free to have an able body but not particularly free to have anything else’ (McRuer 2010 [2006], 385). In the current context of cuts to disability benefits, this idea will resonate for many disabled people in the UK. Might ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’ thus contain within it the idea of ‘compulsory activity’ and ‘compulsory productivity’? These are ideas which this paper will examine.

McRuer develops the concept of compulsory able-bodiedness by drawing on Judith Butler’s notion that heterosexual gender identity is

performed (Butler 1990). He proposes that disabled embodiment can be understood as a non-normative (failed) performance of able-bodiedness, which enables and maintains the fantasy that able-bodiedness exists (2010 [2006], 386–7). As will be argued below in the ‘Active and Passive Technologies’ section, actions that are associated with able embodiment – such as taking a walk – might be read as part of a performance of able-bodiedness, which wilfully avoids seeing its own reliance on technologies such as shoes, preferring instead to see reliance on technology in the disabled subject – for example, in the wheelchair user (see the conversation between Judith Butler and Sunaura Taylor in Taylor 2009, discussed below). Disabled embodiment thus problematises those things about able-bodiedness that have been constructed as natural. In this paper, I seek to show how the challenge it poses to compulsory able-bodiedness might operate both as an example for academia to follow, and as an analogy for the kind of critique that academics in the humanities and social sciences already offer.

Active and Passive Grammatical Subjects

In *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed proposes that we need to ‘challenge the very separation of active and passive’, arguing that this distinction ‘works to secure different classes of being’ (Ahmed 2010,

210). The English language betrays a preference for active, rather than passive subjects, Ahmed observes: we favour the sentence, ‘the chicken crossed the road’, over the construction ‘the road was crossed by the chicken’ because we want to ‘preserve the fantasy that the subject, even the animal-subject, is the one who acts’ (Ahmed 2010, 209).⁷ The road is grammatically devalued: it is regarded as passive, as ‘doing nothing’ (Ahmed 2010, 209). However, the road can be reconceived as a ‘provider’; it ‘provides the point at which we can cross, at which we can go from one side to the other’ (Ahmed 2010, 209). Thus, ‘that which has been deemed as passive’ may in fact provide ‘the conditions of possibility for doing something’ (Ahmed 2010, 209).

Could the road operate as an analogy for academia? Ostensibly, academia in the humanities and social sciences ‘does nothing’, at least as far as certain politicians are concerned. Yet academia provides an environment in which we can think about how ‘passivity’ is ‘distributed’, rather than being natural (Ahmed 2010, 209). It is not just the chicken that uses the road: it is also used by the politician, to reach the government buildings where political discourse is made.

Active and Passive Technologies

I suggest that the experience of impairment “‘orientates” bodies in specific ways’ and reconfigures

the notions of activity and passivity (Ahmed 2006, 21). As Judith Butler observes in her conversation with Sunaura Taylor in the film *Examined Life*, ‘nobody takes a walk without there being a technique of walking, [...] without there being something that supports that walk, [...] outside of ourselves’ (Butler in Taylor 2009). A wheelchair is perceived as a facilitative technology which allows the disabled person to ‘take a walk’ whereas the facilitative properties of ‘shoe[s]’ go unnoticed (Taylor 2009). Why is it that the technology used by a disabled person can be perceived as such – as actively enabling – yet the technology used by those who regard themselves as nondisabled ‘does nothing’, so that the act of walking emerges as natural rather than cultural? Through this naturalisation of the world, nondisabled subjects experience themselves as active; they do not notice the role played by those objects such as shoes and pavements and roads in providing the conditions of possibility for activity. Meanwhile, the cultural production of the wheelchair as a technology makes the wheelchair user constantly aware that her activity depends on something outside of herself; she is continually brought into contact with her own inability to ‘do’ in the terms of society. This is not the same as her passivity, although a culture of ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’ (McRuer 2010 [2006], 383) tends to view it as passivity.

What would it mean to conceive

of academia as the wheelchair user? To do so would posit academic discourse as one which identifies itself as disabled, as aware of the prostheses upon which it depends, as conscious of its contingency and its limitations. We might characterise other discourses, meanwhile, as nondisabled, jostling for position ahead of academic ones, bold and unaware of the props on which they rely, unconscious of the privilege of not being confronted by this awareness.

Being Actively Passive

For me, the process of learning to walk itself was an exercise in learning how my body 'does not do' according to the terms of other bodies. My walking was made conscious to me, I experienced it as a cultural production, as a failed attempt at activity. If, like me, your learning to walk involved placing your feet into a trail of insoles positioned at equidistant intervals across the floor of a physiotherapist's studio, with the physiotherapist's voice at your back instructing you to put your heel down as you walk, you are only too aware that the insoles on the floor are the active ones; they are the ones with the power to determine the 'rightness' of your walking.

For most nondisabled people, walking simply 'happens', it is not something which needs to be thought. For me as a disabled subject, the experience of being taught to walk as others walk, to use my

body as others do, was an experience of becoming conscious of that which remains unconscious, spontaneous, we might even say passive, for most people. Learning to walk, for this disabled subject, was about forcing the body to become actively aware of itself in those most 'passive', most unscripted of moments. Ahmed speaks of 'paths', of 'scripts' and of 'straightening devices' which lead us to reproduce certain kinds of subjectivities; I understand these concepts not only at a literal level, but at a bodily level, since my own walking was scripted for me as a way of making my body straight (Ahmed 2006, 16; Ahmed 2010, 91).

There is a paradox here: I am speaking of nondisabled subjects experiencing themselves as active because they do not have an experience of their walking as something they produce actively – rather it is something they do 'naturally', passively. By contrast, I experienced myself as passive in relation to the 'path' of insoles I was expected to "tread": the 'path' seemed to be active in forming me as a passive, compliant disabled subject (Ahmed 2006, 16).⁸ However, the process of internalising the path entailed a literal 'becoming active': a learned policing of my own body, such that the body would now *actively* reproduce those movements that other bodies performed passively, unconsciously, nonchalantly. I suggest that the nondisabled subject might be described as *passively active*, whereas I expe-

rience myself as *actively passive*, or perhaps as *actively active*.

The disabled subject sees activity differently because for her, a great deal of activity goes into those tiny, everyday tasks that are framed as the ‘passive’ ones we need to complete in order to reach the active, productive ones. In her memoir *Waist-High in the World: A Life Among the Nondisabled*, Nancy Mairs, who lives with multiple sclerosis (MS), recounts an experience of performing her morning routine alone, in the absence of her carers: ‘[t]he myriad small actions that most people would perform all but unconsciously tax my ingenuity: removing the plastic wrist splint I wear to bed, unfastening my watch, pulling my nightgown over my head’ (Mairs 1996, 66). Several pages of prose are dedicated to describing, and defamiliarising for the reader, acts such as showering and using the toilet: these habitual processes that society barely acknowledges as ‘acts’ are brought into consciousness as such. In her critique of phenomenology, Ahmed draws attention to the hidden domestic labour which permits Husserl to be seated at his writing-table, choosing it as the object of his investigations (Ahmed 2006, 31). It is significant that some objects and acts are deemed appropriate for analysis, while others remain out of sight.

Might we understand politically engaged academia as *actively passive*? Might the disabled subject,

conscious of her own ‘unproductive’ labour – the labour undertaken to reach the place that others simply inhabit – figure as a metaphor for politically engaged academia, which labours to de-naturalise those positions and ideas we take for granted? The humanities and the social sciences have sought to be conscious of the ‘directions’ they have ‘followed’, and not to take the ‘arrival’ in a particular location for granted as a form of ‘magic’, but rather to see it as an example of ‘social reproduction’ (Ahmed 2006, 16; 17; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990 [1977], 3). Politically engaged academia has also shown how some objects and acts are deemed worthy of intellectual attention, while others are relegated to the status of ‘the passive’.

The Passive, the Ethical, the Complex

Mairs’ memoir is involved in a project of remapping the world from a perspective which is, literally, waist-high. As part of this process, ‘the passive’ and ‘the active’ are re-framed. Yet this task is not straightforward, for these terms have accrued specific moral and ethical associations, as Ahmed argues (Ahmed 2010, 208–9). Mairs highlights this difficulty in her account of the challenges of existing in a body which is, in her words, ‘[g]ood for nothing’ (Mairs 1996, 61). The use of the adjective ‘good’ here is not just an idiomatic coincidence, but is highly significant, in that the equa-

tion between morality and action is under scrutiny. Mairs draws attention to this issue as follows:

But is a woman for whom any action at all is nearly impossible capable of right action, or am I just being morally cocky here? After all, if I claim to be a good woman, I leave myself open to the question: Good for what? The most straightforward answer is the most tempting: Good for nothing. I mean really. (Mairs 1996, 60–1).

In a society which values work, activity and productivity – where we are ‘free to have an able body but not particularly free to have anything else’, in McRuer’s terms (2010 [2006], 385) – to be ‘good’ we feel we must be good *for something*. Since ‘the qualities of activity and passivity are distributed’ in particular ways and to particular bodies, that *something* is socially defined and cannot be just *anything* (Ahmed 2010, 209). For Mairs, that *something* involves ‘*doing*’ (Mairs 1996, 61): she speaks of her desire to ‘act out [her] love, in the way that a dancer inscribes abstract movements on the air with hands and feet and torso and head in order to give her private vision public force’ (Mairs 1996, 79). As this painfully beautiful metaphor of the dancer implies, the quality of activity, and the moral ‘beauty’ attached to it, gets located in the one who is seen to be ‘*do[ing]* love’ (Mairs 1996, 79).

In a chapter entitled, ‘Taking Care’, which draws attention to the multiple significances of this idiom, Mairs laments that it is not enough to take care *from* others, unless one is also ‘tak[ing] care *of* others’ (Mairs 1996, 83 (my emphasis)).

Although ‘[p]assivities tend to be located in the bodies of those on whom we have given up’ – disabled bodies, for example – Ahmed reconfigures passivity by pointing out that ‘[t]o give something up can be not to see the quality of an action’ (Ahmed 2010, 209). In Mairs’ writing, the defamiliarisation of conventionally passive tasks inflects those tasks with ‘the quality of an action’. By ‘improvis[ing] [...] alternatives to the traditional modes of tendering care’, which sometimes means, paradoxically, accepting care from others, Mairs is ‘taking all the care [she] can’ (Mairs 1996, 83; 84). Indeed, as Mairs notes, there is a particular ‘etiquette’ to the passive action of ‘taking care from others’ (Mairs 1996, 70). Here Mairs’ ‘passivity’ resembles an ‘ethical capacity’ in the sense described by Ahmed, who states that ‘you have to be willing to be affected by others, to receive their influence’ (Ahmed 2010, 221).

This kind of ethical passivity, I suggest, is a quality that politically engaged academia should seek to espouse. Les Back argues that one of the roles of academic sociology is to counter the ‘auction of authoritarianism that is pervasive not only in popular media but also in political

debates' (Back 2007, 14). Sociology must aspire to perform 'attentive listening' which values 'the importance of living with doubt in the service of understanding, of trying to grapple with moral complexity' (Back 2007, 19; 14–15). Rather than being expected to emulate activism, academia must be valued for the things it does differently.

Academia's commitment to nuance and 'moral complexity' allows for an exploration of the inequalities between bodies that do not translate easily into slogans for political protest (Back 2007, 14). The idea of the *actively passive* subject is not very catchy, but it describes an experience that we might need to understand if we are to include the body for whom it is true. For Tanya Titchkosky, the experience of disability is one of being '[b]etwixt and [b]etween', which, she argues, is a rich and productive space from which to offer insights into the experience of 'human alterity' (Titchkosky 2003, 209; 232).⁹ The notion of '[b]etween-ness' (Titchkosky 2003, 217) resonates for me since my body occupies a liminal space between disability and able embodiment; whilst I have a physical impairment, others do not usually notice it when they first meet me. I do not fit either category. An account of the experience of not fitting, but of trying to fit, and of simultaneously trying not to fit does not translate well into conventional political discourse; it resists being a "sound bite" (Back 2007,

16). In Hammersley's terms, it is exactly the sort of contribution which gets 'lost in translation' when it enters public discourse (Hammersley 2012, Slide 26). Yet it is a fitting subject for academia.

Resisting 'Active-ism'

In this essay I have drawn on accounts of the lived experience of impairment to trouble the distinctions drawn between 'the passive' and 'the active'. Following Ahmed, I have argued that the categorisation of a body or a practice as 'passive' may involve not seeing 'the quality of an action' (Ahmed 2010, 209). In the current political climate, academia in the humanities and the social sciences is sometimes characterised as passive and unengaged. The new Research Excellence Framework will measure 'impact', with the ostensible goal of ensuring that the research funded by the taxpayer has value. Of course, the politically engaged academic strives to have an impact. But what if, in demanding recognisable 'impact' we are in fact obscuring our ability to see the 'quality of an action' contained in something deemed to be passive? What if we are seeing only the chicken and not the road, the wheelchair and not the shoes, the action of writing and not the action of showering in the morning which made it possible to write now?

Jonathan Bate has observed that '[t]here is [...] a simple answer to the question "what is the value of

research in the humanities?” which is that ‘research in the humanities is the only activity that can establish the meaning of such a question’ (Bate 2011, 3). In its efforts to establish the meaning(s) of this question, and other similar ones, politically engaged academia undertakes *actively passive* labour, inhabiting a disabled subject position. We need this kind of actively passive academic labour in order to be able to see how it is that the active mode comes to be valued, and why in certain circles (not least among the politically powerful), activism, more than academia, has come to be associated with political engagement. The impact agenda might only seem to be ‘demand[ing] too much’ (Belfiore and Upchurch 2012, slide 19) of academia because its frames of reference are unable to measure the ‘much’ that takes place in the realm of the actively passive. There is ‘much’ that needs to be valued that cannot be understood according to the narrow terms of ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’ (McRuer 2010 [2006], 383) and compulsory activity.

In a rather strange irony, we might see the new focus on impact as inviting us to become the activists we have always wanted to be – after all, we can choose to have the kind of impact that resists dominant discourses, can’t we? However, I would suggest that the problem is precisely our ‘*interpellation*’ (Althusser 1971, 163) as ‘active-ists’ by the ‘impact

agenda’, and the valuing of ‘activism’ implicit in this ‘hailing’ (Althusser 1971, 163). Certain subjects (both literal bodies and bodies of thought) get left behind in this process of interpellation, and we leave them behind at our peril. The emphasis on impact can thus be characterised as a ‘straightening device’ in that it demands that as academics we follow certain ‘paths’ and not others, ones which are demonstrably active and productive in the terms of contemporary culture (Ahmed 2010, 145; Ahmed 2006, 16).

Endnotes

¹ Information about the assessment of impact in the Research Excellence Framework is available at: <http://www.ref.ac.uk/panels/assessmentcriteriaandleveldefinitions/>. [Accessed 27 March 2013].

² Arguably, one might wish to draw a distinction here between impact in the social sciences and in the humanities. Arts and humanities subjects are particularly vulnerable to suspicion. As Belfiore and Bennett note, ‘impact studies, focusing as they do on economic and social indicators, do not actually engage with the real purpose of the arts’ (Belfiore and Bennett 2010, 7). Perhaps – one might argue – such indicators are more apt for engaging with social sciences research; however as disciplinary boundaries become less distinct, and research methods become more open to debate, this is not necessarily the case.

³ To my knowledge, Ahmed is the only theorist who has sought to defamiliarise activity and passivity in this way. However, in *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed engages with a long philosophical tradition in which happiness is framed in terms of activity and unhappiness in terms of passivity (Ahmed 2010, 210–211).

- ⁴ In coining the term, Spivak describes a 'strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest' (Spivak 1988 [1985], 205). This later comes to be described as 'strategic essentialism'.
- ⁵ I would like to thank Nick Hocking for the terms 'active-ism' and 'active-ist'.
- ⁶ 'Activism' is (like 'academia' and 'party politics') an umbrella term which is used to describe a huge range of political activities, some of which could be said to speak in the terms of party politics, and some of which use very different, and deeply subversive tactics. As stated, many academics regard themselves as activists, so these identities are in no way mutually exclusive. In this paper, I am interested in the way in which political engagement becomes aligned with the active mode, such that activism has to be 'active-ist' in order to make itself heard as political discourse.
- ⁷ Admittedly, this argument is specific to the English language; perhaps activity and passivity are constructed differently in other languages. This may be one of the points at which my argument demonstrates its own positionality and its attention to the particular rather than the universal. Nevertheless, it seems important to attend to the way in which qualities such as passivity are 'distributed', as Ahmed puts it (Ahmed 2010, 209), and since language is one of the mechanisms of distribution, thinking linguistically is a vital part of the project of defamiliarisation.
- ⁸ I employ Ahmed's terms here, but I am speaking of a highly literal experience of being formed by a 'path'.
- ⁹ Ahmed's re-evaluation of the role of the road prompts me to question the 'human' part of this noun-phrase: what about non-human animals, wheelchairs and roads? Moreover, the work of Mel Chen (2012) in this field leads to questions about the fitness for purpose of the term 'the humanities'.

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Investigating Genderless Utopias: Exposing the Sexual Harassment of Female Protestors in the Egyptian Uprisings of 2011

Emily Miles

Political uprisings and 'democratic' mobilisations utilise discourses of freedom and democracy in order to oppose social injustice and threats to equality. Yet within the mobilisations themselves, discourse constructs legitimate and illegitimate subjects through gendered power relations and sexualised violence. During the Tahrir Square uprisings in Egypt in 2011, activists attempted to oppose tyrannical state power by reframing the legitimacy of their protest through expressing themselves as 'The People'. Whilst they successfully brought about the fall of Mubarak's regime, elitism and social divisions that dominated Egyptian society failed to be significantly challenged. Feminist academic theory has previously offered insight into how nation states construct legitimate subjects through hegemonic patriarchal power. Events in Egypt demonstrate that attempts to create 'genderless' spaces free from social divisions can in fact mask prevailing relations of oppressive power. If political activists were to draw upon feminist academic theory, and feminist theory to transcend the academic vacuum, each may be able to address their own limitations and cross the binary in order to attain more lasting social transformation.

Keywords: Gender, Egypt, Uprising, Mubarak, Tahrir, Sexual Violence, Feminism, Activism, Utopia, Harassment, Protestors, Elitism.

Democratic mobilisations and activist movements usually erupt in response to a perceived threat against social justice and human rights. However, critique is needed to reveal when those mobilisations themselves perpetuate inequality

for marginalised groups. The adoption of a feminist theoretical lens has been a useful tool in highlighting inequality in the political arena. Yet relations of power operate to constrain and create individuals at all levels of social life, including in

spaces of supposed equality and democracy. Relations of power – oppressive and resistant – between social movements and tyrannical authorities have been considerably examined by feminist academic theorists through a gendered lens (Van der Molen and Bal 2011; Luibhéid 2002; Lee 2011). However, there has been little academic analysis of the factions and gendered inequalities within social movements that claim to be spaces of equality and ‘genderlessness’.

As part of this special edition focusing on the relationship between academia and activism, this paper will examine how adopting a feminist theoretical understanding of contemporary social movements could enable activists to be more self-reflexive, and to have a greater impact in challenging global inequality and embedded social structures. In order to challenge the binary between the two, it will also be highlighted that activism informs academia by embodying a tangible reality for theories that have been created in isolated academic spaces (Appadurai 2000). In the Egyptian uprisings of 2011, demands for human rights and social equality culminated in nationwide strikes and eighteen days of occupation in Tahrir Square, Cairo. Although the ‘revolution’ brought about the resignation of Hosni Mubarak, Egypt’s reigning dictator of nearly thirty years, the patriarchal and elitist structures that dominate Egyptian society – and many others

around the world – arguably remain unchanged. In this paper, I argue that the failure to shift hegemonic practices and elitist social structures was in part due to the deliberate erasure of the gender and other socio-positionings of the activists themselves, meaning that demands for ‘The Egyptian People’ were in reality beneficial to Egyptians of dominant social status – namely that of older, middle-class men. Through an examination of how gendered discourses have remained stark throughout the Egyptian uprisings, and in turn how this constituted itself in the ‘sexualised terrorisation’ of female protestors (Amar 2011, 300), I hope to highlight how the adoption of a feminist theoretical perspective can be incorporated into the aims and methods of other democratic mobilisations, and eventually lead to a more permanent socio-political transformation. It is worth noting that throughout this paper, the term ‘democratic’ mobilisations is used not to infer a ‘Western’ belief in the concept of democracy, but in order to emphasise that mobilisations that claim to be democratic spaces of freedom and equality – like the concept of democracy itself – can in fact disguise unequal claims to representation.

In the past decade there has been a rise – or renewal – of grassroots political activism in the form of active civil society groups, social movements and uprisings against the perceived global injustices of cor-

ruption, tyranny and neoliberal economic expansion (Grey and Sawyer 2008). Given that activism and occupation are once again becoming popular alternatives to failing democratic processes, it is important to address its limitations through academic analysis. Inequality and violence against women within activist groups is a controversy that is rarely discussed by activists, and has so far received very little academic interest. Mobilisations like the Occupy Movement and the Arab Spring claim to represent 'The People' or the '99%' (Van Gelder 2011) and pursue universality as a political ideology in itself: the belief in a world that can exist beyond the social identities that divide us such as gender, age, race, class, sexuality, or religion. Contemporary activism mostly involves the claiming of public spaces, which '[dare] to imagine a new socio-political and economic alternative that offers greater possibility of equality' (NYCGA 2012). However, in both Occupy and the Arab Spring, sexual violence against female protesters ensued. The academic work of key theorists such as Judith Butler (1993) and Michel Foucault (1981) point to how sexual violence is an expression of unequal gendered power relations within a given space or social group. By placing the violence against female protesters within a theoretical context, we can scrutinise how demands of 'equality' can in fact erase notions

of difference and ignore the voices of marginalised groups.

Universalism and Genderless Utopia

Over the past decade there have been signs of unrest and protest across the Egyptian region (Shehata 2011), but none as significant as the Tahrir Square uprisings in 2011. Social inequality and lack of economic access were at the heart of the protests, but the myriad of issues became reduced to one clear aim – to end Mubarak's regime. All over Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) states, uprisings were to start and end with the phrase 'The People Want the Fall of the Regime' (Amar 2012): a slogan that reflects how diverse factions and identity groups in civil society united to achieve democratic and social justice. The activist revolution that came to be known as the 'Arab Spring' consisted of multiple small-scale demonstrations, mass protests, revolutionary processes, the ousting of dictators, and the brutal crackdown and killing of protesters across the MENA region (Al-Ali 2012, 26). On the 25 January 2011, tens of thousands of Egyptians took to the streets, the country enacted a civil disobedience policy, and after eighteen 'days of rage' the thirty year-long regime of Hosni Mubarak was brought to an end (Gardner 2011).

Egyptian society has a great diversity of religions, class and ages

but is (like many societies) extremely hierarchical and dominated by upper-class elites (Islah 2009). During the eighteen days of Tahrir Square occupation, different identities or groups put aside sectarian differences and united under the nationalist discourse of 'The Egyptian People'. The 'Movement for Change', or *Kifaya*, had been in existence for the previous decade and consisted of a collaboration between a vast range of different groups (El-Mahdi 2009, 88). A similar tactic was used to overcome sectarianism in other Arab Spring uprisings. For instance, in Bahrain, female activist Munira Fakhro played a crucial role as leader and spokesperson for building a movement that was 'not Sunni, not Shia, but Bahraini' (Al-Ali 2012, 26). Nationalist discourses were used to create legitimacy behind the movement: the belief that they acted for the benefit of the entire country, rather than for one sectarian group. By utilising a discourse of 'The People', protestors legitimised their presence in the square through the entitlements of citizenship – 'not Islam. Not identity politics. Not East versus West' (Amar 2012).

For the Tahririst revolutionaries, the highly visible presence of women in Tahrir Square helped enhance this legitimacy. Since women are often framed in the West as symbols of Islamic oppression, the visible resistance and anger of women emphasised a rhetoric of 'democracy' and freedom that is pursued by the

US (Eschele 2001). Women made up 20–50% of the protestors in Tahrir Square, and it was women who started the revolution (Hafez 2012). There had been multiple strikes and small protests over the past decade, including that of textile workers in the Mahalla al-Kubra province in 2006, most of whom being female and working class (Beinin 2009, 79). The labour movement transformed itself into a popular uprising on 25 January 2011 after 26-year old activist Asmaa Mahfouz released a YouTube video describing herself as an 'Egyptian on fire' and calling 'The People' to gather at Tahrir Square. She challenged Egyptians to reclaim their rights through rhetoric of nationalist pride: 'If we still have honour, and want to live in dignity on this land, we have to go down on January 25' (Mahfouz 2011). She demanded 'if you think yourself a man, come with me on January 25. Whoever says women shouldn't go to protests because they will get beaten, let him have some honour and manhood and come with me on January 25' (Mahfouz 2011). By calling upon Egyptian men specifically, Mahfouz offered them an alternative understanding of masculinity that is framed within a nationalist discourse, and a method for marginalised and excluded men to reclaim their lost dignity – and thus challenge the attempt of the state to control gendered identity scripts.

The discourse of 'alternative' masculinities has emerged in the

work of NGOs that work with men in the MENA and wider African region in order to engage them in gender equality issues (Esplen 2006; Barker 2005). These discourses challenge men to be 'gender transformative' and to address harmful masculinity constructs that encourage violence against women, neglectful fatherhood, and risky sexual behaviour that is linked to the spread of HIV/AIDS (Harrison et al. 2006). The comments of Mahfouz and other female protestors in Tahrir Square for men to be 'real' men and to protect women and girls from violence is arguably gender transformative – challenging male protestors to play a key role in combating violence against women – whilst reinforcing a gendered division of labour, and encouraging the rhetoric of male protectors and female victims (Kaplan 1994). The complexities surrounding apparently alternative or new gender norms, and the inability for female protestors to separate harmful and positive male gender norms, highlights how spaces of 'democracy' and equality remain deeply gendered.

Taher describes her interviews with activists who depicted Tahrir Square as a utopia of genderless commonality: 'No one sees you as a woman here; no one sees you as a man. We are all united in our desire for democracy and freedom' (Taher 2012, 369). Activists believed that this collaboration of age, class, gender and religion created a 'utopian

space that forged a new gendered social contract' (El-Saadawi in Amar 2011, 301) and an expression of global activist solidarity with other uprisings. It was this legitimacy that secured their primary aim of Mubarak's removal from government. The broad-based support behind the revolution and legitimacy of The People's demands encouraged the entire country to enact civil disobedience and strikes, driving the military to remove their support from Mubarak (Hafez 2012, 40), thus forcing his resignation and legitimising a revitalised grassroots political consciousness.

Engendering Tahrir

Despite the belief of the Tahrir Square occupiers that they had created a space of social equality, events that occurred after Mubarak's resignation revealed how fragile that conception truly was. On closer examination, gendered scripts were stark throughout the eighteen days of occupation, and the patriarchal hegemony of Egyptian society was not so easily overturned.

In Egypt, state power was situated under the tyranny of Hosni Mubarak whilst being framed as a regime of 'benign paternalism' (Hafez 2012). Mubarak depicted himself as the father of Egypt, constructing a form of patriarchal power that allowed him to infantilise his citizens, rendering them inactive and 'docile' (Foucault 1981, 85). Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinities points to

how forms of male power are consolidated, not 'at the point of a gun' but through hegemonic power relations that become internalised and embedded within social practices (Connell 1987, 184). When the emergency law that had been in place since 1981 was extended again in 2006, Prime Minister Nazif claimed that 'We will never use the emergency law other than to protect the citizen and the security of the nation and combat terrorism' (Williams 2006), reflecting how mantras of protection against terrorism were constantly used to justify authoritarianism. Hafez argues that a patriarchal state was maintained through 'shaping the day-to-day operations of individuals and reconfiguring individual subjectivity' (2012, 39). Mubarak entrenched his power over the Egyptian people not simply through violence, open repression and media control, but through the construction of his people as docile and with strict gender roles (Foucault 1981). Resistance to his regime thus attempted to break down conventional notions of male and female behaviour.

At the start of the uprisings, Western media analysis was framed within what Amar has named the 'Arab Street' discourse whereby Arab men are fetishised, racialised, and portrayed as hypermasculine 'thugs' (Replogle 2011, 799) who are drawn to terrorism and violence due to their social and economic poverty (UNDP 2011). A United

Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report (2011) claimed that 'exclusion and frustration can lead to crime and violence', pushing young men towards extremist Islamism and terrorism. Amar argues that this discourse shifted suddenly with what he describes as the 'Anderson Cooper' effect that occurred when a CNN foreign affairs journalist was attacked by pro-Mubarak supporters in Tahrir Square (Amar 2012). The nonviolent and secular nature of the Tahrir Square occupation questions the 'masculinity crisis' theory and reverses the discourse of the emotional, eroticised terrorist. However, the depiction of male protestors in this way suggests that gendered scripts were not in place only to constrain female Egyptians.

In the days following Mubarak's resignation, the nature of the protests shifted dramatically. Security forces and groups of men from the Muslim Brotherhood came to Tahrir Square to protest directly against female protestors, in order to sexually humiliate and harass them. A rhetoric of 'good Muslim woman' emerged again, as 'a group of men gathered around the women, heckled them shouting abuse, verbally and sexually attacking them' they were told 'go back home and to the kitchen' (Taheer 2012, 370.) Many female protestors were also arrested. Those that were detained by security forces reported psychological torture, electric shocks, and the infliction of 'virginity tests'

by unsupervised male doctors (Al-Ali 2012, 29). When questioned, a Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) general claimed that ‘the girls who were detained were not like your daughter or mine’ (Eltahawy 2011), reinforcing notions of legitimate gendered and classed behaviour for women. Protests continued throughout the year, and on the 19 December 2011 a small number of protestors occupied outside the Cabinet building and were met with a violent backlash from military forces. This led to the iconic image of the ‘woman with the blue bra’ being stamped on by a security agent (Taher 2012, 372), giving rise to increased media attention around the world for the plight of Egyptian women. Amar argues that this was part of a deliberate strategy by the security state to ‘delegitimise, intimidate and blur both the image and the message of these movements by infiltrating and surrounding them with plain-clothes thugs, deputised by police’ (Amar 2011, 308). The role of men – as protestors, ‘thugs’, or security forces – therefore became blurred between ‘real men’ who protect female protestors, or ‘bad men’ who sexually brutalise female protestors, and ultimately reproduced gendered norms and inequalities within the space claimed by Tahrirists to be genderless.

After the violent backlash on International Women’s Day in March 2011 when many women were arrested and sexually violated, at the

other protests that followed later in the year women protestors started to shout slogans such as ‘the daughters of Egypt do not get stripped’ (Taher 2012, 373). In December 2011, reports state that 10,000 women were present, that there was no violent backlash against the protestors, and that large numbers of men were present in solidarity ‘initially forming human chains to “protect” the women’ (Taher 2012, 373). Therefore, despite claims to genderlessness and universal human rights, normative gender scripts and a logic of ‘acceptable behaviour’ continued to dominate throughout the Egyptian revolution. The failure to recognise this ultimately undermined the fundamental cohesion of the movement and its potential for change.

Academic theories provide insight into how these conceptions shape discursive reality for activists in democratic mobilisations. A primary way in which patriarchal power manifests itself is through sexualised violence as a tool to construct legitimate and docile bodies (Butler 1993). The presence of sexual violence across many different regions during periods of political unrest suggests a pattern in the actions of nation states to demonise and punish resistance. Recent research has primarily been undertaken into state-led sexual violence and control of sexualities (Luibhéid 2004; Lee 2011; Puri 2006), but there has been considerably less examination

of sexual violence between protestors. There is also little analysis of the role of women in gender-neutral movements – the majority of analysis focusing instead on women's or overtly feminist movements. Female protestors embody a 'double deviance' – in their capacity as anti-state actors, and also as women who challenge conventional gender norms, which can pose a threat to the interests of their male counterparts.

Sexual violence is expressed in order to further entrench authoritarian power (Butler 1993). Butler argues that power is exerted through sexual violence and the construction of legitimate identities (Butler 1992, 351). Power relations thus create notions of the self through discourse and normative violence that are performed according to a culturally-defined script that constructs the 'powerful' (Norm) versus the 'powerless' (Other) through injurious speech (Butler 1997, 49). In the construction of acceptable or legitimate identities, the intersection of class, nationality, gender, age and race become additional factors that seek to exclude the Other and thus render the body docile and obedient.

Mahmood's discussion of the subtleties of agency in Egypt points to how legitimacy can be reclaimed (Mahmood 2001: 204). She cautions against the logic of either subordination or subversion with no middle ground, arguing that oppressed

groups exert a form of agency that is 'not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create' (Mahmood 2001, 203). Women's involvement in the Tahrir Square uprising brought that capacity into the public space, but in doing so highlighted the threat that women posed to the regime. Women's groups organised and mobilised against the state, posing a threat to cultural norms and hierarchical Egyptian society, threatening to subvert the docile subject that had been created. After the revolution, male elites tried to cling on to power whilst giving the impression that the revolution was a success in order to minimise opposition. In Amar's examination of hypervisibility, he talks of how women who were largely middle class, highly educated and organised members of women's rights groups and who had been integral in leading the revolution, were undermined through a combination of their identity construction as the 'Other', and force in order to instil fear and prevent other women from joining the protest. Sexual violence was used as a humiliation tactic and method to delegitimise the protestors, emphasising that gendered identities cannot be dismantled or separated from people's identity and experience. Feminist academic theory therefore needs to find a different route to dismantling the violence of patriarchy

other than framing gender as something separate, social, and removable from experience and identity.

Conclusion

The intention of this analysis is to point out how other social justice movements can subvert imposed notions of the legitimate subject, without neglecting the needs of marginalised groups, namely women, within that movement, thus contributing to the left-wing activist agenda. Egyptian women's rights activist Mozn Hassan demands that 'it is time for this class of feminists to finally get out of its hotel conference rooms and well-guarded foundation offices and try to take back the streets' (Hassan in Amar 2011, 322). Feminist scholarship has revealed gendered power structures within formal political processes, and the rise of informal politics in the form of grassroots activism – in which both men and women participate – should not be neglected from the feminist gaze.

It is problematic to assume that claims to equality automatically lead to equal representation of marginalised identity groups, and specific attention should be paid to subgroups' needs and concerns. Feminist methodology allows for a more nuanced understanding of political structures of power, allowing navigation of hidden authorities and challenging dominant beliefs (Conti and O'Neill 2007). Butler (1993) argues that political theory must have normative

ambitions and transformative influence. By mapping the links between sexualised terror against female protestors and the erasure of a gendered viewpoint within democratic mobilisations, I hope to have highlighted key potential learning points for future democratic mobilisations in Egypt and beyond. The inability of the Egyptian uprisings in 2011 to translate into a complete social revolution suggests that grassroots activism is still a flawed technique in need of improvement. In order to improve life for marginalised people in oppressive and elitist societies, grassroots activism remains a valuable expression of political power that has great potential for achieving change.

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Evelien Geerts

**Sushila Mesquita, Maria Katharina Wiedlack, and
Katrin Lasthofer eds. 2012. *IMPORT – EXPORT –
TRANSPORT. Queer Theory, Queer Critique and
Activism in Motion*. Vienna: Zaglossus. 352 pp.
Paperback.**

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IMPORT – EXPORT – TRANSPORT. Queer Theory, Queer Critique and Activism in Motion (2012), a critical, interdisciplinary and transnational anthology in contemporary queer theory, queer studies and queer activism, consists of articles, essays and artwork that were first presented at the 2011 conference of the same name at the University of Vienna in Austria. Following the conference's conceptual structure and themes, this collection first of all addresses one of the most urgent matters in queer theory today, namely the issue of whether the concept queer still has the theoretical and political power to challenge and subvert society's current discourses and norms with regards to gender, sexuality and sexual politics without however relapsing into the kind of identity politics that works with rigid and exclusive identity cat-

egories (also see e.g. Cohen 1997 for her radical critique of identity politics and queer identity politics; and Eng et al. 2005 for a more recent deconstruction of (gay) identity politics). Whereas most of the authors of this anthology have their own, sometimes opposing views with regards to the matter of identity politics – a topic that gets introduced in this volume's first essay, in which Bini Adamczak and Mike Laufenberg criticise the politics of identity, and the politics of individuality that seems to be brought about by such a model – all of them do stress the present-day political and activist relevance and potential of queer theory.

The theme of queer theory and practice hence immediately enters the debate in *IMPORT – EXPORT – TRANSPORT*, because both the editors and authors effectively show

their readers how queer has been taken on or, on some occasions, has been rejected by activists and activist organizations outside the US (see e.g. the essay of Kulpa et al. on the ambiguous Polish (dis)identifications with the concept of queer in this volume). And the spotlighting of queer praxis and practices becomes even more manifest when the reader is confronted with the various queer artistic projects and creative essays that are included in this collection: Hanna Hacker's self-reflexive queer autoethnography, for example, offers a startling insight into the life and experiences of a queer Austrian 'femme-and-professor' (312) in a conservative academic context. By using an autoethnographic method in her poetic, almost *écriture féminine*-like essay (also see e.g. Cixous 1975), Hacker disrupts the traditional norms and logics of academic writing, and successfully brings theory and praxis closer together. Praxis and theory also stand face-to-face in Anthony Clair Wagner's subversive 'monster workshop' (347), which Wagner organised during the conference and tells us about in his written contribution to this anthology; during this workshop, Wagner asked the conference's participants to reappropriate the image of the monster, a category which has often been negatively associated with transsexuality, in order to act out their inner queerness and 'blur out the boundaries of normativity' (347).

The elements of theory and praxis are hence obviously completely entangled in this volume. But *IMPORT – EXPORT – TRANSPORT* nonetheless also pays attention to how queer theory – often branded as a hegemonic Western (Anglo-) American strand of thought (see e.g. Halberstam's acknowledgment of this issue in this volume on page 280, or Kulpa et al. for a similar critique and the thought-provoking statement that the complexities of Polish LGBT politics cannot be fully captured when seen through an American-biased lens on pages 120–7) – and queer studies and research in general, have been exported to non-English-speaking countries. Countries where they are not passively imported, as is often thought, but where they are in fact being critically and productively appropriated by various non-US scholars and organisations on a local level. *IMPORT – EXPORT – TRANSPORT* addresses this fascinating 'traveling process of "queer"' (18), queer theory and studies by investigating how queer is interpreted in multiple different ways, and how it is being brought into action in various local, non-North American contexts. The main motivation behind this anthology therefore not only appears to lie in the queering or the deconstruction of the so-called binary of academic theory versus activist practices – a dichotomy that is often said to be at work in feminism as well – but also lies in "de-centring queer studies" (18).

This concept of 'de-centralisation or de-Westernisation/Americanisation' (Kulpa and Mizielińska 2011, 101) has been borrowed by the editors of this volume from Robert Kulpa's and Joanna Mizielińska's *De-Centring Western Sexualities* (2011), and it should be seen as this anthology's most crucial leitmotif. Both the editors and authors of *IMPORT – EXPORT – TRANSPORT* effectively demonstrate that the traditional interpretation of travelling theories and frameworks as entities that are exclusively being exported from the (Anglo-)American context to non-English-speaking countries begs for an urgent and critical re-examination; this one-sided view of import-export relations does not do justice to the reality of how queer studies and its main concepts are actively and creatively being reworked and given new, localised meanings in countries such as China, former Yugoslavia, France and Germany, and Spain (see e.g. the contributions of Bao; Kajinić; Möser; and Wiesnerová in this volume). As this anthology proves, queer theory, queer studies and 'queer activism' are more than ever 'cultural and social activit[ies] within the dynamics of global/transnational academic knowledge production and (trans-)local community engagement' (Mesquita et al., 19). The processes of cultural exportation and importation of queer thus run along the criss-crossing tracks of multi-directionality, which means

that the cultural transportation of localised queer theories, studies and activisms to Anglo-American countries should be taken into account as well – which is exactly what is being demonstrated in *IMPORT – EXPORT – TRANSPORT*.

Both the motifs of deconstructing the supposed gap between theory and praxis, and the various cultural translations of queer, are thus at the centre of this anthology. But what really makes this diverse volume stand out is the fact that it upholds queer theory's and queer studies' tradition of critical self-examination. Although *IMPORT – EXPORT – TRANSPORT* as a whole is not explicitly written from a critical queer postcolonial and/or queer coloured perspective, in contrast to such volumes as *Postcolonial, Queer* (2001) or *Black Queer Studies* (2005), some of the essays in this anthology do address the topics of queer of colour critique and intersectionality (see e.g. Halberstam for the former, and Barát and Sußner for the latter). The fact that some of the authors introduce the topic of intersectionality here might sound odd at first, since intersectional theorists (see e.g. Crenshaw 1989; Wekker 2002) tend to see subjects as situated in a framework of multiple forms of oppression and privilege that interact with one another through socially constructed, co-constituting categories or identity markers, such as gender, ethnicity and others, whereas queer theo-

rists are known for their eagerness to disrupt and denaturalise identity categories in order to make the normative structures behind these categories visible. Yet, both Erzsébet Barát and Petra Sußner are involved in the process of sketching out a more intersectional, queer approach in critical legal theory in this volume – and their essays do not appear to be self-contradictory at all. They both seem to make intersectional and queer thought fruitful for one another, Sußner by examining and validating intersectionality as a possible tool to ‘overcome the gap between lesbian and gay equality politics and queer interventions’ (65) in queer legal theory, and Barát by ‘argu[ing] for a non-exclusionary, intersectional act of categorization [...]’ (82) when it comes to LGBT litigation cases. This combination of queer theory and intersectional thinking is thought-provoking, and although it has been taken up by some theorists already (see e.g. Rahman 2010; Fotopoulou 2012), these essays will definitively inspire other queer scholars and activists to further explore the path of intersectionality.

To conclude, it is exactly the combination of this volume’s attention to deconstructing the gap between queer theory and praxis, its critical views on the cultural translations of queer theory, and its manifest interest in making queer studies and theory more open to intersectional thought and other important con-

temporary theoretical interventions, that makes *IMPORT – EXPORT – TRANSPORT* such an interesting collection of queer gems. This anthology is definitively a valuable resource for those who are interested in queer theory, studies and activism with an interdisciplinary, transnational and critical, self-reflexive twist.

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**Judith Butler. 2012. *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*. New York: Columbia University Press. 288 pp.
ISBN: 9780231146104**

In Judith Butler's *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (2012), the historical call of the Shoah is present. Examining ways in which the Holocaust continues to constitute a stumbling block on which Western civilization trips over its morals, history and violence in the present, Butler describes this as an operation of trauma, where time is held hostage by a past whose violence overwhelms reason, and thus obscures possibility. A confusion of times results, relevant not only for understanding how the traumatized are forced to repeatedly confront suffering, which takes hold of the future, but also for the notion of competing temporalities that Butler has often turned to in the past decade. What would it mean to break the spell of this traumatic hold on historical scale?

This question guides a careful untangling of the knots of effacement and obscurity that enable the misuse of our trauma and history. I

use the pronoun 'we' in the hope of speaking to a tentative and hopeful universal that emerges in Butler's work and can be understood to be consistently elaborated in this book. This is not an attempt to impose a universal by erasing distinction and particularity but, instead, one that aims to honor the basic needs we increasingly share. In these pages, the possibility and necessity of such a vulnerable yet global universality has to do with learning a lesson from the ungraspable historical catastrophe called Shoah, Holocaust or Auschwitz.

Parting Ways is comprised of eight chapters, many of which have been published in previous versions or given as lectures. Together they present the direction of thought of one of the most widely-cited contemporary Western thinkers. From critiquing conditions that enable war today in *Frames of War* (2009), Butler turns in *Parting Ways* to the controversial questions of the poli-

tics of memory. Adhering to no identitarian tradition, the work evokes the cohabitation of Jewish and non-Jewish thinking on Israel/Palestine. Butler's conception of cohabitation as the basic right that might ground other rights is developed in Chapter 6, 'Quandaries of the Plural.' This increasingly significant notion emerges from a sustained engagement with Hannah Arendt's work, especially *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, where Arendt understands genocide in terms of a refusal to share the world with others.

Butler argues that taking into account voices of varying traditions in a critique of unjust policies is politically and theoretically necessary to combat the hegemonic effect that aims to silence criticism. With characteristic poignancy and even momentary lightness in the face of excruciatingly heavy questions, the book assembles a motley crew including Emmanuel Levinas, Mahmoud Darwish and Edward Said, who accompany us on the way to making a claim for binationalism in Israel/Palestine. While in the corporate media echoes of impossibility form the background of this complex issue, careful historical considerations belie the excuses which would perpetuate the conflict for the sake of domination and exploitation in the region. The theme of binationalism does not falter throughout the following pages, but acquires a philosophical depth, the inspiration for which Butler attributes to Said and Arendt.

In light of the recent UN decision to recognize Palestine's independent observer status, a movement is legible toward alleviating the unsustainability propped up by the Israeli wall, in the context of which the question of binationalism gains urgency.

Chapter 2, 'Unable to Kill: Levinas contra Levinas,' exhibits the practice of reading that neither rejects a work outright for its mistakes, nor ignores problems to accept it wholesale. This nuanced practice enables Butler to extend Levinas' ethics to those whom he was unable to face on his own terms. Thus this chapter returns to the struggle with the commandment not to kill and its contemporary reverberations. This concern forms a central thread in Butler's work on ethics and politics, via Levinas and Walter Benjamin. Throughout the discussion of the prohibition of killing, nonviolence emerges as the call of ethics in Butler's work, irreducible (and perhaps in counter-distinction) to pacifism. Chapter 3, 'Walter Benjamin and the Critique of Violence,' is a slightly expanded version of Butler's 2006 discussion, which reads Benjamin's seminal essay in terms of nonviolence, and thus in counter-distinction to Derrida's criticism in 'Force of Law' (1990). The small additions to the introduction and the last section (re)turn to Benjamin's notoriously difficult and controversial thinking on messianic materialism, also addressed in the following Chapter 4, 'Flashing Up.'

Skipping ahead, the final chapter, 'What shall we do without exile?' borrows its title from a poem by Mahmood Darwish. Here we witness a profound relation to literature and poetry, while elaborating the significance of exile. This relation is also important in *Frames of War*, and could be said to lend Butler's writing its at times ethereal quality. From *Gender Trouble* (1990) onward, we might surmise an engagement with literature as 'necessary fiction.' In earlier work, Butler described sex and gender as 'necessary fictions.' In similar terms, literature is neither circumscribed to a fictional realm nor reducible to a reflection of reality. There is a serious yet hopeful speaking and listening on both sides, as there is among theory and practice, which are neither separate nor homogenous for Butler. Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the great appeal of such praxis today.

The penultimate Chapter 7, 'Primo Levi for the Present,' discusses another major theme in Butler's work: the appropriation of discourse, particularly that of the Shoah, as an inevitable yet indeterminable consequence of time. Exploring Primo Levi's struggle with the political heritage of being a witness in Auschwitz, Butler returns to the need to reappropriate this history against misuse and injustice rather than remaining silent. Levi had repeatedly and often provocatively criticized the belligerent policies

of the Israeli state. Butler wonders about Levi's suicide, after so many years of vocal testimony. Were the attempts to silence criticism of Israel's actions and policies, alongside the weight of living and dying that haunted survivors, related to Levi's inability to continue? Chapter 5, 'Is Judaism Zionism,' defends the position of Jews and others opposed to political Zionism in present form against defacing, hurtful and unfair accusations of self-hate, or Anti-Semitism, that are indiscriminately leveled against all critics of Israeli policies in certain places in Israel, Germany and United States, among others. In 2012 such accusations were directed against Butler, on the occasion of being awarded the Adorno Prize in Frankfurt, Germany. All the major German newspapers seemed to open their pages to Butler's defense of critique – also in relation to Israeli policies. *Parting Ways* reiterates how these charges not only water-down real issues of Anti-Semitism, but also attempt to silence critique through misappropriating the Shoah, which constitutes an instrumentalization of the politics of memory.

This book can be read as posing the necessity to learn from an event that overwhelms understanding in order to make that event what it should be – history – and thus open the possibility of breaking the traumatic hold that it exercises on the present. This lesson urges us to draw connections between the

wrongs that underlie fascism and racism; injustice must be opposed regardless of the identity of victims and perpetrators. This position does not contest the singularity of the Shoah, which is at once remembered as an existing historical event that exceeds full comprehension in its scale and its horror, and at the same time, approached as a catastrophe that cannot be used to justify any further suffering. The remembrance of the tragedy, the preservation of the memory of its victims, and safeguarding this memory against not only those who would deny it but also those who would deploy it to justify other kinds of oppression enable it to become what it is, and must be, and yet, what, following the nature of trauma, it has not been: history.

These are not humble aims, yet their necessity becomes more and more evident every day, as the reach of global politics becomes stronger and stronger in a world so prone to corruption that it characterizes its *modus operandi*. Violent conflicts break out repeatedly between Israeli forces and the civilian population, and not only Palestinian resisters. The Israeli army continues killing civilians, without even leaving safe places to evacuate the injured in the recent conflict.¹ Irrevocably situated in this current urgency, the critique at issue embodies the necessity of all modes of engagement, not least academic.

Endnotes

¹ *Democracynow* news report, 15 November 2012.

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**Sara Ahmed. 2012. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 243 pp.
ISBN: 9780822352365**

In the everyday reality of equal opportunities questionnaires, corporate diversity policies, multiculturalism and global migration, Sara Ahmed's 2012 book *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* addresses some of the most significant problems that shape contemporary culture and society in the UK. Processes of othering or, as she calls it, 'stranger making' are always at the centre of Ahmed's work. The figure of the stranger, as she points out in her previous book *Strange Encounters* (2000), is not completely unfamiliar. A stranger is someone 'already recognised' as stranger, as someone who does not belong, who is 'out of place' and who is always already too close (2000, 22). Stranger making, she argues further, does not only produce the body of the stranger as stranger, but also the space where some bodies become strangers, while other bodies are at home. 'Some bodies become understood

as the rightful occupants of certain spaces' (2012, 2), she reflects in her present book, while other bodies are intruders, trespassers. Ahmed's latest book examines processes of inclusion/exclusion in institutional settings: how bodies and spaces are regulated in institutional life, or as she puts it 'how some more than others will be at home' (i.e. *not* out of place) 'in institutions that assume certain bodies as their norm' (2012, 3).

What prompted the research leading to the writing of the book was a series of changes in the legal regulation of equality in institutions (the Race Relations Amendment Act of 2000, the Equality Act of 2010, amongst others) which together led to what Ahmed calls 'a new equality regime' in the UK (2012, 8). The new legislation 'made race equality into a *positive duty* under law' requiring public institutions to come up with their own race equality policies (2012, 4 (my emphasis)).

Elsewhere, Ahmed describes the figure of the feminist in academia as 'unhappy', killjoy, or spoilsport. The feminist refuses to share the happiness of others, and 'disturbs the fantasy' of happiness (Ahmed 2010). Ahmed's story in the present book offers the 'unhappy' story of diversity politics brought about in the wake of the new legislation. In institutions that celebrate diversity, racism is an 'unhappy word' (2012, 154–155) reserved for the unhappy, who are in turn discredited as the killjoy. Ironically, the celebration of diversity and equality as something already accomplished, Ahmed cleverly points out, is one of the discursive strategies this new regime deploys to maintain/reproduce social inequalities and systemic racial discrimination. Talking about racism in an institution that is already committed to diversity and racial equality becomes a problem, because it threatens to destroy the reputation of that institution and the fantasy that racism is 'over', that it is a thing of the past. Talking about racism is anachronistic, unfashionable and even unpatriotic – the British being modern, enlightened, and as such, anti-racist (2012, 48).

Following the new equality legislation, Ahmed has been appointed as a member of the team at her university writing the institution's race equality policy. While drawing on her own experience, her analysis is based on interviews she conducted with diversity practitioners at other

universities, conference talks and workshops. Defining her method as 'an ethnography of texts' (2012, 12), Ahmed is interested in how the language of diversity gets circulated and embedded in the language of the institution.

The project lends itself to critically thinking through the perceived tension between theory and practice, and to thinking about social activism in general. Drafting documents of race equality, one has to constantly reflect on the ways in which those documents may be applied to the lived experience of social injustice in institutions. This prompts Ahmed, borrowing the terminology of speech act theory, to think strategically about how to 'do things' with those words. Diversity workers work in a 'gap' (2012, 126) between documents and praxis, in between documents, and between the future promise of a commitment to diversity and the present reality of racial discrimination. Ahmed is looking at the possibilities of inhabiting these gaps strategically.

An emphasis on experience is what gives this work a political edge against what has been seen as a dead-end to bringing together theory and practice in post-structuralist thought. Instead of examining questions of agency, Ahmed's phenomenological approach to institutional life examines 'how we inhabit institutions' (2012, 12), our orientations within an institution and towards that institution. Her 'institutional

phenomenology' (2012, 24) brings back the reality of experience, the material effects of institutionalisation, the materiality of bodies and spaces, of texts (documents) and of bodies assembling around tables (committees). She opens with the questions 'What does diversity do?' and 'What are we doing when we use the language of diversity?' (2012, 1), assuming there *are* bodies and spaces, documents and institutions; and that words *do* do things and people *do* do things with words, even though what they do is not always what they claim they do, as she later points out.

This brings us to perhaps the most exciting chapter examining statements of commitment. As she already signals in her introduction, 'the difficulty of equality as a politics' is that often 'policy becomes a substitute for action' because there is 'an investment in both law and policy as "performatives"', that is, a conviction that the words of the law will accomplish that which they name (2012, 10–11). Chapter Four (113–140) discusses statements of commitment in this light. When a commitment to diversity does not entail action, that commitment can be thought of, Ahmed argues, as 'non-performative' because the commitment is made precisely to *not* do what it says. On the contrary, the commitment is used (by way of citation) to relieve someone of the responsibility of taking action, as if action has already been taken in

the form of making the commitment. Ahmed's reversed deconstructive logic runs in a similar fashion throughout the whole book in a very tight, thorough and clear analysis of the discourse of diversity.

However, what I would consider the weakness of the book is that it reduces questions of diversity to race equality, and race equality to colour. Post-colonial theory, feminism, and especially feminists of colour, as Ahmed herself points out, have invented a good portion of vocabulary allowing for radical critical engagement with multiple intersecting structures of domination and subordination (2012, 13). In the meantime, the word 'disability' appears in the index of terminology once, while references to class and age are not listed at all. Discrimination against immigrants from Eastern Europe, which is very much at the centre of political discourse in the UK, somehow falls short of becoming theoretically articulated. There is some reflection on LGBT issues, but mainly in the context of gay imperialism and homonationalism (2012, 148). Similarly, the issue of disability comes up exclusively in connection with arguments where it is deployed to discredit, or draw attention away from, the experience of racial discrimination targeting people of colour (2012, 211, for example). Disability (as well as class), thus, seems to be reduced to the status of discursive strategy at the expense of embodied experience.

While I do not contest the relevance of the point Ahmed makes here, nor do I try to argue for a completely inclusive (happy) theory, it seems to me that under-emphasising forms of discrimination other than discrimination against people of colour puts this particular project in danger for a number of reasons. It reinforces the view that (1) racism, political mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion and questions of equality have a proper context; (2) that the context is the domination of the (white) West over the Third World; (3) and that racism, thus, has a biological – and empirical – basis.

Ahmed talks about how inclusion of the ‘other’ is always *on condition* (2012, 42–3). The person embodying diversity is welcomed by the institution – more specifically, the implicitly white bodies that make up the body of the institution – on the condition that he or she blends in with the image of the institution. You are welcome as a Bangladeshi woman as long as you do not plan to have kids. Similarly, it is okay to be gay as long as you do not sleep around and potentially spread AIDS. However, while some sinners thus gain redemption, the promise of inclusion is addressed to certain bodies and not to others. There are bodies, Ahmed emphasises, which cannot inhabit either diversity or whiteness. Perhaps looking at disability would expose the ‘on condition’ aspect of inclusion and help articulate the point Ahmed makes: you

can be autistic as long as you are a team-player, or depressed as long as you are pro-active. Of course, there is always the possibility of being referred to psychotherapy: work for your happiness, the bottom line goes, because your unhappiness will not be recognised as legitimate.

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