DIY OR DIE!

DO-IT-YOURSELF, DO-IT-TOGETHER & PUNK ANARCHISM

EDITED BY JIM DONAGHEY, WILL BOISSEAU & CAROLINE KALTEFLEITER

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To everyone who keeps on keeping on, despite everything. JD

To Alba, Elsie, Felix and Lyra. WB

To Dimitri, Julian and Amelia – stay strong and continue the fight for justice. CK

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CHAPTER EIGHT

TRANSGRESSIVE STREET INTERVENTION AS A FORM OF ANARCHIST (IN)DIRECT ACTION AND EMBODIED PUNK PHILOSOPHY IN BUENOS AIRES (ARGENTINA) AND NEW YORK CITY (UNITED STATES)

HUGH SILLITOE

Chapter Eight: Transgressive street intervention as a form of anarchist (in)direct action and embodied punk philosophy in Buenos Aires (Argentina) and New York City (United States)

Hugh Sillitoe

Buenos Aires, 21st of October 2017

I arrive at the intersection of Cid Campeador in the neighbourhood of Caballito to find a small crowd already accumulating around a slickly besuited man, a woman in a bright blue gymnastic suit and bleach blonde wig, and six figures in trench coats brandishing clipboards. These performers form part of the anarchistic performance collective Camara Humana [Human Camera], who I had met previously whilst they were rehearsing within the squatted theatre Teatro Popular La Otra Cosa [The Other Thing People's Theatre] where a large part of my fieldwork in Buenos Aires took place. In the centre of the crowd, Chili sits connecting a sound system together – they are my friend and research co-performer within the anti-capitalist theatrical popular education collective La Escuela de Teatro Político (ETP – The School of Political Theatre) also based within Teatro Popular La Otra Cosa. Agustina, Lucía, and Mati, three other members of ETP, are also there amongst the gathering crowd, keeping a watchful eye out for any potential police presence. Chili, having connected the speakers, comes over to greet us and adds his opinion concerning how to spot an undercover cop, which is met by hums of agreement from the group – 'you can tell, even though a guy has long hair, there's

Figure 8:1 – Camara Humana invigilating the streets of Buenos Aires (photograph by Hugh Sillitoe).

something weird, something fascist – that's no punk, that's a cop'.

The intervention begins with the besuited man calling out in a clichéd advertiser's tone about an incredible product that he has for sale, which is guaranteed to make the city safer for all who purchase it. On the opposite side of the road an official billboard of the Argentine government reads – 'we continue advancing towards a safer city'. Having built up the suspense over the course of a few minutes, the presenter declares the name of his product – the 'human camera'. At this point, four 'cameras' on stilts emerge from around the street corners at the edge of the intersection. Dressed in silver and black robes, they have human bodies yet large cameras with menacing red lights for heads. These cameras begin to observe passersby whilst the figures with clipboards move out to attempt to make some sales.

Whilst the cameras wander around officiously invigilating the intersection, the woman in the blue gymnastic suit, whom the presenter refers to as his assistant, performs a purposefully clumsy dance with some long ribbons as a kind of anti-cheerleader. Other than some passersby who stop to watch for a few moments, these acts in the centre of the intersection are largely observed by a crowd of other members of the Buenos Aires underground performance scene. Concerning this, Alvaro, a clown working with ETP, reviewing photos and commenting on the action later would offer the critique that – 'If the audience is just punks, then it doesn't matter if the action takes place

in the street or in some punk's living room, we need to go further than that'.

Meanwhile, the presenter orchestrates a raffle, handing out tokens to the crowd, just in time for the assistant to call out the winning number as she finishes her clownish dance routine. The winner is a young Colombian woman who is asked a series of questions in order to receive a mystery prize. The first question concerns if Buenos Aires is 'a) unsafe], b) very unsafe, c) more unsafe than other parts of Latin America, or d) somewhere where one always feels afraid to walk alone'. The woman replies 'unsafe'. The following question is 'How many times have you been robbed this year?' The answer is three. The presenter next asks if the robberies consisted of pickpocketing or violent theft, and the answer is that they were violent incidents. The presenter then reacts with a highly exaggerated extended shout of 'How terriiiiiiible!' at which the woman and much of the audience laugh.

The penultimate question concerns what should happen to robbers and the woman replies that they should have to face up to what they've done but that in all the cases when she was robbed there was not sufficient evidence to charge anybody. She then elaborates, in what appears to be an earnest contradiction of the satirical tone of the performance, that perhaps with some cameras it would finally be possible to have evidence and to start to improve things. The presenter appears unsure how to respond before pulling an exaggeratedly incredulous expression and encouraging the audience to applaud. He then asks the final question – 'Why do people rob things?', to which the assistant shouts out 'Lack of opportunities?' and the presenter replies, 'No, because they are bad'. The intervention is ended by the raffle-winner being told that she may choose her own camera to take with her, which she is promptly tied to by the neck with a dog chain 'to live forever safely and happily'.

Reflecting on the action later that evening, Chili, would declare – 'To laugh in the doorway of apocalypse, this is fucking punk rock'.

New York City, 23rd of August 2018

Parading along the High Line elevated greenway in the west side of Manhattan, JME, in a mask of a red and white striped top hat with eyeholes cut in pulled down all the way over his face and with a rusty watering can glued on top, smashes chains noisily against trash cans. Meanwhile, Kalan – a fellow member of the anarcho-nihilist performance collective The Cart Department – wears a fishnet bodysuit and furry mask with beekeeper style mesh pulled across his face, kneeling in front of passersby to offer them puppet shows with a marionette that he had recently made out of driftwood. At the same time, I am wearing a mask made from a painted cardboard box with two deer antlers protruding from the front and a large golden papier-mâché sun emerging like a crest from the back. As this character, I greet other passersby with handshakes using a false golden hand and drag a spoon across the front of an old air-conditioning unit hung around my neck as if I were playing the washboard in a skiffle band. The soundtrack blaring at high volume on repeat from Kalan's boombox features the GG Allin songs 'NYC Tonight' (1982) and 'Expose Yourself to Kids' (1988). Kalan cynically describes these as 'some feel-good songs to get the tourists excited'.

Small crowds cluster around us, some with expressions of wonder, others of disgust, others apparently indifferent. Many take photos and videos. Kalan begins to search trash cans for food scraps, pulling out half-eaten hotdogs and cookies and offering them to passersby, then lifting his mask up and eating them himself when they refuse. One woman asks me what we are protesting about. I respond that I'm not sure and ask her what she thinks we might be protesting about. She responds – 'climate change'.

Dodging arriving security workers, we descend into Chelsea where we try on samples of perfume outside fancy stores, taking exaggerated, whooping delight in each aroma, and draw in chalk on the sidewalk. Kalan writes 'Worship death here' in one spot then, a few stops further on, writes 'Worship death over

there' with an arrow towards the original message. I label trash bags on the street with expensive price tags similar to those used in the surrounding art galleries and invite people walking by to admire the exhibit. Indeed, in a private gallery across the street, the window display shows, carefully illuminated against a perfect white background, a graffiti style design of a skull on a canvas alongside the words 'FUCK YOU PUNK', with a price tag of $10,000. Talking about this later with Madison, another performance artist with The Cart Department, she would compare it to the use of rainbow-coloured packaging by corporations in NYC around the time of Pride, saying it was like 'gay kombucha at Starbucks … the punk, the queer, and the weird made into something that smells nice that you can buy'. JME, Kalan, and I continue to roam the streets of Chelsea in character for a few hours, eventually stopping as Kalan removes his mask and declares – 'Alright, I'm tired of being different now'. JME and I take off our masks too, both dripping in sweat, and JME surmises – 'Well, I don't know what we just achieved, but I think it was worth doing, I mean I guess no one ever wrote a song and just knew straight away – "Yup, that's the way this will change the world"'.

We arrange to reconvene later that day at the arts bar Flowers for All Occasions in the Bushwick neighbourhood of Brooklyn. As I stand outside the bar with Madison, Kalan pulls up on his bicycle, having changed out of his costume from earlier into a full business suit. Madison greets him with a call – 'Well, hello there, Smartypants!' – to which Kalan replies with a wry smile – 'Hey, yeah, I guess I ran out of punk juice'.

Introduction

I begin this chapter by sharing these two 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973, p. 30) drawn from sixteen months of comparative (auto)ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted with numerous anarchistic performance collectives in Buenos Aires and New York City to attempt to immerse readers immediately in the

underground performance scenes of my research. As I have written about in more detail elsewhere (Sillitoe, 2020), I use the semi-parenthesized term '(auto)ethnography' to refer to my methodology that sees the mutually informative relationship between ethnography – that is the 'deep hanging out' (Rosaldo, 1989) of extended participant observation within a certain population – and autoethnography – that is concentration upon the actions, thoughts, experiences, and emotions of the researcher themselves as data (Holman-Jones et al., 2015). My observations with different punk and anarchist performance collectives' and reflections upon my own practice as a punk and anarchist artist are thus understood here as one dataset.

The above vignettes will also serve to help me illustrate the central argument that I seek to make in this chapter that artists and activists creating such transgressive street interventions are undoing essentialist conceptualisations of what constitutes punk and anarchist action and proposing an innovative new (anti)model for punk and anarchist performance praxis, as shall be analyzed shortly. (By 'praxis' I mean the interrelationship of theory and action.) In what follows I will show how such deconstruction of reified notions of punk and anarchist action through experimental performance may be seen to have significant ramifications, not only for how we understand punk and anarchism, but also how we understand the possibilities of political action more broadly.

(In)direct action

Centrally I propose that a broadened conception of what might constitute punk and anarchist performance allows for a reconsideration of the classical anarchist tactic of 'direct action' (Graeber, 2009) – that is, the practice of taking calculated and targeted action to address the perceived root cause of a particular political problem. Animal rights groups freeing guinea pigs from laboratory cages (Munro, 2011), environmentalists occupying the terrain where fossil fuel infrastructure is proposed

to be built (Bradshaw, 2015), or Food Not Bombs campaigners collecting waste produce from dumpsters and using it to serve free meals to the hungry (Heynen, 2010) would all be examples of direct action.

In contrast to this, reflecting upon how cultural and political shifts may also occur as a result of broader, untargeted actions, I formulate the complementary notion of 'indirect action'. This is inspired by previous critical reflection upon the potential political and cultural impacts of punk music and performance. This literature has tended, since Dick Hebdige's description of the 'semiotic guerrilla warfare' of 1970s punk subculture in the UK (1979, p. 105), to frame punk as largely having diffuse, widespread impacts rather than acute, focused aims (Marcus, 1989; Savage, 1991). However, it must be noted at the same time that many punk collectives have engaged in calculated, targeted actions alongside more oblique counter-cultural affronts. Prominent examples include the anti-Thatcher pranks of 1980s anarcho-punk collective Crass (Glasper, 2007), Jello Biafra of Dead Kennedys running a mock campaign for mayor of San Francisco (Bogad, 2016b), and Desperate Bicycles' anthem

Figure 8:2 – The Cart Department during one of their regular street interventions (photograph by Ivana Casanova).

'Advice On Arrest'(1978) whose lyrics are easily-memorizable instructions of best conduct if arrested. This co-existence of direct and indirect political actions within punk feeds into my development of the blended concept of (in)direct action discussed in this chapter.

My conception of 'indirect action' is further informed by consideration of numerous historical art/political groups whose performance practices may also be seen to have influenced political and cultural change in a more indirect manner than, say, the direct action of armed revolution. Such movements include Futurism (Berghaus, 2012), Dadaism (Gordon, 1987), Surrealism (Rapti, 2013), Situationism (Wark, 2015), Fluxus and the happenings (Higgins, 2002), Provo, (Kempton, 2007), the Yippies (Hoffman, 1971), and Pomarańczowa Alternatywa [Orange Alternative] (Romanienko, 2007). However, the scope of this chapter does not allow for a rich unpicking of the lineage of transgressive performance within the twentieth/twenty-first century artistic and political avant-gardes (for attempts at this task see Berghaus (2010) or Goldberg (2011)). Rather, I highlight these movements here to loosely situate the contemporary transgressive performances that my research focuses upon in relation to their antecedents.

Some further contemporary collectives worldwide that may be seen as exemplifying more indirect political performances include: Russian provocateurs Voina [War], known for staging an orgy in the Moscow Museum of Biology, throwing live cats at McDonald's workers, and daubing a 65-metre tall penis on a St Petersburg drawbridge facing the headquarters of the FSB (Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti [Federal Security Service] – successor organization of the KGB (Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti [Committee for State Security])) (Zaytseva, 2012); the Janez Janša group of Slovenian artists all operating under the same name borrowed from a right wing politician (Georgelou, 2014); the Italian 'after-failure' arts collective IOCOSE creating oblique acts such as installing flat-pack guillotines in numerous IKEA stores (Ruffino et al., 2017); Japanese group Chim↑Pom known for theatrically hunting street rats and turning them into taxidermied Pikachus (Chim↑Pom, 2015); and Czech network Ztohoven (a Czech-language pun that may be read as 'Z toho

ven' [Out of it] or 'Sto Hoven' [One hundred shits]) who hoisted an enormous pair of underpants in place of the national flag above the presidential palace in Prague (Pospiszyl, 2016).

It is important to note here that despite overarching leftist and often anarchist politics, some avant-garde performance flirts with fascism, the most notable historical example being Italian Futurism (Berghaus, 1996). Likewise notable fascist 'punk' branches also exist (Worley, 2012; Sabin, 1999), alongside entrenched heterosexist subcultural norms (Leblanc, 1999). Opposing these oppressive tendencies alongside my research co-performers, I foreground the queer etymological root of 'punk' as a reclaimed homophobic/classist slur, with an original connotation somewhere between 'thug' and 'fag' (Dale, 2016, p. 132). Here, I extract an ideal type of queer punk transgression that attacks, rather than subculturally buttresses, hegemonic matrices of domination, as illustrated in practice by queercore (Nault, 2018) and riot grrrl (Marcus, 2010). In this sense, following the conceptualization of punk centred upon an anti-authoritarian essence encountered during my fieldwork, those fascists who call themselves 'punk' are not punk at all but rather its antithesis. Recognizing from my fieldwork that any attempt at direct action likely includes some elements of indirect action and vice versa, I coin the semi-parenthesized concept of (in)direct action, contained in the title of this chapter, in order to express three related conditions within a single shorthand: the ideal type of direct action; the opposite ideal type of indirect action; and the actual shifting liminal realities of (in)direct actions that contain elements of both ideal types to different degrees.

My conceptualization of (in)direct action intersects with work I have published elsewhere building upon the work of activist scholars such as Larry Bogad (2016a; 2016b), Stephen Duncombe (2016), and Ben Shepard (2011). These researchers have suggested that transgressive street action is ultimately an example of 'tactical performance' wherein transgressive performance is presented as a sub-option within a theatrical take on the sociological notion of the 'repertoire of contention' (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007). This repertoire encompasses the full gamut of different methods that those wishing to provoke socio-political

change have at their disposal; the task of aspiring change-makers thus being to tactically implement the most effective options from this inventory in relation to their given cause and context. In contrast, I have explored how over-consideration of such use of transgressive street performance as tactical direct action has prevented reflection on the distinct political possibilities of more 'supra-tactical', inexplicable, and indirect actions that attempt to go beyond strategic thinking and undermine normative 'distributions of the sensible' (Rancière, 2004; Sillitoe, 2021). In this chapter I aim to show how a broadened consideration of punk and anarchist performance might reinforce these insights and allow us to better comprehend a complex constellation of directly and indirectly politically impactful actions.

Analysis of (auto)ethnographic vignettes – punk as anti-authoritarian essence and laughter in the face of power

Returning to an analysis of the opening (auto)ethnographic vignettes above, something that is evident in both accounts – and that appeared broadly shared between the avant-garde performance networks of Buenos Aires and NYC throughout my fieldwork – was the idea that punk represents an anti-authoritarian essence and subversive way of being that goes beyond ascription to a particular subcultural style. This can be seen in Chili's widely agreed-upon assertion that the difference between a punk and an undercover cop dressed up as a punk is something that can simply be sensed. Meanwhile, in NYC, Kalan's ironic declaration to have 'run out of punk juice' whilst dressed in a suit may be viewed as making the same point in the opposite direction: as much as a cop dressed as a punk can never be a punk, a punk dressed as a businessman may still be one. Punk here is not about how you look or how you sound but rather the anti-authoritarian and counter-normative values

that your actions evince. Contrary to classically popular understandings of punk as a principally musical subculture (Laing, 1985) or stylistic 'neo-tribe' (Maffesoli, 1996; Bennett, 1999), my research supports recent arguments that punk is better understood as a multi-faceted and malleable mode of cultural/political resistance (The Subcultures Network, 2014; Ensminger, 2016) and a do-it-yourself embodiment of a uniquely 'punk' political philosophy overlapping with autonomous anarchism (Kristiansen et al., 2012; Sofianos et al., 2017), as shall be further evidenced below.

There is also evidence within both vignettes of attitudes that I encountered many times during fieldwork that, where an essentialized notion of punk as a certain style pervades and associated stylized subcultural cliques are allowed to develop, then the dissident potential of punk is suffocated and replaced with a consumer-friendly husk of itself. Madison's derision of the cynical use of rainbow packaging by corporations or sanitised versions of 'punk' aesthetics by elitist art galleries speaks to this. Kalan's sardonic description of songs by the highly controversial figure of GG Allin (Marschall, 2016) as feel-good anthems for tourists also chimes with these concerns. Kalan and the rest of The Cart Department were fully aware that even the grotesque and violent reputation of someone such as GG Allin, known for assaulting his audiences and defecating on stage, now feeds in to the construction of tourist lures branding NYC as 'wild' and 'edgy'. Indeed, the chorus of one of those songs reads now almost as the tagline for a tourist bar crawl: 'one thing that I know is – we're gonna raise hell in New York City tonight' (1982). This resonates with research indicating how squatting artists, punks, and anarchists have been implicated as inadvertently influencing gentrification (van der Steen et al., 2014, p. 18), with the 1980s occupation of multiple dilapidated city properties in the contemporarily swish Lower East Side of Manhattan providing a prominent example in NYC (Starecheski, 2016). Meanwhile, in Buenos Aires, Alvaro's assessment of the Camara Humana action as intrinsically limited due to its primary audience consisting of punks who were already on the side of the intervention, speaks to a concern that intertwined punk values and aesthetics are at risk of creating hermetic echo chambers

if the notion of what constitutes punk is not continually questioned and punk communities do not open themselves more broadly and 'go further' than the superficial borders of style.

Questions are raised here concerning if and how punk can avoid becoming assimilated into normative, consumerist, capitalist cultural frameworks and/or ghettoized as a self-contained fringe with little broader political or cultural significance. My research co-performers and I repeatedly asked these very same questions amongst ourselves concerning our transgressive performances throughout my fieldwork in both Buenos Aires and NYC. A consistent element in these conversations was the idea that to laugh, make fun, and display flagrant disrespect and irreverence in the face of power, oppression, and despair is an integrally punk act that cannot ever be fully assimilated into the norms it disdains and mocks. Chili's expression, above, of laughing in the doorway of the apocalypse as an inherently punk act encapsulates this view. Meanwhile the Camara Humana performers laughing about the preponderance of violent crime in Buenos Aires while under the scrutiny of menacing yet inefficient anthropomorphised security cameras may be seen as an example of this in practice. In NYC the '(not)happenings' regularly staged by The Cart Department throughout my fieldwork – surrealistic interventions in the normative current of public spaces, of which the above vignette provides one example – may also be seen to exemplify the punk act of laughing in the face of authority and exposing the restrictive boundaries of conventionality via their transgression. This is reminiscent of numerous analyses that link punk to Bakhtin's (1968) notion of carnival – the 'laughter laughing at itself' (Lachmann, 1988, p. 132; Jones, 2002). This 'embodiment of the liberated communality of the people in perennially renewed rebellion against the social and spiritual restriction of the official order' (Lindley, 1996, p. 17) also remains a commonplace lens for interpreting the kinds of avant-garde performance that I study. Further, carnivalesque political intervention has been readily linked to anarchist direct action, as seen within the widespread notion of 'carnival-against-capital' (McKay, 1996) or what Larry Bogad, prior to refining his definition of tactical performance, called 'tactical carnival' (2006, p. 46). As such, the same concept and

practice of carnival has been linked to both direct and indirect political actions, illustrating the intermingled reality of different forms of punk and anarchist (in)direct action that this chapter seeks to highlight.

The three central findings concerning the attitudes of anarchist performance artists towards punk that I identify within the above vignettes, and that I will continue to demonstrate and analyze in relation to other fieldwork observations below, are as follows: 1) punk may not be reduced to a particular style or sound but ought rather to be considered more broadly as the expression of an anti-authoritarian essence; 2) the stylistic essentialization of punk and its assimilation to consumerist norms must be rejected as negating and neutralizing this anti-authoritarian essence; 3) the intrinsically punk power of derisive, carnivalesque laughter must be celebrated and holds a unique and irrepressible potential for (in)directly generating socio-political change. Collectively these observations inform the framing of transgressive street performance as an embodiment of punk philosophy and innovative form of anarchist (in) direct action that I put forward in this chapter.

(Anti)definitions of punk and anarchism

From my fieldwork in Buenos Aires and NYC, as undergirded by my experience as a touring musician in the absurdo-anarcho-dada-folk-punk band Dangle Manatee and my ongoing cross-cultural work as the large, daft, shape-shifting toe and absurdo-anarchist performance artist Huge Sillytoe, I would argue that punk is a highly malleable, contextually dependent concept. This chimes with Penny Rimbaud of Crass referring to punk as an indefinable 'isn't' (cited in Steinholt, 2012). We might link this evasion of clear definition and celebration of ambiguity within punk to what Hans Richter referred to as the 'raging anti, anti, anti, linked with an equally passionate pro, pro, pro' of Dadaism (1964, p. 35). Punk, like dada and other movements of subversive, avant-garde performance mentioned above, thus

remains 'a notoriously evasive and multifaceted beast' (Smith et al., 2017, p. 3) offering a 'revolution … that does not define itself by preemptive conclusions … revolution *without* a goal, but revolution *with* effect' (Jones, 2006, p. 12 [emphasis in original]). For this reason I do not attempt to define punk, seeing the very act of rigid definition and attempted cementation of power/knowledge structures surrounding a given concept as something that punk and avant-garde performance more broadly seek to oppose. Likewise, mirroring the capacity of punk to embrace mess and contradiction – to shout one's feelings even if they are not coherent or 'sensible' according to conventional constructions – I do not seek to make a classically reasoned academic argument in this chapter. Rather I explore the political possibilities of transgressive street performance in a way that matches their own obliqueness, and put forward the blurrier, more ambiguous anti-definition outlined above that allows the title of 'punk' to fall upon anything that exudes an anti-authoritarian essence and evade becoming tamed as a consumable classification.

However, a further clarification must be added here, that a notion of essentialized punk dissent having become crystalized within popular culture. Think, for example, of Green Day's 'American Idiot' (both the song (2004) and subsequent sell-out Broadway show (2010)) – taking an ostensibly anti-establishment stance may not necessarily be anti-establishment at all (Diehl, 2007). This also connects to discussion of the 'museumification' of avant-garde art, such as Peter Bürger's comments concerning Duchamp's ready-mades: 'once the signed bottle drier has been accepted as an object that deserves a place in a museum, the provocation no longer provokes; it turns into its opposite' (1984, p. 52). To be punk, then, in the terms that I put forward in this chapter, an action must be actively provocative, not to be confused with a sanitized and assimilated chimera of provocation. I argue that it is precisely the kind of crude provocation exemplified by the opening vignettes of this chapter that allows punk performances to operate as (in)direct actions that may influence political and cultural shifts by calling into question the legitimacy of the norms that they transgress.

Anarchism, like punk, is also often couched in terms of what it opposes rather than what it proposes. Anarchism is

anti-hierarchical, anti-state, anti-fascist, anti-oppression. Indeed, as with the notion of punk discussed above, what unites all strands of anarchism, despite their intense factionalization, is a rejection of authority, alongside an assertion of the fundamental equality of humankind. Such ultimate equalitarianism has classically been seen as an end to be achieved through temporary hierarchical revolutionary means (Bakunin, 1972 [1866]), as a preferable condition for a self-interested union of egoists (Stirner, 1995 [1844]), or as the basis for a co-operative society of federated communities (Proudhon, 1994 [1840]), amongst many other interpretations. However, whilst exactly how hierarchy is to be rejected can be the source of bitter dispute, it remains a common thread. As George Woodcock summarizes, paraphrasing Sébastien Faure, '[a]ll anarchists deny authority, many of them fight against it' (2004, p. 11). In classical anarchist thought, this is commonly expressed in relation to anarchy being a 'natural' order with authority as an 'artificial' imposition denying the 'absolute truth' of equality. For instance, William Godwin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon were both confident that an orderly society without laws or government would be the natural state following the enlightenment of all rational individuals. Meanwhile, Mikhail Bakunin's 'scientific anarchism' saw anarchy and liberty as outgrowths of 'natural law', as echoed by Peter Kropotkin's systematic analysis of the shared dictates of 'nature' and 'society'. Thus many classical anarchist thinkers have equated the essential equality of humankind with a natural or organic order, deserving recognition so that humankind may be released from artificial restriction, thereby allowing the natural apex of human socio-political possibilities – anarchy – to flourish.

However, such appeals to a reified notion of 'nature' may be seen to differ little substantively from conservative claims of the natural 'correctness' of right wing ideologies such as the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer (Offer, 2000). In response I would argue that our conceptualization of anarchism might usefully be broadened, in a similar way to that already discussed concerning punk moving beyond its initial categorization as a subcultural style. Here, anarchism may be considered not so much as a natural, predestined equalitarian condition, but rather

more simply as the rejection of hierarchies and the attempt to exist beyond them, closely mirroring the conceptualization of punk discussed above. This certainly maps on to my observations of the intertwined and often overlapping perceptions of punk and anarchism amongst the anarchist performance artists with whom I conducted my fieldwork. I found punk and anarchism as concepts informing and firing transgressive street performance to be largely quasi-synonymous, both being perceived by my research co-performers as centred on the rejection of authority, suffocated of their revolutionary potential if essentialized and contained within supposedly unambiguous definitions, and offering the possibility for playful revolt against all forms of oppression. As such, in my (auto)ethnographic observations punk and anarchism did not so much go hand in hand but rather constituted different knuckles of the same fist thrown in the air in anti-authoritarian revolt. In this light, the kinds of transgressive street performance that I investigate may be framed as at the cutting edge of contemporary punk and anarchist action: counter-normative acts in public space serving to undermine hegemonic norms that undergird conventional hierarchical thinking.

Transgressive street performance as revolutionary action

Given the entrenchment of older and stricter notions of anarchism, oftentimes warped by the influence of Marxist materialism into what has been termed 'workerist anarchism' (Donaghey, 2020), the suggestion that street performance interventions might be impactful and even revolutionary acts can be hard for some more traditional organizers to swallow. In NYC one former collaborator of the anarchist experimental theatre company The Living Theatre, now affiliated with the Metropolitan Anarchist Coordinating Committee (MACC) activist network, told me in response to hearing about my

research: 'the climate is not great for that kind of thing right now … I make [performance] proposals every once in a while with groups like this, but no one bites, it's not obviously anarchist enough for them'.

Here the label of 'anarchist' in a traditional activist organizing context can be seen to represent a limited focus on a certain number of actions as legitimate and productive. This was an interpretation within activist groups that I came across again and again throughout my research in Buenos Aires and NYC. The word interpretation is key here. It is important to note that different 'classical' anarchists such as Bakunin, Stirner, and Goldman may be seen to have actually advocated for a multiplicity of transgressive acts in the name of various understandings of anarchism. Indeed, Goldman has famously been paraphrased as stating 'If I can't dance I don't want to be in your revolution' (Shulman, 1991). However, in practice during my ethnographic fieldwork I found the reified notion of 'anarchism' to often be reduced by activist groups to a dogmatic position seeking 'revolution' by a limited selection of predetermined strategies. I do not seek within this article to speculate in depth concerning the reasons behind the prominence of such a reductive understanding of anarchism amongst more traditional activist groups, but rather note it as an important aspect of my observations.

The above quotation from the MACC activist also illustrates my consistent observation throughout fieldwork that the inherent ambiguity of transgressive performance is more unpalatable for those with a dogmatic ideological stance associated with narrow perceptions of 'appropriate' political action. In my observations, activists ascribing to an inflexible interpretation of anarchism were typically not open to transgressive performance, seeing its obscurity as obstructive to their clear vision and thus 'not obviously anarchist enough'. I write this chapter to illustrate anarchism as exceeding classical workerist activities such as organizing meetings or agitating for general strikes (to which many activists observed in both Buenos Aires and NYC reduce their perception of 'true' anarchism). This mirrors how I seek to show how our understandings of punk likewise may stretch far beyond reductive and clichéd representations of

distorted guitars, ripped jeans, and facial piercings. The rejection of such dogmatism by the anarchist performance artists that I worked with can be seen in the incredulous response of Madison of The Cart Department when I asked her for her thoughts on the classical activist rejection of transgressive street performance as frivolous, hedonistic, and insufficiently critical: 'So what I've got to punch a cop every time I'm pissed or I'm a fake? Give me a break!'

Resisting in this way such accusations that their counter-normative performance work was too 'weird' to have any 'serious' political impact, I observed my research co-performers in both Buenos Aires and NYC persist with their absurdist street interventions with the conviction that such actions were potentially revolutionary. Etcétera, another artist collective with whom I worked during my fieldwork in Buenos Aires, boast over twenty years of staging disruptive street actions in Argentina and worldwide. Etcétera began this practice with participation in protest performances known as 'escraches' during the 1990s where unprosecuted members of the Argentine dictatorial military junta of 1976-1983 were publicly denounced outside their homes for their role in the 'disappearance', murder, and torture of over 30,000 people (Kaiser, 2002; Taylor, 2003). Within escraches, Etcétera staged surrealist actions such as a football match between Argentina and Argentina where both sides lost (resonating with the hosting of the 1978 World Cup in Argentina to conceal the atrocities of the dictatorial regime) and sermons by generals and priests in grotesquely disfigured masks attempting to glorify their murderous actions yet being drowned out by disharmonic trumpet fanfare and the reproachful chants of demonstrators. Such acts served both to obliquely ridicule and deconstruct the myth of power that these now disgraced military figures once used to legitimate bloody oppression and also to distract police attention whilst the houses of the genocidas (those responsible for genocide) were pelted with red paint. As such these actions provide another example of a blend of indirect and direct intentions within transgressive street performance, the direct facilitation of the staining of the residences of genocidas being combined with a more indirect undermining of constructed notions of

'sense' and 'power' that allowed tyranny to grow in the first place.

From these origins, Etcétera have gone on to orchestrate many transgressive street actions, including: installing toilets on the steps of the Argentine national congress and inviting people to shit directly onto the corrupt political artifice; running a seemingly earnest campaign for a goose to become President of Argentina; and staging numerous exaggerated 'errors' as the bumbling guerrillas with plywood rifles that make up their off-shoot collective of Internacional Errorista (Etcétera, 2017). During my fieldwork, Etcétera undertook several further actions including launching an ironic museum of neo-extractivism – undercutting the celebration of unsustainable extractivist capitalism in Latin America whilst dressed as giant genetically modified corn-on-the-cobs. They also attacked the seat of the Argentine government, the Casa Rosada, as a ramshackle band of 'errorists' with a cardboard helicopter. All of these actions can be understood as being fired by the anti-authoritarian essence of punk identified above, rejecting essentialization of what anarchist action might be, and rather laughing in the face of power. In our conversations, members of Etcétera consistently allied themselves with more classically anarchist movements, yet in their own performance practice often translated this anti-hierarchical drive into a more oblique attack upon the normative 'distribution of the sensible' that undergirds power imbalances, rather than turning to the notions of more traditional anarchist direct action maintained by other activist groups. Loreto, one of the founders of Etcétera, echoing the issues noted above of performance artists in NYC finding it hard to convince anarchist activist networks of the political relevance of their actions, once noted with me that 'Some anarchists sometimes have doubts with us and with errorism, they say it is too irreverent, but really what we do is too radical for them'. Ironically, this quotation speaks to the conservatism I observed amongst many activists – an inflexible conceptualization of anarchism and inability to imagine political actions operating beyond rationalistic and strategized revolutionary thinking. By exploring a broadened conception of what opposing hierarchy might mean in practice (which is also to say a broadened conception of what anarchism

Figure 8:3 – Madison Cranberry and Jamie McGann of The Cart Department during a (not)happening on the streets of Brooklyn (photograph by Ivana Casanova).

and punk might mean), Etcétera and the other performance collectives with which I have conducted fieldwork may then be seen to be pioneering new possibilities for anarchist and punk action that break through and beyond restrictive conceptions of appropriate and sensible political action.

Seeing transgressive street performance as opening pathways for a revolution against restrictive hegemonic notions of 'sense' can be further illustrated by an interaction that I had with Kalan of The Cart Department concerning their proclaimed intention to take one of their shopping carts full of garbage sculptures to the frontline of the anarchist resistance in Rojava. Here Kalan mocked simultaneously the earnest, militarily-strategized revolutionary hopes of numerous Western anarchists who had taken up arms with the YPG (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel [People's Protection Units]) and his own bathetic absurd performance art. The farce of imagining NYC-based anarcho-nihilist puppetry transposed into war-torn northern Syria – how profoundly out of place Kalan wearing fishnet stockings and a mask of trash would be amongst the military fatigued revolutionary

ranks – may be seen to highlight the oft-unbridgeable chasm between direct or indirect approaches to social change. Kalan elaborated that when he had proposed the idea to an anarchist acquaintance who was canvassing support for Rojavan leftist fighters, they had responded that some puppet shows might be a welcome morale boost – 'No', Kalan had reportedly asserted, mimicking the manipulation of a puppet with a wry smile, 'this *is* revolution, Sweetie!' Here Bogad's (2016a) suggestion that tactical performance constitutes one element of a cultural 'air-war' that facilitates the success of the 'ground war' of more conventional activism was rejected. Rather, as I commonly observed amongst performance artists in both NYC and Buenos Aires, transgressive intervention was seen as embodying revolutionary change in itself, breaking away from the dominant power/knowledge paradigm that assumes an obligatory tacticality to political action. Meanwhile I observed such performances to be typically punctuated by tragicomic laughter surrounding a lack of hope of the broader societal realization of the radical change that the acts attempted to embody – once again laughing in the doorway of apocalypse.

Figure 8:4 – Etcétera during one of their many escrache interventions (photograph) by Etcétera.

Conclusion: a call to (in)direct action

Stephen Duncombe, a prominent voice within the tactical performance literature advocating precise metrics for measuring creative activist impact, speaks of his introduction to political radicalism through punk, but that this only brought him 'halfway there' since '[p]unk had no strategic plan; it had no plan at all' (2002, p. 5). This represents a commonplace criticism from a tactical perspective of more ambiguous and oblique punk actions as ineffective (Anderson, 2004; Cornell, 2005), whilst others have attempted to defend punk movements by squeezing them within a tactical frame after all (Moore and Roberts, 2009; Barrett, 2013). However, what I have sought to argue in this chapter is that amorphous rejection of tactically maximized efficiency might alternatively be interpreted as a central fount of both anarchism and punk's derisive, transformative potency, as exemplified by the transgressive street interventions of my research. Fitfully and impulsively shrieking in the ears and spitting in the face of hegemonic normativity, such punk actions might open interrogation and perhaps alteration of otherwise unquestioned regimented norms, offering an indirect complement to direct, strategized activist organizing and moving away from reified notions of anarchist militancy as always rigid and serious.

Such interrogation of norms may result in: conservative backlash, normative reinforcement, and the commercialization and domestication of dissent (Moore, 2005); or continual progressive shifting of discourse and expanded parameters of normatively acceptable behaviours (Clark, 2003); or, perhaps most likely, a complex admixture wherein reactionary responses may sharpen or blunt rebellion dependent on (sub)cultural context. In this way, from the vantage point of a punk performer, exact outcomes are ultimately unforeseeable, strict planning being exasperatedly renounced and overwritten by a more instinctual disdain towards normative constraints and associated hierarchies. Summing up the tactical approach to social change is the classic quote: '[i]f the real radical finds that having long hair

Figure 8:5 – Internacional Errorista invading the Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, Argentina in 2005 (photograoh by Etcétera).

sets up psychological barriers to communication and organization, he [*sic*] cuts his hair' (Alinsky, 1971, p. xix). Opposing this 'hair cut' metaphor, queer punk performers such as myself and those I work with respond with asymmetrical tangles or spikes and grotesque tattoos on freshly shaved gender-nonconforming scalps. Such commitment to offence and refusal to compromise is characteristic of my observations of exaggeratedly transgressive street performances that question the constructed 'meaning' of normative boundaries and underpinning notions of rationality, centring an anti-authoritarian essence that is both quintessentially punk and anarchist.

Through my documentation and analysis of transgressive street performances as anarchist (in)direct action, I argue that conventional notions of what constitutes 'the political' that have informed recent assessments of political use of performance are drawn into question. The necessity of a rational goal orientation that undergirds the notion of a repertoire of contention (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007), often reductively borrowed within recent research concerning artivist performance without attention to existing critiques within Social Movement Studies

Figure 8:6 – Kalan with one of their performance carts in the New York City subway (photograph by Kalan Sherrard).

(Melucci, 1996; Eyerman and Jamison, 2003), is problematized by my assessment of the oblique political drives of many performances. Here, via the proposal of the liminal framework of (in)direct action, my work contributes to widening the scope of what kinds of performance may be considered and researched as political acts. I illustrate how exaggeratedly transgressing normative expectations in public space may draw into question and begin to undo the hierarchies that are held in place by the maintenance of such expectations. At the very least within the examples discussed above I hope to have shown how transgressive street performance may allow for a sneer of disrespect towards hegemonic normativity within which the germ of greater freedoms for all may yet survive.

This text, focused as it is on *action*, whether direct or indirect, must end with an imperative, an invitation. To all the punks and anarchists (broadly undefined) reading this: go outside today and make revolutionary nonsense! Interpret this however feels right for you and do so however you are able and

however feels safe, but above all – do it! You might spout wisdom in an invented language on the street corner, drum wildly upon trashcans in a marketplace, or invite strangers to speak of and enact their dreams during a bus journey. You might simply move your body in a way that is not usual for you, subtly beginning to queer and unravel embodied normative expectations. You might just howl into the night. We can do all this together. Together we are not only stronger, but stranger too, and with each transgressive act imperceptibly yet relentlessly intertwined across the countless contexts that make up this world, so the baselessness of any normative framework and the bald injustice of associated power disparities may become, bit by bit, more widely acknowledged, and oppression more virulently rejected and undermined. If punk teaches us anything it must be that the distribution of the sensible and matrices of power/knowledge are always alterable, may be spat upon and reformed, maybe even undone entirely. Meanwhile, anarchists continue to whisper from all corners: 'another world is possible; another world is possible' as we wriggle, jiggle, squeak, and squeal in more and more unexpected ways, resisting assimilation and domination with every gyration and honk, the world can surely only become a little more free, at least for a moment, a little more full of punk juice for the slurping.

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