

What's That Smell?

Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives

How do we read the agency of the subject when its demand for cultural and psychic and political survival makes itself known as style?

—Judith Butler, "Agencies of Style for a Liminal Subject"

In the last chapter, I examined relays of influence between dominant and minority representations of eccentric gendering. Mainstream films like *The Full Monty* and *Austin Powers* might borrow or even pilfer an aesthetics of drag and gender construction from subcultural sources, and they then tend to bury their subcultural sources in the process of transforming resistant performance into lucrative entertainment. The relationship between subcultural production and the avant-garde, however, is much more complex and interactive, as I argued in chapter 5. Here, I want to theorize queer subculture production in relation to new considerations of time and space that as I have tried to show throughout this book, make sense of the decisions that queer people make about where to live, how to live and how to recraft relationality itself.

Queer Temporalities

One of my central assertions has been that queer temporality disrupts the normative narratives of time that form the base of nearly every definition of the human in almost all of our modes of understanding, from the professions of psychoanalysis and medicine, to socioeconomic and demographic studies on which every sort of state policy is based, to our understandings of the affective and the aesthetic. In Western cultures, we chart the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation; and we create longevity as the most desirable future. We applaud the pursuit of long life (under any circumstances) and pathologize modes of living that show little or no concern for longevity. At a mo-

ment when so many middle-class gays and lesbians are choosing to raise children in conventional family settings, it is important to study queer life modes that offer alternatives to family time and family life. In the descriptions of subcultural life in this chapter, I explore the stretched-out adolescences of queer culture makers that disrupt conventional accounts of subculture, youth culture, adulthood, and maturity. The notion of a stretched-out adolescence, for example, challenges the conventional binary formulation of a life narrative divided by a clear break between youth and adulthood; this life narrative charts an obvious transition out of childish dependency through marriage and into adult responsibility through reproduction. (Subcultural involvement, by delaying the onset of reproductive adulthood) challenges what Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner in their essay "Sex in Public" have termed the "institutions of intimacy" through which heteronormative culture secures its "metacultural intelligibility" (Berlant and Warner 1998, 553).

The Butler essay cited in the epigraph above—from a volume dedicated to the work of Stuart Hall—tackles the question of what kinds of agency can be read into forms of activity that tend to be associated with style. And building on the work by Hall and others in the classic volume on subcultures *Resistance through Rituals*, Butler puts the concept of "ritual" into motion as a practice that can either reinforce or disrupt cultural norms. Liminal subjects, she implies, those who are excluded from "the norms that govern the recognizability of the human," are sacrificed to maintain coherence within the category of the human, and for them, style is both the sign of their exclusion and the mode by which they survive nonetheless. The power of Butler's work, here and elsewhere, lies in her ability to show how much has been excluded, rejected, and abjected in the formation of human community, and what toll those exclusions take on particular subjects.

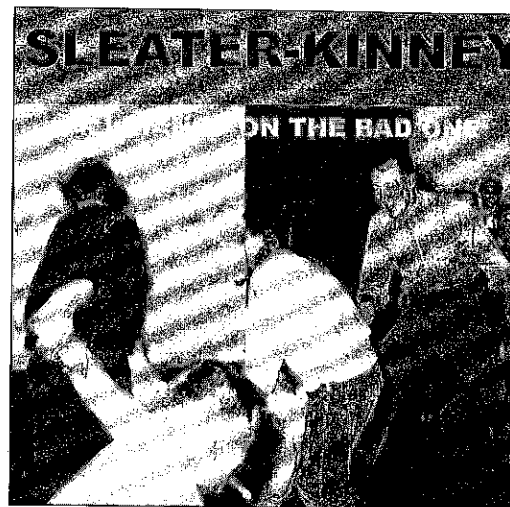
Punk has always been the stylized and ritualized language of the rejected; queer punk has surfaced in recent years as a potent critique of hetero- and homonormativity, and dyke punk in particular, by bands like Tribe 8 and The Haggard, inspires a reconsideration of the topic of subcultures in relation to queer cultural production and in opposition to notions of gay community. Subcultures provide a vital critique of the seemingly organic nature of "community," and they make visible the forms of unbelonging and disconnection that are necessary to the creation of community. At a time when "gay and lesbian community" is used as a rallying cry for fairly conservative social projects aimed at assimilating gays and lesbians into the mainstream

but no fear of
subcultural
life
to be a
subculture
(... and on?)

of the life of the nation and the family, queer subcultures preserve the critique of heteronormativity that was always implicit in queer life. Community, generally speaking, is the term used to describe seemingly natural forms of congregation. As Sarah Thornton comments in her introduction to *The Subcultures Reader*, "Community tends to suggest a more permanent population, often aligned to a neighborhood, of which family is the key constituent part. Kinship would seem to be one of the main building blocks of community" (Thornton 1997, 2). Subcultures, however, suggest transient, extrafamilial, and oppositional modes of affiliation. The idea of community, writes Jean Luc Nancy in "The Inoperative Community," emerges out of the Christian ritual of communion and expresses a sense of something that we once had that has now been lost—a connection that was once organic and life-giving that now is moribund and redundant. Nancy calls this the "lost community" and expresses suspicion about this "belated invention": "What this community has 'lost'—the immanence and the intimacy of a communion—is lost only in the sense that such a 'loss' is constitutive of 'community' itself" (Nancy 1991, 12). The reminder that quests for community are always nostalgic attempts to return to some fantasized moment of union and unity reveals the conservative stakes in community for all kinds of political projects, and makes the reconsideration of subcultures all the more urgent.

The Ballad of a Ladyman

Sleater-Kinney's anthem "Ballad of a Ladyman" describes the allure of subcultural life for the ladyman, the freak who wants to "rock with the tough girls." They sing: "I could be demure like / girls who are soft for / boys who are fearful of / getting an earful / But I gotta rock!" The band layers Corin Tucker's shrill but tuneful vocals over the discordant and forceful guitar playing of Carrie Brownstein and the hard rhythm of Janet Weiss's percussion. This is a beat that takes no prisoners and makes no concessions to the "boys who are fearful of getting an earful." And while Sleater-Kinney are most often folded into histories of the "riot grrrl" phenomenon and girl punk, they must also be placed within a new wave of dyke subcultures. When taken separately, riot dyke bands, drag kings, and queer slam poets all seem to represent a queer edge in a larger cultural phenomenon. When considered together, they add up to a fierce and lively queer subculture that needs to be reckoned with on its own terms. This chapter tracks the significant differences between the ladymen who rock and roll, drag up, and slam their way toward new



Sleater-Kinney, *All Hands on the Bad One*, CD cover, 2000.

queer futures and the punk rockers of an earlier generation of subcultural activity. My tour of dyke subcultures takes in riot dyke punk by bands like Sleater-Kinney, The Butchies, Le Tigre, Tribe 8, The Haggard, and Bitch and Animal; drag kings like Dred, and drag king boy-band parody group Back-door Boys; and slam poets like Alix Olson and Stacey Ann Chin. Queer subcultures are related to old-school subcultures like punk, but they also carve out new territory for a consideration of the overlap of gender, generation, class, race, community, and sexuality in relation to minority cultural production.

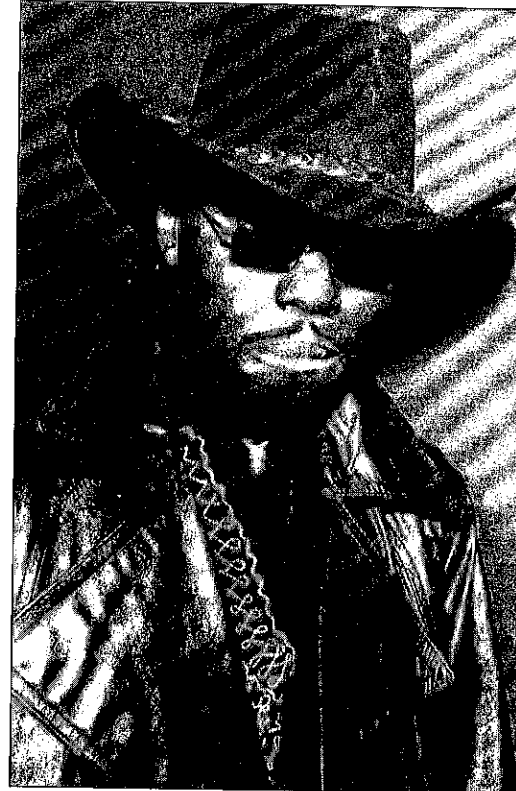
I have long been interested in and part of various subcultural groups. As a young person, I remember well the experience of finding punk rock in the middle of a typically horrible grammar school experience in England in the 1970s. I plunged into punk rock music, clothing, and rebellion precisely because it gave me a language with which to reject not only the high-cultural texts in the classroom but also the homophobia, gender normativity, and sexism outside it. I tried singing in a punk band called Penny Black and the Stamps for a brief two-week period, thinking that my utter lack of musical ability would finally serve me well. But alas, even punk divas scream in key, and my rebel yells were not mellifluous enough to launch my punk singing career. Instead of singing, I collected records, went to shows, dyed my hair, and fashioned butch outfits from safety pins and bondage pants. And so I learned at an early age that even if you cannot be in the band, participation

at multiple levels is what subculture offers. I found myself reminiscing over my punk past when I began researching drag king cultures for a collaborative project with photographer Del LaGrace Volcano. Through my new subcultural involvement, I began to see some specific features of queer subculture as opposed to larger historical subcultures like punk rock.

After finishing my drag king book in 1999, I received calls every few months from television stations wanting me to put them in touch with drag kings for talk shows and news shows (Halberstam and Volcano 1999). Most of these shows would invite the kings on to parade around with some drag queens in front of a studio audience. At the end of the show, the audience would vote on whether each king or queen was *really* a man or *really* a woman. A few of the kings managed to circumvent the either/or format and offer up a more complex gendered self; and so, black drag king Dred took off her moustache to reveal a "woman's" face, but then took off her wig to reveal a bald pate. The audience was confused and horrified by the spectacle of indeterminacy. Josh Gamson in *Freaks Talk Back* has written about the potential for talk shows to allow the "crazies" and "queers" to talk back, but most of the time when drag kings appeared in mass public venues, the host did all the talking (Gamson 1999). Drag kings also made an appearance on HBO's *Sex and the City* and MTV's *Real Life*. On every occasion that drag kings appeared on "straight" television, they were deployed as an entertaining backdrop against which heterosexual desire was showcased and celebrated. As someone who has tirelessly promoted drag kings, as individual performers and a subculture, I found the whole process of watching the mass culture's flirtation with drag kings depressing and disheartening. But it did clarify for me what my stakes might be in promoting drag kings: after watching drag kings try to go prime time, I remain committed to archiving, celebrating, and analyzing queer subcultures before they are dismissed by mass culture, or disheartened by lack of exposure or dogged by what might be called "subcultural fatigue"—namely, the phenomenon of burnout among subcultural producers.

As the talk show phenomenon vividly illustrates, mainstream culture within postmodernism should be defined as the process by which subcultures are *both* recognized and absorbed, mostly for the profit of large media conglomerates. In other words, when television stations show an interest in a dyke subculture like drag kings, this is cause for both celebration and concern. On the one hand, the mainstream recognition and acknowledgment of a subculture has the potential to alter the contours of dominant culture

(purposeful slowness on TV;
convergence on theme)



Betsy Gallagher, "Dred," 1996.
Reprinted by permission of the artist.

(think here of the small inroads into popular notions of sex, gender, and race made by the regular presence of black drag queen Ru Paul on cable television). But on the other hand, most of the interest directed by mainstream media at subcultures is voyeuristic and predatory. The subculture might appear on television eventually as an illustration of the strange and perverse, or else it will be summarily robbed of its salient features and the subcultural form—drag, for example, will be lifted without the subcultural producers, drag queens or kings. In an essay called "Elements of Vogue" that tracks the results of precisely this process, José Gatti and Marco Becquer examine the contradictory effects of the sudden visibility of Harlem drag balls and their drag practices. In their analysis of the co-optation of gay voguing by Madonna's hit single "Vogue" and Jenni Livingston's acclaimed independent film *Paris Is Burning*, Gatti and Becquer show how the counterhegemonic

knowledge articulated in voguing meets with "the violence of the universal." Gatti and Becquer write of Madonna's video and Livingston's film that "both partake in the production of newness, a process which purports to keep us up-to-date as it continually adds on novelties to a relational system that absorbs them; both contain vogueing beneath the pluralist umbrella of hipness" (Gatti and Becquer 1997, 452). And so while the queens in *Paris Is Burning* expressed a desire for precisely the kind of fame and fortune that did eventually accrue to voguing, the fame went to Livingston and the fortune went to Madonna. The subculture itself—the gay black and Puerto Rican children of the houses of Channel, Extravaganza, and LaBeija—disappeared back into the world of sex work, HIV, and queer glamour, and within five years of the release of *Paris Is Burning*, five of the queens in the film were dead.¹

The mainstream absorption of voguing highlights the uneven exchange between dominant-culture scavengers and subcultural artists: subcultural artists often seek out mainstream attention for their performances and productions in the hopes of gaining financial assistance for future endeavors. Subcultural activity is, of course, rarely profitable, always costly for the producers, and can be short-lived without the necessary cash infusions (in the words of Sleater-Kinney, "This music gig doesn't pay that good, but the fans are alright"). Some subcultural producers turn the subculture itself into a source of revenue, and as Angela McRobbie comments in her essay "Shut Up and Dance: Youth Culture and Changing Modes of Femininity," "Subcultures are often ways of creating job opportunities as more traditional careers disappear" (McRobbie 1994, 162). So while the subcultural producers hope for cash and a little exposure, the dominant culture scavengers are usually looking for a story and hoping for that brush with the "new" and the "hip" described so well by Gatti and Becquer. In my experiences working with drag kings, however, I found that while big media reached their "hipness quota" quickly with the addition of a few well-placed drag kings, they almost never paid for drag king services in return, and when they did pay, it was always a pittance. Obviously the payback for the subcultural participants cannot come in the form of material benefits; what seems more useful, then, in this exchange between mainstream attention and subcultural product, would be to use the encounter to force some kind of recognition on audiences that what is appealing about mainstream culture may well come from subcultures that they do not even know exist or that they have repudiated.

subcultural scenes. And yet it remains an important text for thinking about how to move beyond the contextualization of subcultures in terms of relations between youth and parent cultures, and for its formulations of style and historicity.

Almost all of the early work on subcultures, including Hebdige's, presumed the dominance of males in subcultural activity and studied youth groups as the most lively producers of new cultural styles. The subcultures that I want to examine here are neither male nor necessarily young, and they are less likely to be co-opted or absorbed back into dominant culture because they were never offered membership in dominant groups in the first place. Queer lesbian subcultures have rarely been discussed in the existing literature, and they offer today a new area of study for queer scholarship as well as exciting opportunities for collaborations between queer cultural producers and queer academics. One of the reasons that theorists tend to look to subcultures for political mobilization has to do with the conflation of subculture and youth culture. Hebdige, in his essay "Youth, Surveillance, and Display," for example, understands youth subcultures to register a dissatisfaction and alienation from "parent cultures" that is both "a declaration of independence . . . and a confirmation of the fact of powerlessness" (Hebdige 1997, 404). Even though this reading provides us with a better understanding of how political protest might be registered in a youth subculture, it remains trapped in the oedipal framework that pits the subculture against the parent culture.

Queer subcultures, unlike the male-dominated youth cultures that Hebdige, Stuart Hall, and other members of the Birmingham school have written about, are not located in any easy relation to parent cultures. Much of the Birmingham school's work on subcultures (and this is partly why it fell out of favor in the early 1990s) presumed an oedipalized structure within which rebel youths reject the world of their parents, and instead create a netherworld within which to reshape and reform the legacies of an older generation. Economic, political, and social conflicts may be resolved in subcultural arenas, according to these arguments, without really effecting any grand changes at the superstructure level. Of course, such a theory of subcultures has long since been replaced by more nuanced understandings of the relations between class, youth, and mass media, and indeed in her essay "Different, Youthful, Subjectivities: Towards a Cultural Sociology of Youth," Angela McRobbie comments, "There is certainly no longer a case to be made for the traditional argument that youth culture is produced somehow in conditions

of working-class purity, and that such expressions are authentic and in the first instance at least uncontaminated by an avaricious commercial culture" (McRobbie 1994, 179). But while McRobbie goes on to rethink the relations between white youth and youth of color and the meaning of femininity in postmodern youth cultures, she still presumes a heterosexual framework.

Queer subcultures illustrate vividly the limits of subcultural theories that omit consideration of sexuality and sexual styles. Queer subcultures cannot only be placed in relation to a parent culture, and they tend to form in relation to place as much as in relation to a genre of cultural expression, and ultimately, they oppose not only the hegemony of dominant culture but also the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian culture. As Michael Du Plessis and Kathleen Chapman report in an article about "Queercore," for example, "Queercore and homocore not only signaled their allegiances to post-punk subculture, but also positioned themselves as . . . distinct from lesbian and gay" (Du Plessis 1997, 65). Furthermore, queer subcultures are not simply spin-offs from some distinct youth culture like punk: as we will see in relation to riot dyke, queer music subcultures may be as likely to draw on women's music from the 1970s and early 1980s as from British punk circa 1977.

We need to alter our understandings of subcultures in several important ways in order to address the specificities of queer subcultures and queer subcultural sites. First, we need to rethink the relation between theorist and subcultural participant, recognizing that for many queers, the boundary between theorist and cultural producer might be slight or at least permeable. Second, most subcultural theories are created to describe and account for male heterosexual adolescent activity, and they are adjusted only when female heterosexual adolescent activity comes into focus. New queer subcultural theory will have to account for nonheterosexual, nonexclusively male, nonwhite, and nonadolescent subcultural production in all its specificity. Third, we need to theorize the concept of the archive, and consider new models of queer memory and queer history capable of recording and tracing subterranean scenes, fly-by-night clubs, and fleeting trends; we need, in José Muñoz's words, "an archive of the ephemeral" (Muñoz 1996). Finally, queer subcultures offer us an opportunity to redefine the binary of adolescence and adulthood that structures so many inquiries into subcultures. Precisely because many queers refuse and resist the heteronormative imperative of home and family, they also prolong the periods of their life devoted to subcultural participation. This challenge to the notion of the subculture as a

(critique of)

(critique of) the subculture as a

youth formation could, on the one hand, expand the definition of subculture beyond its most banal significations of youth in crisis and, on the other hand, challenge our notion of adulthood as reproductive maturity. I want to now consider each one of these features of queer subcultural production in relation to specific lesbian subcultures.

Queer Space/Queer Time

"Hot Topic": The Death of the Expert

First then, let us consider the relations between subcultural producers and queer cultural theorists: Queer subcultures encourage blurred boundaries between archivists and producers, which is not to say that this is the only subcultural space within which the theorist and the cultural worker may be the same people.² Minority subcultures in general tend to be documented by former or current members of the subculture rather than by "adult" experts. Nonetheless, queer subcultures in particular are often marked by this lack of distinction between the archivist and the cultural worker. A good example of this blurring between producer and analyst would be Dr. Vaginal Davis, a drag queen, who enacts, documents, and theorizes an array of drag characters. Another would be Juanita Mohammed, Mother of the House of Mashood, a women's drag house in Manhattan. Mohammed keeps a history of the participation of women of color in the drag cultures even as she recruits new "children" to the House of Mashood. Mohammed also goes one step further and makes herself central to AIDS activism in relation to queers of color.

The queer archivist or theorist and the cultural worker may also coexist in the same friendship networks, and they may function as coconspirators. A good example of this relation would be academic Tammy Rae Carland, who at one time ran an independent record label, Mr. Lady, managed dyke punk band The Butchies, and taught at the University of North Carolina. Another one would be the relationship between New York University performance studies professor Jose Muñoz, and performance artists Carmelita Tropicana and Marga Gomez. Muñoz writes about both performers in his book *Disidentifications*, and in their joint performance piece titled *Single Wet Female*, Tropicana and Gomez have a lengthy comedic exchange about Muñoz's book and whether they are engaged in acts of disidentification in the play itself. This example shows clearly the merging, overlap, and mutual interaction between theories and performative practice. Finally, the academic and the cul-

(more inspiring than the other)



Le Tigre, *Le Tigre*, CD cover, 1999.

tural producer may see themselves in a complementary relationship—Le Tigre, for instance, a riot dyke band, has a song called "Hot Topic" in which it names the women, academics, filmmakers, musicians, and producers who have inspired the band and whom the band wants to inspire. Le Tigre sings, "Carol Rama and Eleanor Antin / Yoko Ono and Carole Schneeman / You're getting old, that's what they'll say, but / I don't give a damn, I'm listening anyway."

More typically, cultural theorists have looked to groups of which they are not necessarily a part, most often youth subcultures, for an encapsulated expression of the experiences of a subordinated class. The youth subculture then becomes the raw material for a developed theory of cultural resistance, the semiotics of style, or some other discourse that now leaves the subculture behind. For a new generation of queer theorists—a generation moving on from the split between densely theoretical queer theory in a psychoanalytic mode, on the one hand, and strictly ethnographic queer research, on the other—new queer cultural studies feeds off of and back into subcultural production. The academic might be the archivist, a coarchivist, a full-fledged participant in the subcultural scene that the scholar writes about. But only rarely does the queer theorist stand wholly apart from the subculture, examining it with an expert's gaze.

I want to close this section with a quick discussion of one queer hip hop group from Oakland, California: Deepdickollective, which has made these

subcultural forms of collaboration part of its mission. DDC, as it is known, is a "Bourgie-BohoPostPomoAfro-Homo" hip-hop group that situates itself firmly in an indie queer music scene, and characterizes its music and performances as "homohop." The members of DDC are not teenagers or "youth" in any conventional sense, and they aggressively and powerfully produce histories and cultural narratives about their own work. Like many queer subcultural producers (and I want to emphasize that there are many lines of continuity between white queer subcultures and queer subcultures of color; between, say, punk queer girls and homohop boys), they discuss the meanings of their songs, performances, and collaborations, and use both the Internet and local word-of-mouth publicity to get the message out. Also like other queer subcultural performers about whom I write, they pay tribute in their work to the pioneers who came before them (James Baldwin, Essex Hemphill) or to what they call the cultural legacy of homohop. DDC offers a great model for queer subcultural life, and moves us far from the white gay male circuit parties and nightlife that has stood in for all kinds of subcultural activity in the past. But DDC refuses to make its interventions only into queer life; it also points to the interactive, but repressed relations between (queer culture and hip-hop). On its Web site, DDC reproduces a lengthy dialogue between DDC member Juba Kalamka aka Pointfivefag and Jamarhl Crawford, author of a homophobic article titled "Will You Stand Up for Hip-Hop or Bend Over?" Crawford's article, briefly stated, claims that while "homosexual integration" has affected and infected much of mainstream culture, thankfully (according to him) hip-hop is impervious to homosexual influence. Kalamka dialogues with Crawford and schools him in the meaning of homohop. At one point, Crawford tells Kalamka that he thinks DDC is great and will be extremely successful. Kalamka responds,

Actually, we tend to think about it a little differently from that. We look at what we are doing as a function of a greater movement rather than just being a hip-hop crew. We specifically called ourselves a collective because of what it implies in a greater cultural sense in terms of a place for people to enter and exit based upon their needs rather than a band of hard and fast membership. . . . To make some money at hip-hop, a living say, would be a good thing. There's more at stake here though than star-seeking. We are all educators fighting to make space for ourselves and others.

This exchange gives us a model for thinking about interactions between the subculture and the mainstream, and between new youthful groups and performers who have come before them.

Wildcat Women: Lesbian Punk and Slam Poetry

Second, queer subcultural theory should begin with those communities that never seem to surface in the commentaries on subcultures in general: namely, lesbian subcultures and subcultures of color. Cultural theory has created a hierarchy of subcultures that places English punk near the top, and then arranges mods, rockers, metalheads, club kids, DJ cultures, ravers, and rappers in some sort of descending order of importance. At the bottom of the pyramid of subcultures we will find girl fan cultures, house drag cultures, and gay sex cultures. Lesbian subcultures almost never appear at all, and so even in the documentation on balls and drag cultures, women's involvement in and relation to drag has been left out of theoretical accounts and subcultural histories. Recording the presence of lesbian subcultures can make a huge difference to the kinds of subcultural histories that get written—whether it is a history of drag that only focuses on gay men, a history of punk that only looks at white boys, or a history of girl cultures that only concentrates on heterosexual girls.

To give one example of the difference an awareness of lesbian subcultures can make, we can turn to early work in the 1970s on the participation of girls in punk subcultures. Theorists like McRobbie, Jennie Garber, and others talked about the invisibility of female subcultures and the tendency of girls to participate in coed subcultures only as girlfriends or groupies. McRobbie and Garber concluded that "girls' subcultures may have become invisible because the very term 'subculture' has acquired such strong masculine overtones" (McRobbie 1997, 114). In this essay, "Girls and Subcultures," and even in more recent work on girls and subcultures, there tends to be little recognition that some girls, usually queer ones, may in fact involve themselves in subcultures precisely because of the "strong masculine overtones" associated with the activity. And so a young queer girl interested in punk will not be put off by the masculinity of the subculture but may as easily be seduced by it. In another essay, "Settling Accounts with Subcultures," written some twelve years later and collected in McRobbie's book *Feminism and Youth Culture*, however, McRobbie articulates the failed promise of subcultural membership for young girls: "Whereas men who 'play around' with femininity are nowadays credited with some degree of power to choose, gender experimentation,

sexual ambiguity and homosexuality among girls are viewed differently." McRobbie then concludes that "the possibility of escaping oppressive aspects of adolescent heterosexuality in a youth culture . . . remains more or less unavailable to girls" (McRobbie 1991, 36). It is not until the 1990s that girls begin to find in subcultural life an escape hatch from heteronormativity and its regulations. *in general, before that!*

McRobbie's work over the years has served as a critique of the masculinism of early pronouncements on subcultures; but more than this, McRobbie has returned insistently to the topic of youth cultures and gender, race, and class. Indeed, McRobbie's opus now stands as a rich, deep, and important theoretical archive on oppositional forms of culture making. In her collection of essays *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, McRobbie models a form of intellectual practice that she calls "feminist postmodernism" and that allows her to "confront questions which otherwise remain unasked" (McRobbie 1994, 2). In the process of engaging these otherwise unasked questions, she suggests that "we also find our academic practice and our politics undergoing some degree of transformation and change" (2). McRobbie's willingness to track the transformations in her own body of work and to trace changes in her own thinking about key topics provides an excellent model for cultural theory in an ever evolving and shifting field. In one key chapter titled "Shut Up and Dance: Youth Culture and Changing Modes of Femininity," McRobbie returns to the topic of femininity and subcultures, and considers her position now as the mother of a daughter who attends raves. Commenting that we need to reorient our analyses of youth culture given "shifts in gender relations in the last decade," McRobbie examines the impact of feminism on both mass media representations of femininity and gender norms circulated by and among young girls. McRobbie concludes that girls are now operating with more flexible gender norms and that "femininity is no longer the 'other' of feminism" (173).

McRobbie does not go on to study the punk femininities within dyke cultures, yet if she did, she would find a fabulous array of feminist and queer femme performances. Guitarists like Leslie Mah of Tribe 8 as well as vocalists like Kathleen Hanna of Le Tigre and Beth Ditto of The Gossip all articulate the powerful potential of a queer femininity that served as an undercurrent to much of the riot grrrl feminism and is readable as radical style in queer punk. The recent explosion of dyke punk bands like Bitch and Animal, The Butchies, Le Tigre, The Need, The Haggard, and Tribe 8 also challenges the conventional understandings of punk as male dominated and queercore as a

largely gay male phenomenon. This explosion also makes visible the queerness that energized the riot grrrl movement even as it was assiduously ignored by mainstream media. The hardcore styles of many of these bands reminds us that punk in general, contrary to the usual accounts of the subculture, has always been a place for young girls to remake their genders. In her excellent book on women in punk, *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture*, Lauraine Leblanc tracks the relationship of girls to punk rock. While some girls involved themselves in the scene through their boyfriends, Leblanc argues that some of the really tough girls engaged in punk had to become "virtual boys" in order to earn the respect of their male counterparts. Although the subculture remains resolutely heterosexual in form, Leblanc found that punk offered girls "strategies of resistance to gender norms" (Leblanc 1998, 13).

Lesbian punks are pretty much absent from Leblanc's otherwise excellent and thorough ethnographic study of punk girls, and this may have had as much to do with when she conducted her research as with the reluctance of the girls she studied to identify as queer. For as the wave of riot grrrl crested and began to recede in the mid-1990s, many of the most interesting bands left standing were queer, female, and loud. Some of these bands, like Sleater-Kinney, retooled femininity and made punk femininity unreliable as a marker of heterosexuality. Sleater-Kinney modeled new femininities at the level of musical performance as much as at the level of style. For example, the band layers two distinctive guitars over the drums, but it omits the bass. The bass can be read here as a "masculine" instrument in terms of its production of noise in the lower registers, but it can also be read as a stereotypically "female" instrument given that many women in rock bands have been relegated to bass players because the "lead" guitar was presumed to be a male role.⁴ By using two guitars, Sleater-Kinney both undercut the notion of "lead," and refuse the conventional arrangement of bass, guitar, and drums. Other bands, like The Haggard, a hard-core group from Portland, Oregon, produce a gender-bending sound by combining drum and guitar noise with a butch voice overlay. The singer, Emily, produces a guttural roar that is neither a male voice nor a female one and she spews out her lyrics in an indecipherable growl. This butch voice shows no concern for intelligibility or virtuosity, but it produces a raw and original sound while redefining the meaning of voice, singing, and lyric.

Just as the recognition of lesbian involvement in punk subcultures changes the way we understand both the punk phenomenon and the recent

riot dyke music trend, so lesbian involvement in slam poetry forces commentators to rethink universalizing narratives about youth cultures. While slam poetry is a nationwide phenomenon, the emergence of highly talented lesbian slam poets has changed the nature of the slam event. Two performers in particular have garnered mainstream and local attention: white lesbian Alix Olson and Jamaican-born StaceyAnn Chin. Olson was a member of the Nuyorican slam team that won the national championship in 1998. She was also the 1999 OUTWRITE slam champion after a long and thrilling slam off between herself and Chin.⁵ Slam poetry is a form of competitive poetry in which poets perform three-minute poems for a panel of judges chosen from the audience; the judges rate the poems on a scale of one to ten, and the slammers move through preliminary rounds until they face-off in the finals. This necessitates each poet often memorizing and performing up to ten poems a night.

As popularized by the film *SLAM*, the slam poetry contest can easily degenerate into a macho contest of speed and fury; but it is also an offshoot of rap in terms of its rhythm and combination of spoken word with a beat. Slams therefore do attract poets of color in large numbers. Slam appeals to queer youth and queer youth of color because of the obvious connections to rap, and in places like Oakland, spoken word groups of color have been at the center of queer youth activity. Recently, queer poets of color like Chin and Sri Lankan slam poet D'Lo have made the slam a forum for very different messages about love, race, and poetry. In "Dykepoem" from her collection *Wildcat Woman*, Chin begins with the line "I killed a man today," and tells of a young black girl who fights off a rapist and justifies her sinful act: "I going to hell anyway / women who like other women go there, you know." The poem closes with a vision of prison as "a place / with only girl children inside / that place ain't no hell / sounds like heaven to me" (Chin 1998). Chin is a superb performer and regularly slams at queer people of color events all over New York City—she is as likely to appear in a nightclub as at a rally, at a conference as on the street. And while many of her poems are tough, sexy, and angry, she also infuses her work with a sense of irony and self-reflexivity. In "Don't Want to Slam," Chin writes, "I've decided / I don't want to be / a poet who just writes / for the slam anymore." The slam, she goes on to say, is just a "staged revolution," a spectacle of word pimps selling lines and rhymes for a quick "ten" from the judges. With breathtaking speed, the poem moves through a pointed critique of slamming, and makes a call for poems that tell "true histories of me and you" (Chin 1998). But the last

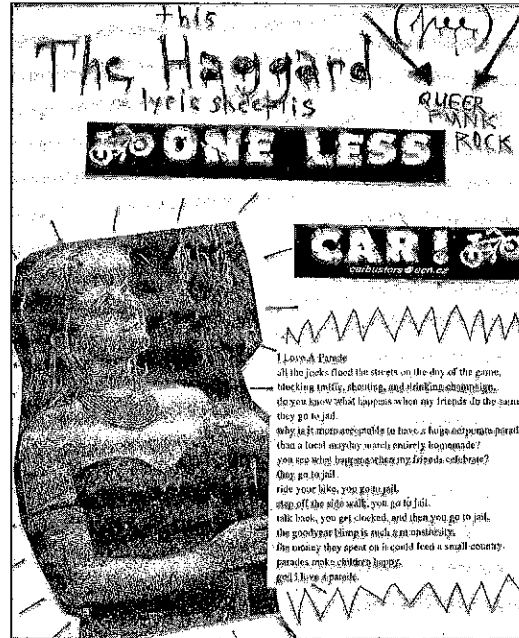
verse shows that the slam *is* true history, *is* revolution, and may just change the world by changing the *word*. By the end of the last line, we believe her:

I want to write
I left my lover and
now I want her back poems
I miss Jamaica
but now I'm never going back poems
I know it's not a ten
but it sends shivers down MY back poems
poems that talk about life
and love and laughter
poems that reveal the flaws
that make strikingly real people
real poems
poems that are so honest
they slam.

Chin and Olson's slam poetry takes both lesbian feminism and women of color feminism to a new stage and a new audience, and make poetry into the language of riot and change.

Shooting Stars: Queer Archives

Third, the nature of queer subcultural activity requires a nuanced theory of archives and archiving. Work on archives and archiving is well underway, and can be found in the work of an eclectic group of queer cultural theorists including Ann Cvetkovich, Lauren Berlant, and Jose Muñoz (Cvetkovich 2003; Berlant 1997; Muñoz 1999). Ideally, an archive of queer subcultures would merge ethnographic interviews with performers and fans with research in the multiple archives that already exist online and in other unofficial sites. Queer zines, posters, guerrilla art, and other temporary artifacts would make up some of the paper archives, and descriptions of shows along with the self-understandings of cultural producers would provide supplementary materials. But the notion of an archive has to extend beyond the image of a place to collect material or hold documents, and it has to become a floating signifier for the kinds of lives implied by the paper remnants of shows, clubs, events, and meetings. The archive is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of

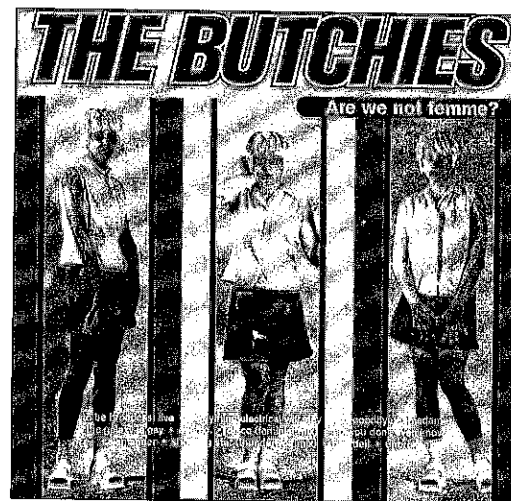


Haggard lyric sheet, 2001.

cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity. In order for the archive to function it requires users, interpreters, and cultural historians to wade through the material and piece together the jigsaw puzzle of queer history in the making.

While some of the work of queer archiving certainly falls to academics, cultural producers also play a big role in constructing queer genealogies and memories. As we saw in Le Tigre's song, the lyrics to "Hot Topic" create an eclectic encyclopedia of queer cultural production through unlikely juxtapositions ("Gayatri Spivak and Angela Davis / Laurie Weeks and Dorothy Allison") and claim a new poetic logic: "Hot topic is the way that we rhyme / hot topic is the way that we rhyme." In other words, the historically situated theorists, filmmakers, and musicians rhyme with each other's work—the rhyme is located in the function and not in the words. Similarly, while many lesbian punk bands do trace their influences back to male punk or classic rock, as we saw in the last section, contrary to what one may expect, they do not completely distance themselves from or counteridentify with 1970s and 1980s "women's music." In fact, some dykecore bands see themselves as very much a part of a tradition of loud and angry women. On their CD *Are We Not*

Femme? for example, North Carolina-based band The Butchies performs a cover of feminist goddess Cris Williamson's classic song "Shooting Star." Williamson's soaring emotion-laden song becomes a tough, percussive anthem in the capable hands of The Butchies's members, who add drum rolls and screeching guitars to lift the song out of a woman-loving woman groove and into a new era. On the band's liner notes, The Butchies thank Williamson for "being radical and singing songs to girls before too many others were and for writing such a kickass song." If we look at the covers from The Butchies's CD and Williamson's CD, it would be hard to detect the connections between the two. The Butchies's CD pays obvious homage to punk concept band Devo both in terms of its title (Devo's first album was called *Are We Not Men*) and its iconography. The connection between The Butchies and Williamson, however, runs much deeper than their relation to punk bands like Devo. The Butchies appear on the cover wearing short red-leather miniskirts that do quote the red plastic flowerpot hats worn by Devo on the cover of *Are We Not Men*. Williamson, on the other hand, appears in dungarees and stands in what looks like the Joshua Tree Desert. Her album title *The Changer and the Changed* references a modality of mutuality, organic transformation, and reciprocity. The song itself, in her hands, tells of "wonderful moments on the journey through my desert." She sings of "crossing the desert for you" and seeing a shooting star, which reminds her of her lover. The spectral image of the shooting star figures quite differently in The

The Butchies, *Are We Not Femme?* CD cover, 1998.

Cris Williamson, *Changer and the Changed*, LP cover, 1975.



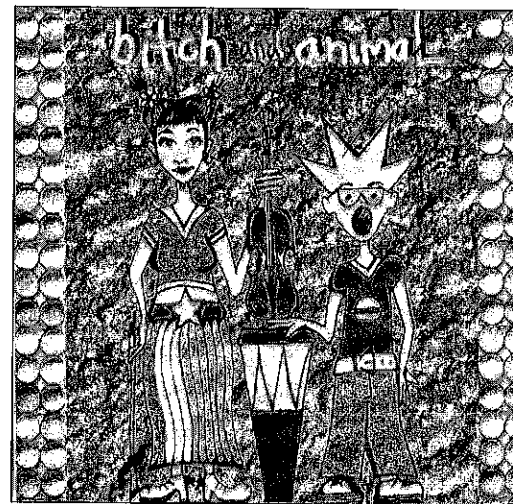
Butchies's version, where it takes on more of the qualities of a rocket than a galactic wonder. But The Butchies cover version of Williamson's song has the tone of a tribute and not a parody by making her song relevant for a new generation of listeners.

The Butchies refuse the model of generational conflict, and build a bridge between their raucous spirit of rebellion and the quieter, acoustic world of women's music from the 1970s and 1980s. Like the new queer punk productions, women's music by Alix Dobkins, Williamson, and others was produced on independent labels (like Olivia Records) and received only scant mainstream attention. This music opened up a new phase in U.S. acoustic folk music by developing large and enthusiastic lesbian audiences for music that had previously been associated with heterosexual political culture. This re-orientation of folk has had repercussions in the contemporary folk scene, where being a lesbian is often seen as a prerequisite for being a successful acoustic musician.

In her excellent essay "The Missing Link: Riot Grrrl, Feminism, Lesbian Culture," Mary Celeste Kearney also points to the continuity rather than the break between women's music and riot grrrl. But, she comments, links between earlier modes of lesbian feminism and contemporary riot grrrl productions are regularly ignored in favor of a history that makes riot grrrl the female offspring of male-dominated punk. The earlier music was made for, by, and about women, and while much of it did consist of folk-influenced

ballads, there was also a hard and angry subgenre that combined lyrics about man hating with loud guitar playing (Maxine Feldman's music, for example). As Kearney observes, however, the noncommercial practices of 1970s lesbian musicians has made them less easy to identify as major influences on a new generation of "all-girl community," and so while women's music is erased as a musical influence, so lesbianism is ignored as a social context for riot grrrl. Kearney writes that "in spite of the coterminous emergence in the US of riot grrrl and queercore bands like Tribe 8, Random Violet, The Mudwimmin and Team Dresch, there have been relatively few links made by the mainstream press between lesbian feminism, queercore and riot grrrl" (Kearney 1997, 222).

Other lesbian punk or punk/folk bands see themselves as both heirs to an earlier generation of "pussy power" and pioneers of new musical genres. Bitch and Animal, for example, authors of "The Pussy Manifesto," describe their CD *What's That Smell* as "tit rock."⁶ In live performances, Bitch plays an electric violin and Animal plays an array of percussion. Their songs, like those of The Butchies, are themselves archival records of lesbian subculture. One song from *What's That Smell* called "Drag King Bar" posits the drag king bar as an alternative to a rather tired mainstream lesbian scene. With Animal picking out a "yee hah" tune on the banjo, Bitch sings about a place where "all the boys were really girls and the fags whip out their pearls." Bitch tells of being picked up by one particularly bold king, and the song ends in a rous-



Bitch and Animal, *What's That Smell?* CD cover, 1999.

ing symphony of violin and drums. Bitch and Animal document and celebrate the emergence of a drag king scene in contemporary queer clubs, and they blend country-influenced folk with avant-garde percussion to do so. But their cover art and manifestos harken back to an era of women-loving-women in their embrace of the female body; on their Web site, furthermore, fans are encouraged to take up terms like "pussy" and "tits" with pride by brushing off the taint of patriarchal insult. Like The Butchies's decision to cover a Williamson song, Bitch and Animal's pussy power reaches out to an earlier generation of women musicians refusing once and for all the oedipal imperative to overthrow the old and bring on the new.

"I Want It That Way": A Time for Queers

Fourth, queer subcultures afford us a perfect opportunity to depart from a normative model of youth cultures as stages on the way to adulthood; this allows us to map out different forms of adulthood, or the refusal of adulthood and new modes of deliberate deviance. Queers participate in subcultures for far longer than their heterosexual counterparts. (At a time when heterosexual men and women are spending their weekends, their extra cash, and all their free time shuttling back and forth between the weddings of friends and family, urban queers tend to spend their leisure time and money on subcultural involvement: this may take the form of intense weekend clubbing, playing in small music bands, going to drag balls, participating in slam poetry events, or seeing performances of one kind or another in cramped and poorly ventilated spaces.) Just as homosexuality itself has been theorized by psychoanalysis as a stage of development, a phase, that the adolescent will hopefully pass through quickly and painlessly, so subcultural involvement has been theorized as a life stage rather than a lifelong commitment. (For queers, the separation between youth and adulthood quite simply does not hold, and queer adolescence can extend far beyond one's twenties.) I want to return here to the notion of queer time, a different mode of temporality that might arise out of an immersion in club cultures or queer sex cultures. (While obviously heterosexual people also go to clubs and some involve themselves in sex cultures, queer urbanites, lacking the pacing and schedules that inhere to family life and reproduction, might visit clubs and participate in sex cultures well into their forties or fifties on a regular basis.)

We need to situate the critique of the adult/youth binary quite carefully in relation to the production of queer public spheres because the idea of an



The Backstreet Boys, *Millennium*, CD cover, 1999.

extended adolescence is not particularly new, and nor is it always and everywhere a sign of resistant subcultures. As the success of the MTV-generated movie *Jackass* demonstrates, young white men are often encouraged to prolong their periods of adolescent fun and games long beyond their teenage years. But while "risk" for a twenty-something white dude jackass means eating urine-soaked snow, driving a golf cart into a pond, or sticking a toy car up his ass, risk means something quite different for the queer subcultural producers with whom I work. The clearly faggoty overtones of a movie like *Jackass* also shows what has been repressed in the representation of male homosocial bonding as a form of violent fun and flagrant rule breaking: the queerness of subcultural life is implied in this film and then quickly buried in flurries of homophobic othering. The phenomenon of *Jackass* (which has made its young white male participants instantly rich) suggests the scope of an "epistemology of youth"—the way in which a stretched-out adolescence in one arena (young white manhood or "Jackass subjectivity") tends to be accompanied by high degrees of misogyny and homophobia, and can be contrasted with the extended adolescence of nonreproductive queer subcultural participants that facilitates community formation and offers alternative life narratives.

Of course, a strict binary between adolescence and adulthood has also been racially coded, and this means that work on queer subcultures that

takes aim at the adult/youth binary can have problematic implications for people of color. As Eric Lott argues in his work "Racial Cross-Dressing and the Construction of American Whiteness," the desiring dynamics between white men and men of color often posits blackness as a state of "arrested adolescence" through which white masculinity must pass on its way to adulthood (Lott 1999). Lott quotes Leslie Fiedler's uncritical observations on the developmental narrative of white adulthood: "Born theoretically white, we are permitted to pass our childhood as imaginary Indians, our adolescence as imaginary Negroes, and only then are expected to settle down to being what we really are: white once more." Obviously in Fiedler's description of becoming "white once more," we hear the pernicious effects of racializing the divide between adulthood and childhood. While much of the resistance to this binary has come in the form of claiming the powerful space of adulthood, responsibility, and maturity for people of color, another method of opposing the racialized epistemology of youth, is to dismantle the inevitability and mutually exclusive construction of youth/maturity.

One consequence of the unproblematic assumption of the youth/adult binary can be observed in the recent popularity of queer youth groups. "Queer youth" has become a meaningful category largely as a result of outreach by social service providers. While I am arguing here that we might want to slow down the rush to adulthood insofar as adulthood has been unquestioningly associated with reproduction and the family, I am also suspicious of the rush to market queer youth as a new "at risk" group with its own special interests and needs. Queer youth sets up younger gays and lesbians not as the inheritors and benefactors of several decades of queer activism but rather as victims of homophobia who need "outreach" programs and support groups. By creating age limits for the groups and requiring people to "age out" at twenty-six or above, these programs both extend the period of youth into the mid-twenties and also make a sharp division between youth and adult, and often set up the two groups as antagonists. I would also claim that the new emphasis on queer youth, can unwittingly contribute to an erasure of queer history. At this particular historical moment, queers who came out in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s are fast approaching old age; these folks did not have the benefit of LGBT activism, queer activism, and so on, and their histories are important to an understanding of our present. This new emphasis on youth—again, an emphasis that arises out of an overreliance on the youth/adulthood binary—encourages young queers to think about the present and the future while ignoring the past. Not all queer youth groups or-

ganize around the category of youth such as it has been established by social service providers, however, and some groups for queer youth of color seem more likely to mark out generational differences with a set of new categorical markers like "homo-thug," "homey-sexual," or "stud."

At the same time that queers extend participation in subcultural activity long beyond their "youth," some queer subcultures also provide a critical lens through which to revisit seemingly heterosexual youth cultures. In new work on subcultures and gender/sexuality, generally speaking, there is the potential to explore the possibilities and the promise of rebellious youth genders. By focusing on the realization of tomboy desires or youthful femme aspirations in dyke punk bands and forms of queer fandom, we can see that preadult, preidentitarian girl roles offer a set of opportunities for theorizing gender, sexuality, race, and social rebellion precisely because they occupy the space of the "not-yet," the not fully realized. These girl roles are not absolutely predictive of either heterosexual or lesbian adulthoods; rather, the desires, the play, and the anguish they access allow us to theorize other relations to identity.

Gayle Wald's essay "Teenybopper Music and the Girling of Boy Bands" has also drawn our attention to the homoerotic subtext of much teen culture. Boy bands like the Backstreet Boys, Wald suggests, produce and manage anxieties about gay modes of gender performance. Boy bands perform what Wald calls "a girlish masculinity" and they channel the fantasy of perpetual youth referenced by the moniker "boy"; but they also play out socially acceptable forms of rebellion ("backstreet," for example, conjures up images of working-class youth) that can be both expressed and neatly channeled into white, middle-class heteronormativity. The phenomenon of boy bands, for me, raises a number of questions not simply about the performance of masculinity but also about what Wald refers to as the threatening aspect of the "ecstatic responses that they elicit" (Wald 2002, 25). After all, while music critics love to dismiss fandom as a passive teenybopper subculture, there is something all too powerful about a nearly hysterical audience of teen girls screaming and crying together; this activity may well have as much to say about the desire between the screamers as it says about their desire for the mythic boys. Wald argues that the phenomenon of teenybopper fans and young boy bands creates a homophobic fear of both boy fandom and homoerotic dynamics onstage between the boy performers. Yet the policing of male homosexuality, Wald continues, "creates opportunities for girls to engage in modes of consumption that have a markedly homoerotic

component, although they are typically characterized in terms of (heterosexual) 'puppy love'" (32). Again, the notion of homoerotic bonding as a stage on the way to heterosexual maturity creates a context within which both subcultural activity and queer desire can be dismissed as temporary and nonserious. Wald's careful excavation of the sources of social scorn levied at teenyboppers and her contextualization of the boy band phenomenon within popular culture opens up new and important questions about youth cultures and femininity, and it makes possible a consideration of the queer-ness of even the most heterosexually inflected preadult activity.

I never invested much hope for queer alternatives in the performance of boy bands, I must admit, until I was present at the world premiere of New York's Backdoor Boys. When this drag king boy band took the stage as A. J., Nick, Kevin, Howie, and Brian, I saw at last the butch potential of the boy band phenomenon. The queer audience screamed as each boy was introduced, picked their favorites, and began the ritual ecstatic fan worship that we associate with teenage girls, but that seems to be fun at any age. The current between the stage and the packed house was electric. At least part of the appeal of the Backstreet Boys depends on the production of seemingly safe and almost unreal masculinities—the boys croon about what they would do for their girls, about being there for them, buying them flowers, giving them gifts, doing everything that other boys supposedly won't do. The boys, in short, offer themselves as a safe alternative to the misogyny and mistreatment that many girls find and expect in adolescent relationships. Here, in a drag king context, the space of the alternative is taken back from the realm of popular culture and revealed as proper to the subcultural space. As the Backdoor Boys went into their version of "I Want It That Way" and began to act out the barely concealed homoerotic implication of the lyric, the queer crowd went wild; the source of pleasure for the queer fans had as much to do with the acting out of the song's homo potential as with the sexual appeal of the drag kings. The Backdoor Boys's performance of "I Want It That Way" speaks to the purpose of what Wald calls "the deliberate sublimation of sexual explicitness" in the Backstreet Boys's lyrics and dance moves. The fan desire and ecstasy can only be maintained by keeping at bay the erotic relations between the boys, on the one hand, and the potentially erotic relations between the screaming girls, on the other. As the boys sing together, the girls scream together, and the whole fragile edifice of heterosexuality could come tumbling down at any moment if the homosocial structures of desire are made explicit. The drag king impersonation of the faggy boy band, finally,

recognizes the act as a performance of neither male heterosexuality nor gay masculinity—this is rather an intricate performance of butch masculinity, queer masculinity, that presents itself to screaming girls as a safe alternative to hetero-masculinities.

Finally, all of these representations of teen and youth genders offer us a space within which to think through the alternatives that young people create for themselves to the routine and tired options recycled by adult culture. When the Backstreet Boys croon "I want it THAT way" and the girls scream, we think for a moment that it does not have to be *this* way, and that just maybe girl and boy partial identities can be carried forward into adulthood in terms of a politics of refusal—the refusal to grow up and enter the heteronormative adulthoods implied by these concepts of progress and maturity. The boy bands in particular allow us to think of boyhood, girlhood, and even tomboyhood and riot grrrlhood not as stages to pass through but as preidentities to carry forward, inhabit, and sustain.

Generational Divides

In this next section, I want to build on an understanding of subcultural life as a place of collectivity rather than membership, and subcultural activity, as Deepdickollective see it, as educational rather than profitable. While DDC draw powerfully on Essex Hemphill, Marlon Riggs, and other queer men of color who came before them, they also quite deliberately place themselves in relation to mainstream hip-hop culture, and demand to be heard and taken seriously within this new formation: homohop. In the example with which I conclude this chapter, a set of continuities and divisions within lesbian culture and queer punk culture produces a rupture in feminist genealogy, and reveals the stakes in producing viable theories of queer time and space.

In a brilliant essay on the relations between different historical renderings of queer identity and community, "Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations," Elizabeth Freeman introduces the concept of "temporal drag." For Freeman, temporal drag works against postmodern forms of pastiche by operating as "a stubborn identification with a set of social coordinates that exceed one's own historical moment." The possibility of such contrary temporal identifications, Freeman suggests, forces us to ask, "What is the time of queer performativity?" (Freeman 2000, 2). By breaking free from a model of intergenerational dialogue that presumes conflict and the "anxiety of influence," Freeman's close reading of temporality, affect, and queer performance

points the way to an immensely subtle and complex understanding of the relations between the "now" of performance and the "then" of historical time. I use Freeman's theoretical frame here to explore the web of influences, identifications, and disidentifications that connects the contemporary queer dyke music scene to an earlier movement of women's music. I will focus here on performers who seem to answer, or at least address, Freeman's question. As I will argue, one performer, Ferron, seems located both "out of time" and "before her time," and is somehow trapped in between different registers of historical realness. A performer like Ferron exemplifies what Freeman describes as "the gravitational pull that 'lesbian' sometimes seems to exert on 'queer'" (2).

In contemporary dyke scenes, queer musicians have multiple opportunities to play to diverse and large audiences. Many contemporary queer performers like Tribe 8, The Butchies, and Bitch and Animal reference themes of gender bending and sex play while also exploring their proximity to and distance from the women musicians who paved the way for an independent dyke music scene. Most of these contemporary bands also set themselves up against an earlier conception of white lesbian community, which included elements of sex negativity, gender separatism, cultural feminism, and womanism. But even as these bands clearly mark their difference, generically and politically, from the women's music that preceded them, they also draw surprising lines of affiliation with an earlier moment in feminism. As we saw earlier, The Butchies perform a cover of Williamson's classic song "Shooting Star" by way of tribute and as a form of archiving her contribution to the history of women's music production. Recent women's music festivals like Ladyfest 2000 are also clear inheritors of lesbian feminist music festivals and they revive an earlier model of feminism for a new generation of grrrls. Finally, Tribe 8 certainly performs a brand of sexually explicit hard-core punk, complete with dildo-waving antics onstage, but their old-fashioned brand of man hating comes straight out of 1970s women's music concerts. All three bands have played the Michigan Women's Music Festival and all three have found themselves lumped into the catchall category of "transphobic" by camp trans protesters.

But this new tradition of dyke punk, or riot dyke, also perpetuates another tradition of women's music—namely, the emphasis on white womanhood, or the exclusive focus within lesbian feminism on issues of gender and sexuality, and the disinterest in a politics of race and class. At Ladyfest, the issue of the event's racial homogeneity has been a constant irritant, but the de-

bates about the antitrans politics of the Michigan Women's Music Festival has tended to drown out other debates about race. And while white queer punk bands have upended the sex negativity of women's music and have replaced a soft acoustic sound with raucous guitars, they have done little to change its continuing legacy of racial exclusivity.

In summer 2002 in San Francisco during the annual Queer Arts Festival, the issue of race and generational conflict, political legacy, and temporal drag was staged in a dramatic fashion. That year, for the first time, musicians were included in the lineup of performances and acts. Impresario and curator Sini Anderson of Sister Spit fame decided to create a music series by pairing up older and younger queer musicians, and then splicing their performances together with an interview segment in the middle of the show. The idea, as comedian MC Elvira Kurt helpfully explained, was to put into conversation artists and audiences who might otherwise think of each other as utterly alien. The pairings included First Nation group Ulali with Kinnie Star, a Canadian self-described "mixed blood, Mohawk, hip-hop, faker, white girl" musician; Kaia Wilson of The Butchies with acoustic maverick Ferron; rhythm and blues performer Nedra Johnson with blues singer "sugar mama" Gwen Avery; Bitch and Animal with the Jewish lesbian surfer, "Pholk" singer, the Tupperware lady Phranc. Some of the pairings worked, obviously, through racial and cultural identification, some through gender styles, and others through musical styles.

It was quickly apparent that different traditions of feminism produced different intergenerational relations between and among performers. Star, for example, paid tribute to a cappella group Ulali by sampling its music on one of her most powerful songs, "Red %!" and she showed that the relationship between their music and hers, despite the extremely different styles, was not that of past and present. Star's lyrics, in English, French, and Spanish, built respectfully on the chants of Ulali, and Ulali became the foundation for her raps. Star's tribute to Ulali modeled the ways in which the old and the new can cohabit within the space of queer subculture and across feminist generations. The legacy of white feminism and lesbian feminism in particular has been much more difficult to reconcile with contemporary queer culture, and so on the evenings when white performers from different generations shared the stage, something happened that created insights into the mechanics and function of Freeman's concept of temporal drag. On the night when Wilson opened for Ferron, a fascinating contrast in styles and modes of masculinity emerged. Similarly, when Bitch and Animal opened for Phranc, the audience

was confronted with a complex politics of address. In both cases, the older performers seemed to be at odds with history, out of sync, and working with a different understanding of time and rhythm where we can understand rhythm as literally a form of "keeping time" or being in time.

On the evening when Wilson paired up with Ferron, the crowd was a blend of San Francisco young punks and older queer women. Wilson, used to playing in a band, seemed out of sorts on the stage alone. She played a short acoustic set more reminiscent of Holly Near than Johnny Rotten and moved aside for the interview segment. The interviewers were Lynn Breedlove of Tribe 8 and women's music producer Barbara Price. While Breedlove tried to joke with Wilson, Price asked tough and important questions about The Butchies's punk-influenced style and its relation to earlier women's music genres. Even though her set seemed to match up perfectly with an earlier era of women's music, Wilson seemed at a loss for language to discuss the connection. When Ferron came onstage, however, the dynamics and mood changed completely. Ferron was dressed in jeans, jacket, and tie, and looked much butchier than any Butchie on the stage and certainly butchier than she had looked in her younger days. Her butch style was also a form of temporal drag given that she had steered clear of a butch persona at the height of her career in the 1980s; but now, in the heat of a butch-femme revival, she obviously felt enabled to display an open investment in her own masculinity. And still, her butch style was not the butchness of twenty-something San Franciscans; it was the butch style that she might have indulged in during the 1980s had she thought her career as a folk singer in the midst of an era of women's music could have survived it. The tie and cowboy boots looked both dignified and sad as they carried the weight of her own repressed past.

Ferron immediately took charge of the conversation and talked about how, when she began playing music in the 1970s and 1980s, there were no early influences, no women who had laid the way for her, no histories that she had to reject or to which she could lay claim. She said, "For me there were no influences, it was empty out there and all I got back was a resounding echo. When you want to still an echo," she added, "you have to go to the source. So I decided to just rely on myself." She marveled at Wilson's sense of having musical styles from which to choose, and announced herself to be of the past and yet without a past. This created a vertiginous temporal space by placing her outside of both her own and queer time. Her dynamic with Wilson and Melissa York from The Butchies was fatherly rather than nurtur-

ing, and in true paternal style, she commended York on her drumming, describing it as "restrained and therefore all the more powerful." When Ferron took the stage a few moments after the interview ended, the theater experienced a surge of some combination of nostalgia and anticipation. Ferron, unlike Phranc, who had played a few evenings earlier to an uninterested crowd of Bitch and Animal supporters, was able to lift herself out of the past and touch down meaningfully in the present.

In her essay on temporal drag, Freeman argues that Butler's rendering of gender as a copy with no original, unwittingly forecloses the possibility that "prior signs" might have purchase over "whatever looks newer." Freeman writes, "To reduce all embodied performance to the status of copies with no originals is to ignore the interesting threat that the genuine *past*-ness of the past sometimes makes to the political present" (2). Ferron's performance presented an original with no copy—she was neither the historical template that younger performers imitated or rejected nor the representative of an earlier era. In the time of women's music, Ferron was as much of an anomaly as she was in this moment of queer punk. And so Ferron, in the context of this evening's pairing of her with a much younger and much less butch musician from The Butchies, took on the glow of authenticity and originality, and created an interesting relay of sentiment and affect between herself and the young audience.

Shadows on a Dime

Ferron's songs have always been about time passing, about her place in time, her sense of her career in music as "moving forward by holding back." I want to end with a closer look at one of her most famous songs, "Shadows on a Dime," to track the performances and performers who lie somewhere in between the "then" of historical time and the "now" of performance, the temporal drag and lag that allows some pieces of history to simply fall away and remain lost to narrative. Ferron represents what can be lost even for white lesbians in the relentless urge to universalize white lesbian culture and represent it as historically continuous. In "Shadows on a Dime," Ferron tells an origin story somewhat at odds with the lesbian feminist myths of women's community. She tells the autobiographical story of a young singer who leaves her factory job in a depressed industrial town to look for fame and fortune in the big city. As she begins her story, she also begins relentlessly to mark time—"Fifteen years ago I worked the line"—and she understands her life



Ferron, *Testimony*, LP cover, 1980.

stages as before and after she began to sing, suggesting a different form of development: coming-of-age here is literally a coming to voice. And she remembers her community as not lesbians but female factory workers, and music is an escape from not simply hard labor but a life reduced to “doing time.” Musical time by comparison—“Ten years have worn this guitar down”—is about “having time,” and while old women die from the hard work in the factory, Ferron’s guitar marks time’s passing more gently and it “resonates with age.” But Ferron also brings the past into the present by promising that she won’t forget about the factory and, by implication, the class politics that it engenders; and this memory will install an uncertainty in the present about a successful future: “Can I give you what you want to see? Can we do it one more time?” Her class background, like her barely concealed butchness, leaves her outside of both the queer musical communities in contemporary San Francisco and the women’s music communities of the 1980s.

As the song builds, it progresses without recourse to a chorus and it is plotted as a spiral rather than a cycle; the singer enters “dream time” and begins to address her newly formed audience—“I sing to you to feed the dream.” This dreamscape allows for queer time, a time of eros that is represented in the next verse by a lost lover—“Five years have blazed since she warmed my side”—but that is actually the romantic relationship between Ferron and the

listener. Finally, dream time opens up into heterotopic space as Ferron references the motor of the song’s narrative, a train that takes her from her rural working-class past to an as yet unknown queer urban future. The train represents time as movement through space, and locates subjectivity as both local and distant: “This window makes a perfect frame.” In the song’s last verse, we are in a tentative and even fatigued space of the now: “And now a tired conductor passes by.” Even in this fleeting present, other temporalities crowd the stage; generational time enters as the conductor tells Ferron, “I have a daughter as old as you.” And yet Ferron identifies not with his daughter but with a younger version of him: “I imagine him with his hair jet black.” The time of his past (the younger conductor with whom Ferron identifies) and his future (his daughter) are abruptly compressed by the time of queer performativity as he announces that “the New York train stops here.”

At the Brava Theater that night, the time of queer performativity was this heterotopic space crammed with overlapping temporalities for both audience and performer. Ferron represented authenticity (old butch versus new butch), copy (she comes belatedly into a butchness that she could not express in the time of women’s music), a past in queer music history that is not the history of women’s music, and an uncanny present of a singer whose time has come even as she remains out of time and whose audience has arrived but too late to see her in her time. When Ferron launched into the opening verse of “Shadows on a Dime” that night, the audience sat up, caught for a moment by another rhythm and pulled “forward by holding back.” The bond between audience and performer was palpable and, dare I say, real. Ferron got as far as Santa Cruz—“I left my soul in Santa Cruz”—then fumbled for the words: “I ached all night / Next day I lost my. . . .” What did I lose? she asked the audience—“my shoes.” She picked up pace again: “It’s so optional what you may or may not lose / in this pattern we call time.” But that was it, she lost the words after that, she couldn’t remember what came next, and this young audience, unlike her other audiences in Santa Cruz and Michigan, could not help by calling out the words for her to sing. She strummed a few more bars and then fell silent.

In any project on queer temporality, one has to grapple with the meaning of intergenerational dialogue outside the frameworks of conflict or mandatory continuity. Today’s young punky performers connect easily with their multigenerational audiences. But the older performers create an affective vortex by pulling new audiences to a place they neither remember nor know through history, and by simultaneously taking older audiences back to that

place between the time of lesbian and the time of queer. Ferron surmounts the problem of her audience's conflicting time frames by articulating herself as her own best audience and refusing the empty lure of mainstream success: "But I don't forget about the factory / I don't expect this ride to always be / Can I give them what they want to see / Let me do it twice—The second time for me." And she invites those who do listen to enter that strange space behind the window of a train, and to look out from behind the music onto the urban landscape of a queer time in which fame, fortune, and success will always be as fleeting as "shadows on a dime." The song ends abruptly in the middle of a thought leaving her and us, the audience, stranded in a past that no longer exists, waiting for the future recognition that we now know will never come.

Queer Times

In his powerful study of a disappearing sexual subculture in New York City, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, queer legend Samuel Delany describes queer subterranean worlds as "a complex of interlocking systems and subsystems" (xviii). The unimaginably precious meaning of these systems are of no consequence to the city planner who sees only ugliness and filth where Delany sees a distillation of the promise of radical democracy. The porn theaters that Delany visits and learns from offer him and other men, he claims, one of the last opportunities in urban America for "interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will" (Delany 1999, 111). Counterpublics, as his book shows, are spaces created and altered by certain subcultures for their own uses. Since lesbians and women in general partake so little in public sex cultures, we, much more than gay men, need to develop and protect counterpublics for subcultural uses. In the Bay Area—San Francisco and Oakland in particular—there is a long history of subcultural activity; counterpublics abound here, and new bands, spoken word artists, and performers appear weekly at different shows in different venues. These counterpublics have survived the dot.com explosion and the latest recession, the yuppies and the businesspeople; they have also survived so far the new patriotism of a post-9-11 culture and the new homonormativity of the recent lesbian baby boom. To return to Butler's question from "Agencies of Style for a Liminal Subject," "What sorts of style signal the crisis of survival?" (2000, 36), we can now answer that the crisis of survival is being played out nightly in a club near you. The radical styles crafted in queer punk bands, slam poetry events, and drag

king boy bands do not express some mythically pure form of agency or will but rather model other modes of being and becoming that scramble our understandings of place, time, development, action, and transformation.

In this chapter, I have tried to chart a different epistemology of youth and seniority for queers, and an altered understanding of temporal movement and generational interaction. According to Ferron's haunting song, "We move forward fast by holding back." I want to hold on to the complex temporal pattern of her song in order to disrupt simple models of continuity and linear understandings of cultural influence. We may well be touched by the tribute paid by The Butchies to Williamson or by Tribe 8 to Joan Jett, but the echo of Ulali in Star's music reminds us that these tributes tell only part of the story of second-wave feminism, 1970s women's culture, and lesbian subcultures. The project of subcultural historiography demands that we look at the silences, the gaps, and the ruptures in the spaces of performance, and that we use them to tell disorderly narratives. A queer history of subcultures, armed with a queer sense of temporality, tracks the activity of community building, traces the contours of collectivity, and follows the eccentric careers of those pioneers who fall outside the neat models of narrative history—the Ferrons and Phrancis, but also the Joan Armatrading—and who still need to find a place in the winding, twisting story of queer subcultural lives.

In their foundational introduction to their anthology *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd offer a more broad-based understanding of the implications of alternative temporalities. Lowe and Lloyd articulate a critique of modernity that resonates in what they label "the excavation and connection of alternative histories and their different temporalities that cannot be contained by the progressive narrative of Western developmentalism" (Lowe and Lloyd 1997, 5). In Lowe and Lloyd's anthology, the alternative political cultures in question are global in nature and mostly situated out of the West. But their call for "affirmative inventories of the survival of alternatives" can also be engaged in the very belly of the beast. Lowe and Lloyd instruct us in the methods for seeking out alternative lives in capitalism, and their introduction provides a theoretical map of capital's shadows. Ferron, like Deepdickcollective and other subcultural groups, understands herself to be engaged in a collective project that is rewarded not by capital or visibility, not by the market, but by an affective connection with those people who will eventually be the vessels of memory for all she now forgets. And like Lowe and Lloyd, Ferron looks not to the dime but to its shadows.

belly of the beast
potential culture?

Notes

Notes to Chapter 1

- 1 Thanks to Glen Mimura for the phrase "epistemology of youth."

Notes to Chapter 2

1 For more on the erasure of Philip and the downplaying of the racial narrative, see the debates about *Boys Don't Cry in Screen*, particularly the essay by Jennifer Devere Brody (2002).

2 I found out later that the filmmakers, Muska and Olafsdottir, had been present at an earlier screening of the film in Seattle where similar concerns had been raised and no satisfactory answers had been provided by the two directors. In some ways, I was fielding questions meant for Muska and Olafsdottir, but in other ways, I was being positioned as another "outsider" who seemed not to be able to comprehend the complexities of small-town life in the Midwest. I tried to correspond with Muska and Olafsdottir about this particular set of reactions to their work, but to no avail. They did not want to talk about the question of "condescension" at all and had no insights to offer about these readings of *The Brandon Teena Story*.

3 Alan Sinfield usefully defines the "metropolitan" for use in queer studies in his essay "The Production of Gay and the Return of Power." He remarks on the interactive definitions of metropolitan and nonmetropolitan, and defines metropolitan sexualities as those that take place in the "global centers of capital" and the "principal cities in a nation state" (21). He qualifies this homogenizing notion of the metropolitan, however, by noting that "subordinated groups living at or near the centres of capital and specifically non-white minorities, may be in some aspects non-metropolitan; a Filipino living in New York may share some ideas and attitudes with people living in the Philippines" (21).

4 See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other*. Fabian writes that "the temporal discourse of anthropology as it was formed decisively under the paradigm of evolutionism rested on a conception of Time that was not only secularized and naturalized but also thoroughly spatialized" (16).