2.6. What is punk rock? What is DIY? Masculinities and politics between *l'art pour l'art* and *l'art pour la révolution*

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Abstract

Punk Rock is dominated by (white, heterosexual) males. This imposes the question how male domination is established in spite of the political stances of active Punk Rockers. To deal with this question, my starting point is to ask how the musical genre Punk Rock and gender are co-produced. Drawing on ethnographic field work and two focus group discussions in the Punk Rock and DIY scene in Graz (Austria), I will show how Punk Rock is distinguished from so called "tough" genres by context-dependent references to music, political views, modes of production and distribution, or most notably gender. Punk Rock is related to a specific anti-hegemonic masculinity. On the one hand, however, the male domination prevalent in most rock genres is reproduced. On the other hand, masculinity within Punk Rock is contested. Punk Rock is either understood as *l'art pour l'art* or as *l'art pour la révolution* – an emancipative and political means to tackle male domination.

"Indie sux, hard-line sux, emo sux, you suck!

— But what about Punk Rock?

— Hahaha"

(Anti-Flag)

What is Punk Rock? This simple question is not so easy to answer. Or rather: everyone might have an answer to this question, but the answers will differ a lot – depending on who we ask when, where and in which context, e.g. about which band. The above quoted Band Anti-Flag differentiates itself from Indie, Hard-Line, and Emo. And what about identifying themselves as Punk Rockers? They laugh. I would argue that they do this because they do not want or can define what Punk Rock actually is. They rather say (or sing) what Punk Rock is not. In its contrast to the named three other genres, Punk Rock is at least not for "a bunch of snobs", not "anti-choice" and sounding "like metal tunes", and not "really weak", as the lyrics of that song continue (Anti-Flag 2002). What this example indicates is that the boundary between Punk Rock and other genres is drawn on the basis of quite different things. Musical, social and political aspects come into play. And that struggles of inclusion and exclusion might be bound to the definition of the music one plays. "You suck", if you like indie, hard-line, or emo.

In this paper I will trace the ambiguity and the contested character of the categorisation of the musical genre Punk Rock. My aim is to show how the categorisation of music into

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differentiated genres is related to different constructions of gender and related (scene) political attitudes. The denial of hard-line is for example related to their "anti-choice" attitude and their "metal tunes", and thus related to gender and sexuality politics as well as musical practices. My starting point is the thesis that the differentiation of music into genres and the differentiation of subjects into gendered categories are simultaneous and interwoven social processes. I will show how different constructions of masculinity and Punk Rock can be regarded as co-constructed in social practices. At the same time, the understanding of musical practices and the meaning of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) is at stake and the subject of scene-internal struggles.

The work of many inspiring scholars indicates that gender is a central domain of conflict within the Punk Rock scene. In spite of the claim to be a socio-political counterculture (cf. Büsser, 1998; Calmbach, 2007), gender inequalities remain to persist in the Punk Rock universe. In the 1990s the Riot Grrrl movement in the USA attempted to end male domination in Punk Rock and Hardcore (Gottlieb & Wald, 1995). But gender is still a domain of struggles within the scene. Schippers (2002) coins the term of "gender manoeuvring" to describe the political action of scene-goers to shift the gender order within the alternative hard-rock scene. Punk Rock activities and DIY-practices are not in itself politically emancipative, conclude Císař and Koubek (2012). They map the DIY-scene of Brno along the axes of politicization and commodification with the result that DIY can be highly political or highly commercial and nonpolitical. In this paper I want to investigate how these lines of conflict about the intention of DIY musical practices within the scene do relate to questions of gender. Haenfler (2006) for example speaks of "manhood in contradiction", that the Hardcore and Straight Edge scene is characterised by a pro-feminist and progressive masculinity on the one hand and a rather macho-masculinity on the other hand. But how may gender be related to the conception of diy and musical activities? In this regard the symbolic meanings of musical practices and their categorisation into musical genres offers interesting insights. As Strong (2011) can show, riot grrrl became the "women-genre" over the years, subsuming all alternative rock bands with female musicians. Bands that were known as Grunge bands in the beginning of the 90s, such as Hole, were nearly 20 years later seen as Riot Grrrl bands. The symbolic labelling and categorisation of the music changed during the years. This indicates that political ambitions and gender constructions relate highly to the symbolic categorisation of music: to the question what is Punk Rock?

Musical genres as boundary work processes

I do conceive musical genres not as inherent to musical properties, but as *concepts of knowledge* (cf. Foucault, 2002, p. 63) to deal with musical material. Further, I regard distinct genres as the product of boundary work. According to Bourdieu (1996, pp. 223–227), the struggle about classification of art is the very stuff of artistic fields. What is art and what not? And if so, what kind of art? This classification struggle involves a serious game between the actors about their position in the particular field. Not for alternative Rock music but for Jazz, Appelrouth (2010) has shown how the boundary work to demarcate Jazz has been loaded with social and political/moral attributes. The development of Jazz from a so called "Black" music to a so called "White" music also involved an increase of social status. Following this view, we cannot conceive musical genres as a fixed and given categories. Genre differentiation is not solely grounded in the musical practices and related to social differentiations and power

relations (cf. e.g. Curran, 1996). Hence, I understand musical genres as contested knowledge areas that are produced in continuous boundary work processes.

The sociological concept of boundary work was introduced by Thomas Gieryn in Science and Technology Studies (Gieryn, 1999). Gieryn defined boundary work and the demarcation of knowledge territories as "a contextually contingent and interest-driven pragmatic accomplishment drawing selectively on inconsistent and ambiguous attributes." (Gieryn, 1995, p. 393) Applying this to musical genres, what constitutes a genre varies from context to context, from situation to situation, and is directly related to struggles for power. In combination with field theory according to Bourdieu (1996), these struggles are practices situated in the social field of music. Thus musical practices are structured by specific habitus and schemata of perception, action and valuing. These schemata are directly related to the symbolic-discursive order of musical genres (for the relation of practices and discourses cf. Reckwitz, 2008; Paulitz, 2012, pp. 50–58). To sum this up, I grasp musical genres as symbolic order that is produced and reproduced in practices of boundary work by actors in the social fields of music. Genres structure musical practices at large and get incorporated as practical knowledge by social actors.

To connect the boundary work concept to gender constructions, I draw on recent advancements of this concept in feminist Science and Technology Studies (Paulitz, 2012). Following this theoretical framework, I will draw on the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) as the generative principle of male habitus to analyse masculinity constructions that is discussed recently in German Gender and Masculinity Studies (Scholz, 2004; Meuser, 2009, 2010). Thus I understand masculinities as multiple and constructed in relation to other masculinities on the one hand and to femininities on the other. Masculinities are constructed in relation to a context specific model of hegemonic masculinity that functions as a cultural norm. In this theoretical frame, the context specific masculinity norm is inextricably intertwined with the symbolic order of musical genres. Therefore I draw on the concept of co-construction of gender and technology (Paulitz, 2012, p. 60; Singer, 2005). Music in its materiality (DeNora, 2000) and genre as knowledge and symbolic order are constitutive for specific gender constructions and vice versa. Musical genres and masculinities occur as concurrent and interdependently construction: certain musical practices are bound to specific masculinity constructions and vice versa. Musical genres are demarcated by references to masculinity models, while the symbolic reference to a context-specific model of hegemonic masculinity can be understood as a resource in the game in the social field of music to gain power (cf. Paulitz, 2012). Gender and especially masculinity constructions function as my critical lens through which I analyse norms and practices in the Graz Punk Rock scene.

Empirical methods – group discussions and participant observation

Based on the assumption that knowledge can be explicit or implicit, I combine two different approaches to grasp gender norms and images in both types of knowledge. Explicit knowledge is directly accessible via discursive practices. Implicit knowledge is only partly accessible via discursive practices and has to be reconstructed via the observation of social practices in which this knowledge is activated (Kalthoff, 2003, p. 74). Discursive and non-discursive practices need not to correspond to each other, but rather can also be characterised by specific cracks and tensions between them, or towards other practices (Reckwitz, 2008).

My enquiries took place in Graz, mainly in an autonomous youth centre called Sub². I have conducted two focus group discussions with participants from the Graz Punk Rock and DIY scene. I did not stimulate the discussions with words, but played pairwise different songs at a first stage and showed a collage of different pictures at a second stage. This approach was influenced by the intersectional study of Degele and Janz (2011), who used a collage of different pictures, on the one hand and the technique of the sounding questionnaire on the other hand. With this empirical design I left it as much as possible to the participants of the discussions how to verbally categorise the music. As a second method I conducted participant observations at 17 concerts. All materials were analysed according to the coding strategies in the sense of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). My following analysis mainly focuses on the symbolic level and the statements in the focus groups.

So, what is punk rock?

I will first deal in this section with how Punk Rock is characterised and distinguished from other genres and how thereby the position of Punk Rock (as a subfield) and its actors in the field of music is contested. In a second step I will proceed to discuss struggles within Punk Rock for the "right" interpretation of what DIY means.

Three chords: the "classical definition"?

The first pair of songs (by the bands Ruidosa Inmundicia and Leons Massacre) I played to stimulate the group discussion, was chosen by the contrast between different kinds of hardcore punk. Talking about these two songs, they are at the same time categorised into different genres while these are hierarchically positioned in the field of music.

- E: Well, for me this was a mix between Nu-Metal and typical Beat-Down Hardcore. (...) In your face!
- Q: Maybe the first one was what one rather calls Punk Rock, if it is possible to categorize that way, and the second song is maybe a mixture that once originated out of it.
- T: From Punk Rock and five other musical genres
- Q: From Punk Rock and five other musical genres, right.

Punk Rock is described as music that once originated and stayed 'pure' ever since, some even say the DIY-practices "came out of nothing" (T) in the USA in the 1980s. Punk Rock is seen as an authentic musical style, while other genres are composed out of other musics. What is classified as Punk Rock is thus seen to be the only legitimate representative of the values of Punk Rock and DIY in the way the actors ascribe them to the musical practice of the founder generation. The other named genres have their relation to Punk Rock, since they once originated from it, but due to their mixture with other genres they are not seen as Punk Rock. Only what is seen as Punk Rock today can legitimately claim to stand in the highly valued DIY-tradition. Additionally, Punk Rock is loaded with higher symbolic value, because it is a genre that does not owe its existence to other genres, in oppositions to others.

The struggle for symbolic weight in the musical field goes further than the categorization of music. The mentioned Bands I used as a first stimulus also played concerts in two different

² You can find information on this venue here: http://subsubsub.at [27.08.2014]. Most of the concerts are organised by the collective "No Punx in Gradec", you can find information here: http://diy-gradec.at [27.08.2014].

venues in Graz. Interestingly this was recognized and of high importance for the participants. How music is categorized is related to the symbolic connotation of infrastructure, especially the different venues, that are linked to different genres. And this implies claims to legitimately use and shape these locations.

E: Another rather problematic topic is the Explo[siv].

Q: Yes!

E: I don't know if the Explo[siv] would still exist without Punk Rock. Or without people, who attended the Punk Rock shows in the Explo[siv].

Q: Yes, certainly not!

The "Explosiv" is related to the second song and thereby excluded from Punk Rock by the participants. In this representation it is not only the music that originated out of Punk Rock, but also the necessary venues used to be Punk Rock venues once. Similar to the DIY-practices in the US-context, this implies that Punk Rockers once established the rooms and formed the necessary infrastructure for youth (sub)cultural activities that are used nowadays by musicians of other genres. The important point is that these venues would not exist without Punk. This connects Punk Rock with originality that functions as a resource to gain higher symbolic value in the musical field. Further, the Explosiv is criticized for offering a stage to bands that are seen as openly sexist. Since sexism is explicitly excluded from Punk Rock (see next section), the Explosiv is questioned as a relevant venue for Punk Rock.

But what actually are aspects that characterize Punk Rock? The participants of the group discussions do not come to a clear definition. But for another participant, also music with other influences can be punk, while there is also the "classical" definition, obviously the "original" Punk Rock:

S: I would also see music as Punk Rock that does not fit into the classical three or four chord Punk Rock definition, but also have some electronic elements or something like that.

For the participant S. Punk Rock is not bound to musical aspects. Thus, also "electronic elements" can be part of Punk Rock, although they do not belong to the "classical" definition. This "classical" kind of Punk Rock rather represents a dilettantism and minimalism as a musical style. But how can further elements be added to this constitutive basis, without becoming a different music that is mixture out of "Punk Rock and five other musical genres"? The discussion of a Weston-song I played during the focus group offers interesting insights:

Z: But why is it a Punk Rock song?

Q: Because of the chords.

All: *laugh*

The interesting part about this sequence is the laughter after the statement that the chords make this song to be a Punk Rock song. Obviously the difference is not based solely in the music. One major aspect here is politics, but discussing the Ramones, the contradiction becomes obvious to the participants:

- T: No one would say the Ramones are not a Punk Rock band.
- Q: I would rather say the Ramones are punk than Blink [128] is punk, because of the influence the Ramones had on other Bands.
- Z: And they had their statements. Standing on a stage with unkempt hair
- T: But on the other hand, two of them were Republicans. And that is definitely not punk!

At this point of the discussion, there is a clash between the consensus that seems to exist in the scene, since no one would deny that the Ramones are a legitimate Punk Rock band, and their political engagement on the right side of the political spectrum. Another participant (R) solves this contradiction by stating that Punk Rock is defined by some sort of "rebelliousness". This discussion of what defines Punk Rock shows that it is indeed dependent on the actual context that is discussed and even for the participants themselves no clear-cut and definite boundary around Punk Rock exists. Sometimes musical aspects are brought forward, sometimes political, sometimes the sheer number of sold records. Some aspects might sediment and stabilize the boundary and mark the symbolic land of Punk Rock, encompassing certain aspects. But it is still contested and the line is drawn in every statement. For example, "electronic elements" are seen as possible parts of Punk Rock, while other music are differentiated as other musical genres because of being composed. What is at stake in these processes of negotiation is for example the access to infrastructure like venues (and audiences) to play concerts. In the following section I will show that the boundary work demarcating genres from each other builds upon musical and social aspects at the same time. The genres excluded from Punk Rock are not only excluded on a musical basis, but the musical practices are directly linked to a specific kind of masculinity and thus named "tough".

"Tough": what punk rock is not

"Tough" encompasses various genres and labels a specific symbolic terrain that is demarcated from Punk Rock. The participants speak for example of "tough sound", "tough concerts" or "tough behaviour". "Tough" is always negatively connoted and explicitly gendered as masculine. For example a participant states that at "tough" concerts are "nearly only guys that perform their macho-masculinity-whatever-thing" (A.). Thus, "tough" functions as a negative against which Punk Rock is constituted. This negative is mainly characterised by an orientation towards becoming a rock star and explicit sexism that is ascribed to "tough" musical genres.

"Tough" genres are described as hyper-masculine, while Punk Rock is seen as gender-neutral. This "tough" masculinity and a related exclusion of women are mainly seen in a competitive logic of musical practices.

A: That is the point of these [tough] concerts: who has the hardest sound, who has the coolest tattoos, who moshes the most aggressive, who screams the most brutal? And here I am missing the punk! They do it not because of frustration or anger, but to distinguish one and to compete against others. And I think that is something extremely masculine. And thus I can explain why female persons might not feel welcome in such an environment.

It is assumed that the participants of "tough" concerts are mainly interested in the competition with others and that this competition is the reason, why these concerts are seen as mainly masculine. Again, Punk is positioned as 'authentic' against other genres, since in Punk Rock the performance is hard because of legitimate feelings like frustration and not because of the selfish aim to gain reputation. This competitive logic and the aim to be better than others correspond to the ascription that "tough" musicians aspire to become rock stars. It is ascribed to the (wannabe) rock stars that they foster the hierarchical division of musicians and consumers, while the musicians feel as something better because of their musical skills (which are a domain of competition as well).

Furthermore, in the description of the Punk Rockers, "tough" musicians employ explicitly sexist accounts strategically (like calling their band "Bitch-Slap"), to gain attention and

commercial profit in the rock musical field. It is stated that this "sexism is a stereotype or blueprint for some tough (...) Hard-core bands to do some marketing" (E.). Competitiveness and sexism are connected and associated with the (mainstream) rock musical field. Both are strictly opposed in Punk Rock. Practices like these are sanctioned and anti-sexism is established as an alternative norm. The symbolic reference to the hegemonic model of the rock star does not promise benefits in the subfield of punk. To be acknowledged as a proper Punk Rocker, you may not join this kind of competition in this context. In opposition, Punk Rock is connected with a do-it-yourself attitude, minimalism and dilettantism, and the claim that everyone can grab a guitar and play. On top, as we have seen, against the description of "tough" practices as masculine, the expression of frustration or anger on a stage in Punk Rock is not seen as a gendered practice. However, Punk Rock is not described as free from gender inequality. Rather, the boundary work towards "tough" genres is put into effect by a reflexive practice and the demonstration of critical awareness of male dominance and sexist structures in rock musical contexts. Discursive practices of reflexion are main building blocks of the construction of a progressive and anti-hegemonic masculinity in Punk Rock. References to this kind of masculinity construction do promise profits in the game in this subfield of music.

By rejecting the "tough" masculinity, an anti-hegemonic masculinity is constructed. However, this does not mean that this supposedly progressive masculinity does not go along with male dominance. In statements that do not engage in boundary work towards other genres, it is femininity that represents the "other" that "actually" does not belong to Punk Rock.

A.: Especially in the area that we [his band] play, it is strange, but it is absolutely not an easy music to listen to, or not a hard kind of music. But however, we often play with bands that still are male dominated, but women also do play active roles in these bands.

This statement reflects an image that is anchored in everyday knowledge and that indicates that women rather prefer "softer" and easily accessible musical styles. The astonishment of participants, saying that it is strange that women actually are active participants, also in "harder" Punk Rock styles, reveals the norm that femininity is usually not connected with Punk Rock - especially not with "harder" styles. To sum this up, in the case of Punk Rock an accepted masculinity must be positioned anti-hegemonic and references to this model of masculinity promise profits in the game of prestige – but still at the expense of the symbolic exclusion of women.

...and what is DIY?

But this does not mean that Punk Rock encompasses one uniform model of masculinity. I will proceed in this section with differentiations within Punk Rock. In the specific context that I researched in Graz I found two competing forms of interpreting DIY that are mainly divergent in the connection of the do-it-yourself-paradigm with gender and the wider field politics. I found two positions that I called the "self-made-man" and the "activist".

The self-made-man: punk rock and DIY as a l'art pour l'art

The "self-made-man" can be characterised by the acceptance of musical quality as a legitimate criteria in a vertical order of bands. But in contrast to the rest of the musical field, musical practices are not related to the aim of commercial success. However, the aim in this sense is

to "come around", to play as many shows across Europe as possible. To meet their friends as several musicians said on stage. Musical practices are an aim in themselves and not a means to challenge gender order or other inequalities directly, but rather mediated by calls to participate in demonstrations or squatting activities. But discussing the possibility of challenging male dominance in Punk Rock bands by introducing a kind of quota of women – as practiced by the band RVIVR –, the "self-made-man" refers to musical quality as the only legitimate criteria of choosing support bands.

- T: For example RVIVR, as far as I know, they asked the booker to book support bands in which a women or a homosexual person plays an instrument.
- Q: That is complete nonsense, from my point of view.
- T: Definitely!
- Q: Somehow, because they should look for good bands or young bands that need a gig, and not for a specific gender.

Instead of seeing the "quota" as a possible feminist action, the musical practice is presented as gender-neutral (similar to the frustrations expressed on stage) and maledominance is traced back to punk-external factors. Therefore the "self-made-man" is not interested in changing the gender order within Punk Rock. This is also related in the understanding of do-it-yourself as a kind of ethic of hard work. Musical quality and success (that is seen in playing many tours and shows) must be achieved by one's own initiative. It is (implicitly) denied that gender is a structuring order of gaining reputational positions within the Punk Rock scene:

T: But that is how it works. Many bands have connections because they invest a lot of time and come around a lot. From nothing nothing comes. All the work you invest will be rewarded sometimes.

Furthermore, against this claim, to play Punk Rock concerts musicians often use expensive and professional music equipment that contradicts this symbolic claim of a low-budget minimalist attitude. Also, these instruments can be described as masculine status symbols. However, Punk Rockers have invented strategies to bridge this gap between symbolic claims and material practices. They decorate their instruments and especially the instrument's cases with stickers of other punk bands and/or with political messages as a way to integrate the professional instruments into amateurish punk contexts. DIY appears to be a symbolic attitude that many bands rather perform on the surface of their instruments. It seems to be an obligatory symbolic reference, necessary to fit into Punk Rock venues to play as many concerts as possible.

To sum it up, regarding musical practices and the conception of what is "success", the "self-made-man" privileges musical quality over political impact. Although gender inequality is reflected as prevalent within the Punk Rock scene, musical practices themselves are not seen as a possible point of action. Rather they are described as gender neutral, mainly in comparison and distinction from so called "tough" genres. It is some kind of hard work necessary to achieve a prestigious position. And it fits to this conception that then a kind of "quota" is not a (legitimate) way to reach this position. This implicates that those who take advantage of the quota do not invest the same hard work or reach the quality of other bands.

The activist: punk rock and DIY as a l'art pour la révolution

The second interpretation of DIY criticises this position. DIY should be inherently political. It is described as a network that should revolutionise society and should not be there to benefit a few people:

A: To be honest, DIY is not a threat for the society when [name of the band] plays in a squat and is in a small van on tour in Europe.

S: Yes, then DIY means that this band comes around, but that's it.

Punk Rock is not understood as a practice to gain a prestigious position in the musical field, but as a practice to change society. And in contrast to the "self-made-man", the "activist" does not exclude musical practices from this claim. Music is not (only) a medium to spread political beliefs and initiate actions, but seen as political action itself. Thus, the "activist", connects musical practices and performing on a stage as political acts and therefore as potentially emancipative. One of the aims is to change the gender-order within Punk Rock and in society as a whole through musical activism:

E: Well, all the bands like Limp Wrist and so on. In my view they can be seen as the queer or gay equivalent to the riot grrrl movement. They say: 'we are here and we are present and we muddle in your fuckin' heteronormative matrix!'

In this practice masculinity is questioned as the dominant gender. The relevant criterion is political activism and the potential for emancipation, while musical quality is (symbolically) not relevant. The practices that are referred to here can be described as a means to occupy a place that is otherwise mainly reserved for straight white males. The (straight) male domination in the Punk Rock scene is questioned and its reproduction disrupted. The act to go on stage and to perform alternative, e.g. queer, identities is seen as a way to actively change the order of gender and sexuality in the Punk Rock scene and beyond. This quality of musical practices is put in the foreground and more relevant than the sound and "quality" of the music. Music is not only a medium to spread political views, but a realm for political activism itself.

Resume: ambiguities in punk rock

I have shown in the first part of my analysis that Punk Rock is not defined by some music-inherent features but the result of constant boundary work processes. These boundary work processes are strongly connected to gender constructions. A progressive masculinity construction is related to Punk Rock, mainly constructed by the demarcation and devaluation of so called "tough" genres. However, while Punk Rock is defined as progressive and antisexist, the related model of masculinity also builds upon the symbolic exclusion of women. A central point here is that gender-inequality is not seen as grounded in the musical practices. But there is not a uniform gender construction privileged in Punk Rock. Also within Punk Rock there are struggles about what DIY and musical practices as such mean. Within Punk Rock, gender order is challenged by an understanding of musical practices as political and emancipative acts.

Still, the construction of masculinity in Punk Rock is bound to practices that produce the exclusion of marginalised gender constructions due to their masculine connotation. The "serious games among men" happen more subtle under the surface of a pro-feminist discourse that only partly finds its counterpart in practices. This shows that this pro-feminist



discourse has certain effects. But besides this it is apparent that the symbolic reference to antisexism can paradoxically also be seen as a resource in the "serious games among men".

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