SMASH THE SYSTEM!

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Punk Anarchism as a Culture of Resistance

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TRANS-FEMINIST PUNK IN THE UNITED STATES: COLLECTIVE ACTION, ACTIVISM & A LIBIDINAL ECONOMY OF NOISE

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Chapter Thirteen: Trans-feminist punk in the United States: Collective action, activism, and a libidinal economy of noise

Casey Robertson

This chapter explores the tripartite relationship between transgender identities, political activism, and sonic practice. In particular, this chapter employs theorizations of noise to explore a rupture in the prevalent binarisms of sound and gender in the American punk scene and its aesthetics. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks such as Herbert Marcuse's one-dimensional society and Jean-François Lyotard's conception of a libidinal economy, the sonic practices of trans-feminist artists such as GLOSS (Girls Living Outside Society's Shit) and the HIRS Collective are re-examined to interrogate their capacities to initiate acts of intentional antagonism to construct new spaces for the invisible and/or overlooked. Through such a trajectory, the intended goal is to reveal not only such trans-feminist artists' collective actions of political resistance towards the modern neoliberal state, but perhaps most importantly, the typically less examined yet far-reaching ramifications of their inherent situatedness outside of such socio-political structures and machinery. While such artistic practice pits itself against the increasingly one-dimensional state of commodification in the punk genre, it also probes deeper to illuminate the related homonormative currents which have exerted considerable effort to flatten notions of diversity and difference within contemporary LGBTQ2S communities. It is ultimately through this complex matrix of identity, affective flows, and a political (dis)engagement with the dynamics of the American punk genre that we can begin to bear witness upon a modern form of sonic anarchism; one which fragments itself off from previous constructions yet reveals a possibility for new formations to those previously rendered silenced, both figuratively and literally.

When discussing the transgender movement within the United States historically, we not only bear witness to a rich history of anarchistic organizing and resistance toward hegemonic structures, but also an existence which

activist Jerimarie Liesegang once argued was both radical and anarchistic, if not insurrectionary at its core (2012, p. 88). While activists such as Liesegang have articulated anarchist currents in the very embodiment of trans individuals, others such as Elis L Herman have argued that gender subversion is most effective when viewed as a tool of anarchy (2015, p. 76). Whether we examine modern examples of gender transgression, or past efforts to resist the biopolitics of normativity as structured through the project of modernity, trans individuals have consistently provided examples which could be described as a schism against the gradual co-opting of queer identities into the currents of late capitalism and its related counterpart, homonormativity. With this stated, throughout the past decade, we have witnessed a heightened exposure of trans identities within mainstream media outlets in the United States, with a slow move toward a limited (though often problematic) inclusion of trans characters into television and film. *Time* magazine even produced an article titled 'The Transgender Tipping Point' (2014). Such heightened exposure has led some to believe that a fundamental shift in public discourse has occurred. One such example comes from the philosopher, Slavoj Žižek (University of Dundee, 2019), who recently attempted to argue that transgender identities fit neatly into the structures of late capitalism, citing his rationale as an endorsement of trans rights from corporate figures Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, and Tim Cook. Despite such supposed progress of a more inclusive society for trans individuals, 2019 had the highest number of reported anti-trans hate crimes in the United States (Lang, 2020). Furthermore, much of the inclusion we hear of is very much surface level; a case of in-theory but not in-practice. As Reina Gosset, Erica A Stanley, and Joanna Burton have recently stated in the introduction to their volume on trans cultural production:

> we know that when produced within the cosmology of racial capitalism, the promise of 'positive representation' ultimately gives little support or protection to many, if not most, trans and gender non-conforming people, particularly those who are low-income and/or of color – the very people whose lives and labor constitute the ground for the figuration of this moment of visibility. (2017, p. xv)

It is against the backdrop of such complexities that this chapter will explore and highlight pathways of anarchist thought and organizing in the United States, notably through sonic acts of expression from trans individuals engaged in the punk genre of music. While it could be argued that much of the literature written upon trans issues is often visual in nature, it is important to also examine the role of the sonic and the auditory and their entangled relationship with the biopolitics of hegemony. (These key terms can be defined as follows: biopolitics – the subjectivized management of human life by regimes of governance; hegemony – political, moral and cultural domination by a ruling class.) As Robin James has argued:

> Sound frequencies, the overtone series, the limitations of the human ear, organs, hormones, chromosomes, the shape and color of bodies – these supposedly natural phenomena make it easy to appeal to nature in defining music, race, or gender, and in making normative claims about them. (2010, p. xiii)

Keeping this in mind, there are many examples of artists both past and present that could aid in a survey of considerable length, however, this chapter aims to carry out a more concentrated focus to provide an incomplete but in-depth examination through two trans-feminist punk artists, GLOSS and the HIRS Collective, both active in the United States during the past decade. It is through these transgressive acts of sonic expression that we will explore the possibility of resistance and agency through a proposed conception referred to as a libidinal economy of noise. Thus, such a discussion attempts to delve into the auditory dimension of such contexts. Considering that so much attention toward trans issues is placed upon aspects of the visual, such a shift toward the auditory dimension will allow us to begin to explore what philosopher Don Ihde has described as a decentring of the dominant tradition of visualism to search for a recovery of the richness of primary experience, whether forgotten, covered over, or simply that which yields itself not toward the visual but toward the realm of listening (2007, p. 13).

Historical foundations of trans anarchisms

When discussing the transgender movement's relationship with anarchist thought and organizing, we can trace such a politics back to the political activism of such groups as Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) which was a group formed following a 1970 sit-in at New York University to protest the cancellation of a dance sponsored by a gay organization. STAR would solidify during 1971 through the efforts of Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P Johnson, and was a gender non-conforming, gay, and transgender activist organization that worked as a political collective while also addressing overlooked issues such as the need to provide support and housing for homeless queer youth and sex workers in Downtown Manhattan. Though only active in an official capacity for approximately three years, STAR has been considered not only groundbreaking in the realm of queer liberation, but also a historical model for future organizers. In addition to STAR's community work, the collective also produced documents such as a manifesto calling for an end to the widespread systemic oppression of sex workers and sexual and gender minorities, and included a final point stating:

> We want a revolutionary peoples' government, where transvestites, street people, women, homosexuals, Puerto Ricans, Indians, and all oppressed people are free, and not fucked over by this government who treat us like the scum of the earth and kills us off like flies, one by one, and throw us into jail to rot. This government who spends millions of dollars to go to the moon, and lets the poor Americans starve to death. (STAR, 1970, in Cohen, 2008, p. 37)

STAR worked from a similar standpoint to their contemporaries of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), embodying a multi-faceted understanding of liberation that was shaped by both anti-racist and anti-imperialist movements. Yet despite such significance and far-reaching influence, much of modern discourse has until recently given little attention to such collectives and alliances, often relegating them to the sidelines for more palatable assimilationist currents toward contemporary neoliberalism. As Nothing has noted, STAR without a doubt employed anarchistic tactics to empower

gender-variant people to survive in spite of the state. Nothing further states that it is because of transphobia and white supremacy, coupled with overarching assimilationist ideologies that such acts of insurrection have been erased from popular narratives (2013, pp. 3-11). Similarly, historian Roderick Ferguson has argued that the contemporary mainstreaming of queerness is a trend that also has an effect of obscuring the real and historically productive convergences between queer politics and other forms of struggle (2019, p. 19). Ferguson draws from the critical theory of Herbert Marcuse, notably through his theory of a one-dimensional society which argues that industrial resources are utilized to disqualify opposition, rendering a resultant society in which 'former antagonists' are united in an 'overriding interest in the preservation and improvement of the institutional status quo' (Marcuse, 1964, p. xlv). Through Ferguson's one-dimensional account of queerness, popular narratives such as that of Stonewall not only scrub the prior activist histories from the accounts of gender non-conforming people involved but also renders them as pre-political subjects who merely provided a stepping-stone to single-issue gay rights. It is such widespread and whitewashed narratives that truncate histories of long-standing political activism and engagement into mere fleeting momentary actions. Drawing from the accounts of Rivera, Ferguson argues 'it is more accurate to say that trans women were the intersectional linchpins between anti-racist, queer, and transgender liberations' (2019, p. 21). While this discussion focuses upon modern acts of artistic political organization amongst the trans movement, it is important to begin by emphasizing that such action is not a modern development but rather a consistent avenue of political action, sometimes working in convergent pathways with other groups, but also at many times working in divergent pathways of time and space as well. We also encounter similar challenges when examining the history of trans artists in the American punk scene. While one might assume that trans identities would find a suitable outlet of expression within the American punk scene both musically and culturally, such a correlation has been in reality a complex relationship, one not without its embodied tensions and contradictions, but also one of possibility through the cultural production of punk artists GLOSS and the HIRS Collective. It is through the affective engagement of the sonic practices of these two trans-feminist artists that I theorize the possibility of a libidinal economy of noise; a concept holding potential for not only trans identities, but

also other anarchists searching for remaining possibilities of resistance within the totalizing biopolitical structures of modern neoliberal states.

Prior to examining the cultural production of such specific artists, or even the related subcultures or politics of punk, it is important to recognize the related fragmentary nature at play. Perhaps such a challenge has been articulated by Ruud Noys, who recently stated:

> To be clear, there is no aesthetic prescription for anarchist music; any attempt to define it solely on the basis of sound or style is fruitless. Any aesthetic that is identified as 'anarchist' is immediately undercut by non-anarchist manifestations of that same aesthetic – but in an even more fundamental sense, it *shouldn't* be possible to identify an anarchist aesthetic. The musical forms, genres and scenes associated with anarchism are myriad, which is to be expected since anarchism itself is highly amorphous and ill-defined. (2020, p. 15)

In a similar manner, it is important to also avoid totalizing narratives or definitions related to discussions of gender in this context. Thus, when examining anarchistic music which lacks a concretely defined aesthetic, we should allow for a similar parallel of fluidity when discussing the work of trans artists which embody a vast heterogenous spectrum of identities and expressions. Thus, we must exercise caution when attempting to examine and explore this form of interplay with punk music in this particular discussion. In recent scholarship such an issue has been brought into focus into by Jay Szpilka (2020), who in a similar manner to Noys, has recently noted that any understanding we aim to attain of trans artists in the punk genre will also encounter similar limitations. Szpilka proposes that any mapping of such a history must uncover the artists' related punk biographies and then proceed by undertaking a related investigation of punk's fostering of dissident womanhoods (2020, p. 121). While such an approach provides a contemporary framework to examine trans artists engaged in the punk genre, we also face the challenge of effectively piecing together such histories. While it is true that trans women have been active throughout punk's history, such identities have often been either overlooked and/or misrepresented throughout past decades. Such issues pose challenges not only due to the omitted aspects of identity and expression in oral histories and publications,

but more problematically, also due to accounts and descriptions which may have unintentionally or at times even intentionally misrepresented the artists being discussed. Shifts in language and discourse related to diverse identities and expressions must also be accounted for as well. While this particular chapter has the benefit of exploring such connections within a recent historical context, it is important to be cognizant of such inherent challenges prior to proceeding. In an effort to recognize the diversity of trans artists and their cultural production, we can draw upon useful methodology from Heckert who has argued that anarchism must oppose overdetermined notions of opposites as they imply binarism which is a tool of oppression (2012, pp. 63-75). Allowing for such fluidity also reveals related fissures of possibility. As Herman argues in her article 'Transarchism', through their various crossings of cultural borders, trans individuals can expose the ambiguous nature of the state and how it acts as an unfixed collection of powered forces rather than a monolithic manifestation of power to reveal not only the significance of gender as an expression of state biopower, but also how related transgressions exert methods of resistance (2014, p. 98).

GLOSS (Girls Living Outside Society's Shit)

The first artist to be discussed in this chapter is GLOSS (Girls Living Outside Society's Shit), a trans-feminist hardcore punk band that was active in Olympia, Washington from 2014-2016. GLOSS, a five-person band, was fronted by Sadie 'Switchblade' Smith and included guitarists Jake Bison and Tannrr Hainsworth, bassist Julaya Antolin, and percussionist Corey Evans. Inspired by the emotional vulnerability of Massachusetts-based hardcore punk artists Reach the Sky and Bane, Switchblade sought to address what she viewed as a void of diversity and experience in this scene, particularly in relation to the inclusion of women, people identifying as queer, trans, the disabled, and people of color. For GLOSS, inclusion in their performance spaces would not only include feeling safe, but perhaps more significantly, also feeling welcome. With this stated, GLOSS's approach worked to alter the immediate landscape, both through the musical material produced and the dynamics of the surrounding space for performers and attendees. While the band produced only approximately fifteen minutes of recorded music in

entirety through two extended play records (EPs), their work has proved impactful through not only the thematic content of their lyrics, but also through the visceral intensity of their performative aesthetics. Both of these realms are notable in their ability to articulate often overlooked and unaddressed themes of violence saturating the day-to-day existence of trans individuals in the United States. GLOSS's first 2015 release simply titled *Demo* helped establish their relevance in articulating trans experiences with the tracks such as 'GLOSS (We're From The Future)', 'Masculine Artifice', 'Outcast Stomp', 'Lined Lips And Spiked Bats', and 'Targets Of Men'. *Demo's* lyrical themes additionally articulated related experiences such as the cis-gaze, and the medicalization of trans bodies. The opening track 'GLOSS' would become an anthem during live performances, with Switchblade surrounded by

Figure 13:1 – Cover of GLOSS's *Trans Day of Revenge* (2016).

audience members collectively shouting:

> They told us we were girls.
>
> How we talk, dress, look, and cry.
>
> They told us we were girls.
>
> So we claimed our female lives.
>
> Now they tell us we aren't girls.
>
> Our femininity doesn't fit.
>
> We're fucking future girls living outside society's shit!
>
> (GLOSS, 2015)

While many bands encourage audience participation, GLOSS proved unique in this regard through their manner of engagement, notably by articulating connections to many of those listening who often felt excluded from the related music scenes. Such action was perhaps best exemplified through the lyrics from 'Outcast Stomp':

> This is for the outcasts,
>
> Rejects/girls and the queers.
>
> For the downtrodden women who have shed their last tears/for the fighters,
>
> Psychos/freaks and the femmes,
>
> For all the transgender ladies in constant transition cast out.
>
> Outcast Stomp!
>
> (GLOSS, 2015)

The success of *Demo* would quickly demonstrate the void that Switchblade saw the need to address within the punk subculture of the United States. She would later describe how *Demo* managed to resonate across fields of experience with both audiences and listeners, stating:

I consistently feel bowled over by the [positive reaction to the demo] … I have been brought to tears many times from letters, emails and conversations at our shows with other queer and trans folks who have been impacted by our songs … I think for trans women to be honest about their lives there [will] be a lot of pain and a lot of shit to dig up. Singing in GLOSS is kind of like getting to be a superhero, like weaponizing a lifetime of anguish and alienation. (Switchblade, in Berbernick, 2015)

The band would follow up with a second extended play album *Trans Day of Revenge* which was released the day after the 2016 mass shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. The record was only six minutes and fifty-eight seconds in length yet managed to further articulate the violent realities that many trans individuals face as well as related themes such as police brutality and racism. The album's opening track titled 'Give Violence a Chance' begins with lyrics which state: 'When peace is just another word for death, it's our turn to give violence a chance!' The track confronts the inadequacies of the justice system, and demands action. GLOSS also reflects upon the one dimensionality of the queer movement in the title track 'Trans Day of Revenge', which states, 'HRC, selfish fucks/Yuppie gays threw us under the bus'. The reference to HRC refers to the Human Rights Campaign, the largest LGBTQ advocacy group and LGBTQ political lobbying organization in the United States, who in 2007 took an ambiguous stance on the 2007 Employment Non-Discrimination Act which included protections for discrimination against sexual orientation but not gender identity or expression. The track ends with the following call:

Trans day of revenge!

Trans day of revenge!

Trans day of revenge!

Black trans women,

Draped in white sheets,

Beaten to death,

Harassed by police.

Homeless elders,

Wander the streets.

Trans day of revenge.

Not as weak as we seem.

(GLOSS, 2016)

Percussionist Jake Bison reflected upon such themes in an interview, stating: 'What we do is antagonistic towards society … I'm interested in destroying society, not being tolerated by it' (Bison, 2016, in Exposito et al., 2016). GLOSS would attempt to strike a balance in live performances which would contain such themes of anger and rage, yet also maintain a welcoming and inclusive space. Such performances were often carried out in intimate settings where Switchblade would preface songs with their related stories, whether discussing pain, trauma, or political matters. For example, Switchblade opened a 2016 performance in San Jose, California requesting a moment of silence and asking the audience to repeat 'I am forgiven, I am loved … flawed, imperfect, tender, and gorgeous'.

GLOSS later attain more widespread media attention when they turned down a $50,000 recording contract from Epitaph due to the record label's association with Warner Music Group Corporation, a multinational record label conglomerate which is currently the third largest in the world (according to US and Canada market share). While technically an independent record label, Epitaph is still part of Warner's Alternative Distribution Alliance. With this stated, the band opted instead to self-release through their guitarist's label Total Negativity. Switchblade elaborated upon this decision, stating: 'While signing to a label like Epitaph would be in many ways relieving, it would probably mean the death of the feeling that so many of you have told us means so much to you … What I'm trying to say is that we don't have to jump into their world, we can create a new one' (Switchblade, in Adams, 2016). GLOSS considered the idea of integrating a radical organization into a profit-sharing model if they did sign to the label to benefit a homeless shelter, AMP in San Jose, Black Lives Matter groups, or disabled queers, but ultimately

decided to go against any pathway that would benefit corporate music. Switchblade also argued that she wanted GLOSS to be a threat to entrenched models; at the very least to be exciting. While the publicity surrounding the rejection of Epitaph led to increased visibility, GLOSS's members felt that such newly acquired notoriety began to overshadow the work of the band itself which ultimately contributed to their dissolution. Though GLOSS would no longer perform or produce records, their two extended play albums remain in circulation online through the platform Bandcamp, where any proceeds received are donated to the Interfaiths Works Emergency Overnight Shelter in Olympia, Washington. The band issued one final statement prior to disbanding, arguing: 'The punk we care about isn't supposed to be about getting big or becoming famous, it's supposed to be about challenging ourselves and each other to be better people' (GLOSS, in Hughes, 2016). While short-lived, GLOSS demonstrated the potential of trans artists to effectively channel experience to create their own space to engage in a form of DIY alternative economy which Noys has described as being organized along ethics and values distinct from the mainstream corporate/capitalist industry (2020, p. 24).

The HIRS Collective

The HIRS Collective, named after the third-person neopronoun, was formed in 2011 by vocalist Jenna Pup and guitarist Esem and has continued to expand throughout the past decade as a DIY grindcore punk collective based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Drawing from an intersectional lens, Pup has stated: 'The HIRS Collective exists to fight for, defend, and celebrate the survival of trans, queer, POC, black, women and any and all other folks who have to constantly face violence, marginalization, and oppression' (HIRS, in Rettig, 2021). After initially producing a series of releases on cassette and 7" vinyl, HIRS released a full extended play record in 2018 titled *Friends. Lovers. Favorites.* The EP was released on Get Better Records which is currently co-run by Pup, Koji, and Alex Lichtenauer. As an independent queer/trans record label, Get Better Records has been described as queer forward with an emphasis upon reversing the constant underrepresentation of the queer arts

Figure 13:2 – HIRS Collective (photograph by Farrah Skeiky).

community. The label has also released compilation records such as *A Benefit Comp to Help Pay Medical Bills for Those Activists Fighting Against Fascism and Racism* (Various Artists, 2017), and has donated Bandcamp profits to bail funds as well as Pink and Black, which is a prison abolitionist project supporting LGBTQ and HIV-positive prisoners. *Friends. Lovers. Favorites.* was unique in its manner to bring together a number of collaborations from artists such as Erica Freas (RVIVR), Marissa Paternoster (Screaming Females), Shirley Manson (Garbage), Alice Bag and Candace Hansen (Alice Bag & The Sissy Bears), Martin Crudo (Los Crudos and Limp Wrist), and Laura Jane Grace (Against Me!). While the collective's personnel are both anonymous and revolving, the thematic and aesthetics of HIRS' music are consistent, expressing the volatility of existence in late capitalism, particularly through an articulation of anti-authoritarianism. Such themes of content share a number of common arcs with the work of GLOSS (with Sadie Switchblade performing on a track), however, HIRS takes a different approach aesthetically and organizationally towards expression. The aesthetic is arguably pushed to further extremes with

less emphasis upon horizontal song structure and progression, giving more attention toward the vertical extremities of aesthetics such as volume, percussion, and vocal intensity. With this stated, HIRS additionally utilizes overdubbed sound clips dealing with violence, policing, and religion which are intelligible but often the lyrical content is pushed to limitations of performance. Notable thematic tracks include titles such as 'Wake Up Tomorrow', 'Invisible', 'Last Acrylic Nail in the Coffin', 'It's OK to Be Sad', 'It's OK to Be Sick', 'You Can't Kill Us', and 'Trans Woman Dies of Old Age'. While lyrical themes deal with anti-trans violence, racism, and police brutality, they also contain themes of survival. For example, 'Wake Up Tomorrow' states:

You're a huge reason we are still alive.

You make us want to continue to strive to be living for you, living for us.

We'll care for you until we're dust.

Wake up tomorrow.

(HIRS, 2018)

Similarly, 'It's OK To Be Sick' proclaims:

They say that when we're sick, we're weak. That's furthest from the truth.

We're surviving. It's ok to be sad. It's ok to be sick.

They say that when we're sick, we're weak. They know nothing.

Please – if you have the ability – take it day by day, take care of yourself, and ask us if you need anything.

(HIRS, 2018)

Such tracks are also generally very brief in duration, often consisting of approximately 30 seconds in length. Such organizational structure challenges the expectations of many listeners, even those with a familiarity of their genre.

Though one might initially believe that tracks of such length embody a certain abruptness, there is a certain aesthetic effectiveness that manages to distill the primary points of sonic expression, rendering audible more concentrated affective moments of intensity and listening engagement. At the same time, by HIRS including dozens of tracks on an extended play record, the collective manages to cover a vast territory of thematic content without extraneous aesthetic embellishments to compete with the intensity of expression.

When discussing such alternative structures of song, it may be useful to return to the theory of Frankfurt School theorist Herbert Marcuse, who was a defining early figure of the New Left and an influential figure of various 1960s

Figure 13:3 – Cover of *Friends, Lovers, Favorites* by HIRS (2018).

counter-cultural movements in the United States. Through such an effort, we can revisit Marcuse's theory of one-dimensionality in a similar fashion to Ferguson's usage discussed earlier. Prior to doing so, however, it should be noted that the extent of Marcuse's kinship with anarchism has been a topic of contention amongst certain scholars. While Marcuse never identified politically as an anarchist, certain scholars have brought forth currents of his thought that may resonate with certain aspects of anarchist politics. Maurice Cranston, for example, argued that Marcuse's optimistic belief in the possibility of a non-repressive civilization aligns him with anarchism, or more specifically within a politics of 'Anarcho-Marxism' (1972, p. 93). Furthermore, when discussing potential means for aesthetic liberation in one of his final interviews, Marcuse noted that such types of action would be best suited to begin not only with individuals, but also with small groups (in Kearney, 1977, p. 79). Responding to such types of claims, however, Douglas Kellner has stated that Marcuse was situated closer to notions of individualist revolt advocated by the artistic avant-garde and bohemia (1984, p. 279). Despite such tensions in precisely situating Marcuse's thought, it is of particular relevance to the trans artists being discussed in this context, particularly through the following passage from *One Dimensional Man*:

> underneath the conservative popular base is the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable. They exist outside the democratic process; their life is the most immediate and the most real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions. Thus their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not. (Marcuse, 1964, p. 260)

For Marcuse, one dimensional society entails not only a rise of social repression but also the creation of false needs through the integration of individuals into the system of production and consumption. At first observation, we can note the literal parallel between Marcuse's commentary and GLOSS's name (Girls Living Outside of Society's Shit), but we can also note the alternative format of HIRS' brief songs and how they present a method to resist commodification within the punk genre. With this stated, however, one could argue that the most promising potential comes from small

collectives such as HIRS through their ability to couple the non-integrated nature of trans identities with sonic expression. While the aesthetics and the content of an artist's work is without a doubt relevant, we are also inclined here to recall Tim Yohannan's statement arguing that '[i]n the long run ... what's important about punk is not the lyrics, what people say, but what they do' (in Turner, 1995, in Noys, 2020, p. 25). On a related note, it should be mentioned that other bands fronted by trans individuals also worked to breakdown hegemony to shape more inclusive scenes amongst musical subcultures during this period. For example, Lynn Breedlove of Tribe 8 was active amongst the earliest queercore bands and continues to advocate for trans causes within the San Francisco area. While Laura Jane Grace of Against Me! has been the highest profile, receiving significant media attention when coming out publicly in 2012, various other artists on smaller independent labels of related musical genres have also helped to foster greater visibility amongst their communities. One such example is Marissa Martinez of the grindcore metal band Cretin, who came out in 2008 within a very much male-dominated genre. These artists are worthy of mention to this discussion as their music explored themes of trans identity during this period which, to borrow David Graeber's description, worked to 'expose, subvert, and undermine structures of domination … in a democratic fashion' (2004, p. 7).

Collective action and affective engagement

At this point in our discussion, it is important to explore how artists such as GLOSS and the HIRS Collective connect the issues of their communities to sonic practice. With this stated, to someone witnessing the performances of artists such as GLOSS or HIRS from a peripheral standpoint, the transgressive nature of such sonic acts of expression may not seem readily apparent, however, for those with an intimate understanding of the themes at stake, such performances generate a possibility for new collective formations to unify the struggles of trans individuals and corresponding identities frequently rendered silent. Samantha Riedel of the queer e-zine *them.* has perhaps best described such a possibility during her attendance of a particular 2016 HIRS performance:

The experience is like primal scream therapy for transfeminine rage; it exorcises a ghost you didn't know was living inside you and feeds the part of your soul that's fed up with keeping your head down … there's something about submerging yourself in that pond of blast-beats and allowing the scream to permeate your body that's cleansing, even soothing. HIRS is a bloody-knuckled anthem to transfems' right to exist, bolstering our conviction to live through anything bigots can throw at us. That's an experience that stays with you for life. (2019)

Riedel's commentary is interesting as one is almost inclined to recall Emma Goldman's oft quoted remark 'If I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution', but articulated through a differing trajectory. While Goldman's commentary centres around expressions of joy, Riedel's commentary evokes a different positioning which also articulates rage, though coupled with positive attributes to engage a sense of catharticism. Thus, we can witness certain parallels here, especially when Goldman proclaimed that her cause of anarchism stood for release and freedom from convention and prejudice, stating 'I want freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody's right to beautiful, radiant things ... I would live my beautiful ideal' (1934, p. 56). Whether we examine such examples and commentaries from the distant or recent past, such accounts bring into focus the equally important role undertaken by the listener involved. If we are to follow Ruud Noys' recent suggestion that the most directly transformative aspect of music is its ability to inspire and radicalize, we may be able to bear witness to a rare moment within contemporary American culture that has otherwise been liquidated through totalizing currents of commercialism and commodification. Though the primary experience may be both momentary and fleeting, GLOSS and HIRS have demonstrated possibilities through an establishment of alternate auditory spaces of possibility. The performance is undoubtedly important in this context, but it is crucial to not overlook the engagement of the audience, particularly through the entanglements with listening. There is often a tendency to oversimplify the act of listening, yet such a process is not one of isolation. Bearing this in mind, it is useful to take a moment to draw upon notions of reflexive artistic practice here. Drawing upon Margaret Archer's theory of reflexivity, Mary Ryan (2014) has argued that through the arts we can render visible new modes of reflective expression and corresponding

modalities that can recontextualize our social meanings, engendering new understandings of self in relation to the world, but only if constituted by action toward a reflexive approach to learning and practice. Thus, there is a potential for a powerful form of self-discovery through a performative dialog with the audience. Following Ryan we can begin to further understand such possibilities of interaction between performer, audience, and space. It is through such a matrix that she locates a potential to illuminate moments that embody reflexive expressivity that can not only change the nature of creation or performance but also simultaneously imbues a potential to enact a shift in one's ideas and life concerns (Ryan, 2014, p. 15). With this in mind, it is also important not to simplify the phenomenon of sound itself. As Steve Goodman argues, the immediate recognition of sound is only a fragment of the larger phenomena in practice as the audible is connected to several other formations with the body in a type of synaesthetic relationship that also engages tactile experience (2012, p. 47). If we combine such insights and apply them to Riedel's earlier commentary, we can begin to uncover elements of a particularly affective engagement in a collective sense. While affect theory has been defined in different ways within the field of humanities, for the sake of this discussion we will follow Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg's summary, who state:

> Affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. (2010, p. 1)

Through such a description we can begin to understand a more comprehensive and holistic sonic experience. With the creation of such spaces, GLOSS and collectives such as HIRS manage to enact a new soundscape that however small, fragmentary, and fleeting, manages to initiate a momentary rupture in the neoliberal logics which for many seems almost

inescapable in late capitalism. Here, we can witness similarities with the work of artist and sound theorist Brandon LaBelle, who examines performances which depict vulnerable bodies and the terror of systemic violence (2018, p. 51). Labelle draws upon Graeber's claim that the creative reservoir of revolutionary change comes precisely from invisible spaces. As Graeber proclaims: 'It's precisely from these invisible spaces, invisible, most of all, to power – when the potential for insurrection, and the extraordinary social creativity that seems to emerge out of nowhere in revolutionary moments, actually comes' (2004, p. 35). In this capacity, LaBelle asks provocatively: 'Might sound be deployed as a weapon by way of particular tonalities and collective vibrations, a listening activism, and the force of volume, to support a culture of radical care and compassion?' (2018, p. 9). If we are to follow LaBelle and Graeber, we can begin to recognize the power of invisibility that sound allows in this context, especially in the multiplicity of dimensions of experience to generate new possibilities.

Toward a libidinal economy of noise

At this point in our discussion, I want to now bring forth the conception of noise. At first glance such an action might seem to be both obvious and redundant, considering the many overt connections between punk aesthetics and noise articulated since its very inception so many years prior. With this stated, however, noise is very much a cultural construct, contingent upon the correspondent time and place. As musicologist Jean-Jacques Nattiez has stated, within a society there is rarely a consensus between what is music and what is noise, arguing that expression deemed noise tends to be disturbing, unpleasant, or both (1991, p. 48). It is true that many genres of music are loud in amplitude, however, such acts of sheer volume are not necessarily transgressive in nature against prevailing orders and discourses. In his influential work, *Noise/Music: A History*, Paul Hegarty has reflected upon this issue, pointing out the need to recognize the complexity of noise, arguing that although noise can be loud, it is much more about what is deemed to disturb (2007, p. 4). Noise as a phenomenon also extends beyond simply sound, whether through aspects of information theory, or the notion of the glitch. As Jacob Gabouray has argued, technological protocols that normalize our terms

of engagement often have wide-reaching effects, particularly on minority populations whose needs, desires, and bodies are often excluded from the norms that structure protocological assumptions (2018, p. 488). This has led those such as Gabouray to begin exploring how failure within technological practice may constitute a radical queer practice. Similar explorations have also been undertaken by Vymethoxy Redspiders (2019), a Leeds-based autistic trans artist and a member of the noise duo, Guttersnipe. In discussion on trans identity and noise she spoke of parallels between the missions of what she describes as 'truly experimental music' and radical (trans)feminisms. Redspiders, who has a background in cognitive psychology, produces work that explores the intersections of psychoacoustics, emotion, and identity. She has argued that while there are efforts to demolish essentialisms related to intersectionality, similar essentialisms related to musical and sonic expression still remain very much engrained. Furthermore, she argues that those who do attempt to break such essentialisms are typically not expressing anything that is inherently political in nature. Drawing a parallel between the harshness of trans embodiment and her music, she advocates that it is through radical sounds (noise) that we may bear witness to a potential to resist those institutions which are oppressive musically, and destroy those which are essentialist in nature. Keeping this in mind, there is a unique situatedness present here when we step back and examine the relationality between performer, audience (listener), and the affective engagement of noise through such acts of transfeminine rage. Scholars such as Marie Thompson have previously taken efforts to situate noise within an affective context, arguing 'noise is often felt as well as heard, and known through feeling' (2018, p. 11). Through such a trajectory, Thompson argues for a relational approach that prioritizes open-endedness, fluidity, transformation and plurality, situating bodies as neither autonomous or fixed formally. They are instead articulated via means of engagement with other bodies and constantly exchanging traces throughout the process.

If we are to keep such a theorization of noise in mind, it is useful to couple with the concept of a libidinal economy, first proposed by philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, and more recently revisited by scholars such as André Brock and Eva Hayward. While Lyotard's initial 1974 publication of *Économie Libidinale* (translated into English as *Libidinal Economy* (1993)) was met with controversy, described as a work of anti-theory, and even labeled by some

critics as lacking a moral compass, we can isolate useful aspects from it to develop a framework to examine the acts of sonic expression discussed so far. With this stated, in Lyotard's libidinal economy there are certain bodily phenomena or states that are essentially intangible to formal systems of measurement and classification. While such phenomena essentially slip between the cracks of exchange value in the neoliberal political economy, this does not diminish their significance, especially within the context of our current discussion. Brock has noted that while the libidinal is related to affect, it also includes phobias, desires, and articulates an emotional state; essentially connecting the whole structure of physic and emotional life (2020, p. 32). These excesses, so-to-speak, reside outside structures of stable interpretation, as Lyotard argues, 'libidinal instantiations, these little dispositifs of the retention and flow of the influxes of desire are never unequivocal and cannot give rise to a sociological reading or an unequivocal politics' (Lyotard, 1993, p. 114). Expanding upon the libidinal, Brock has added that it not only highlights the difference between discourse and practice, but additionally illuminates social imaginaries while also undergirding social realities, adding: 'It is infrastructure, invisible to our perceptions just like the materials and processes we pass by or utilize every day-until a rupture occurs' (2020, p. 11). From another lens, Eva Hayward (2017) has used aspects of a libidinal economy in her essay 'Spiderwoman'. Hayward argues that transsexuality is not about authenticity or originality, but instead reveals how bodily feeling and desire are constituted socially and spatially. Noting the political, affective, and social registers that work to produce one's body, she states that there is an emergence of a material, psychical, sensual, and social self through corporeal, spatial, and temporal processes that transfigure the lived body. Hayward connects the libidinal to what she refers to as transpositioning, stating:

> Transpositioning considers how a transsexual emerges through her body's own viscosity, through the energization of corporeal limits. The transpositional is a matrix through which sensations may be drawn back through the body, to make the body feel 'familiar', even as familiarity remains ultimately unattainable … The transpositional, as Lyotard describes the libidinal body, is threaded through itself, just as it's webbed with its neighborhood. (2017, p. 249)

We can follow such articulations with our previous discussions of sonic engagement and begin to sketch out a libidinal economy of noise. Through GLOSS and HIRS' ability to sonically engage their audience through such spatial-affective experiences, we can reimagine the possibilities described earlier by both LaBelle and Graeber to utilize invisibility, corresponding power-relations, and those bodily states intangible to exchange value. Here, we can imagine a libidinal economy of noise as not only a collective abreaction (or emotional purging) of trans experience through the complex matrix of emergent affective states, but also one that also initiates a space to imagine new formations of anarchist organization. Even if only momentarily disengaging with the totalizing structures of capitalism, we can begin to see the potential of such a possibility. We might be reminded here as well of what Reina Gossett, Erica A Stanley, and Johanna Burton refer to in their work on trans cultural production as a 'trapdoor' which they describe as 'those clever contraptions that are not entrances or exits but secret passageways that take you someplace else, often someplace as yet unknown' (2017, xxiii).

Conclusion

In context, this chapter has initiated an effort to re-examine trans-feminist punk in the United States to explore new possibilities through sonic engagement and anarchism. While our discussion has only examined two of the many artists which hold promise for new forms of anarchist organization, both GLOSS and the HIRS Collective have demonstrated that sound itself is an undoubtedly viable medium of such possibility. Through GLOSS's ability to initiate new inclusive sonic spaces, and HIRS' ability to intensify and continue the tradition, we have witnessed how positive engagement is still possible within the twenty-first century punk genre and its related subcultures. Through a shift of attention to the auditory, coupled with a libidinal economy of noise, new possibilities emerge through a combination of creativity, collectivity, and spatiality. Through such action, we may hope to witness new possibilities for a generative politics yet to be fully realized.

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