PUNK PUSHES BACK: HOW BIKINI KILL AND PUSSY RIOT REINVENTED PUNK RADICALISM

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Joseph LoyaconoBustos

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Naomi Wood

Heidi R. Lewis

Punk Pushes Back: How Bikini Kill and Pussy Riot Reimagined Punk Radicalism

Growing up in the late 1990s/early 2000's, it was hard to avoid the alluring presence of punk. For those, myself included, who wanted a tangible synthesis of youthful passion and anger, punk seemed like the most logical choice. Pissed off, unapologetic, fast and determined, punk was the undoubted mecca of self-actualization and political grievances. Beginning informally in the 1970s[1], punk became a space where social critiques and working class frustrations were channeled into music played at break neck speed.[2] While the 1980s saw an influx of relatively homogenous (read: white, male) hardcore punk bands[3] whose focus centered on a critique of popular media and politics, there were some individuals more interested in a radical dismantling of punk. In stark contrast to a codified and largely accepted punk canon, Bikini Kill and Pussy Riot took both mainstream dissent and internal critique as underpinnings of their newly forged identities, illustrating an intimate understanding and fierce dedication to the political worlds they inhabit by blurring the line between activism and personal rebellion. These bands have not established themselves as a linear progression from the punk tradition but as a destructive force bent on navigating the uncomfortable spaces of punk's radicalism, feeding off the inconsistencies within subcultures to better address the inadequacies of popular culture. Using the term radical serves as a shorthand synonymous with the ways both these bands critiqued and restructured the foundational ideologies of what it meant to participate and call one's self punk. Radicalism found its voice mostly through lyrics and fashion, demonstrating radical individualism as a critique of the American mainstream. In *Women and Popular Music*, Sheila Whiteley explores the contention between women in punk and the macho identity of the

[1] Bands like: The Sex Pistols, Souxsie and the Banshees, The Clash, The Ramones etc.
[2] For a more comprehensive history of punk, refer to the introduction of *Punk and Its Afterlives*
[3] Black Flag, Minor Threat, Bad Religion

scene, realizing that "punk women were confronted with the problem of presenting their ides with a comparable 'feel' to that of male groups, an attitude that was confrontational, challenging and culturally relevant" (108). Instead of matching their masculine counterparts in macho aggression towards the American mainstream, both Bikini Kill and Pussy Riot redefined the relationship between punk and politics. In order to understand the multifaceted approach they respectively take to redefine radicalism and rebellion, it is crucial to understand their performance as a multilayered amalgam of politics and performative tactics.

More specifically, Bikini Kill and Pussy Riot heavily utilize both shock and chaos to confront their audiences, taking the punk cannon as a starting point rather than a rigid guide. The vehicles through which these radical ideologies are carried out are shock and chaos, both serving as disturbances of expected norms or codes of conduct. Shock functions as an initial confrontation of the audience with the unexpected, openly challenging and mocking the punk identity through band presentation, words and performance. Organized chaos are the utilization of noticeably more subversive acts which confront and deconstruct traditional structures (audience and performer relationships, performance spaces, structure of the live show) with the intent of restructuring the nature of punk performance and its relationship to individuals. Through an analysis of Bikini Kill's performances at Yale and the Macondo club and Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" and "Putin Will Teach You to Love," I argue that each band's performance tactics was to subvert and differentiate themselves from the subculture, contrasting themselves against a community of contemporary bands committed to continuing the existent "scene." The punk cannon is littered with copious amounts of obscenities, anti-capitalism slogans and calls for cultural rebellion, creating a frame of reference by which all emerging acts are mirrored. Instead of playing to these widely accepted avenues for rebellion, Bikini Kill and Pussy Riot consciously

choose to create their own brand of radicalism. They push the heavily established radical format to its breaking point, no longer relying on undertones or symbolism but on unorthodox live performances to form a new identity. These identities, in conjunction with their respective “scenes,” forced a re-imagination of the nature and foundations of punk radicalism and its accessibility to those on the margins of sub and mainstream culture.

To understand the impact of Bikini Kill and Pussy Riot, it is necessary to situate their performance repertoires within the culture of punk. In their examination of the continued cultural relevance of punk, Jayna Brown, Patrick Deers, and Tavia Nyong'os *Punk and Its Afterlives* helps contextualize the manifestations of punk identities as “specifically performative expressions of defiance, disobedience, and rebellion” (2). In order to understand the rebellion of punk, it is crucial to examine the objects of its disgust. As a political and musical subculture, punk juxtaposed what can best be called mainstream values. The foundation of this subcultural identity were tied to the notion of radicalism. Music disseminated by forms of mass media (television, radio, large record companies) became the antithesis of the punk identity: technically refined, professionally polished, and never more than mildly politically minded. In conjunction with what is termed mainstream music, punk rebels against the American political system, decrying especially conservative cultural values. The punk ‘scene’ became a site for the performed dissent against both politics and the genre’s alienation from popular music, each band or scene being tailored to the politics of a specific location. The ‘scene’ becomes synonymous with a community of people who self-identify as musicians, fans, activists or sympathetic to the radical identity of punk.

The tenuous relationship between women and punk has been well documented[4] and my current research is an extension on previous scholarship about both gendered dimensions of punk and more specifically, building upon contemporary studies of Riot Grrrl movements and bands. Simon Reynolds and Joy Press wrote *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock 'n' Roll* as an overview of women involved in the creation and continued relevance of rock. *The Sex Revolts* provides an analysis of the integral role gender played in pre through post punk music and culture. Reynolds and Press argue that certain artists and genres (punk in this case) are gendered in their lyrical composition, target audiences and performance styles. It is apparent that masculinity became the initial identity of punk expression and the first half of this book adequately portrays that through a discussion of the impetuses for the formation of Riot Grrrl "scenes" in the 1990's[5]. Working from the understanding of punk as androcentric, I was able to better juxtapose traditional punk with feminist critiques by Bikini Kill and Pussy Riot. As *The Sex Revolts* served as a starting point for this research, Shehnaz Suterwalla's "Cut, Layer, Break, Fold: Fashioning Gendered Difference, 1970s to the Present" became the way station between established scholarship and my own investigation. Suterwalla's analysis focuses on the symbolic nature of punk fashion and theorized the consciously subversive nature of fashion on and off the stage. This information positioned my analysis of performance as a logical extension of the immense importance punk places on self-presentation and personal politics.

Political Foundations

Bikini Kill embraced the abrasive style of punk by infusing their performances with interludes of personal and audience poetry and speeches, stressing the integration of personal

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[4] "Despite the uncertainties, then, punk opened up a specific space for women to explore and sell their own creativity and to exploit the opportunities inherent in a do-it-yourself musical culture"(Whiteley 114)

[5] Kevin Dunn's and May Summer Farnsworth's "We are the Revolution" provides a more concentrated explanation and history of Riot Grrrl movements

rebellion in their collective band image. With their particular brand of shock and chaos, Bikini Kill firmly cemented their place as political and radical outliers in the 'scene.' In juxtaposition to the conventional political underpinnings of the punk underground, "In a sense, Riot Grrrls are rebelling against rebellion, or at least against the ossified notion of the *cool rebel* who doesn't care – instructable, affect-less, solipsistic" (Reynolds 326). Bikini Kill acted out this rebellion in perhaps the furthest thing from detached and unenthusiastic fervor, pouring both aggression and ideological symbolism into every live performance. During their 1996 show at Yale, Bikini Kill confront their captivated audience with political activism. After their opening song, a guitar string breaks and a momentary lull in the set is turned into an impromptu soap box style speech. Kathleen Hanna (lead singer) uses this opportunity to proclaim that her audience members should look into a slew of political campaigns concerning Free Mumia and a leftist organization called Refuse and Resist, proclaiming that the band is more concerned with action than empty ranting. This conversation with the audience injects politics into the live performance in ways which critical lyrics cannot, presenting those present with more concrete and constructive outlets for the ever-present aggression of punk. Bikini Kill have both espoused some level of political underpinning through their lyrics and performance and managed legitimize their preoccupation with activism through an intimate knowledge of organizations and political campaigns.

Bikini Kill have intentionally placed themselves in contention to their hardcore contemporaries, focusing anger and critique at punk instead of just popular culture. In much the same way as members can raise awareness for politics external to the punk scene, so too is there do they confront these issues as they fester in the punk underground. The d.i.y. ethics of Bikini Kill forged space where, "Riot Grrrls discuss their feeling of alienation from a boy-dominated hardcore punk scene in which they're marginalized; they decry the media's promotion of

unattainable ideas of femininity; they write moving confessional accounts of their experience of harassment and sexual abuse" (Reynolds 323). Bikini Kill push the pissed-off-punk archetype to an unstable new conclusion, refusing to play upon existing canonical radicalism as the avenue for their frustrations. They exist in a musical community where aggression and mainstream disdain are unequivocally considered to be masculine, and are primarily preached and performed in a sea of male bodies. Bikini Kill rebel against a mostly male audience and reclaim aggression from the hands of a scene which reflects the patriarchal hierarchy of the American mainstream. Though they are often lumped in conjunction with their punk contemporaries, it is clear that Bikini Kill are more concerned with destruction than fitting in.

Clearly drawing upon the absence of Bikini Kill's brand of rebellion, punk radicalism in the 2000's was met with its antithesis in the 2011 rise of Pussy Riot. Pussy Riot have effectively erased the line between political activism and punk musicians, often rebelling against firmly established forms of rebellion. Building heavily upon the amalgam of political awareness and audience participation outside of performance spaces, there is a renewed sense of urgency and liberatory potential when examining the rise of Pussy Riot. In both their "Punk Prayer" and "Putin Will Teach You How to Love" videos, musical performance and protest both become insufficient for defining the radical style of their rebellious identity. They make reference to Putin repressing political rebellion and jailing other activists who have lashed out against the Russian state and its affiliates, concluding with their own arrest for radicalism. In "Punk Prayer" there is a moment when all the masked members of the band are standing just below an image of a crucified Christ while begging the Virgin Mary to become a feminist. While continuing with critiques of the relationship between the Orthodox Church and Putin's continued imposition of conservative cultural and social values (Rutland 579), the aforementioned image is cemented as

an indicator of radical punk evolution. The lyrics present a level of activist name dropping and public policy awareness that allow the world to see that Pussy Riot have done their homework, thoughtfully choosing this space and performance style as an integral component of their underlying message. Their rebellion against convention is made all the more powerful as their interaction with the audience shifts dramatically from the traditional punk show as they perform in front of unsuspecting passer-byes, confronting those outside the subculture with their image and performance style. However radical Bikini Kill's self-image became, it was clear that the platform for their message encompassed an audience whose knowledge of or involvement in aspects of punk could be more or less taken for granted; a crucial element which Pussy Riot could not claim.[6] The sites of Pussy Riot's performances were public and therefore did not rely on the presence of sympathetic or at least somewhat understanding audience members, instead the average bystander was a participant regardless of his/her preconception or willingness to interact. Pussy Riot seem to feed off of this atypical interaction as it most often brings them disdain or outright rage by those around them, which re-energizes their performance.

This spectacle draws heavily upon larger geo-political relationships between Russia and the West, playing on preexisting relationships between audiences and political activism. The mainstream attention stretches the political aims of their performances to some ambiguous corners of global political discourse. As Peter Rutland states in his "The Pussy Riot Affair: Gender and National Identity in Putin's Russia," there is also an unmistakable relationship between Pussy Riot's radical feminism and Russia's tenuous relationship to American progressivism. Not only has the band attempted to bring Western feminism to Russia but, "Pussy Riot became a central and highly visible element in the 'clash of values' or 'new Cold

[6] "…Russians struggled to find the categories to make sense of the phenomenon. This is because Western feminist thinking has only minimally penetrated Russian society" (Rutland 579).

War' between Russia and the West" (578). The abrasive nature of their performance style has resulted in a strong aversion to their message, coming from both sides of Russia's conservative/progressive divide. Following a tenuous relationship between the West and Russia, Pussy Riot occupy a space between grassroots radicalism and a quickly dismissed attempt to westernize Russian politics. The intentions of this collective are initially portrayed as progressive political reform of the Putin regime, which is clear through lyrics calling for radical action against the state, and yet begin to morph quickly into a conflict between intent and reception. Building upon the chaotic foundations of their image, perhaps their performances are better thought of as ambiguously confrontational rather than narrowly focused on immediate reform. Pussy Riot's public performance style is a violent break from both punk communities and public activism at a foundational level.

Shock

Even in punks' rebellious atmosphere, there is a codified expectation of how to exercise dissent. Rebellion often takes the form of upbeat rhythms, clashing or rowdy bodies, and an abundance of politically crass lyrics. All these characteristics have become equated with the amalgam that is punks' identity. Chronicling the significance of fashion in punk subcultures, Shenaz Suterwalla's "Cut, Lyaer, Break, Fold: Fashioning Gender Difference" is an analysis of gender dimensions of the public images of punk. Following the surge in popularity of violent and macho acts, it became clear that "The gendered dimension of punk laid foundations that became critical to women's liberatory politics, in subcultural and alternative groups" (272 Suterwalla). When Bikini Kill burst on the scene in the early 1990s, it was clear that their image was built as a reaction to their predecessors and positioned them as foils to the macho punk of the previous decade. Through a noticeable lull in popular media exposure, the late 1990s and 2000s saw punk

fade out of the mainstreams' eye. Enter Pussy Riot's public performance in 2012 and suddenly progressive punk found itself at the center of attention, enveloping international politics and a renewed public interest in this resurging musical tradition. Utilizing the rich tradition of crass and unapologetic style, Pussy Riot and Bikini Kill push even punks' unorthodox expectations to a breaking point.

Forming in Olympia, WA in late 1990, Bikini Kill quickly became one of the most prominent faces of both a punk rebirth and a new brand of punk "scene."[7] Lead singer Kathleen Hanna, along with Kathi Wilcox (bassist), Billy Karren (guitarist) and Tobi Vail (drummer), formed an integral component of a punk renaissance. Bikini Kill's performance repertoire roughly spanned from 1990 to their break up in 1997. Considering their performance library, their shows in Los Angeles (4/25/1993) and Yale University (3/3/1996) nicely bookend the bands existence. Bikini Kill have surely cemented their place as harbingers of the unexpected, though not without the backlash of a partially alienated male fan base. This position as radical artist and sometimes resented ally of the scene was partially brought about by lead-singer Kathleen Hanna's blunt and confrontational stage persona. Coming to popularity in conjunction with a movement of feminist inspired activism, it is clear that "The construction of riot grrrl music and music culture enabled young women and girls to collectively create emotionally charged music counterpublics in which to claim cultural autonomy and contest power" (Downes 216). Following an explosion of hardcore punk pieces whose appeal relied on machismo in a naively derivative arm of popular culture, Bikini Kill held a mirror up to the misogyny of the punk underground and forcibly created a space for their politics. Hanna draws upon fashion, humor and explosive anger to keep the audience in continuous shock and awe. The white male

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[7] Along with other Riot Grrrl bands: L7, Sleater-Kinney, HuggyBear etc.

club of punk became the butt of jokes in lyrics and in stage banter, forcing the core members of the self-proclaimed ‘radical’ scene to face replications of the gendered, classist and racist systems it fought so hard to resist. Bikini Kill gave the audience enough familiarity to lure them into a false sense of security, making the shock of Hanna’s stage persona all the more disturbing.

Instead of simply channeling anger and frustration into lyrics, Kathleen Hanna is adamant about voicing frustrations on stage. In the early years of Bikini Kill’s inception, they played a show and The Macondo club in Los Angeles, CA on April 25, 1993. It was during this performance that Hanna managed to shake up audience conceptions of what it could look like to be a radical feminist on stage. Before the band even begins their set, there is an abrupt demand that all the men in the front row move back so that it can be populated exclusively by women. While a small gesture in theory, it is evident by the disgruntled male fans that this is an unusual request. As female fans flood the front of the stage, there is a visual shift in crowd dynamics as the macho moshing mentality takes a back seat to feminist discourse. Once this newly implemented gender arrangement forcibly pushed by Hannah, the band continues with their set. Midway through the song “Sugar” (a fittingly anti-objectification anthem), Hanna notices that there is a male photographer taking pictures of her from behind. Without missing a beat, she runs up and smashes her open palm into the lens of his camera as she screams “what are you afraid of?” through the mic. The audience grows noticeably more still as they are unsure if this is planned or impromptu and the camera man freezes in fright of perhaps the same feelings. There is a clear assertion of control and the lingering understanding that Hanna is prepared to confront anyone who will not abide by her rules.

Hanna draws upon fashion choices to shock and confound spectators in what becomes an integral part of her on stage identity.[8] Again, before we have gotten past the first song, Hanna greets the audience by removing her skirt and proclaiming to the crowd that her butt is entirely real despite what some in the press have been proclaiming. While the presence of scantily clad female bodies on stage is not in and of itself particularly new or radical, it is the way Hanna accompanies this newly revealed body with power stances and grueling vocals which transforms its presentation. While using her body as a medium "to perform abjection, then, is to stage the abject body for an audience, potentially eliciting embarrassment, shock, or confusion, in order to express alternative meaning" (271 Suterwalla). Instead of assuming stances meant for the audience's visual or sexual pleasure, she hastily and somewhat clumsily removes her skirt and then quickly proceeds to wale inaudibly through the static driving of guitar riffs and pogo dancing. The initial removal of clothing founds her stage persona as sporadic and unpredictable, keeping her audience on their toes and unsure of where the next moment will take them.

Following a lull in Riot Grrrls public presence, August 2011 saw the rise of a performance based punk collective, Pussy Riot. Formed from an anarchist art collective, Pussy Riot were born as performance artists and self-identified with both Riot Grrrl and feminist underpinnings. Pussy Riot have a significantly smaller log of taped performances to choose from, though each performance creates ample room for performative analysis. Pussy Riot uses shock to confront punk in its own terms, accompanying their messages with an urgency of sound and body movement. On February 21, 2012, members of the media and close companions of the band infiltrated the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, broadcasting the event on both

[8] "Situating herself within the performance traditions of punk rock, Hanna used her body to shock and confront the audience." (Leonard 93)

Russian and international media. The “Punk Prayer” video was the collective’s first break onto an international media stage and resulted in a subsequent arrest of two of bands members. It was this video, which cohesively and succinctly displays the initial utilization of shock, creating a particularly fruitful site for understanding the ideological underpinnings of their later videos. The scene opens with what appears to be a handheld camera (amateur/low quality video image) of a woman in a bright yellow ski mask kneeling in front of a grand altar, she is wearing a green dress and bright purple tights. She is quickly joined by four more masked women who rush the altar to join in coordinated religious crossing, bowing as they rhythmically trace crosses across their torsos. These initial images greet the audience as a series of visual paradoxes: bright colors on a backdrop of reverent religious imagery, a ski masked intruder in a sacred space and conservatively dressed nuns alongside young punks in colorful skirts. The presence of ski masked women is presented as an intrusion of punk politics in a sacred space[9], disrupting the serene beauty of a church and stealing the spot light away from Christ himself. A choir track fades in and (original audio in Russian with an English subtitle feed below) begs for the Virgin Mary to drive away Putin, immediately turning the quintessential medium of religious expression against itself. Instead of a sustained hymn, Pussy Riot opts for a driving beat and harsh vocal melodies.

Pussy Riot’s “Putin Will Teach You How to Love” video continued the distinctive performance style attracted significantly more pre-performance media attention than their “Punk Prayer” installment. Much of this is due to the increasing amount of international criticism the Russian government received for imprisoning the three group members following their brash debut. In a replication of the scene of “Punk Prayer,” this video is a similar takeover of

[9] “The Cathedral of Christ the Savior is a location of particular symbolic resonance. Built in 1860 to commemorate the 1812 victory over Napoleon, it was destroyed by Stalin in 1931, and then rebuilt in 1997” (Rutland 576).

government sanctioned space to transform an unexpected setting into public spectacle. The "Putin Will Teach You How to Love" video then drew heavily on the guerilla style of "Punk Prayer" and yet, brought the audience/performer relationship to the forefront of its visual presentation. Pussy Riot utilized their confrontations with state sponsored authority in this video to bring the relationship between themselves and the Russian state to the forefront. The new setting for this video is a couple outdoor squares in and around the Russian city of Sochi, capitalizing on the location for the Winter Olympics. The banners, statues and swaths of international tourists provides the perfect backdrop for an unapologetic Pussy Riot performance. Though the shock value of this video is prompted by the band, it is ultimately enacted by the states' response to their presence. After the brief introduction, the scene transitions to the band playing under a banner promoting the Olympics. The lyrics of the song make reference to Putin's efforts of dissent suppression, making it clear that this site has been chosen as a way to capitalize on the publicity afforded to the Sochi Olympics. As soon as the performance starts, the band is quickly bombarded by the city's hired security force whose tactic is to surround and corral them in to a fenced in corner. Before there is time to process the unfolding situation, band members begin falling to the ground in rapid succession as they are shoved to the ground and continually lashed with leather riding whips.[10] It is the swift and brutal action on the side of the state which provides the shock of this video, both betraying our expectation of whose tactics are meant to be the star of this strange show and strategically supporting Pussy Riot. The rebel band has now managed to juxtapose their warning that "Putin will make you love the motherland" with images of security forces beating a handful of political dissidents; the absurdity of the states' response to Pussy Riot becomes palpable.

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[10] "In February 2014, Pussy Riot members tried to stage a performance in Sochi during the Olympic Games, but were attacked by Cossacks wielding whips" (Rutland 578)

Performance becomes the vehicle through which Pussy Riot demonstrates the strange and extensive range of publicity stunts which quickly ensnare the attention of global audiences. It is the sheer absurdity and clashing of images which gives the band an unmistakable identity as performance trail blazers and coupled with their attention to visual spectacle, further cements their place among punks' elite. There is a sense of recklessness and raw fury in Pussy Riot's presentation which evokes a sense of renewed relevancy of punk as a popular medium for public expression. The unmistakable masked members of the collective utilize guerilla tactics to confront bystanders in public spaces, creating an atmosphere of contention and a lack of escape from their performances. Sites are chosen with complex intentions of juxtaposing crass lyrics with backdrops meant to symbolize state sponsored cultural values, giving the mere presence of Pussy Riot as an indicator of foreboding.

Organized Chaos

Though seemingly paradoxical, the phrase organized chaos perfectly captures punk's abrasive style and affinity for bursts of energy and aggression. In his "Rules of Rebellion," William Tsistos discusses the relationship between dancing at shows and punk music culture and its self-described lifestyle. In the rise of hardcore in the early 1980s, the punk identity quickly became linked to fighting "the power of social institutions through militant individuality and rebellious lifestyle choices, such as constant drunkness' and moshing" (Tsitsos 402). Thrashing body movements and the chaotic insurgency of punk politics into the mainstream are ways that both Bikini Kill and Pussy Riot build off of earlier punk traditions. These acts of American cultural defiance are on the surface, simply unruly and lacking structure, but ultimately stem from foundational ideologies of deconstruction and rebellion against patriarchal power structures and political repression. The representation of and reception to the chaotic actions of Bikini Kill

and Pussy Riot form yet another level of chaos in their communication with outlets of mainstream media. Regardless of the ideological intentions of their performative intentions, these bands are unable to fully predict their audience's reception of the chaos. The live performance becomes the medium through which these ideals and identities can be navigated and presented to the public, confounding with their frenzied execution and lasting relevance when juxtaposed with mainstream values of political and musical expression. Concerts and public performances take a level of planning in the form of set lists and reserved locations and yet, leave adequate enough unplanned space to allow the shows to take on an untamed life of their own once put into motion.

Bikini Kill capitalize on the clash between traditional femininity and their trademark feminist ideological underpinnings, presenting their audience with a space in which traditional concert structure is abandoned. In a performance at Yale University on March 3, 1996, Bikini Kill exemplified chaotic paradoxes from the minute they set foot on stage. The audience is first confronted with Kathleen Hanna, dressed in a bright pink and yellow shirt and strikingly feminine appearance. Her ponytail is kept back by a bright pink headband and her movements straddle the line between the youthfully feminine and the punk power stance. Following the anomaly of Hanna's wardrobe choice, it becomes clear that through clothing choice, "Punk revolted against the pseudo-liberation of the post hippie '70s by espousing uptightness, fetishism and the unnatural" (Reynolds and Press 304). As the first song begins, she is constantly placing her hands on her hips and accentuating her bobbing ponytail and innocent little girl appearance. It is a comedic representation of traditional girlhood as it is juxtaposed with gnarling vocals and overwhelming static. The visual image of an infantilized Hanna clashes abruptly as she screams and begins to throw her body around stage, immediately confronting the audience as an anomaly.

Her immense energy confounds the frail and delicate image of a young girl as it is quickly evident that she is unpredictable and someone to be feared, harnessing the staccato sharpness of vocal intensity and brute force of sporadic flailing limbs.

In a more subtle sense, Bikini Kill throw set list composition and musicians roles in to constant disarray. About three songs in to the set, (drummer) switches to lead vocals while the (bass) gets on set and Hanna (vocals) is now on bass. The entire band is restructured mid set; everyone can play multiple instruments or sing. Though Hanna is the lead singer, she is willing and insistent that both center stage fame and instrumental roles be shared. In contrast to a stagnant delegation of roles wherein perhaps one or two members are continually in the spotlight, Bikini Kill is dynamically shifting to alter their composition and each members' contribution to the collective group. Though all of their songs and set lists have been prepared beforehand, there is ample room for them to stop abruptly or be spontaneously rearranged. When attending a concert, audience members are never quite sure of the particular songs or energy level they will witness from Bikini Kill. In a similar manner, Bikini Kill adapt their intensity and banter to the particular audience they are playing for that night. In the largely volatile atmosphere of this mutual relationship there is an understanding that organized chaos is the marker of authenticity and intimacy between performers and spectators. Chronicling the problematic relationship between such performers and the mainstream music cannon, Reynolds and Press again provides a framework through which Bikini Kill can be better understood. After examining the unorthodox and sometimes confusing structure of live shows, it is evident that "These women are not necessarily *interested* in making a contribution to rock history or the evolution of the form. Riot Grrrl is foremost about process, not product; it's about the empowerment that come from 'getting up and doing it', and the inspiration audience members

draw from witnessing this spectacle of self-liberation" (328). Spectators have not have not come to these live performance looking for perfectly polished performance, they are more interested in Bikini Kill as charters of rebellious new spaces. Instead of expecting that band members play songs and appear exactly as they do on records, audience members embrace the organic and sometimes awkwardly chaotic concert as a single use experience.

In ways similar to the shock factor, Pussy Riots' "Punk Prayer" relies on chaos to grab attention and confound their audience, restructuring the concert setting and format of musical performance. The live performance style of Pussy Riot relies heavily on injecting their punk politics into places of quiet reverence (churches) and calm decorum (public squares). These performances take careful planning and a conscious effort in choosing location and yet are executed with the intensity of storming mob. Again, revisiting their performance in the Cathedral, it is evident that this performance took unforeseen elements as it unfolded. A fast paced chaotic scene is first conveyed through the use of handheld video cameras and amateur cinematography. From the opening images of the video, it is clear that this event is not the carefully choreographed and nicely shot music video most artists would desire. Instead of creating a theatrical backdrop, the band members transform an ordinary backdrop into a site of political and musical rebellion. Pussy Riot use this grainy and shaky style to position their audience as spectators, thrown in to the crossfire between punk performers and shocked bystanders. The unorthodox cinematography forces the audience to examine the ornate backdrop in a profoundly different light, one in which authority is transferred from deities and holy texts to the crass politics of young radicals.

If "Punk Prayer" is meant as a covert insurgency, then "Putin Will Teach You to Love" is a public riot. The scene begins quiet and calm, with a slightly higher quality handheld camera

panning over the ocean as lullaby music plays softly in the background. We are then greeted by a familiar band of masked band members emerging from the wake, this entry serves as a launching attack. The video quickly fades to a crowded street, Pussy Riot and a swarm of television crews and news cameras are barreling down a city street in Sochi, Russia. In similar fashion to their storming of the Orthodox Church, this spectacle is an attack on a public space. Scenes are spliced together from different locations as images of violent police repression and Pussy Riot whaling on guitars and mics bombard the viewer. There is no lull once the action begins, transporting the viewer's gaze from band-members bloody from being whipped and man handled to Pussy Riot dancing with an Olympic mascot dressed as a stuffed bear. The media's attention was already captured by Pussy Riot and yet, this stunt brings the band's position on the global stage in to question. Analyzing the domestic and international response to Pussy Riot's politics, Peter Rutland's "The Pussy Riot Affair: Gender and National Identity in Putin's Russia," further complicates these performances. Understanding the band and its location both within and outside of Russia, further highlights the growing realization that "it is hard to disentangle these complex trends and discern whether the profound inter-nationalization of Pussy Riot has helped or hindered their cause of bringing political change to Russia" (578). The onslaught of media attention throws both the goals and suspected outcomes of Pussy Riot's videos in to further disarray, as images and news stories perpetually shift context and form. As much as the band could plan aspects of the music, lyrics, dress and choreographed movements, reception can't be planned. The chaos of media attention has propelled Pussy Riot into a foray of criticism and support, intended and unintended consequences morph into their dynamic image.

Conclusion

Both Bikini Kill and Pussy Riot are unapologetic in their respective self-identities. They have forced punk communities and mass media outlets to take them seriously as both political activists and musicians, refusing to sacrifice their ideology or confrontational style. By drawing upon previous studies of punk communities and their multi-layered rebellions, it is clear that these bands are at home in the tradition and, more importantly, do much to subvert it. Juxtaposing Bikini Kill and Pussy Riot exemplifies the ideological underpinnings of feminist punk as an ideology and, yet, exposes its individualism. Bikini Kill took an unprecedented introspective look at punk, refusing to abandon its trademark bravado but still fiercely attacking its problematic similarities to mainstream American culture. Due to the radical reconstruction of live performances, they helped reimagine the boundaries of performer/audience interaction. Utilizing the radical potential of punk, Pussy Riot then redefined live performance and its relationship to political activism. Pussy Riot fundamentally altered the aesthetic of punk, once again propelling radical politics into the mainstream. They dared the State to try to silence their voices, and confronted the systems they opposed with fury and chaotic brilliance. Though the long term effects of Bikini Kill and Pussy Riot remain to be seen, it is clear that they have made lasting impression upon performance and political activism.

The impression both bands had on subculture and mainstream alike was an influx of forced introspection. In a calculated move to differentiate themselves from their punk contemporaries, Bikini Kill and Pussy Riot employed shock and chaos to establish a rift between themselves and the expected. Examining the punk cannon as a traditional sense of rebellion makes the performative substance of these band's live personas all the more intriguing, as they seek out the awkward spaces in established structure. Crass lyrics and macho violence are necessarily superficial when compared to the fundamental questions raised by Bikini Kill and

Pussy Riot. Shock serves as the first line of attack, reaching levels of discomfort which stun audience expectations of their place within a performance. Causing immense and total discomfort becomes a way of initial destabilization, momentarily dazing and captivating those present. Once the audience is thoroughly affronted by each band's initial image, both further complicate the situation by undermining the structure of interaction and throwing every definition of musical performance in to question. Beyond the forced restructuring of audience expectations, both bands remain testaments to the liberatory potential of musical performance. The simple presence of their radicalism is an erasure of the theoretically impossible. Not only do they imply that rebellion can take any form, but more importantly, that there is no limitations on what rebellion can look like. Rather than getting caught up in the established norms and canonical reference points of activism, Bikini Kill and Pussy Riot have effectively demonstrated an uncomfortable lack of limitation.

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