

Subcultural Narrative Identity Construction in Personal Zines

The New Orleans Punk Anarchist Scene and the Impact of Hurricane Katrina

Magisterarbeit

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1 Introduction

This thesis investigates personal zines (self-published, non-commercial, small circulation publications about the everyday life of their authors) as autobiographical narratives providing unique insights into individual and collective subcultural identity construction in the punk anarchist scene of New Orleans. My research interest is basically twofold: first, I am interested in the distinctive subjectivity of personal zines and to follow a narrative approach in studying their role in self-identity formation. Second, I want to explore the subcultural politics of the New Orleans punk scene as representative of general trends in identity formation and political activism, in particular as I understand the local community to be part of the larger “new anarchism” activist scene that has become an influential cultural and political force in the late 1990s (Clark 2004; Kuhn 2008; Weinzierl and Muggleton 2004).

My attention was initially directed towards New Orleans because of an anthology of local zines, *Stories Care Forgot* (Clark 2006). Published shortly after the city had been disastrously flooded in the wake of hurricane Katrina, it documents the local punk scene and how it related to the community at large through zine writings from the years before the storm. I was intrigued by this publication and it prompted me to take a closer look at the New Orleans zine community. The three zine writers I study have each published dedicated zines about their experiences and the process of coping with the effects of the flood. I will analyze these post-disaster zines in order to determine if they indicate a turning point in their authors' life narratives, and to what effect (Kerby 1991). I understand Katrina not as a fateful natural disaster but as an inherently social event and the result of a discriminatory distribution of vulnerability that is revealed through the disaster (Wisner et al. 2004).

Personal zines account for approximately two thirds of all zines published in the US (Schmidt 2004) but academics have only recently discovered their value for the study of autobiographical narratives. The historian Chidgey (2006) evaluates personal zines as a novel source for life story data in historical research, concluding that they “provide valuable qualitative data documenting the micro-histories and situated knowledges of lived experience” and therefore should “take their place among other sources such as letters, diaries, and oral history interviews, as offering unique narratives demonstrating the *effects* of history, as experienced by its living participants” (12, *italics original*). Since zinesters (zine writers) often display an avid interest in investigating particular topics in their lives and

within the surrounding subculture and community, Chidgey views their writing as auto-ethnographic and auto-theoretical. The remarkable self-documentary drive in zine culture is apparent in the numerous self-organized zine libraries across the US and projects such as a film portraying the zine scene in Portland, Oregon (Shadid et al. 2005), and the aforementioned anthology of pre-Katrina zines from New Orleans.

Using zines as research material privileges the perspective and experience of the subjects under research and allows them to preserve a high degree of representational integrity. This perspective can lead to more valuable results since, as Schilt (2003) remarks, the study of zines offers insight into what writers deem relevant for their lives and not what researchers think it is. Having control over self-representation and to produce narratives that do not serve the interests of others, is particularly important for marginalized subjects, for example girls and young women who “are encouraged to speak their stories and provide narratives of their experiences, but at the same time they risk these narratives being scrutinized, interrogated, appropriated and depoliticized.” (Harris 2003, 44). Personal zines focus “the act of self-definition by the zinester/author not on the exceptional or the explicitly unique but on the routine [...] suggesting that even the trivial moments in the lives of average individuals deserve attention and understanding” (Bailey and Michel 2004, 34). Obviously, zine research is necessarily highly specific to the people and locale investigated. In fact, as I will argue, this is to their advantage because only through escaping totalization can possibilities be opened for subterranean, radical, and resisting identities.

Given the cultural provenance of the zine medium, it is no surprise that the majority of personal zines is tied to a subcultural context, in particular to punk. In terms of politics, they almost exclusively subscribe to identity politics instead of ideology-based politics, which matches the emphasize on individual experience (Bailey and Michel 2004). While most scholars have understand subcultures as sites of consumption, the study of zines recognizes and emphasizes cultural production and agency (Poletti 2005; Zobl 2004). This in turn allows to acknowledge subcultural politics, values, and praxis instead of trivializing subcultures by confining investigations to the level of style and ritual. Approaching subcultures with a seriously political perspective is especially important for my study because the zine writers in my sample are situated in the punk anarchist scene and actively pursue political goals. I will look at recent work of scholars who are doing ethnographies of particular subcultures and their findings on collective identity and activism in the setting of new social movements and

post-subcultures (Haenfler 2006; Haunss and Leach 2004; Kuhn 2008; Muggleton 2000). Of particular interest to me are the issues of privilege and whiteness in subculture (Traber 2007).

The following three chapters comprise the theoretical foundation for my empirical research into the New Orleans punk anarchist. In chapter 2, I describe the history of zine publishing and the transformations the zine medium has undergone, paying particular attention to the subcultural context and the personalization of representation and politics it represents. Chapter 2.3 provides an overview of my empirical research and specifies some of the special considerations of doing academic research with zines. Chapter 3 is a discussion of identity and agency with a special focus on performativity and narrative identity construction. These theories form the basis for my study of personal zines as autobiographical narratives. In chapter 4, I explore post-subcultural theory in regard to recent political subcultural formations and diffuse social movements based on collective identity and shared culture. I describe the punk anarchist scene in the US and the forms of subcultural political activism it has developed in recent years. The theoretical part of the thesis concludes with an investigation of the issues of whiteness, privilege, and self-marginalization in the punk scene.

Chapters 5 and 6 contain an empirical study of a sample of personal zines published by three different writers from New Orleans as well as material from interviews I conducted with them. Additional information has been gathered during a research trip to New Orleans in February 2008 and interviews with several experts of zine culture.¹ Chapter 5 explores the characteristics of the New Orleans punk anarchist scene and the zine writers' ideas and concepts about identity, politics, and privilege. In chapter 6, I investigate the effects of hurricane Katrina. Here, I am especially interested in the motivations and the function of post-Katrina zine writing, how the zine writers interpret and cope with the disaster in individual, collective, and personal terms, and the impact on their political values and commitment.

¹ See chapter 10 for a complete list of interviewees.

2 Personal Zines

Zines are non-commercial, self-published, small-circulation print publications, often edited by a single person. They are typically produced using deliberately simple technologies such as typewriters and handwriting, often featuring photos, magazine cut-outs and hand-drawn cartoons assembled in cut-and-paste layout.² Publication happens by photocopying and stapling little booklets that are then inexpensively sold or traded by mail, in alternative bookstores, or through specialist mail-order distributors. Ever since the first science fiction fanzines were created in the 1930s, zine publishing has developed into a well-established cultural practice in the US, significantly enlarging in both audience and publishing activity with the advent of punk fanzines in the 1970s, achieving mainstream recognition and popularity in the 1990s and continuing well into the 21st century. In the mid-1990s, an estimated 10,000 different zine titles were published and read by 500,000 – 750,000 people (Duncombe 1997, 14).

Primarily, zines are a medium of fan cultures and subcultures and the writers and readers are generally located in various youth cultures. These demographics expanded significantly in the 1990s with the rising popularity of the medium. There are popular zines on parenting (*East Village Inky*) and working as a substitute teacher (*On Subbing*), written by authors in their 30s and 40s with families and holding regular jobs. Simultaneously to this process of more mainstream inclusiveness zines also proliferated as a medium for people who do not find themselves adequately recognized or even marginalized by existing subcultures, as it has been the case with riot grrrl and queer zines that addressed issues of feminism, homophobia, and transphobia in the largely heteronormative and male dominated punk subculture. Personal zines can be seen as the radical outcome of a process of individualization and personalization of representation and politics. They evolved during the 1990s and are characterized by very personal content, revolving almost exclusively around the personal life of the single zine writer herself who need not be affiliated with a fan culture or subculture.

2.1 History of Zine Publishing

For the purpose of this study, I will look at five key periods in the history of zine publishing: science fiction fanzines (from early 1930s), punk fanzines (from mid 1970s), queer and riot

2 See appendix chapter 9 for annotated reprints of zines from my research sample to get a visual impression.

grrrl zines (mostly early 1990s), and personal zines (from 1990s). These categories are necessarily approximate and are not to be misunderstood as discrete genres. It is also noteworthy that while popularity shifted to new zine formats over time, their predecessors have not been replaced. Science fiction fanzines, for instance, are very much alive today. Still, the zine medium has changed—or rather: expanded—its format, themes, and audience as it has been adopted by different subcultures, infused with new ideas, and put to different uses. In order to trace the history of today's personal zines and the New Orleans zine scene specifically, these are the significant progressions the medium has undergone.

Zines are a part of the long tradition of alternative self-publishing in the US, stretching back all the way to radical pamphleteers like Thomas Paine in the eighteenth century (Duncombe 1997, 15; Wright 2001, 31). The direct precursor of today's zines are probably the Amateur Press Associations (APA) that were founded at the beginning of the nineteenth century. These organizations published “amateur papers” in reaction to the new professional mass-circulation press that was rapidly expanding at the time. APA members each printed their own material and submitted it to a central mailer who would then collect and redistribute the complete publication. In 1875 at least 500 writers and editors, as well as about the same number of publications were active. The APA model was later “picked up by science fiction fans in the twentieth century as an ideal medium by which to bind together geographically scattered fans” (Duncombe 1997, 50).

2.1.1 Science Fiction Fanzines

The origins of zine publishing are to be found in the science fiction fandom scene of the 1930s. At the time, professional science fiction magazines such as *Amazing Stories* had begun to publish letters from their readers, including the addresses of the writers. Now with the means to connect to like-minded people, science fiction fans started to correspond amongst each other and organized correspondence clubs and fan conventions. Eventually, newsletters and amateur magazines were published using mimeograph technology. The first one was probably *The Comet*, published in May 1930 by the *Science Correspondence Club* (Spencer 2005, 95). These “fan-mags” or “fan-zines” contained letters, stories, and criticism by amateurs and professional writers alike. Reader and writer became interchangeable and symmetric roles. The primary motive for fanzine contributors was interest in the subject matter and communication with other fans. While fanzines were “very nonprofit” (Wertham 1973, 74), they still offered the opportunity to develop professional skills. Quite a number of

professional science fiction writers and comic book authors first published in fanzines (Wertham 1973, 74; Spencer 2005, 97).

The first scholarly publication on zines is Wertham's book *The World of Fanzines* (1973). He celebrates fanzines as a special form of communication that operates outside of the commercial mass media and therefore is able to bypass the "hidden censorship" imposed by economic interests (73).³ Most science fiction fanzines are run by a single person who is contributor, editor, publisher, and distributor at the same time and does not follow a profit motive. The communication between writer and reader is unadulterated and happens "on a more intimate, personal, and perhaps more democratic basis" (74) than it is the case with the mass media. While Wertham displays a progressive position in the enthusiasm about the democratization and dehierarchization the fanzine medium offers, as well as in the acknowledgment of the need for an alternative press to counterweight the mass media, he remains conservative in the question of the actual content of these publications. This limited perspective leads to a major shortcoming of his research: the failure to recognize the crucial expansion and transformation of the fanzine format taking place during the 1960s when fanzines slowly left the science fiction niche and were adopted as a medium by the newly evolving youth subcultures. These were becoming increasingly oppositional and centered on novel music styles, thus falling outside of Wertham's conceptualization of fanzines and their audience. A case in point is *Crawdaddy*, first published in 1965. Wertham categorizes it as an underground press publication (76) yet more recent zine researchers view it as an important early music fanzine (Kleiber 1997; Schmidt 2004a; Spencer 2005).

To Wertham, fanzines "represent not a subculture but a paraculture" (129). Paracultures exist in parallel to the mainstream culture, they are not characterized by resistance to the dominant culture. It is probably useful to substitute the term "fan culture" which is more common today. Members of a fan culture create their own culture as part of a shared spare-time interest, in a fashion more involved than a simple hobby, yet not as politically conscious as it typically is in the case of a subculture or even a counterculture. Also, while being a fan might be an important part of a fan's life and contributes to both individual and collective

3 Wertham had gained notorious popularity with his rallying against comic books in the 1950s. In his book *Seduction of the Innocent*, he claims that portrayals of violence, substance abuse, and sexual activity in comics are harmful to children. Public concern culminated in Senate hearings in which he also testified. In response, the comics industry introduced the Comics Code, a set of rules regulating the contents of comic books, modeled after Hollywood's Motion Picture Production Code of 1930. Wertham's attention to fanzines and his enthusiastic appraisal was initially quite surprising to me.

identities, fandom is unlikely to be existentially transformative. It is always based on the appreciation of something produced by someone else for commercial purposes, for example professional science fiction stories or sports performances: “symbolic texts that have little or no direct social connection to the individual” (Bailey and Michel 2004, 19). Yet, there is substantial creativity to be found when fans become “fan journalists” (Spencer 2005, 98), derive their own cultural artifacts, and create community from what they find mass produced. Fan culture is a creative and often critical response to the conditions in industrialized countries, but not resistance to it. It stays largely within the traditional social order, as waning as it might be, by locating creative activity in what little time is left after employment, family, and other responsibilities are taken care of. Even where it is just meant to be an escape, it remains spare-time.

2.1.2 Punk Fanzines

With punk, fanzines entered the subcultural context and rapidly increased in numbers. The ethics and aesthetics of punk fanzines have decisively shaped zine culture to date, just as punk itself has had a lasting effect on subcultures and mainstream culture alike. Probably the most central element of punk is the call to “do it yourself” (DIY), to produce and organize both material and subcultural needs independently from mainstream society—be it music, clothing, housing, or fanzines. Punk's DIY philosophy is anti-professional/pro-amateur and favors low-fidelity (lo-fi) production technologies that are easily mastered without specialized training. This played a significant role in the transformation of the largely consumptive fan cultures preceding punk into productive subcultures. I agree with Moore (2007) when he argues that since punk, subcultural resistance is less to be found in provocative style, where it had been traditionally located by researchers of subculture, but primarily in the cultural production of the subculture itself, such as music, fanzines, and self-organized show spaces and record labels.

During the 1960s, fanzines had already appeared outside of science fiction fan culture in the form of music fanzines published by avid followers of rock bands.⁴ Although the link

4 In fact, because of personal continuity between the two fan cultures, the fanzine medium was brought to the music scene by science fiction fans such as Paul Williams and Greg Shaw. Both had previously published science fiction fanzines before they created the first music fanzines in the mid-1960s: *Crawdaddy* and *Mojo Navigator Rock'n'Roll News*, respectively (Spencer 2005, 185). Shaw was later joined by John Ingham to produce *Who Put The Bomb*, a very popular music fanzine published from 1969 to 1979. It peaked at an atypically large circulation of 25,000 the year before it ceased publication (Schmidt 2004a).

between youth culture, popular music, and politics had become obvious by then, the popular student movement and hippie subculture of the 1960s and early 1970s did not make much use of fanzines as a medium. Instead they preferred the alternative press, aiming to reach an audience as large as possible (Schmidt 2004a). Punk was a radical departure from both the bohemian student movement and the escapist hippies. It also required a different medium that was less professional and less geared towards being attractive to a large and potentially mainstream audience, but instead more exclusive to the subculture, more immediate and personal in its style. As Sabin and Triggs (2002, 7) note: “punk’s mission to throw out the old order meant that it marked a very distinct break with the hippie subculture that had preceded it—and thus with the old underground press.” Nevertheless, punk fanzines grew from the same necessity that had spawned the alternative press earlier: the mainstream media was incapable or unwilling to report on punk adequately and punks thus sought to create their own representation (Kleiber 1997, 56).

In December 1975, the first issue of the fanzine *Punk* was published in New York. The “punk rock” label had just been established for a new music scene revolving around the club *CBGB’s* in New York (Schmidt 2004a). This new generation of musicians opposed the professionalism, commercialization, and mainstream orientation of the stadium style progressive rock music that prevailed in the early 1970s. Their music was more experimental and at the same time simple, fast, and rough, without involving the usual requirements of proficiency. Inspired by the developments in the US, this music style was rapidly adopted and popularized by musicians in London, before being re-imported into the US (Spencer 2005, 187). Most prominently the British band *Sex Pistols* developed the punk rock music genre while at the same time made infamous its subcultural posture through provocative media appearances (MacLeod 1997, 123). It was also in London where the seminal punk fanzine *Sniffin’ Glue* was first published in July 1976. It offered a platform for the new punk bands and came out almost monthly. In the fifth issue, editor Mark Perry called upon the readers to make their own fanzines (Schmidt 2004a). As Hebdige notes in his major study of subcultures, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Perry and other fanzine editors of the “music press of ‘ordinary fans’ [...] made the symbolic crossing from the dance floor to the stage” which was typical for the participatory philosophy of punk (1979, 110).

Sniffin’ Glue was the template for the fanzines to come, in terms of the style of both format and content. It was done in simple cut and paste layout and then photocopied in black and white (in contrast to *Punk* which was printed). Sabin and Triggs argue that the decrease in

rates for photocopies occurring in the mid-1970s facilitated the rapid spreading of punk fanzines (2002, 17). Photocopying remains the primary reproduction technology for zines up until today and plays an important role in the process of zine making since it is affordable, accessible, and can be leveraged by a single person. Scamming free photocopies from chain copy shops like *Kinko's* or at the workplace is a popular reoccurring theme in zines themselves.

It is characteristic for punk fanzines to feature mistakes, corrections, and traces of the editing process in the final print. Hebdige finds this to produce in the reader a strong effect of “urgency and immediacy, of a paper produced in indecent haste, of memos from the front line” (1979, 111). The proximity of fanzine language to the actual life of its readers lowers the barriers of entry into becoming a zinester oneself. It is the manifestation of punk's general DIY politics, the ideal that anyone can publish a fanzine who wants to do it, regardless of their skills, and in the vernacular of the subculture itself. When punk fanzines do not look and read like professional magazines, it is the result of a conscious decision where specific politics find their expression in an equivalent style.⁵

Obviously DIY philosophy predates punk, but in punk it has been made the central theme of a subculture for the first time. This enabled and encouraged people to become cultural producers and creative participants in a subculture whereas before they had been largely relegated to the role of passive consumers. Punk is a self-created subculture, and not the appendix of a commercial product like science fiction, rock music, or other fan cultures, as critically as these might engage their cultural point of departure. Furthermore, subcultures are in opposition to the parent culture, and this holds especially true for punk. Resistance to the mainstream, rejection of its values, and an overall anarchist conviction are evident in song lyrics and fanzine contents. Many participants of a subculture embrace these subcultural politics as their “whole way of life” (Williams 1958)—as transient as this dedication might be—and it is therein where the personal becomes political and the political becomes personal.

It is difficult to stress enough the importance of the politics of punk subculture for the further development of the zine medium. As Schmidt (2004a) notes: “Je näher die

5 Hebdige refers to this “symbolic fit between the values and lifestyle of a group, its subjective experience and the musical forms it uses to express or reinforce its focal concerns” as homology, a concept introduced by Lévi-Strauss and first applied to subcultures by Paul Willis (Hebdige 1979, 113). In the case of punk, it is the coherence and consistency the subculture provides to its members through the integration of fierce amateur-produced music, violent pogo dance, torn-up clothes, revolutionary lyrics, provocative language, and hastily produced fanzines in cut and paste layout. To Hebdige, homology is a fundamental feature of subcultures.

nachrückenden Jugend- und Subkulturen den Ideen und Idealen von Punk standen, desto mehr Fanzines brachten sie hervor.” The most obvious case in the direct tradition of punk is the American hardcore scene in the first half of the 1980s. Hardcore music is the (re-)adaption of British-style punk music and could be referred to as “second generation punk”. Its beginnings are to be found in the Los Angeles area, most notably Orange County, where suburban middle-class youth created the self-proclaimed “hard core” of punk: even faster and more aggressive music, aiming for “Punk's fury without New Wave's art-school baggage” (Blush 2001, 3). The aspect of communication becomes more important in punk fanzines than it already had been in science fiction fanzines because as a subcultural scene it was not supported—sometimes even opposed—by commercial publications or the mainstream media.⁶

For this study, punk fanzines and their legacy are especially relevant since the scene I research is closely affiliated to punk and anarchist subculture.

2.1.3 Queer and Riot Grrrl Zines

At the end of the 1980s, the prefix in fanzine is dropped and *zine* becomes the most commonly used term. This change in name is significant because it reflects how the zine medium expanded to include individuals that were not necessarily part of fan cultures or youth subcultures but felt themselves to be misrepresented in the mainstream media (Schmidt 2004a). Many of the new zines that started to appear were dedicated to fringe culture, often revolving around a personal obsession of the zine writer and a more or less critical engagement with popular culture. Although there were already personal zines being put out at that time, most of these zines, while idiosyncratic in their approach to popular culture and the mainstream, did not center around a life narrative. I would argue that the phase of mainstream popularity during the 1990s focussed on these fringe culture zines because although they were interestingly different from what the mass media delivered and had a personal touch, they still closely related to mainstream popular culture and did not question its conceptions of how one

⁶ While most fanzines contain reviews of other fanzines and a letters section, dedicated network zines or review zines serve this purpose exclusively. *Factsheet Five* was the most important network zine. First published in May 1982 and consisting of a single page only, it grew to an average 140 pages featuring approximately 1,400 zine reviews and a circulation of more than 15,000 (Duncombe 1997, 50). It was not limited to punk fanzines but reviewed zines of all types that were submitted to the editors. Each zine review included contact information so readers could order or trade an issue. *Factsheet Five* increased the popularity and accessibility of zines immensely, since years before online distributors existed, zines were only available for purchase at punk shows or in major cities that had a bookstore, info-shop, or record store selling zines. Publication ceased in 1998.

should function in society. In essence, they just added an individual twist, an interesting past-time obsession, an aura of authenticity and hipness. This was quickly capitalized upon by the advertisement industry and the culture industry by “borrowing aspects of the underground—and in the process changing their meaning. The underground's condemnation of the dominant culture was being used to package and sell that very same culture” (Duncombe 1997, 133).⁷

While the process of expansion into the mainstream and the discovery by commercial interests with the ensuing discourse on authenticity and “selling out” is important to understand zine culture at large, for the purpose of this study I am more interested in zines by people who are marginalized even in progressive and radical subcultures. Discrimination within subcultures functions the same way it does in the society in general and is primarily based on gender, race, and sexuality. In recent years, even more differentiated categories of discrimination such as age, size, ability, and appearance have been recognized and discussed in zines. Here, I will focus on queer and riot grrrl zines that introduced queer and feminist critique and politics to punk subculture.⁸

According to Spencer, the catalyst for the creation of the “queercore” scene was the zine *JDs*, published 1985 - 1992 by queer artists and activists GB Jones and Bruce LaBruce who,

in response to their sense of alienation and exasperation at the narrow lifestyle choices offered to them by the hardcore punk scene and the mainstream gay scene, [...] turned to the traditionally punk medium of the zine to express their views [...] in order to network, share ideas and develop an alternative culture, which would blend queer and hardcore identities. (2005, 41)

Queercore is the more inclusive successor label to “homocore”, a term introduced to describe the fusion of homosexual and hardcore punk identities by Tom Jennings' and Deke Motif Nihilson's *Homocore* zine, first published in 1988 (44). Queer zines address the double bind experienced by queer punks who face heteronormativity in punk hardcore subculture on the one hand, and assimilationist and consumerist attitudes in mainstream gay culture on the

7 Zines with a punk/anarchist background and anti-consumerism politics that seem to escape cooptation by radically questioning society and proposing lives too different from the mainstream to become popularly accepted or repackaged and sold back to authenticate consumption choices. Nevertheless, as the iconography of advertisement increasingly employs romantic and revolutionary imagery to reach disillusioned and ironic consumers, the threshold of what is acceptable as advertisement content—which is mostly drastically different from the ideology of the producers of the products advertised—is likely to shift in search of access to consumers.

8 Zines written by people of color exist, but they are few. The most well-known are probably *Bamboo Girl* by Sabrina Margarita Alcantara-Tan who describes herself as a “queer mixed-blood Asian girl” (Alcantara-Tan 2000, 159) and *Greenzine* by Christy Road who is a Cuban-American feminist.

other. Queer politics has opened up this discourse to include transgender and transsexual people (47).

In the early 1980s, the discontent of women about male dominance in the punk and alternative rock music scenes and their confinement to narrow roles such as “fan” or “girlfriend” was first voiced in zines, calling out to women to become more active in networking and producing music and zines themselves (Duncombe 1997, 65). Nevertheless, it took until 1991 before zines written by girls and women were published in greater numbers outside of the queercore scene, as part of the “riot grrrl” movement which posed a substantial feminist “subcultural shock” (Schmidt 2004b) to women's representation in pop culture and the punk hardcore scene. The term “riot grrrl” comes from the zine of the same name and is a reference to riots that happened in May 1991 in Washington, DC and the resulting idea of a “girl riot” that originated from a network of female punk musicians from the bands *Bikini Kill* and *Bratmobile*, most prominently Kathleen Hanna (Schmidt 2004b). As they stated in issue five of their zine *Riot Grrrl*, the aim was to “putting the punk back into feminism and feminism into punk” (Duncombe 1997, 66), to use the ideas and practices of punk such as DIY, accessible lo-fi production technology, and amateurism to encourage young women to take cultural representation into their own hands by forming bands, writing zines, starting record labels, organizing events, and networking. The result was a very successful and vibrant cultural politics of feminism that rapidly gained national and international attention (Schmidt 2004b).

Grrrl zines are central to furthering a “DIY, feminist, grrrl-positive agenda that portrays female, queer and transgender youth as powerful, capable, articulate, and critical” (Zobl 2004, 157) and play a crucial part in feminist and queer cultural production and networks that identify, criticize and counter social, political, and cultural discrimination of girls and women. Zines provide a medium to share personal experiences that allows contributors to address sensitive and intimate topics like sexual abuse because they are in control of their representation and the audience is small and supportive. Because of the advantages of zines as a communication medium and to avoid being trivialized and exploited by the mainstream media that had quickly discovered riot grrrl as a new trend to profit from, key figures of the riot grrrl scene called for a media blackout in 1992, encouraging the people involved not to talk to the media (Spencer 2005, 50). As Schilt argues, zines provide a safe space especially for adolescent girls because it is an anonymous medium located outside of the adult world. It enables girls to create support networks without adult intervention or interference and “gives a

new dimension to the empowerment of adolescent girls as it teaches them the tools for seeking their own strategies for navigating adolescence” (2003, 94). She describes this strategy as “c/overt resistance” because the safe space created by zines enables girls to communicate among themselves in protective and supportive semi-privacy while at the same time producing a self-representation of their own choice in semi-public.

The “personal is political” approach of grrrl zines has had a permanent effect on zine culture in making zines more personal, intimate, and focussed on the everyday life of their writers. Queer and grrrl zines are decisive in the development from collective towards more individual subcultural identities and consequently from the fanzine to the personal zine. Their mobilization efforts have also proven successful in the long run: it is estimated that personal zine authors are in the majority women (Bailey and Michel 2004, 5; Chidgey 2006, 3).

2.1.4 Personal Zines

While fanzines primarily facilitate communication between dispersed communities of fans and provide information about the object of fandom, personal zines are “diaries open to the public; shared notes on the day-to-day life, thoughts and experiences of the writer” (Duncombe 1997, 11), in essence a fragmented autobiographic account. Today, the majority of zines in the US are categorized as personal zines, an estimated two thirds of all titles published (Schmidt 2004a). In recent years, anthologies of some popular and long running titles have been published as books, most notably Aaron Cometbus's *Cometbus* (Cometbus 2002) and Cindy Crabb's *Doris* (Crabb 2005).

As I have noted above, queer zines and grrrl zines have been a significant step in the transition from fanzine to personal zine because they introduced a very personal approach to political issues and, vice versa, introduced political considerations into the everyday life and intimate relations of the subcultural audience. However, while these types of zines, out of necessity, were pursuing clear political goals, personal zines are generally not dedicated to a specific political issue but describe the thoughts, motivations, and actions of a single zine writer, with politics implied in choices and considerations. It has always been a feature of many zines to have a single writer, but with personal zines, that person's very life has become the actual content of the zine. The transportation of subcultural politics happens indirectly through the depiction of the zinester's life and how collective and individual goals and ideals are negotiated. This difficult process of constant personal struggle is related in personal zines

with such intimacy and immediateness that it endows both author and medium with a powerful sense of authenticity and authority.

Personal zines are idiosyncratic in nature, reflecting the very particular interests and experiences of the writers who are providing a narrative of their life through the zines they publish. Independence from commercial considerations and the semi-private audience of like-minded people ensured by the small circulation provides zine writers with a safe space to speak out on the topics relevant to them (Schilt 2003). Here, they are free to relate themselves in a personal voice while remaining in control of their self-representation. In conjunction with a supportive community, zine writing is sometimes employed as a therapeutic device by some writers who address highly personal and sensitive issues such as abuse, sickness, and failure (Bailey and Michel 2004). Personal zines function as public diary and life writing for their authors while at the same time providing a unique form of history writing on their local and subcultural communities. Especially the aspect of documentation is apparent in the numerous self-organized zine libraries across the US (Poletti 2005; Atton 2002). Zines are “documenting the micro-histories and situated knowledges of lived experience” (Chidgey 2006, 12) and in this valuable and unique function I study them here.

Bailey and Michel (2004) outline six basic characteristic features of personal zines: personalized design, trauma narratives, social alienation as a theme, autobiographical genres, travel narratives, and everyday life themes. They are part of the fundamental expressive individualism and autobiographical narrativity of personal zines through which the writers are “creating and performing a social self” (2).⁹ The personal zine category remains fuzzy because the characteristics of personal zines are shared, at least partially, by most zines. For the purpose of my study, I consider a zine to be a personal personal if the writing is personal, intimate and primarily serves to further an autobiographical narrative. The zines in my research sample are informed by radical politics but their primary aim is not to publish political theory or rants, instead they illustrate how the political ideals of the writers are realized in their everyday life. Consider Shelley Jackson's zine *Chainbreaker* (Jackson and Clark 2008) that she published in the years before hurricane Katrina: it features multiple contributors and revolves around bicycles and related feminist, environmental, and anti-capitalist politics. Nevertheless, I do regard it as a personal zine because both Jackson's and the contributor's writings relate these issues through personal narratives such as working as a

9 The social constitution of the self and its performance through autobiographical narrative are complex concepts that I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, particularly taking into account Butler's theory of performativity and the narrative identity construction approach.

female bicycle mechanic, observing bicycle usage in other countries during travels, and describing how everyday life is affected by bicycle politics. In recent years, various specific topics have been approached through personal zines, such as falling sick with Crohn's disease in Dave Roche's *About My Disappearance*, using public transportation in Kate Lopresti's *Constant Rider*, working as a dancer in Janet's *Rocket Queen*, and working in the fishing industry in Moe Bowstern's *Xtra Tuff*.

Schmidt (2004a) argues that the personal zine format evolved as a result of the disappearing separation between underground and mainstream culture. Popular culture has become the mainstream, with subcultural music, styles, and ideas being appropriated and driving commercial fashion, record, and advertisement industries. Zines lost their traditional function as exclusive provider of information and collective meaning for subcultures and youth cultures because today's professional magazines are faster to pick up and publicize new trends, at least concerning music and fashion. Even so, there remain many issues exclusive to zine. Since they are free from commercial restrictions, zinesters do not need to consider sales or the interests of advertisement clients. Personal zine writing is radically subjective in a way that is impossible to sustain in commercial publications. It has the inherent advantage of allowing authors to follow through on their ideas without the need to compromise or appease. The increased individuality of personal zines is also expressed in the physical characteristics of many zines with handmade bindings and prints, photos glued in, coming in intricate envelopes, and other artistic, crafty and generally labor intensive features. As Schmidt notes, this turns many zines into a fetish in contrast to most commercially mass produced cultural artifacts.

2.2 Electronic Zines and Weblogs

The internet has provided a new medium for publishing and this has been taken on by zinesters very early by publishing electronic zines (e-zines) online, first in the form of simple text files and later more sophisticatedly designed on the web. More recently, weblogs (blogs) have joined the new “personal media” enabled by networked information technology (Lüders 2007) and made self-publishing a very mainstream activity. I will shortly address some issues here. However, for the purpose of my study I disregard online publishing because it is peripheral to the punk/anarchist zine culture I researched which greatly values handmade and material zines. It seems that mostly fan cultures and their zines have moved online, leaving paper zines to more subculturally inclined writers and artists (Poletti 2005). In fact, in my

interviews with members of the central zine distributor collective Microcosm, it was suggested that people consciously choose to publish on paper because they want to reach a certain radical audience (Biel 2008; Taylor 2008).

Besides the obvious difference in materiality, the most decisive difference between zines and e-zines is access. While zines belong to a “relatively closed underground culture [with] initiation rites [that] demanded a degree of commitment and knowledge” which in effect limits access to zines to a small and subcultural audience, e-zines are virtually accessible to everyone with an internet connection, without the need to undergo a “deviant socialization process” (Duncombe 1997, 230). The very unavailability of zines outside of a certain scene is one of the strengths of the medium although online zine distributors have enlarged access to paper zines (Bailey and Michel 2004, 9). Online publishing cannot create the “safe space” the paper medium does, which is important in particular for intimate personal zines and grrrl zines, because the internet still is a male dominated and sometimes even plain misogynist environment (Cresser, Gunn, and Blame 2001). For a subcultural and radical medium, audience and context of reception matters much more than it does for mainstream publications, especially since zines are also a tool for communication and networking within a specific community.

So far, e-zines and blogs are not having an adverse effect on paper zine publishing. In fact, in a large study on e-zines, Wright (2001) has found that almost two-thirds of the publishers of the 512 e-zines he studied are also publishing in print. According to his analysis this is due to pressures from readers who prefer print and the tradition of zine trading. Publishing e-zines is primarily motivated by the inexpensiveness and the larger potential audience. Wright suggests that the materiality of printed publications will be an increasingly more significant characteristic and I think this is evident in the attention to artistic craft and personalized design of personal zines.

2.3 Zine Research

Using zines as source material for academic research poses several challenges. In one of the few systematic investigation of personal zines as research data, the historian Chidgey (2006) points out that, because they are inherently ephemeral and small-circulation publications, access to zines and determining their provenance can be difficult. In recent years, a couple of zine compilations have been published as books and are available through standard book sellers. Since this is generally only the case with more popular titles which

have been published over a number of years, zine compilations could be understood to represent the mainstream or even a canon of zines. To discover zines that are less prominent and more current, research and acquisition needs to rely on alternative book stores, zine distributors, references between zines, information from people in the zine community, and direct contact to zine authors. There is also a number of zine libraries, mostly non-profit volunteer organizations run by zine writers and readers themselves (Perris 2004). It is important to note that these archives, as well as the few existing institutional collections, for the most part rely on donations, which impacts the selection. A comprehensive and complete zine collection is impossible. Nevertheless, especially because of distributors such as Microcosm that have an online presence and can therefore be used for researching and ordering zines from anywhere in the world, access to zine culture is possible for outsiders.

Even so, as Chidgey remarks, contacting zine writers and studying their local communities is invaluable for “gaining a greater understanding, via personal correspondence, of the aims and motivations of the zine writer” (2006, 11). Consequently, as part of my study of the New Orleans scene, I made a research trip to the US and conducted interviews with experts and zine writers. Initial research and acquisition of zines was done through Microcosm, allowing me to study several post-Katrina zines (Jackson 2006; Amico 2006, 2007; Gerken 2007), a book compilation of the zine *Chainbreaker* (Jackson 2008a), and excerpts from various other New Orleans zines collected in *Stories Care Forgot* (Clark 2006). I interviewed Stephen Duncombe (2008), professor at New York University and author of the only comprehensive academic study of zines, *Notes from Underground* (1997). I conducted two interviews with people from Microcosm (Biel 2008; Taylor 2008) for detailed information on US zine culture and to understand how the New Orleans scene is viewed by people who are part of the national punk scene, but not from that specific place. I spent two weeks in New Orleans to research local institutions of the punk anarchist scene, investigate the state of post-Katrina rebuilding, exploring the specific neighborhoods mentioned in the zines, and to discuss local affairs with residents and activists.¹⁰ Fortunately, all zine writers from my research sample as well as the editor of *Stories Care Forgot* agreed to be interviewed (Amico 2008; Jackson 2008b; Clark 2008; Gerken 2008). This has allowed me to gain a more profound insight into their motivations, to better situate their writings, and to acquire more contextual knowledge

¹⁰ I am very grateful to New Orleans resident Matthew Tritico for his hospitality and the wealth of knowledge he shared with me. I would also like to thank Matthew Olson, an activist and community organizer who has moved to the city after Katrina, for meeting up and discussing his view of the New Orleans scene on a very short notice.

about the place and local scene. Additionally, they were extremely forthcoming in supplying me with earlier issues of their zines that are already out of print.

Personally interviewing each zine author enabled me to secure their consent to quote passages from their zines. Although zines are published and therefore are part of the public record, there still are special ethical requirements in zine research due to the sensitive and personal nature of the texts that are generally not intended to be accessible outside of a limited and particular context. In fact, Chidgey advises researchers to secure permission from zine writers prior to citing their material or to anonymize the text where necessary (2006, 12).

Zines might also present scholars with difficulties regarding more formal aspects of citations and bibliographies. Since bibliographic information and pagination is often missing, limited, or incoherent, it is sometimes unavoidable that references remain incomplete. Often, information can be derived from a close study of the contents, inquiring experts, and from distributor's catalogs. In my sample, especially the pre-Katrina zines are not paginated, leaving respective citations without page numbers. I have tried to edit quotes as little as possible which is not an easy task given the prominent use of the vernacular, references requiring insider knowledge of the local scene, and sometimes spelling and grammar mistakes. I added footnotes to provide contextual knowledge where necessary and opted for replacing misspelled words, clearly marked, instead of using *sic*, to not unnecessarily interrupt the text. Many texts consist of all lower case or all upper case characters without a particular purpose but because they were handwritten or a mechanical typewriter was used. In these cases I use standard capitalization in quotes.

3 Narrative Identity

The question of identity is a central theme in zine writing in general and a fundamental feature of personal zines especially. As I have already illustrated, the zine format has become increasingly personal and autobiographical over its history. According to Duncombe, zinesters “assemble the different bits and pieces of their lives and interests into a formula that they believe represents *who they really are*” (1997, 37, italics original), or in other words: through zine writing they construct, express, and assert identity by producing an autobiographical narrative that ideally achieves to integrate all aspects of their lives to become truly authentic. While identity construction and expression takes many different venues, I find it particularly valuable to study personal zines since they are one of the very few accessible sites where individuals provide an intentional account of themselves in a highly personal way.¹¹ The zine medium, with its small and largely sympathetic audience, offers considerable freedom from (self-)censorship and ensures a high level of control over self-representation, possibly only second to private media such as letters and diaries. Another intriguing and insightful feature is the fragmented and tentative nature of zine autobiographies, written and published in a more or less continuous process over multiple issues, throughout which authors revisit and revise their self-narrative.

Identity is a problematic concept. From “the Romantic stereotype that insists that one can ‘find’ one's Self only by withdrawing from the world” (Bruner 2001, 36) well into modernity, identity has been conceptualized as an essential, unified, and original characteristic of human beings. In recent times, deconstructivist critique has questioned this concept of identity, abandoning the idea of a self-sustaining and sovereign subject by exposing the performative, cultural, psychological and social constructedness of identity. Yet, as Hall (1996) notes, the concept of identity is more prominent than ever before because it is irreducibly linked to questions of agency and politics in contemporary society. The concept of identity has not been “superseded dialectically” by the critique it encountered, but has merely been put “under erasure” for lack of a new and different concept replacing it and therefore retains its

¹¹ Focusing on a written medium necessarily privileges language and narrative in my discussion of identity.

This does not mean I disregard corporeality. Obviously, sensual experiences and non-textual aesthetics are very important to human experience and identity formation, especially in a subcultural/youth culture setting with its emphasize on style, music, action, and celebratory immediacy. I expect these influences to surface in the texts I study.

significance although the meaning has changed (1). Today, identity is conceptualized as multiple, fragmented, and constantly changing. It relies on the Other, its “constitutive outside”, in relation to which it asserts its difference, and consequently needs to be thought of as radically social (4). This in turn grounds the subject and its self-identity in the historically specific—hence contingent—discursive formations and power modalities.

The difficulty introduced thereby is to locate self-identity in the continuum between being interpellated into position by the dominant discourses on the one hand and being produced through individual agency on the other hand. The discussion has swung both sides but neither structural or reductionist positions, be they materialist or cultural in ideological orientation, nor the naively romantic clinging to the autonomous and sovereign subject has been convincing. While it seems widely accepted that identity has become the locus of most Western politics by virtue of privileging individual difference and rights, the mechanisms of power and possibilities of resistance remain contested. Hall points out the complex balance in that to be effective, identification requires the subject to actually invest into the subjectivity it is being offered, if only temporary, while being aware of its representational and incomplete nature (1996, 6). Identity thus becomes a matter of articulation or performance of the self, yet on terms not under control of the subject. In this sense, identity and individuality are expressive, but not in the sense of expressing the essential truth of a person, but by claiming a strategic position. Nevertheless, the danger of re-essentializing subject positions through the construction of collective strategic identities serving as the basis for identity politics needs to be paid attention to.

In this study, I am interested in transformative agency as it occurs in a subcultural setting, with identity narratives in personal zines as my primary object of investigation. I expect identity construction to serve a dual function that is collective and individual at the same time. Collective in the sense of claiming a strategic position for progressive and transformative political purposes and individual in the sense of asserting personal difference and as a tool for finding meaning in one's life. Frequently, there will be a critical tension, ideally productive, between the two functions as individuals try to negotiate and integrate both. Evidently, I do presume the possibility of agency and resistance. This is informed by the actual people I have encountered during my research: highly creative and politically aware individuals who form a subcultural and oppositional community aimed at integrating politics, art, and everyday life. Zines are just the device to achieve this. To study the individual and local narratives in these written artifacts is to privilege the subjective perspective first and to relate it to collective and

social processes second. I will look at theories of identity and subject formation that are useful to conceptualize how individuals and collectives construct their identity while being influenced by the cultural context through identifications, conventions, and narratives it supplements in the process.

3.1 Expressive Individualism

Before investigating theories of identity construction, I find it helpful to set a more general stage by briefly looking at the cultural and political developments that have led to the importance of individual difference and self-identity, as well as attendant changes in mechanisms of power. Personal zines reflect a striking feature of individuation in postmodern society: while traditional constraints to individual self-realization are diminishing, the aim for ever greater degrees of difference increases. The goal has shifted from reaching a valued and independent position within society to establishing oneself as a unique individual, someone who is different from everyone else. Hence the growing significance of the concept of identity. The problem with radical difference, of course, is the need to still remain intelligible to others and thus the need to conform to at least some common norms, since individualism is not targeting loneliness. Here, I would argue, lies the significance of subcultures as they enable and honor individuation in a collective setting, as small as it might be compared to society at large. The accelerated search for cultural difference has facilitated the formation and specialization of subcultural groups.

Fluck (1998) discusses exactly these transformation of individualism and politics in US history. Following Tocqueville's lead, he understands the "basic social problem of democracy [...] as that of distinguishing oneself from the mass of others" (53). In comparison to feudal societies, democracy reduces traditional sources of symbolic distinction. Modernity has introduced the ideal and responsibility of self-development. This in turn leaves the individual with the requirement to actively construct its difference. As Fluck remarks, these concepts of self-development and individualism are products of the process of modernization as it is occurring in Western societies. Individualism is not to be confused with egoism or selfishness, but is an anti-totalitarian project to strengthen the individual against authoritarian forces. Considering the early establishment of democracy and forceful modernization in the US, it should come as no surprise that individualism enjoys a long tradition in US culture and is an established legitimate rationale employed by various political camps.

Historically, Fluck differentiates between two stages in the development of individualism, taking the cue from Bellah *et al.* (1985). Traditionally, individualism has been an economic notion: the strife for independence of the yeoman farmer in agrarianism or the achievement of social distinction from the masses through enterprise and integrity during industrialization. Fluck refers to this stage as economic or utilitarian individualism. More recently, individualism has been located in “the assertion of cultural difference, that is, the ability of the individual to assert his or her own uniqueness and otherness against the powers of cultural convention and encroaching disciplinary regimes” (60). This stage of individualism is called expressive individualism. Fluck attributes the shift from economic to expressive individualism to increasing individualization and cultural dehierarchization. The democratization of society has undermined the rigid social structures that used to be the traditional sources of inequality and impediments to achieving self-realization. Hence, individuation shifts its focus to attaining cultural difference, or in other words, cultural, or even more specifically, subcultural capital (Thornton 1995). Interesting enough, expressive individualism needs to counter the potentially radical equality resulting from cultural dehierarchization by constructing novel cultural difference, lest the possibilities won be lost again.

I would suggest that personal zines are an exemplary literary genre of expressive individualism. In contrast to traditional autobiographic writings they do not provide an account of the struggle to achieve wealth and popularity, but instead describe a process of individuation targeting cultural difference from a decidedly post-material position. This process is fragmented, tentative, and fundamentally open-ended, as the search for difference pursues a goal it can never fully accomplish—it clearly misses the teleological drive of the success tales economic individualism produces. In personal zines, economic or social “failure” is not only a viable option, but actually the loser, slacker, nerd, and outsider represent ideal types of zine protagonists. They might be “losers in the game of American meritocracy” (Duncombe 1997, 21), but by removing themselves from the pressures and requirements of mainstream society and its career-oriented lifestyle they are able to pursue creative self-realization and to assert an expressive individuality. The high value placed on individuality and uniqueness is also quite obvious in the aesthetic form of personal zines. Many zines are intricate objects and their production incorporates laborious processes such as hand-made prints or hand-tied binding that turn each zine into a singular object. These “strong traces of human production” create an “aura of aesthetic integrity” lacking in mass produced

artifacts and electronic media (Bailey and Michel 2004, 24). The physical and aesthetic qualities are part of the expressive character of personal zines.

Again, this individualism is not to be misunderstood as atomism. While the writers of personal zines do not aspire general social acceptance, they are often tied to certain subcultural values and aim for recognition therein. This subcultural orientation is generally characterized by critical and constructive participation, exemplified by queer and riot grrrl zines that intend to initiate and influence intra-scene discourses on homophobia and sexism. In personal zines, these topics are approached in a very personal way, often related through accounts of discrimination the writer has experienced. Thus, the general theme of many personal zines is to find the delicate balance between both individual and collective requirements and desires while being actively involved in shaping subcultural discourse.

Concerning the question of power and resistance under the conditions of expressive individualism, a move towards more differentiated formations can be observed. The analysis of power has shifted its location from obvious agents or institutions to discursive regimes that exercise power and contain resistance in systemic ways through a hegemonic stronghold on cultural expression (see my discussion of Foucault in 3.2.1). This new formation of power derives its effectiveness from being largely “invisible” since it “determines meaning and the perception of the world before the individual is even aware of it, by constituting the linguistic and cultural patterns through which we make sense of the world” (Fluck 1998, 56). Fluck locates the origin of these changes in the political analysis of the student movement in the late 1960s. Its consequence has been a shift in radicalism from political radicalism to cultural radicalism. Since, if power determines cultural meaning, resistance must also target cultural expression. Political analysis must identify how cultural meaning and available identities have been shaped by powerful interests. Therefore, the goal is to expose how seemingly “natural” cultural concepts and social relations such as patriarchy, heteronormativity, logocentrism, and whiteness are in fact contingent constructions that support a particular order and thus serve particular interests. On the more practical level of resistance, the only way to escape the pervasive forces of power is to escape its normalizing effects through maximizing individual cultural difference. This is exactly the goal of expressive individualism.

As Fluck points out, this cultural radicalism is not based on social theories describing relations between groups and members of the political system as a whole—traditionally Marxist in orientation—but focuses on the removal of barriers to self-empowerment (58). In his view, the weakness of this approach is the inability to develop systematic structures or

procedures to enable the settlement of all the different claims to difference in society because there is always the danger of violating someone else's claim. The situation cannot be resolved without common normative ideals, but this option is unavailable because the very idea of normativity already violates the goal of radical difference.¹² In effect, political engagement is redefined as cultural self-definition with its endless contingencies and through this removal from universalistic claims to political or economic power runs into the danger to have its radical energies contained. Yet, this is only problematic if we neglect the possibility that the cultural sphere is able to exert influence on economic and political structures. Fluck suggests “that the cultural realm has turned into a sphere that is, increasingly, contradicting (not opposing) dominant economic and social structures” (66). By fostering imaginary self-empowerment and increasing individualization, it holds the potential to subvert technocratic values and authoritarian tendencies in both economic and political spheres.

A similar argument about not only the possibility but in fact the importance of cultural change as basis for political change is advanced by Rochon (1998). He stresses the role of critical communities that identify and elaborate novel cultural values and then diffuse them to mobilize movements. In his theory, preexisting social networks take up these discourses as the rationale for collective action. Rochon distinguishes between the social and the political spheres these movements operate in, wherein affecting change has dual targets: cultural values in the social arena and governmental institutions in the political arena. I agree with both Fluck and Rochon on the general idea that the flows of power between the cultural and the political sphere are bidirectional, or, to be more precise, that it is increasingly in culture where innovative ideas and new discourses are created and where social and political change originates. Precisely because nowadays power mostly depends on the consent of the governed instead of the exercise of violence, it is open—or at least vulnerable—to influences from the social and cultural fields where this consent is being negotiated.

¹² I would not be as pessimistic as Fluck is here since I am not convinced that there is always necessarily a conflict. Especially claims to self-realization and assertion of an expressive identity are often realized in a context that is relatively isolated from others who might be offended. This seems particularly true for most urban environments in the US where people live in spatial segregation. Also, I wonder if the right to difference is not already a common normative ideal these parties have accepted and hence on that basis could be called on to respect others' claims to difference, probably by pleading for tolerance. In the end, and this is a point I am about to make in the text, the more privileged individuals or groups are, the better they are able to assert their difference because they are less dependent on others in the first place. This of course is an asymmetrical situation.

Nevertheless, it is very important to note that both authors assume an already emancipated and privileged position for their agents. This is one of the main concerns of this thesis because most zine writers come from a privileged background: white middle class. Even as culture has become more democratic and enabled some minority groups to claim a recognized, if not necessarily valued, cultural identity, still only a few are able to become cultural producers who are being heard and achieve wider relevance. The concerns of expressive individualism and cultural radicalism are the concerns of people who are already free from poverty and oppression, who have the means and social position affording and allowing them to strive for self-realization.¹³ For Giddens, to whom I will return in more detail later, this feature of late modern societies is what he terms life politics, a politics that in contrast to emancipatory politics “does not primarily concern the conditions which liberate us in order to make choices: it is a politics *of choice*” (Giddens 1991, 214, italics his). It is the politics of individuals who already have gained considerable autonomy in their actions.

Obviously, many people in the US suffer powerful structural constraints and are denied this autonomy—especially in New Orleans where the blatant longterm effects of slavery and racism have been brought to national and international attention through the social crisis following hurricane Katrina. This has made the place so interesting for my research because it is difficult for the people who moved there by choice to be part of a political scene to ignore these issues and being comfortable with enjoying the benefits of their privileges. Nevertheless, I think these concerns remain generally external to the immediate life of the zinesters because it is still a choice to get involved in matters of racism and poverty if one is white and affluent. Sexism and homophobia are different in this respect because these forms of discrimination affect zine writers as well.

3.2 Narrative Approaches to Identity and Agency

This section explores theories of identity and agency that center on self narratives in Foucault, Butler, and Giddens. While I hope to be able to introduce some fundamental considerations about narrative approaches to identity, I cannot engage with the complete body of work of these complex authors and ask the reader to excuse the resulting sketchiness.

13 In fact, one might go as far as to argue that it has turned into an obligation, when, according to Baumann, it has become “the *duty* of the postmodern citizen [...] to lead an enjoyable life [and] the state is obliged to supply the facilities deemed necessary for such life” (1996, 34, italics mine).

3.2.1 Technologies of the Self

It is Foucault's work that has most decisively questioned the traditional analysis of power relations in the way it has already been hinted at in the preceding chapter. To him, power is a constructive, if not necessarily benign, force working at all levels of society and employed through and by all its members and institutions in the relations they have with each other (Foucault 1983, 93pp). This represents a shift from ideology to discourse since the former still implies an identifiable source of power such as the government and its institutions whereas the latter recognizes the implicitness of every person and practice in the formation and exercise of power and control. In this sense, subjects are produced by power, they cannot exist outside of discursive and disciplinary regulative boundaries (Traber 2007, 8). While Foucault's theory advances our understanding of subject formation, ultimately there is little place for agency and subjectivity in this overpowering setup, in effect bringing us back to something resembling Althusser's ever effective ideological state apparatus that always succeeds in interpellating subjects into the positions allocated for them (Hall 1996, 12). Hall shows that in Foucault's later work this shortcoming is addressed by exploring self-regulation and technologies of the self that "are most effectively demonstrated in the practices of self-production, in specific modes of conduct, in what we have come from later works to recognize as a kind of *performativity*" (13, italics original). This shift is evident in one of his last publications where Foucault states how after having "insisted too much on the technology of domination and power" he is now "more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of the self" (1988, 19). In this essay he traces the practice of the disclosure of the self from Greco-Roman philosophy to the Christian confessional tradition. This technology of the self is especially relevant for the purpose of my study since it is closely related to the practice of zine writing in general, which already Wertham views as self-disclosure (1973, 123), and to personal zine writing in particular.

According to Foucault, knowledge of the self has become the fundamental principle in matters of knowledge and morality in the modern Western world. Its precursor is the concern for the care of the self for which writing has been the major device ever since the Hellenistic age, establishing the self as "a theme or object (subject) of writing activity [as] one of the most ancient Western traditions" (1988, 27). The examination of the conscience began with letter writing functioning as a transcription of the process. In the Christian era, diary writing and the shift from examination of what you did to what you thought, to the "struggle of the

soul”, was introduced (30). Disclosure of the self becomes a very important practice because Christianity imposes the confessional as requirement for achieving salvation. It is the duty of each person to know about their desires and temptations and to disclose or confess this knowledge to God or the community, “to bear public or private witness against oneself” (40). Permanent verbalization becomes an ideal of purity and truth, turning what cannot be expressed into a sin. Regardless of changes over time and different Christian traditions, to Foucault the common and crucial feature is the connection between disclosure of the self and renunciation of the self. Through martyrdom, obedience to a master, or verbalization of thoughts one effectively surrenders one's will and oneself. Since the eighteenth century, disclosure of the self has changed its character and function as “the techniques of verbalization have been reinserted in a different context by the so-called human sciences in order to use them without renunciation of the self but to constitute, positively, a new self” (49). Disclosure and knowledge of the self has turned into a constructive practice, the basis for both production and construction of the self, with traditional religious norms being replaced by secular science as the dominant regulatory discourse.

Here in Foucault, we find the foundation of the narrative performativity of the self, the concern of my study. The personal zine is a way to constitute the self and to assert self-identity through self-disclosure. Personal zine writing stands in the tradition of letter writing and diary writing but goes even further in the degree of self-disclosure by virtue of its semi-public nature. It is disconnected from traditional religious motives (at least I have never found any indicators to that effect in a zine) but resonates deeply with the Western traditions of self-knowledge and self-writing Foucault traces throughout history. Zines sometimes function as a peculiar sort of confession when zine writers give an account of things they did that they themselves consider to be morally wrong or failing certain individual or collective ideals. They reflect on what they learned from the experience and promise to do differently in the future. Although inevitably anonymous and silent, the potential reader is often implicitly present in the process, as the format of the zine is a mixture between diary and letter that is always directed to someone. Sometimes they are addressed directly or given advice stemming from the zinester's experience, in an interesting reversal of confessional roles. I also see a parallel between the concern for the care of the self and the way trauma narratives function as “informal therapy” in personal zines (Bailey and Michel 2004, 26).

While Foucault seems useful to me in this respect, especially in terms of the cultural history of self-disclosure he documents, there are shortcomings. As Hall critiques, Foucault

does not make the step from a phenomenology of the subject and a genealogy of the technologies of the self to the exploration of how individuals actually identify or fail to identify with the identities that are forcefully presented to them through the dominant discourse, how normative pressures are negotiated, how processes of self-regulation work or fail to work, in short: how contingency might enter the relation between discourse and subject. According to Hall, the problems lies in Foucault's rejection of psychoanalysis as “simply another network of disciplinary power relations” and therefore his inability to engage with the concept of the unconscious which leads to an excess of intentionality in his theory of the subject (Hall 1996, 14). On the question of resistance to the powerful discursive regimes in Foucault's theory, Traber finds that only a micropolitics of individual difference to counter totalization seems possible, entailing the danger of “receding into an aesthetics of personal identity to enhance private freedom” (2007, 8). His critique mirrors Bauman's words of caution about the “political disablement” in postmodernity because the individuals casts “the Other primarily as the object of aesthetic, not moral, evaluation; as a matter of taste, not responsibility” (1996, 33).

3.2.2 Narrative Performativity

Butler addresses the complex transactions between subject, body, discourse, and identity through the concept of performativity. Her point of departure is feminist theory and identity politics, making her work particularly relevant to my study because it establishes a general concern for transformative agency. She combines Foucault's concept of regulatory power with psychoanalysis which enables her to study subjective processes of identification while taking into account normative discourses, in a sense providing the remedy for the shortcomings in Foucault (Hall 1996, 15).

It is crucial to not misunderstand performativity as allowing subjects to assume and perform an identity that is of their own free choice and which they might change frequently and at will. Rather, in the tradition of Foucault, she argues that the subject is discursively constructed, including its materialization, the body. Performance, the stylized repetition of acts, constructs identity following cultural norms, reflecting the reiterative power of discourse that produces what it regulates (Hall 1996, 14). In this sense, gender identity is not expressive but performative, it is produced through the performance of culturally sanctioned gender attributes which do not simply express a pre-cultural “natural” gender or are conferred on the subject by a distinct and binary biological sex (Loxley 2007, 118).

Butler exposes the performative and non-essential in gender by exploring instances of “gender trouble”, most prominently drag and butch/femme lesbian identities, where normative models of gender and desire are contested by the Other they seek to excluded. Not only does this render tangible the contingency of gender identity, but the “deviant” performances show that the “normal” identity performances are able to “claim the place of nature or claim the place of symbolic necessity [...] only by occluding the ways in which they are performatively established” (Butler 2004, 209). This is not only a question of culture and gender but extends to corporeality and sex, where, again through the address of the non-normative such as intersexuality and transsexuality, Butler deconstructs the idea of a distinct binary sex. Her strategy is to investigate the breaking points in the “nexus of power and knowledge that gives rise to the field of intelligible things” (216). In the case of the body, she unveils how binary sex is presented as scientific fact but is demonstrably contingent, therefore scientific “knowledge” acts as a regulative and normative discourse that constructs intelligible female and male bodies.¹⁴

The fact that the subject is governed by social norms and even depends on them to be recognizable humans does not preclude agency. In fact, it is the very discomfort of subjection that breeds resistance. To Butler, agency “is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. [T]he ‘I’ that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them” (2004, 3). Her perspective shows a way to conceptualize agency without trivializing structural constraints or negating individual capacity for reflexivity, which one might read into Giddens (see below) and Foucault, respectively. I also like to think of her as significantly contributing to the discussion about cultural radicalism earlier in this chapter when she talks about drag performance. She addresses the relation between politics and culture, or in other words, material reality and imaginary self-empowerment, through the significance of fantasy for the survival of drag performers of color who face the threat of racist, homophobic and transphobic violence: “the struggle to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy. [...] Fantasy allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise. Fantasy is what establishes the possible in excess of the real”

14 The relation between the body and the performative is also where Butler locates the possibility of resistance at the most basic level. The body is the site where the subject is ultimately able to escape mechanical interpellation. There is an “agency of corporeality” because the body exceeds speech and is able to interfere with the process of sedimentation of social conventions, to not be “just the predictable product of that process of identity formation or subjection” (Loxley 2007, 135).

(216). Here, subcultural imagination does not just serve as a provider of individual identity or leisurely entertainment, but organizes material aspects of everyday life and creates supportive and protective communities.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler (2001) discusses the role of self narration to an Other for identity formation in relation to personal accountability and social responsibility. This article is particularly relevant to my study of personal zines because it contains crucial thoughts on the narrative performance of the self and acts as the basis for the following exploration of narrative identity construction. The point of her departure is the poststructuralist understanding of the subject as having only limited self knowledge, of being “opaque” to itself. She counters the critics who claim that an incoherent subject lacks the basis for personal and social ethical accountability by stressing that because self-opacity is constituted by the very social nature of the subject, the Other is always already a part of ourselves. We are unable to narrate ourself completely and are aware of our vulnerability to the Other and this is the origin of the ethical bond with the Other: “I find that my very formation implicates the Other in me, my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others” (37).

Similar to what we have seen before in her work, Butler goes to the body as the source for social interaction and ultimately for agency. It is the very irreducibility of the body and thus the inescapable public exposure of the self to the Other that leads to the direct address by the Other and its demand to give an account of oneself. There is a fundamental dependency on the Other which makes us social beings. Butler points out how in the stories we tell each other we recognize our individual singularity while at the same time a certain substitutability is established because we need to be recognizable in our narrative, and therefore need to follow norms of life narratives. To resort to norms that are inevitably not of my own making disorients the narrative away from me, it externalizes the account of myself.¹⁵ Butler also argues that a self-account is necessarily fictional since the original referent, the pre-narrative condition of my being, is inaccessible to me and I am consequently unable to give a complete and authoritative account of myself. This is also evident from the fact that narrative is always retrospective and changing with every narrative performance. When I narrate myself I am always “reconstructing, even as I produce myself differently in the very act of telling” (27).

15 I read this effect of disowning one's life narrative as the inevitable consequence of its social externalization as being comparable to what Foucault called renunciation of the self as the consequence of verbalization in self-disclosure.

The contingency and volatility of self narratives conflict dramatically with the normative demand for selfsameness and coherence in Western culture which entails the demands for coherent life narratives and stable identities. To Butler, this constitutes in fact a form of violence: “Suspending the demand for self-identity or, more particularly, for complete coherence, seems to me to counter a certain ethical violence that demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same” (27). Even if it would be possible to give a coherent account of oneself at a given point in time—already highly unlikely—it is practically impossible to comply with the norm of coherence for subjects who live in time and thus change. Thus wanting to know someone, to ask for the account of that person's life, needs to be an open question.

At any rate, Butler is not arguing against narrativity since “[n]o one can live in a radically non-narratable world or survive a radically non-narratable life” (34). Narration is a resource for survival, the subject needs to be addressed, to be brought into the “discursive world of the story”, which entangles it in relations and norms while simultaneously allowing it to imagine itself and thrive. Again, Butler's concern is with coherence, in both the rhetorical sense of imposing itself on the narrative through genre conventions and in the sense of the mental health norm advanced by some schools of psychoanalysis (32). The problem lies in “the way in which narrative coherence may foreclose upon an ethical resource, namely, an acceptance of the limits of knowability in oneself and others” (34). Allowing for and being aware of this limit is crucial for her argument about the ethical responsibility of the poststructuralist subject that is opaque to itself and others. To base the request for personal accountability on a coherent life narrative imposes a particular conception of ethics that essentially disregards the particularities and complexity of that life.

Considering autobiographical narratives in personal zines, it is important to note how the zine medium detaches the subject from the public exposure of the body. In fact, as zines establish a mode of “communicating that frees individuals from face-to-face interaction (with all its accompanying visual and auditory cues of gender, race, age, and so forth), and the writer is only known by what he or she puts down on paper, the notion of who and what one is in a zine is potentially very flexible” (Duncombe 1997, 38). Zines enable the writer to escape the direct address by the Other, it affords them a substantial autonomy to decide how and when they disclose what about themselves. They therefore lack the violence of the requirement of coherence and the forced confessional. I think this is one of the reasons why it is often a medium for marginalized voices. The other reason goes back to what Butler argued

about the role of fantasy for survival. As Duncombe notes above, zines allow their writers to imagine themselves differently and to put this identity into action in the zine, to try it out, without the risk of being punished. However, since the audience is generally anonymous and zines are essentially unsolicited, are they not “less social” than immediate interaction, a solipsist way to avoid social life and politics? I do not think so. Self-disclosure, as Butler argues, always serves a dual function: to provide information and to relate to someone (Butler 2001, 31). Sociality is always a driving force behind personal zines, it is never just to put out information about oneself, but also unavoidably about relating to others.

3.2.3 Reflexive Project of the Self

With Giddens' *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991) I would like to introduce a sociological perspective of identity. His reflexive project of the self is quite different from what I have discussed so far as it invests fundamental agency in a reflexive and rational subject. In this setup, modernity has led to the emergence of a post-traditional society that enables people to perceive themselves as projects they are able to shape without conventional constraints.¹⁶ While reflexivity is intrinsic to humans who monitor their activities, in modernity reflexivity is extended to all institutions, social relations and scientific knowledge, leading to perpetual introspection and transformation. The radical doubt thus introduced into all aspects of life is “existentially troubling for ordinary individuals” (21). This anxiety is managed by individuals using expert strategies similar to institutional risk management, calculating and balancing risk and opportunity, and increasingly resorting to professional expertise through therapy, counseling and self-help manuals which to Giddens are expressions of the reflexivity of the self in late modernity (34). The function of therapy is to enable the individual to effectively realize the project of the self, that is to assume responsibility for the construction of a coherent life narrative that integrates constant reflection on the past with planning for the future.

To Giddens, “identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor—important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*” (1991, 54, italics original) which “provides the means of giving coherence to the finite lifespan given changing external circumstances” (215). In contrast to poststructuralist thought as we have seen it in Butler, the subject Giddens implies is essentially self-grounded and autonomous. It

¹⁶ Giddens defines modernity as the joint condition of industrialization, capitalism, and the nation state as it has emerged in post-feudal Europe (1991, 15). Giddens refers to the present as “late” or “high” modernity because in his view, postmodernity is essentially just radical modernity (breaking with tradition) and radical reflexivity (deconstructivism) (Tucker 1993, 195).

commands the capacity for rational evaluation and planning of its actions to pursue the particular goals it sets itself. Its ideal life narration is coherent and unambiguous, whereas in Butler, not only is this deemed impossible to achieve, but even more significantly, the demand for coherence in self narration is viewed as a form of violence, forcing the subject to conform to social norms and narrative genre conventions for the sake of intersubjective intelligibility. Giddens' view of therapy as a "methodology of life-planning [to harmonize] present concerns and future projects with a psychological inheritance from the past" (180) conceptualizes it as an unproblematic and neutral tool, lacking the critical analysis of both Foucault and Butler, or, as Alexander puts it, "turns Foucault on his head, suggesting that contemporary actors have gained enormous control (reflexivity) over their selves and their environments by making wide use of various therapeutic techniques" (1996, 135).

It is difficult to see how Giddens' autonomous subject and its reflexive self-identity relates to other subjects since to him "a stable sense of self-identity presupposes [...] an acceptance [...] of others but it is not directly derivable from them" (1991, 54). He "imports some of Mead's work in order to develop a more social understanding of reflexivity, but it does not go far enough" (Adams 2003, 233). Following Mead more consequently, Giddens would have to accept that individuation and the construction of self-narrative is fundamentally dependent on social interaction, as Habermas reminds us:

daß sich die Individuierung nicht als die in Einsamkeit und Freiheit vollzogene Selbstrealisierung eines selbsttätigen Subjekts vorgestellt wird, sondern als sprachlich vermittelter Prozeß der Vergesellschaftung und der gleichzeitigen Konstituierung einer ihrer selbst bewußten Lebensgeschichte. [...] Individualität bildet sich in Verhältnissen intersubjektiver Anerkennung und intersubjektiv vermittelter Selbstverständigung. (Habermas 1988, 191)

Whereas for Mead reflexivity is reducible to interaction and thus to the specific cultural framework (Adams 2003, 233), Giddens fails to acknowledge the fundamental cultural dimension of subjectivity, self-identity, and society in general.

This tendency to view culture as an irrelevant anachronism is most obvious in Giddens' insistence on the existence of the post-traditional order as a distinctive quality of late modernity. He reproduces early modernization theory: pre-modern and early modern societies as having been dominated by rigid, dogmatic, and irrational social structures while today, in late modernity, subjects are detraditionalized and liberated (Alexander 1996, 135). However, individuals cannot transcend being culturally embedded since they fundamentally depend on common cultural forms and ideas. They cannot position themselves outside of culture and society to attain the level of reflexivity and autonomy Giddens envisions. This also applies to

science, as Foucault has shown, which means that the “reflexive project of the selfhood is as much a product of social and cultural interactions as any other [and] the construction of the self as an empowered, liberated agent is itself the unreflexive product of a particular cultural tradition; namely Western modernity” (Adams 2003, 234). It is intriguing how Giddens tries to avoid the problem of reintroducing culture in his theory by using the concept of lifestyle (Giddens 1991, 81), which, I would argue, is just a different term for the individual adoption of a certain (sub-)cultural style and association with the corresponding social group. If Giddens would allow for culture in his theory, I might even be able to agree with him to some level about the dynamics of late modernity because in “contemporary societies [...] cultural forms are more separated from ascriptive positions, whether institutional, moral or geographic” (Alexander 1996, 138). This does not do away with traditions which are nothing more than cultural forms with some sort of a commonly recognized history.

As the reflexive self is mostly concerned with pursuing its own life project, a new form of politics evolves. I have already introduced Giddens' concept of life politics earlier. It is a politics of choice that builds upon the achievements of emancipatory politics which mainly targeted distributive justice. Now life politics concerns itself with the “questions of how we should live our lives in emancipated social circumstances [and] bring to the fore problems and questions of a moral and existential type” (Giddens 1991, 224). Through life politics Giddens tries to integrate individual choices into a collective form. Collective action in this sense is a temporary association of individuals to more effectively realize their personal goals, essentially a technique of self-realization. These narrow interest group politics might even be beneficial to other groups when more general values such as tolerance achieved for one group propagates to the society at large. According to Giddens, life politics, in contrast to postmodern thought, leads to a remoralisation of society because it is grounded in realizing a “good” life in all its aspects concerning oneself and others, it is informed by the “personal is political” idea of second wave feminism. However, the details of how life politics work are unclear since Giddens' account remains critically underdeveloped. I have also already noted before that life politics is only applicable to and useful for privileged subjects, and this applies more generally as well to Giddens' basic assumption of the possibility of liberated individual choices and self-fashioning. He concedes that this might be problematic at least to some degree: “The capability of adopting freely chosen lifestyles [...] stands in tension [...] with barriers to emancipation. [It] will surely require a major reconstruction of emancipatory politics” (231).

I have introduced Giddens to this study because I would like to get to some sort of interdisciplinary middle ground between the perspectives of cultural studies and sociology regarding identity and agency. As Hays (1994) argues, social structure consists of two interconnected elements: systems of social relations and systems of meaning. In most cases, the first is studied by sociology and the latter by culture studies, and both often fail to take the other element into account sufficiently. It might be possible to claim that where the one has a material perspective, the other is more imaginary. The effect seems to be that sociological thought has a basically functional outlook whereas cultural studies allows for more contingency. Now, Hays remarks, “cultural systems of knowledge, values, and practices, just like systems of relations between differently located social groups, are recurrently reproduced far more often than they are transformed” (69) which means that for the most time, they are perceived as static structures that exert an overwhelming influence on people's lives, predating and prefiguring individual existence. However, since structural change does happen from time to time, the interesting question is “under what cultural and relational conditions, and through what cultural and relational processes, structurally transformative agency occurs [particularly when] carried out by those with less powerful positions in systems of social relations” (71), including to some degree, I would argue, the majority of zine writers.

An important point I want to make here, and my selection of authors so far has hopefully already advanced my case, is that in fact, and this might be counterintuitive at first, the cultural system is more stable than the social system, or to use Butler's terms in her discussion of sexual difference, it takes much longer to change the symbolic order than the social order (Butler 2004, 212). Obviously there is cultural change at shallow and deeper, more symbolic, levels and I am referring to the latter here, in the sense of long-running transformations. For example, in the case of racism, while it already took a significant amount of time to raise awareness and establish at least rudimentary legislation to address discrimination, to really overcome it on the level of a cultural change in even the most everyday aspects of life will take substantially longer (Haenfler 2006, 200). In this sense, it is more important to ground social theory in cultural analysis than vice versa, since the social order is the expression of a more fundamental symbolic order. Keeping this in mind, I find Giddens' social analysis helpful in contextualizing the social crisis in New Orleans following hurricane Katrina through his observations about the increasing tendency of the sequestration of experience, that is the “hiding” of disturbing experiences such as sickness, death, deviance and violent nature

through spatial and disciplinary structuring of social environments. The socially determined vulnerability to disaster (Wisner et al. 2004) is introduced in chapter 6.

3.3 Identity Construction in Political Activism

My interest in personal zines and identity construction is focussed on aspects of transformative agency. This comprises of political activism in an extended sense, as it is realized in a subcultural scene context, in my case the New Orleans punk scene. This activism takes place outside of political institutions and social movements, in self-organized anarchist collectives, federated networks, ad-hoc coalitions, and most importantly through everyday choices and activities (I will elaborate on these forms of activism and the subculture-movement-scene nexus in the following chapter). At this point, I want to explore at a more basic level how considerations of identity and the self, or social psychology in general, have entered the study of social movements and activism in the first place.

Historically, three phases in social movement theory can be distinguished according to Stryker, Owens, and White (2000). Before the 1960s, movements were approached through collective psychology and mostly seen as irrational crowd behavior, ideologically directed, or compensating for social disorganization. Consequently, the movements of the 1960s were conceived as being deficient in some sense: stemming from alienation, motivated by frustration about status inconsistencies, or simply as the actions of misfits: “Social movements were taken to be anything but well-considered responses to legitimate concerns about real but oppositional interests” (2). In the 1970s, theories took a turn in the opposite direction with very rational models presuming rational actors, enabling theorists to assume the equivalence of all activists and through this simplification to focus on structural and organizational variables instead of individuals. This perspective soon ran into problems when it failed to explain why people behaved differently given equivalence in the variables controlled for. Hence in the 1990s, social psychology was reintroduced into social movement theory, this time focussed on the individual level, “a social psychology that recognizes and accommodates variation in human beings” (4) and concerns itself primarily with individual and collective identity concepts.

As Della Porta and Diani (2006) argue, collective identity enables collective action by promoting the necessary levels of solidarity through common meaning, it is a way to overcome the diversity of the activists with different backgrounds such as class, gender, and ethnicity. There is an impact on personal identity through activism as well and engagement in

collective action can lead to radical personal transformation. Studying individual identity leads to issues of difference I have discussed earlier in this chapter. The oppositional character of social movement activism can be helpful in attaining difference, as well as the collective social setting of movements that supports this process. However, and this is especially significant in the context of my study, Della Porta and Diani note that “it is possible to feel part of a movement without identifying with any specific organization and, indeed, even express an explicit dissent towards the notion of organization in general” (99). This might explain how non-organized zine writers conceive themselves part of a movement and how activism takes place outside of established social movements formations, as it is mostly the case in the self-organized punk anarchist setting.

Following Teske's (1997) study of political activists in America helps to further broaden the conceptualization of politics and activism. His theory of “identity construction points to the qualitative concerns and the desires activists have that certain qualities be instantiated in their actions and lives” (121). Their motivation is to be found beyond the traditional self-interest versus altruism reasoning of political science, it is the strife to become a particular kind of person, to attain a particular identity, to live a certain life through their actions. Teske stresses the fundamental importance of studying and learning about the purposes and intentions of activists from their own accounts of activism. Bobel (2007) has also conducted interviews with activists and makes the very interesting observation that many of them do not identify as activists because the activist identity, the way it is perceived as a standard, is “constructed by unrealistic, even romantic, notions of the omniscient, tireless and selfless individual. [...] Activist, as an identity, is out of reach for many who, in spite of doing the work, resist the identity” (156). Her finding reminds us of the complexities of individual identity negotiation and warn against an oversimplified conception of identity in social movement studies. I hope that my study of personal zine writings and individual interviews achieves to yield an understanding of the zine writers' concepts of politics and activism, how they view their own political activism, and how it relates to their self-identity.

3.4 Narrative Identity Construction

This subchapter investigates approaches to identity construction through the use of narratives. Here, narrative emplotment is the key concept for understanding self-identity and how individuals make meaning of their lives. Tying back to the theories of Foucault, Butler, and Giddens discussed earlier, subjects are conceptualized to be fundamentally constituted

through narrative performance. Self-narratives exist in different formats and address various audiences, ranging from internal reflections and private diaries to personal conversations to published autobiographical writings and oral histories—and of course personal zines. They enable individuals to achieve a level of coherence and continuity in the interpretation of the events occurring in their lives, making possible a sense of meaning and self-identity. Individuals reinterpret and revise their self-narratives over time to build biographies and form identities that are both dynamic and multiple. What follows from this line of thought is that identity is neither an essential nor a predetermined character of an individual but is discursive, performative, and culturally situated. This perspective allows for considerable agency while at the same time being grounded in the cultural context since the construction of narratives is always influenced by the cultural resources at hand: genre conventions, master narratives, and the need to be intelligible to others and oneself alike, even when the aim is for difference. Even the very concepts of narrativity and personal history itself are products of Western thought. Still, the individual can exercise imaginary freedom because self-narratives are necessarily fictional, as I have shown Butler to argue before. As Hall puts it: “identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being [...] They arise from the narrativization of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity” (1996, 4).

The reader has probably noticed that I have avoided a straight forward definition of narrative so far. This is a difficult venture indeed since narratives are used in many different variations. The lowest common denominator might be to equate narratives with stories, a form of discourse that connects significant events in a chronological and interpretative fashion that strives toward coherence and meaning. Narratives are located “above” or “after” immediate experiences and “below” or “before” systemic theorizing thought (Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman 1997). Narratives are rhetorical devices with persuasive power, they have a narrator and an audience—who might be identical. They are shaped by the cultural conventions and narrative genres we have learned from being surrounded by stories from infancy on (Brockmeier and Harré 2001).

3.4.1 Narratology

Brockmeier and Carbaugh (2001) describe how narratology has left its traditional linguistic domain where it had been applied in a structuralist and formalistic fashion. Today, narratology

is a heuristic tool to be used in combination with other theories and its focus has shifted to examine the form and content of narratives for insights into their cultural context: “narrative analysis turns into an activity of ‘cultural analysis’, that is, into a form of interpretation of culture” (5). It is primarily employed by anthropology and ethnography with the objective to discover the social relations and local cultural meanings that are voiced through narratives. However, narratives are not only expressive of the conditions and traditions they are generated in but, and this is crucial for the kind of politics the narrative approach permits, narratives are a tool for imaginary empowerment, “a laboratory of possibilities for human identity construction” (8), because, comparable to literary text, they remain open to multiple (re-)interpretations as well as necessarily being unfinished and containing numerous unrealized options and demands. This constitutes the irrepressible contingency of narratives and in consequence of life narratives and identity.

In the human sciences, Brockmeier and Carbaugh view the rise of personal narrative studies as part of the post-positivist movement that introduced the turn that has many names: cultural, discursive, post-structuralist. In psychology, narratives have come to be seen as the “central hinge between culture and mind” (10) by scholars in the cultural or discursive psychology schools who aim to complement the traditionally individualistic focus of the discipline. As the study of narrative progresses, the focus shifts even more away from internal states of the mind towards discourse and the local cultural and sociohistorical context. Of particular interest for my study in this respect is the joining of approaches from sociology and ethnography to study local narratives for the role they play in people's perceptions of place and community. Work in this area suggests that local identity emerges through the stories that people tell about places and spaces, they connect individual identity and local identity through a “situated performance” (13). To Fisher, community narratives might answer the question of how to enable people who are dissociated from the locale and its people to arrive at a sense of interdependence that “leads to joint actions, to a sense of community, without individuals homogenized into conformist or repressive collectivities” (1997, 322). His concept of community as constituted through communication benefits from the interpretative openness and collaborative nature of narratives to connect people on a level that enables collective politics while maintaining respect for individual difference. Additionally, individuals may belong to multiple communities and these need not actually be tied to a specific locale.

In the zines I study, the themes of community based activism, local history and to feel connected to the place is very prominent. All four authors are not originally from New

Orleans and this seems to even increase the importance of deliberating in their writings the reasons for staying in the city given the odds they face, especially after hurricane Katrina. They also identify with the punk anarchist subculture and scene which transcends the specific locale and is sustained by shared narratives—with zines being a significant medium.

3.4.2 Autobiography

As Freeman and Brockmeier (2001) argue, the very concepts of individual identity and personal history, both fundamental to autobiographical writing, are linked to the general idea of historicity as the referent for understanding one's own existence. The idea of an independent and self-defined identity becomes possible only when the individual is removed from older mythical and collective frameworks of interpretation in modern European thought. As we have already seen in Foucault's discussion of self-disclosure, the idea of personal accountability has evolved from Christianity where the accountability to God was ultimately located in individual reflections on personal actions and their accordance with religious norms. These religious norms have been supplemented or complemented by a variety of secular cultural and social norms. In autobiography, the current norms and the order of the present is retrospectively applied to past events which explains the fundamental interpretative and provisional character of life narratives. There is always a component of ethical evaluation in autobiography, but its referent has changed from a teleological to a historical understanding of life in the transition from modernity to postmodernity.

To evaluate an autobiography, Freeman and Brockmeier suggest, is to investigate its narrative integrity, the measure of “the coherence and depth of one's ethical commitments, as evidenced by the shape of one's life” (2001, 76). They argue that postmodern Western societies allow for more open and changing identities and thus narrative integrity is lower in the sense of life narratives being more ambiguous and multivoiced than in the past. Still, the search for attaining narrative integrity seems to intensify since the individual is faced with numerous available options. In fact, Brockmeier argues elsewhere (2001), what happens in autobiographical writing might be an imposition of a “reverse teleology” on the narrative, countering the arbitrariness and uncertainty of life by structuring its events into some sort of unifying and meaningful form. To Brockmeier, this “absorption of contingency” is necessitated by a psychological need for stability and coherence in everyday life. In this respect, it is intriguing to study personal zines as autobiographical writings. Since they are fragments published over a period of time it should be possible to investigate changes to the

interpretative and normative framework with which writers evaluate their life narratives and approach their own identity construction.

The Western ideal of individuality calls for exceptionalism and deviancy at the same time where autobiographical accounts need to stay within what Bruner (2001) calls “culturally canonical accounts” and the “folk psychology canon”, or in other words: the common conventions to be adhered to in order to be socially comprehensible. There always remains a certain tension between the autobiographical genre requirements of portraying the self as an individual construct on the one hand and it being a socially distributed and interrelated creation on the other hand. As Bruner puts it, individuals tend to form alliances with others, to form an “in-group” which defines itself in difference to the “out-group”. This concept is useful to look at how life narratives contribute to subcultural formation and especially how they are defined in distinction of its respective out-group, the mainstream and maybe other subcultures.

3.4.3 The Narrative Subject

The narrative identity construction approach does not only investigate how subjects construct identity and evaluate their life in autobiographical writing but how a fundamentally narrative subject might be constituted. According to Kerby (1991), self-narration is not merely descriptive of a self but “fundamental to the emergence and reality of that subject. [...] ‘Persons’ are primarily the result of ascribing subject status or selfhood to those sites of narration and expression we call human bodies” (4). Kerby argues against any notion of a metaphysical or essential subject, to him there is no subject outside of narrative performance. Self-narration is not the conscious expression of a prelinguistic subject but the subject is the product of its life narrative and hence of the cultural and social traditions that shape language and the autobiographical genre. The human subject is nothing but a “self-interpreting animal” (114) with the only access to itself mediated through self-narrative. As the subject is produced through narratives, it is also produced through its actions, it is not “behind” those acts, but the result of the narrative framing and interpretation of those acts. Kerby's idea of agency or autonomy implies “that possible actions are evaluated in light of the values I *already* accept responsibility for, values that are already determinants for the direction of my life and therefore for the type of person that I am” (57, italics original). Subjects can choose their actions but the choice is limited by what they conceive to be legitimate in light of their own history and the cultural context in general: “Freedom relates to the possibilities for self-

definition and expression allowed the individual in the system” (113). The question remains: if the “system” presupposes everything then how can there be transformation, if at all possible? Kerby's understanding of discursive power is informed by Foucault, it is inescapable. Still, he allows for gradual change within the given system “because signifiers function in differential relations and not solely by a system of prefigured meanings, it is possible to generate new and often revealing significances by tropic transformations” (113). This is nothing but linguistic change, to be sure, but I understand it to entail the possibility of resignification which can be part of a powerful politics, as the history of the terms “punk”, “gay”, and “queer” prominently shows.

Kerby makes an important point about personal crisis that is very relevant for my thesis. Since there is no “inner substantial core of personhood” (6) to a subject, self-identity depends entirely on the life narrative. Consequently, achieving closure or at least narrative integrity in the form of coherence and continuity becomes the paramount aim. If this fails and the narrative becomes too fragmented and discontinuous it is commonly diagnosed as the pathological condition of multiple personality disorder. Life narratives are especially vulnerable when profound interruptions in the interpretative framework occur or new events cannot be integrated coherently into the personal history: “Questions of identity and self-understanding arise primarily in crisis situations and at certain turning points in our routine behavior” (6). In the case of New Orleans and the community of zine writers whose narratives I study, the social and personal crisis surrounding hurricane Katrina is one such occasion.

3.4.4 Critique and Potential

Narrative emplotment might be problematic, as critics of narrative theory claim. Historians and literary critics warn that narratives impart structure and moralize the events they tell. They appease the problematic desire for closure, resolve, and transcendental meaning in life. By presenting history as a story, subject status might be conferred onto institutions, which works to support the state and its authority. To postmodern critics, narratives bear the danger of reinstating the grand meta-narratives of modernity: the conventional nature of narrative emplotment is affirmative of the status quo and Western ideals such as linear history, progress, and the autonomous subject, but hides this through its supposed immediacy (Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman 1997, xxvi).

The proponents of narrative theory can be broadly categorized into two schools. There are the “pluralists” who distrust any sort of totalization or effort to create a meaningful unity of

one's life and society. They value narratives because it can act as a collage of independent stories and perspectives that are not necessarily combined. The other group might be called “integrationalist”, they see in narratives the potential to overcome the fragmentation and incoherence in contemporary society and to foster communities (xxix).

I agree with the critics that there is a potential danger in narrative emplotment to create meaning and coherence in the interest of the dominant discourse, to essentialize and naturalize what is contingent. Nevertheless, at the individual and local level I find the narrative approach to be very useful as it opens a space for counter narratives from a subjective and non-totalizing perspective. One must take care not to privilege dominant and normative narratives at the expense of subterranean and oppositional narratives. Apart from the personal zines that I investigate, the narrative approach has been prominent with numerous oral history projects that have recorded the stories of New Orleans residents post Katrina (Welsh 2008; Stein and Preuss 2006).

4 Subcultural Politics

In this chapter I will approach the politics of the New Orleans setting where the zine writers I study are situated. As I have already shown, zines are generally associated with a subcultural context informed by punk ideals, primarily DIY, and this is in particular the case with my research sample.¹⁷ This context is culturally productive and politically active—and surprisingly difficult to capture adequately because it does not fit into the traditional academic conceptions of subculture, counterculture or social movement. Therefore I will first discuss the recent theoretical advances that have taken place under the label of post-subcultural studies which allow to account for more fluent and heterogeneous subcultural identities as well as the emergence of political activist movements using subcultural practices. In particular, I find Haenfler's (2006) ethnography of the straight edge scene and his synthesis of the concepts of subculture, collective identity, and new social movements instructive. Ultimately, I will propose to apply the concept of the subcultural movement scene as described by Haunss and Leach (2004).

The New Orleans scene represents a node in a national and international network of shared subcultural and political practices most commonly referred to as globalization movement. It is characterized by anti-capitalist and anti-consumerist positions and employs creative protest and direct action tactics, achieving mainstream recognition during the 1999 anti-WTO protests in Seattle. While this broad movement also includes formal social movements and NGOs, my focus is on the particular scene that emerged in the late 1990s through the combination of post-punk counter-hegemonic subculture with the radical politics and

¹⁷ It is important to note that punk music and zines are not exclusive to what we might call “progressive” subcultures that hold at least vaguely left political convictions, but have also been adapted as a medium by right-wing subcultures. In Germany, racist skinheads, militant fascists, and organized neo-Nazis have joint forces over the course of the 1990s and are making increasingly use of music and fanzines to disseminate racist, xenophobic, and anti-semitic ideology in youth cultures (Fromm 2008; Buschborn 2004). Similar developments exist in the US, for example in the resurgent racist skinhead scene (Anti Defamation League 2006; Sabin and Triggs 2002, 2), the “NS hatecore”, and “NS black metal” music scenes (Fromm 2008; Anti Defamation League 2000), all of which employ music and zines as a means to reach youth audiences and forge collective identities. Both racist skinheads and the hatecore scene have their origins in the punk/hardcore subculture from which progressive subcultural styles were appropriated to promote ideologies in a way that is attractive to the youth of today.

federated structures of new anarchism (Dylan Clark 2004; Kuhn 2008; Weinzierl and Muggleton 2004).

The discussion of subculture and activism needs to address the issue of whiteness and privilege because the majority of zine writers, punks, and activists in the US are white and have a middle class background (Duncombe 1997; Kuhn 2008; Traber 2007). This topic is especially relevant in the case of New Orleans where a substantial share of the predominantly African-American population lives in poverty—a reality brought back to both local and national attention through the social crisis following hurricane Katrina (Jones-Deweever and Hartman 2006; Lavelle and Feagin 2006; Harriford and Thompson 2006). The persistent effects of racism and the tension between the white activists' political intentions and aspirations, their privileged position, and the gentrification they cause when moving into poor New Orleans neighborhoods is a much discussed topic in New Orleans zines and will be a theme of my study.

Readers might have noticed how I use the terms subculture and scene seemingly interchangeably and arbitrarily. This chapter will also serve to differentiate between subculture, counterculture, scene, and social movement, but I will continue to use the terms subculture and scene as generic labels. Whereas the former refers more to the cultural aspects and retains a somewhat theoretical connotation while the latter incorporates notions of a more particular place and people and is a term more likely to be used by members of a scene themselves. The problematic in using the term subculture is reminiscent of the discussion in relation to the concept of identity in the previous chapter: as Muggleton and Weinzierl (2004) point out, although it has been thoroughly criticized, there is no established new concept supplanting subculture: “although the whole research agenda in this area has clearly shifted, heralding the emergence of new methodological, theoretical and substantive concerns, a new, dominant paradigm has yet to develop in place of the old”—in fact, because the proposed new concepts such as tribe or clubculture are “often used to abstract different aspects of social reality” they are not necessarily incompatible with each other (5).

4.1 Beyond Subcultures

The origins of subcultural studies is to be found in the studies of British youth subcultures conducted in the 1970s by scholars from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham. Their general perspective was to portray working-class youth as engaged in “heroic” resistance against subordination through *symbolic* challenges to

mainstream society by using provocative style in music, clothing, vernacular, and conduct. Subcultures were understood to emerge as clearly identifiable novel styles only to become incorporated into the mainstream and thus effectively defused politically in a quick linear progression from teds, mods, rockers, skinheads to the punks (Weinzierl and Muggleton 2004).

4.1.1 Post-Subcultures

During the 1990s, the continuing critique of the CCCS concept of subculture and detailed studies of new subcultures employing ethnographic methods—often undertaken by scholars with a subcultural socialization—has led to the field of post-subcultural studies, “understood as a collection of published works, and thus a constructed field of study” (Weinzierl and Muggleton 2004, 4). Clarke contributed one of the first and still influential critique of CCCS subcultural theory (1981). He points out the simplistic and over-determined connection CCCS scholars have established between subcultural styles and the purportedly socio-economic location, rendering subcultural affiliation essentialist and non-contradictory, begging the questions how actors could be able to change between different subcultures, how they could deviate individually within a specific subculture, and how novel subcultural styles emerge in the first place. CCCS accounts focus on the innovatory moment in subcultures when the novelty of its style can be viewed as potentially resistant by virtue of simple shock value. As Clarke remarks, this view depends on the existence of an undifferentiated and conventional mainstream, reflecting the CCCS scholar's disdain for mass culture, following the Frankfurt School tradition. Consequently, subcultures are valued because they fit modernist ideals: avant-gardism, originality and authenticity—implying the elitist position that the majority of subculturalists who joined after the novel subcultural style had already been popularized is inauthentic. Clarke points out that the exclusive focus on style and spheres of leisure prevents investigations into what subcultural “mannequins” actually do besides consuming styles that have magically appeared. Therefore, “any future analysis of youth must transcend an exclusive focus on style” (178).

In the 1990s, subcultural style was re-investigated in terms of performativity and difference. Thornton's (1995) study of British club cultures introduces, following Bourdieu, the notion of subcultural capital as a means of distinction. Since club cultures are “*ad hoc* communities with fluid boundaries [...] and heavily dependent on ‘being in the know’” (200), subcultural agents need to achieve individual “hipness” through the accumulation of

subcultural capital to distinct themselves from anonymous and undifferentiated masses. Thornton asserts the complex interrelationship between media coverage and subcultural innovation in the continuous process of defining and redefining what is in or out of fashion and hence high or low in subcultural capital. Since subcultural capital is less bound to class than traditional cultural capital, subcultural distinction enables youth to escape the parental class, at least temporarily. Therefore, keeping in mind the limited predominantly heterosexual and white setting Thornton studied, age and gender have become the most significant structural differentiators.

Thornton makes the important point that, given how social circumstances have changed since the 1960s and 1970s, difference cannot be viewed anymore as inherently progressive in the sense of expressing deviance and dissidence. During the 1980s, the conservative backlash, advanced post-industrial commodity production, and more differentiated media channels have recast difference as a technique to achieve distinction that may in fact be supportive of the dominant values of competition, individualization and discrimination. The social function of difference has thus become politically ambiguous and the “politics of the youthful will to classlessness [...] is a means of obfuscating the dominant structure in order to set up an alternative and, as such, is an ideological precondition for the effective operations of subcultural capital” (209).

As useful as Thornton's concept of subcultural capital is to account for the fluency in today's subcultural formations and to capture the complex construction of subcultural boundaries, it still leads to an understanding of subcultural actors privileging individual needs above collective values and ideals and in consequence “manifestly fails as an adequate explanation of new forms of political youth cultural activism that have developed during recent years” (Weinzierl and Muggleton 2004, 12). It is missing, as Marchart puts it, “an analysis of the passage between culture and macro-politics” (2004, 90) as subcultural rituals and micro-politics are a necessary but not sufficient basis for macro-political action. In the end, remaining on a purely symbolic level of subcultural analysis and politics might even fail the original intentions of the CCCS scholars:

In an age where it is fashionable in academic circles to celebrate “conscious resistance to the soap opera text” as a “site of social struggle”, it is important to consider again the original intention of the early students of cultural resistance: Gramsci, Hobsbawm, and the scholars of the CCCS. They were interested in cultural politics not as an end in itself, but in its promise for setting the stage for political formations. In the last analysis, the politics of underground culture, like all “counterhegemonic cultures” and “pre-political” formations, offers a necessary but not sufficient condition for social change. (Duncombe 1997, 193)

Still, as both Muggleton (2000) and Marchart (2004) argue, this problematic in cultural studies is a result of the differentiation between middle-class countercultural and working-class subcultural formations as introduced by the CCCS scholars themselves. According to their view, countercultures of the 1960s and 1970s were conceived as explicitly political and ideological, opposing the dominant culture by political action and creating alternative institutions, while subcultural resistance was relegated to the purely symbolic and ritualistic level. In his study of subcultures, Muggleton finds that people's individualistic stylistic identification and affiliation with subcultures are the result of the underlying assertion of the freedom to express oneself and to be liberated from convention in the sense of Bellah *et al.*'s (1985) concept of expressive individualism, as I have discussed it in Fluck (1998) in the previous chapter. In a revision of the established interpretation of subcultural history, Muggleton (2000) argues that while this ideal has been traditionally located in the upper middle classes, it has permeated the lower strata of society much earlier than usually understood, probably as early as the 1960s: "subcultures are manifestations of self-expression, individual autonomy and cultural diversity, and [...] these traits have an elective affinity with bohemian values that have increasingly come to define the experiences of sections of post-war working-class and lower-middle-class youth" (167). Hence, the distinction that has been made in the CCCS tradition between middle-class counterculture and working-class subculture is questionable at best and should not be upheld. Marchart (2004) argues that (sub-)cultural studies has shifted the focus to the micro-political level because it privileges the study of the politics of popular culture and subcultural symbolic resistance while disregarding practical macro-political resistance as it is found in countercultures. While this has proven very valuable in uncovering the hidden politics of culture and everyday practices of resistance, it largely precludes the theorization of how transformative political action can emerge from there: "By focusing on micro-politics and by leaving to political scientist and theorists the study of the moment of politicization, cultural studies became, to a large degree, the study of political frontiers in their *sedimented form* and not in their *reactivated form*" (92, italics original). Ultimately, to Marchart, "going macro" requires subcultural formations to transcend their particularistic interests and to universalize their demands by joining other social forces.

4.1.2 Subculture, Counterculture and Social Movement Convergence

During the 1990s, a diversity of new forms of creative protest and direct action such as Reclaim the Streets¹⁸, Critical Mass¹⁹, guerilla theater²⁰, adbusting²¹ or radical cheerleading²² has emerged (Shepard and Hayduk 2002; Carlsson 2002). Large international mobilizations of activists to protest meetings of transnational bodies like the WTO and the G8 have become commonplace and achieve significant media attention, at least since the 1999 anti-WTO protests in Seattle. A wide range of groups, each with their own particular ecological and social concerns, has been forming alliances in opposition against economic neoliberalism and corporate globalization. This broad “movement of movements” is often referred to as “anti-globalization” movement, although this label is rejected by most participants because it is a very global movement that specifically opposes neoliberalism and corporate globalization. Preferred terms are “global justice movement” or “globalization movement” (Graeber 2002, 62). According to Weinzierl and Muggleton, it is “currently the only promising political project of the left” (2004, 9) and highly relevant to the discussion of subcultural politics because

the new protest formations combine subcultural communications and (often post-Marxist) countercultural ideologies to produce ‘carnivals of protest’. They use subculturally derived modes of articulation and identity generation but also engage macro-politically, operating ideologically and hedonistically at the same time. With their universalist dimension of anti-capitalism the youth cultural networks within the anti-globalization movement have reached the moment of politicization when forms of cultural self-organization turn into overtly politicized ‘anarchist bazaars’. Hence, these new protest formations differ considerably from historical countercultures because they are able to self-incorporate subcultural communication modes. And while they have in common with ‘new social movements’ an unconventional form of political participation, they differ from these movements by explicitly targeting the core of the global capitalist economy. (Weinzierl and Muggleton 2004, 15)

In the globalization movement, subcultural style, countercultural tactics and new social movement politics converge and create potent creative protest formations informed by punk's culture of DIY and self-organization as well as anarchist politics of radical democracy and direct action.

18 Blocking streets from car traffic through creative actions, often involving mobile sound systems, dancing crowds, and street performers.

19 Regular collective bicycle rides on major streets, blocking out car traffic.

20 Subversive performance in public, such as the *Billionaires for Bush* during George W. Bush's presidential campaign who dressed up as rich people and rallied for the candidate.

21 Modifying images and letters on billboards to change them into anti-consumerist messages.

22 “Ironical” cheerleading with radical chants.

As Haenfler (2006) argues in conclusion of his ethnography of the straight edge punk scene,²³ collective identity is fundamental to these new cultural, lifestyle-based and diffuse movements since they lack formal organizational structures. He finds the straight edge collective identity to provide values and meanings that become integrated into individual lives and offer guidance to evaluate individual actions. Collective identity is the basis from which people derive their individualized commitment to a movement to the degree that individual and collective values become aligned. People might subscribe to one or multiple collective identities derived from ideals such as “environmental preservation”, “fair trade”, “anti-car”, or “animal rights” without ever becoming active in a particular organization or any specific action. However, it might strongly influence their everyday life and choices by adhering to the values adopted from the collective identity, such as recycling, commuting to work by bicycle, buying from an organic food cooperative, or adopting a vegan diet. From these mundane realizations of values, people might then take the step to join with other people to collectively further their cause. The merging of subcultural and political practices or, to put it in other terms, hedonistically and ideologically motivated involvement, at the same time lowers the barriers of entry and makes it more attractive for people to subscribe to a political ideal without the need to accept wholesale grand political theories. Individual commitment is deepened as it becomes integrated with everyday life and self-identity to form a personal lifestyle and thus becomes personally meaningful and satisfactory to act in accordance with.

Haenfler's argument ties in with my discussion of identity in the previous chapter where I conceptualized identity as non-essential and socially constructed, (re-)produced through performance in everyday life. We already find in Teske (1997) and Giddens (1991) the concept of an identity construction approach to political activism and lifestyle-based politics of choice. From Butler (Butler 2001, 2004) I would appropriate the complex relationship between social structure and individual agency in identity performance. Approaching subcultures and social movements through the concepts of collective and individual identity

23 To be straight edge means to abstain completely from the consumption of drugs, including caffeine and nicotine, and to not engage in promiscuous sexuality. It developed during the early 1980s in the East Coast hardcore punk scene, decisively influenced by the lyrics to the 1981 song *Straight Edge* by the hardcore band *Minor Threat* from Washington, DC, and has become a significant movement within the national and international hardcore scene (Haenfler 2004, 409). Straight edge is often combined with veganism and features a “clean” look with athletic clothing and short haircuts. The difference to, say, the “drunk punx” who celebrate the consumption of alcohol, is indicative of the internal diversity of punk subculture that is “not reducible to musical preferences and clothing style because often times such differences are the result of deeply held ethical and/or political beliefs” (Furness 2005, 131).

seems to be suitable to account for the semi-dynamic and fragmented identities people perform. It respects their always provisional self-narratives by not requiring them to uncompromisingly subscribe to a totalizing master-narrative such as socialism or communism.

4.1.3 The Scene

The scene concept originates in popular music studies. Hesmondhalgh (2005), for example, compares the usefulness of the concepts subculture, scene, and tribe for describing collective structures organized around the consumption of music. While he ultimately calls for the abandonment of the search for a new “master-term” in replacement of subculture, he values the scene concept as it “is richer, provides new understandings of musical collectivities in relation to space and place, and offers insights into the formation of aesthetic communities in modern urban life” (38). In the context of punk, the scene takes on additional meanings because the central idea of DIY strengthens subcultural production and self-organization: “When punks use the term ‘scene’ they mean the active creation of infrastructure to support punk bands and other forms of creative activity. This means finding places to play, building a supportive audience, developing strategies for living cheaply, shared punk houses, and such like” (O'Connor 2002, 226). The scene becomes an alternative space with increasing significance for the participant's everyday life where subculture and politics merge.

According to Haunss and Leach (2004), a scene is located between subculture and social movement while at the same time overlapping and being an amalgam of both. Membership is less rigid and more loosely marked than that of both the subculture with its specific music and fashion style and the social movement with its functionalist organization. However, at the same time it adds to both by infusing the social movement with cultural glue and personal politics, and adding to the subculture political awareness and action. A scene serves the function of a bidirectional transmitter between subculture and social movement, establishing informal networks allowing people to move between the two. It also embodies an element of a specific place, time, and people. At the same time, through the shared subcultural and political consciousness it is linked to other local scenes up to the transnational level.

In brief, we conceptualize scenes as action-oriented social structures which are less rigid than milieus, less volatile and less culture-oriented than subcultures, and less demanding and all-encompassing than countercultures. Scenes are social places where subcultures, countercultures and social movements meet and influence each other. By action-oriented we mean that active involvement rather than merely passive consumption or a shared

social background is necessary to be part of a scene. Scenes are enacted and reproduced by their participants. (Haunss and Leach 2004, 11)

In the end, I also chose to use the term and concept of the scene because it is utilized by activists and punks themselves (Dylan Clark 2004), who, by the way, are also more likely to refer to themselves as “kids” rather than “punks”, especially in the hardcore scene (Haenfler 2006). The feeling to belong and to be committed to a specific local scene such as the New Orleans punk anarchist scene might influence—yet not determine—virtually all aspects of a person's life, from housing choices, diet, musical preferences, clothing, working, socializing, leisure-time activities to political ideals and activism. Even so, as the individual relation to a scene is non-essential and of choice, a great degree of individuality is retained.

4.2 The Punk Anarchist Scene

As Clark writes, the contemporary “post-punk” or “anarchist punk” scene “is evolving into one of the most powerful political forces in North America and Europe” (2004, 234). The combination of punk subculture and anarchist politics is in fact not surprising given the suspicion of organizations and hierarchies in punk (O'Hara 1995), but what has been surprising to many is the resurgence of an anarchism movement in the US during the late 1990s and its continued strong presence since the 1999 anti-WTO protests in Seattle, culminating in the label “new anarchism” (Kuhn 2008).

What I am attempting to do here, and it will inevitably remain a cursory glance, is to describe the cultural and political foundations of the local New Orleans scene where my zine sample is situated and which contextualizes the narratives. Of course, given my small sample and since the punk anarchist scene is not a homogeneous monolith, I am necessarily focusing on a specific segment in this study. However, this segment cannot be identified by traditional subcultural markers such as musical genre or clothing style but requires an evaluation of cultural and political practices and values such as DIY, direct action, non-hierarchical organization, and anarchist politics.

4.2.1 From Hardcore to the Punk Anarchist Scene

Although punk music has its origins in the New York music scene, it first became infamous in the U.K., primarily through the provocative stance of the band the *Sex Pistols* in 1976. Marcus (1990) quotes McLaren, who had imported punk music from the US and managed the *Sex Pistols*: “We wanted to create a situation where kids would be less interested in buying

records than in speaking for themselves” (437).²⁴ His statement reflects the original DIY attitude of punk that aimed to be an accessible, amateur, and lo-fi alternative to the over-professionalized and commercialized rock music at the time. Although the *Sex Pistols* in fact signed on with major labels, numerous other amateur punk bands sprung up in the U.K. and the US who recorded with small independent labels or simply played inexpensive shows, often at private residences, without ever making a record at all (Moore 2007).

Punk was quickly “re-imported” into the US where it was adapted to the social and cultural setting. Most notably, by 1980, an US-American variation of punk was created: hardcore. Started by bands from the suburbs in the greater Los Angeles area, hardcore was a simplified and faster version of punk music, with songs often not lasting longer than one minute. Musicians and fans primarily came from white middle-class suburban families. Hardcore was a reaction to the declining economic situation in the US and a reaction to the severe conservative backlash in politics and culture that became evident in the election of Ronald Reagan as president in the fall of 1980. The white middle-class was experiencing downward mobility for the first time in post-war America and the utopian vision of suburban development was failing, perceived by the new generation of youths as nothing but moral and economic decay, boredom, and conformity—aptly summarized in *Suburbia*, a 1984 fictional movie on the Los Angeles punk scene, as: “suburbia is the slum of the future” (Spheeris 1984). The style of hardcore was more rough and simpler than the oftentimes weird and flamboyant apparel of British punks:

There arose a generation of disaffected kids who wanted Punk's fury without New Wave's art-school baggage. [...] 1976-80 were the Punk and New Wave years; Hardcore happened 1980-1986. If Punk peaked in '77, then Hardcore's glory days were '81-82, when it was still undefined and unpredictable. Hardcore was an American phenomenon fueled by British and homegrown Punk scenes. It began in Southern California. The first HC bands came out of suburban L.A. beach towns, probably 'cause there they lived as close to The American Dream as you could get. Born of a doomed ideal of middle-class utopia, Punk juiced their nihilism. [...] Hardcore extended, mimicked or reacted to Punk; it appropriated some aspects yet discarded others. It reaffirmed the attitude, and rejected New Wave. That's why it was *hard-core* Punk — for people who were fed up. (Blush 2001, 3, italics original)

24 In 1972, McLaren had opened a boutique in London together with his business partner Vivienne Westwood, today a famous fashion designer, selling subcultural fashion. He stayed in New York for several months during 1974 where he discovered the local proto-punk music, ultimately returning to London after failing as a manager for the *New York Dolls*. The subsequent year he took over management of the band that was to become the *Sex Pistols*. McLaren quickly achieved popularity with the *Sex Pistols* during 1976 and the band signed on with a number of major record label (Marcus 1990).

MacLeod (1997) makes an important point in his study of the suburban Los Angeles punk scene: there was a decisive dialectic at play between the mass media and the evolving punk subculture that has been crucial to the development of hardcore in particular and the punk subculture in general. In Britain, punk “was part media hoax [and] its politics were to be played out within the mainstream media” (124) and with the involuntary help of major record labels. On this account, it is noteworthy that McLaren had studied art in the latter part of the 1960s and was inspired by the Situationist International in his creation of the *Sex Pistols* (Marcus 1990), as well as citing him on his motives: “cash from chaos” (MacLeod 1997, 124). MacLeod argues that punk subculture in the US was significantly inspired by a 1977 NBC news report on punk rock in London that led already existing groups of musicians and disillusioned youth to self-identity as punks and to adopt the style from the media. Nevertheless, the different setting transformed punk into hardcore: “Settling its protest solidly in American suburbia, hardcore removed the urban working class and artistic connotations from punk. [Los Angeles punks were] young, mostly white and male, and broadly middle class” (1997, 127).

Whereas in Britain punk was instantly portrayed as a threat to society by the media and caused a moral panic, initial coverage in the US was relatively benign or at least neutral since it was understood as a curious and distant European craze. However, when punk was adopted by the suburban youth and reappeared as hardcore, now a local movement, the media quickly changed its reporting: “With the emergence of hardcore punk rock in the early 1980s, however, punk became a homegrown social product, and thus a potential direct threat to the social order. The dominant media, from the music press to film to various forms of television programming, in response combined direct attack with incorporation or cooptation” (MacLeod 1997, 131). This in turn attracted violent youths to punk shows, following the subculture's portrayal as excitingly dangerous in the media, in consequence leading to heightened levels of repression by the authorities. The reaction of the punks was twofold: on the one hand they increasingly created independent media, that is fanzines, to provide information from their own perspective and to escape negative stereotyping (Duncombe 1997, 207). On the other hand, and probably even more significantly, MacLeod argues that hardcore punks started to police the scene to keep the unwanted latecomers out. The hardcore identity was formed in negation of its negative media representation as violent and intoxicated youth, ultimately leading to the assertion of a morally positive identity: “the ‘media blitz’ forced a redefinition of hardcore as a positive movement, rather than negative, nihilistic or negating”

(134). In contrast to the British punks, US hardcore punks for the most part would not settle for provocation or ignorance of mainstream portrayal.

In this sense, punk subculture in the US, particularly in the native hardcore tradition, has been a substantially politicized subculture almost from its beginning. “When it comes to choosing a political ideology, Punks are primarily anarchists”, as O'Hara states in his analysis of the US punk scene, *The Philosophy of Punk* (1995, 56). He argues that it was the second wave of European punk bands who, being more explicitly politically oriented than the US bands, were very influential in establishing anarchism in the US punk scene during the first half of the 1980s. Anarchism is attractive to punk because it offers progressive political ideals that do not build on hierarchical organizations that pursue the stateist goal of taking over government. In terms of practical politics, punk anarchists maintain an uneasy strategic relationship with left organizations and social movements because of the general disapproval of cadre-led organizations and prominent spokespersons or leaders. Nevertheless, even within the punk anarchist scene there are numerous disputes about anarchist practices such as militancy, property destruction, and violence against police forces.

O'Hara stresses the point that “anarchy does not simply mean no laws, it means no *need* for laws. Anarchy requires individuals to behave responsibly” (78, italics his) and it thus remains impossible to realize Anarchism on a general scale without a prior transformation of people towards anarchist ideals which cannot be forced on them. Following this idea, the punk anarchist scene predominantly focuses its efforts on implementing politics in everyday life choices and practices first. The strategy of aiming for fundamental cultural change through the transformation of one's own life is advanced by the subcultural setting that advances the diffusion of values through the mechanisms of collective identity and ideally culminates into collective action through diffuse culture-based social movements, as described above. These lifestyle politics have been denounced as “lifestyle anarchism” by critics in the tradition of social anarchism such as Murray Bookchin. In his influential book *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm*, he criticizes an individualized anarchism devoid of social objectives and giving in to postmodern imagination, anti-rationalism, desire, plurality, and a disdain of organization and political theories (Kuhn 2008, 134). While his critique is in parts simply expressive of a different political analysis and strategy that largely disregards cultural and mundane politics, it also points out a central problematic in individual anarchism and the punk anarchist scene: the privileged position of the majority of anarchists and punks that primarily derives from their

whiteness. I have already mentioned this issue at several points throughout this thesis and will discuss it in more detail in relation to subcultural self-marginalization at the end of this chapter.

As I already mention in chapter 2.1.2, DIY is probably the most fundamental aspect of punk anarchist praxis, with its origins in punk bands doing independent recording, releasing, and touring which extended to the creation of non-profit and often volunteer-run record stores, show spaces, community centers, and info shops. As Moore (2007) argues, ever since punk, subcultural resistance needs to be understood as DIY cultural *production*. Poletti (2005) uses the term “anti-authoritarian culture” which engages in independent media, activism, graffiti, and squatting. The goal is independence from the culture industry and more effective activism: “From the perspective of most participants in DIY cultures, its value comes from the continued critique of the producer/consumer binarism of commercial culture as enacted through various forms of cultural independence, as well as more vigorous acts of resistance or protest” (185). DIY philosophy has lead to the creation of independent institutions and non-profit businesses which are a staple of most local scenes: bicycle shops, bookstores, people's kitchens, printing businesses, prisoner book programs, health clinics, zine distributors. Of particular importance for many local scenes are bicycle related projects and “bike punx” activism (Furness 2005). Volunteer bicycle repair shops are a hub for many local punk anarchist scenes, as well as regular Critical Mass and women-only “Clitoral Mass” collective rides, theme rides, and using bicycles as the primary mode of transportation to commute and often also when working in the delivery and messaging businesses. *Plan B*, the bicycle collective in New Orleans, has played an important role for the punk anarchist scene and the wider community, especially in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, and all zine writers in my sample have volunteered there at one time and write about it in their zines. Shelley Jackson's zine *Chainbreaker* focuses primarily on bicycle politics, and she has recently published a bicycle repair manual together with Ethan Clark which also reprints of all four issues of her zine (Jackson and Ethan Clark 2008).

The punk anarchist scene features a plethora of objectives and values such as anti-capitalism, anti-sexism, anti-racism, anti-consumerism, veganism, straight edge, as well as the advancement of queer rights, animal rights, environmental preservation, simple living, and primitivism, to name just the most prominent ones (O'Hara 1995; Kuhn 2008). Due to the sheer diversity and breadth of topics and individual differences in prioritization, they sometimes stand in conflict with each other, leading to disputes within the scene or factions as

for example O'Hara's characterization of large parts of the straight edge scene indicates: self-righteous and reactionary, mainly a community of middle class heterosexual macho males. Haenfler's (2006) study of straight edge paints a decidedly more positive picture but still addresses in detail the problematic issues of male dominance and sexism within the scene. Given this complex situation, it is crucial to analyze specific discourses of a particular scene and individual motives as I aim to do in this study.

4.2.2 Post-Punk and New Anarchism

Clark argues that early punk had for the most part only been “simulated ‘anarchy’, the performance of an unruly mob. So long as it could convince or alarm straight people, it achieved the enactment” (2004, 233). Its effectiveness depended on novelty, provocation, and a frightened mainstream. After punk had been commercialized and domesticated, punk stopped being effective as a political tool since it failed to cause moral panic. Consequently, contemporary punk or “post-punk” has turned to the actual practice of anarchy: “punks have found that the ultimate authenticity lies in political action. [...] The threatening pose has been replaced with the actual threat” (234).²⁵ According to Graeber (2004), during the 1990s, anarchist principles such as autonomy, voluntary association, self-organization, mutual aid, and direct democracy have become the basis for organizing in the international and local networks of what is now known as the globalization movement, slowly taking up the role Marxism had played for social movements in the 1960s.

During the 1999 anti-WTO protests in Seattle, the successful blockade of the meeting by activists and the struggles between riot police forces and demonstrators attracted great attention by the mass media. *Newsweek* coined the slogan “The Battle of Seattle” and *Time Magazine* identified the responsible party with their headline “How Organized Anarchists led Seattle Into Chaos”. The label “new anarchism” is a creation of the mainstream media who quickly focussed on the anarchist community in Eugene, OR, as the alleged driving force behind the radical protests. CBS aired a prominent *60 Minutes* reportage titled “The New Anarchists” revolving around the black bloc in Seattle and the anarchists from Eugene who promised the kind of sensational coverage the media was looking for (Kuhn 2008, 32). In fact, as Kuhn (2008) argues, the Eugene contingent was just one group among many anarchists at

²⁵ It is interesting to note that the transformation from punk into post-punk in the political sense discussed here has been a transformation from a subcultural into a countercultural formation in the classic sense of differentiating symbolic vs. political resistance. Even so, on the level of music and style, early punk had a much greater potential to provoke and shock than hardcore ever achieved to (Budde 1997).

the protests, who amounted in total to just a fraction of the tens of thousands of protectors. Yet, as the media concentrated its Seattle coverage on anarchists and the Eugene scene, portraying the anarchists activists as potent and dangerous, the anarchist label gained an enormous popularity among activists, an effect comparable to what had happened after initial reports about British punk. International protests and blockades of meetings of international organizations had already been happening in other countries before and the direct action tactics were mainly imported from Europe, but only in Seattle did they achieve sustained attention of national and international media. The significance of Seattle for the anarchists and the globalization movement in general originates from its unexpected forcefulness and effectiveness within the symbolic center of neoliberal capitalism.

Although the label “new anarchism”, referring to the contemporary anarchist scene as it has gained prominence since the late 1990s, has been coined by the mainstream media, it has also been accepted by many anarchists themselves. In the discourse within the new anarchist scene there have been two strands I find especially interesting in the context of my study. The first is *post-left anarchism* which calls for an autonomous anarchism to disconnect from the traditional left to reject its party politics, hierarchical organizing, and ideological baggage (Kuhn 2008, 182). The second is *post-anarchism*, an academic attempt to develop an updated theory of anarchism with poststructural and postmodern thought centering on non-essential identities, discursive power relations, and a genealogical conception of history (Kuhn 2008, 223). Both trains of thought are relevant for the punk anarchist scene, as they capture its subcultural, creative, and self-organized praxis as well as account for the provisional and performative conceptions of identity.

4.3 Whiteness and Self-Marginalization

The majority of people in the punk anarchist scene and the zine community are white²⁶ and thus enjoy a privileged status in society. At any rate, this applies to all zine writers I interviewed as well as to everyone else I encountered in the New Orleans scene. In addition, many come from a middle-class background. Although it is impossible to arrive at reliable demographics, it seems reasonable enough to describe the majority of zine writers as being

young and the children of professionals, culturally if not financially middle-class. White and raised in a relatively privileged position within the dominant culture, they have since embarked on “careers” of deviance that have moved them to the edges of this society:

26 See photo on page 108 showing a typical group from the local New Orleans and national punk anarchist scene.

embracing downwardly mobile career aspirations, unpopular musical and literary tastes, transgressive ideas about sexuality, unorthodox artistic sensibilities, and a politics resolutely outside the status quo (more often to the left but sometimes to the right). [...] In short, zine writers and readers, although they'd be horrified to be tagged with such a pat term, are what used to be called bohemians. (Duncombe 1997, 8)

Similar claims have been made about the punk anarchist scene in general (Traber 2007; Dylan Clark 2004; Kuhn 2008; MacLeod 1997). Being able to escape racial profiling by authorities, shopkeepers, and security personnel allows more freedom to pursue deviant or illegal activities such as shoplifting, squatting, dumpster diving,²⁷ or train hopping, all of which are popular to varying degrees within punk anarchist scenes. Even so, they have also been discussed and criticized as being part of a romanticized lifestyle ideal which is only available as a choice to people who are young, able bodied, male, and most of all: white (Kuhn 2008, 135). Being a white activist means to have the privilege of picking and abandoning one's struggles at will, while activists of color are often forced to fight against consequences of racism such as police brutality, poverty, and housing (95).

Whiteness and privilege in the punk anarchist scene are an often discussed and recurrent topic in zines. Jen Lorang from Olympia, WA, has published an entire zine of interviews (2007) with people from the Pacific Northwest punk scene about punk subculture, identity, and problems of exclusion in the scene. She calls on the readers to realize and to work on their individual privileges so that the punk scene can become “a place of refuge to *find support* in these life projects, not a place of refuge *from* working on these issues” (70, italics original), as the latter often happens in this predominantly white male heterosexual context.

Whiteness as a cultural, historical, and social construct has become an object of academic interest in the US where critical whiteness studies were established in the early 1990s.²⁸ Critical whiteness studies investigate and expose the normativity of whiteness. However, the full privileges of “being white” are not awarded to everyone with a white complexion as the policing of normative whiteness shows, for example through the derogatory label “white

27 “Dumpster diving” or “dumpstering” refers to the activity of reclaiming food or other goods from trash containers. Besides reducing personal expenses, dumpstering is seen as a practical critique of wastefulness and over-consumption. *Food not Bombs* groups have been giving out free food prepared from dumpstered ingredients since 1980 and are present in many local punk anarchist scenes (Kuhn 2008, 47).

28 Awareness of normative whiteness has of course been raised much earlier than its academic institutionalization. The origin of this discourse is usually pinpointed to the 1970s when African-American feminists criticized the predominantly white feminist movement for assimilating the experiences of women of color into a “neutral” category of “women” without paying attention to the specific oppression they were subjected to (Junker 2005; Kuhn 2008).

trash” for less educated and poor whites (Newitz and Wray 1997). White ethnicity needs to be studied as a racial marker, social position, and cultural identity just as it is done with “non-white” ethnicities, with the crucial difference that whiteness entails a privileged status (Junker 2005). Since whiteness has been historically constructed as universal and general, it is often seen as unmarked or invisible in the sense of there not being a distinct white culture. Traber (2007) addresses this problem and offers a working definition of whiteness that I share:

Whiteness studies points out how the race's invisibility sustains it as hegemonic norm, but invisibility is not nonexistence. It is the invisibility of white *ideology*, not culture, that buttresses it as an unseen, unquestionable common sense. I use white(ness) as referring specifically to a hegemonic *dominant* identity, one diffused throughout the social formation, thereby noting the constricted options accorded the values, standards, and expectations associated with “being white”. (Traber 2007, 15, italics original)

The misconceptualization of white culture as unmarked and hence *unremarkable*, goes in tandem with non-white “ethnic” cultures being regarded as exotic, authentic, and desirable by white people. As much as white identity is defined *ex negativo* identities of color, it has also been attractive for whites to borrow and co-opt select practices and styles from these other cultural identities in the search for individual difference, for example from traditionally African-American hip hop subculture. While for most people this remains restricted to the symbolic level of subcultural consumption, some target a more substantially liminal identity by voluntarily assuming what they perceive to be the authentic conditions of everyday life of the Other.

As part of a study of individualism and whiteness in US-American culture, Traber (2007) examines how a group of white punks in Los Angeles adopted the “lifestyle” of poor urban people of color by moving into a derelict inner-city housing project with the intention to escape their suburban middle-class background and to renounce the privileges it endows them with. However, they miss the point that they are able to make this choice exactly because of these privileges: “White straight males [...] are granted more license [...] to focus on the self without a concern for the community. White males have had the freedom to pick up and leave at will when the impulse strikes” (6). One cannot ignore the structural constraints that limit the power and control people of color have over their lives and henceforth any “treatment of border subjectivities equating white subjects and the Others they mimic as having comparable opportunities for subject (re)formation is problematic at best, naive at worst, since the latter has notably less control over their life-options” (18). Self-marginalization depends on the Other to have a distinct stable identity that can be assumed to transgress the white identity one chooses to leave. This means that the Other is denied the agency to construct or modify their

identity while at the same time being turned into an exotic signifier to serve the interests of the self-fashioned outlaws. According to Traber, there is a potentiality to be considered in self-marginalization since “denying the absolute authority of white bourgeois culture” is a necessary first step towards resistance and liberation (161). Yet being alienated is not enough, Traber argues for radical multiplicity to fight totalization through weakening hierarchies and demystifying discourses. Abandoning a transcendental and essentialist conceptualization of the self leads to the recognition that “identities, like narratives, are localized and functional, personal and provisional, and this may have a chance to prevent the violence of having a naturalized sense of self worshiped as the one and only Truth” (162). Here again we find a critique against totalization and the requirement for coherent self-identity which I have already explored in Butler's theories. In the above quote, Traber also explicitly includes narratives into his discussion, bringing us back to the focus of my thesis: self-narratives and narrative identity construction in personal zines. I will study the potential of personal zines to provide a space for narratives in Traber's sense: localized, functional, personal, and provisional.

5 Identity and Politics in the New Orleans Scene

In the foreword to the pre-Katrina New Orleans zine anthology *Stories Care Forgot*, editor Ethan Clark describes the significance of the compilation to him:

[T]hese zines tell the story of a time, a place, and a group of people who were struggling to follow their ideals and figure out their place in a troubled and magical city. To me, these pages are the story of my coming-of-age as told by the people who inspired and influenced me during the waning years of my teenagerdom and into my early twenties. None of the authors of “Stories Care Forgot” are from New Orleans. They are people who picked it as their home, the place where they could see just how much could be done. (2006, 2)

This quote captures quite well the idea and direction of my own investigation. I am aware, as is Clark, that looking at a relatively small sample of zine writings from a specific time and place cannot yield more than a very subjective and particular perspective. However, this is not a shortcoming, but the very aim of my investigation: to study the subjective narratives produced in the context of a subcultural scene, situated in a specific locale, in order to explore the motives of why these people have moved to that specific place and which ideals they pursue in what way. As Hope Amico notes in her interview, while the zine selection in the anthology only provides “a glimpse into just a section of the subculture” (2008, 9:00), it still is representative of the New Orleans punk anarchist scene. The stories these people relate in their zines have not only been inspiring and influential for people in the local scene, like Clark confirms in his own case, but throughout the punk anarchist scene in the US, given the popularity of zines from New Orleans and the legendary allurement of the place itself.

5.1 The New Orleans Scene

As I have already discussed, subcultural scenes are tied to a strong sense of place, and the special appeal of New Orleans to the punk anarchist scene comes up time and time again in interviews and zines. It consists of many factors—a closer study into these parameters and determinants of the subcultural appeal of the city would make for an interesting research in its own right. At the most basic level are affordable housing (less so post-Katrina), the warm climate, and the large informal employment sector tied to the tourism industry which provides ample opportunities to earn a living as street performer or bike delivery person that are in tune with punk employment ethics. New Orleans features a permissive celebratory culture, manifest in Mardi Gras, the French Quarter, second line parades, and relaxed public drinking

laws. The rich hybrid cultural heritage based on the mixing of French and British colonizers with African-American and Native-American culture is present in the buildings, street names, cuisine, music, and celebrations. This is perceived as a unique “original culture” that is very conducive to the “vibrant sense of being” in the city (Sparky Taylor in: Biel 2008, 64:30). The city's economic dependence on tourism has led to generally preservative zoning laws. At least before Katrina, New Orleans was seen as “unapproachable” for investors (Taylor 2008, 3:15) and the few large-scale developments such as the Superdome football stadium, convention center, hotels, and casinos have been mostly limited to the business district without affecting the French Quarter and older residential neighborhoods.²⁹

The resulting image of New Orleans and the local scene, substantially created and transported through its zines, is that of an extraordinary “wild” place of debauchery and where there is always something exciting happening and to do (Taylor 2008, 16:50). To many punks who were raised in a protective suburban middle class environment, New Orleans promises to fulfill dreams of a radically different place of almost revolutionary opportunities to realize their ideal community and politics. New Orleans is often seen as a “low tech” place (Jackson 2006, 1) resulting from its old buildings, lack of urban development, and the poverty of the people—in effect establishing a general DIY quality of the whole place, not just within punk subculture. Ethan Clark says that in fact not many punk rock bands are started in New Orleans because there is already a native “scrappy and DIY culture” (2008, 41:35).³⁰ The life of most locals appears very similar to the style of the punk anarchist community so that its oppositional posture does not make as much sense there as it does in more affluent places.

Alas, this idealized image of New Orleans stands in stark contrast to the reality for most New Orleans residents: living in an impoverished, gritty, dangerous, crime-ridden city with deeply-entrenched racism, a desolate public infrastructure, and, being largely built below sea level, vulnerable to catastrophic flooding, as it happened most recently in 2005 following hurricane Katrina. The zine writers I have interviewed are well aware of their privilege of living in New Orleans by choice and that their lives, as much as they are also in danger of

29 A notable and revealing exception was the construction of the elevated interstate I-10. It cuts through Treme, the oldest African-American neighborhood of New Orleans, and destroyed the tree-lined Claiborne Avenue, effectively separating the neighborhood from the French Quarter (Clark 2006, 72).

30 Elaborating on this interesting observation, he says that Balkan-style brass music is the most popular with punk kids in New Orleans at the moment. To highlight the overall futility of the oppositional punk stance given the existing popular culture in New Orleans, he offers the comparison: “as if living in the Paris Commune and drawing anarchist symbols on your shirts and be like: ‘fuck you!’” (Clark 2008, 44:00).

being mugged or shot, are still much more secure, comfortable, and stable than those of most of the rest of the population. Structural discrimination and gentrification processes are a recurring theme in the zines, as most zine writers connect their privileges to whiteness and understand community activism, especially working with children from disadvantaged families—which in New Orleans almost always implies an African-American background—as an important part of realizing their political ideals. In the interview, John Gerken says that structural discrimination, especially racism, is much more “on the surface” in New Orleans and that this is “valuable” for politically minded people like him who live there by choice because it confronts them with the realities of racism and forces them to acknowledge their own privileged position (2008, 17:00).

5.2 “The chemistry of place”:³¹ New Orleans as Home

Hope Amico dedicates almost a complete zine to the process of deciding whether to move to New Orleans and the particularities of the place (2003). After her first extended stay in New Orleans and the ensuing deliberations about living there permanently, she writes:

Would I stay in the crazy city of so many legends and Mardi Gras stories [...]? I missed my friends and my p.o. box. I missed knowing what to expect. But giving that up had brought me here, to the city where I felt strangely, instantly comfortable. But the streets are paved in puke and sin and no one stays long enough to see what's left the next day [...]. [T]his city is your fair-weather friend. It will reassure, coax you to stay. It'll buy you whiskey despite your insistence that you don't drink but tonight you do. It will make you forget that you have put Texas between you and most of your friends. (2003)

It is obvious that as much as she feels connected to her current home and her friends there, New Orleans is very enticing to her because of the legendary stories of the place that are circulated in the punk subculture, a new home that promises to help her to break away from established habits and realize the change in life she is apparently looking for. Nevertheless, she remains guarded about the decision to move to New Orleans as she clearly sees how its overwhelming seductiveness is in a delicate balance with its dangerousness, carelessness, and excess. In her characterization of the city she describes it as if it were an actual person, the proverbial “fair-weather friend” who tries to persuade you into giving in to that secretly harbored desire for drunk debauchery you very well know is irresponsible. New Orleans will make you forget about the friends you have only to abandon you the minute you might in fact need to rely on her, it is an inherently unreliable place.

31 Taken from the tagline of Hope Amico's zine *Keep Fighting, Keep Loving* #6 (2006, 3).

Amico understands New Orleans as a place that has a transformative influence on her identity. During the decision-making process about moving to the city, she poses herself the question: “Who am I becoming here?” (2003), indicating that she bases her decision on the projected trajectory of how her self-identity will evolve given the circumstances she expects to encounter in New Orleans. This is an interesting take on identity formation: she balances the assertion of reflexivity and agency in evaluating and deciding to move to a new place with a sense of passivity in giving in to the inescapable influence it will have on her. In her next zine, after she has moved to New Orleans, she quotes a friend: “Home isn't a place, or just a place, but a process that occurs within a location” (2004), affirming that place is not a geographical marker but represents process and thus implies change.

Over the years, the idea of a peculiar and difficult balance between opportunity and danger remains part of Amico's accounts of living in New Orleans. This paradox is well expressed when she writes: “I have said that what I love about this city is that anything can happen. For better or worse anything does happen” (2007, 47). She was looking for change and personal transformation when she moved to the city, and in this respect “anything can happen” represents a positive quality, the promise of new impressions and unexpected opportunities. However, as she already realized in her initial remarks, some possibilities are better left unexplored and some experiences are better avoided, such as falling victim to a crime or an accident:

Seems like New Orleans is the luckiest or the worst place for anyone. I've always felt luck here [...]. But I've also been hit by a car then mugged twice a year and a half later. [...] I was reassured that this happens to everyone here but that isn't comforting. This isn't normal. It fills me with a tense fear I can't shake. [...] I decided once again to stay. To not be afraid of complex situations. (2006, 27)

Here the theme of the delicate balance is further radicalized into the idea that New Orleans is a place of extremes where either the best or the worst things happen to people. From her experience of living there, she has now been forced to realize that its dangers are not just vice and liquor, but do in fact amount to traumatic and live-threatening situations. The reaction of her peers exposes a normative discourse within the scene that states one must accept these dangers as normal if one wants to be part of the New Orleans punk anarchist subculture, a part of which entails risking harm by abiding by its common practices such as riding bicycles and living in more dangerous parts of the city. Although Amico is traumatized by her negative experiences and it does not read as if this could be offset by the luck she had, she still decides to stay, motivated, as I would propose, by her dedication to the political values held by herself

and the subculture. Crime and accidents are understood as resulting from structural poverty and a car-centric transportation culture. While mainstream ideology suggests to avoid these threats by avoiding poorer parts of the city, living in more affluent neighborhoods, and driving a car, punk subculture explicitly refuses these options, even though and in fact because they are available to most members because of their privileged background. In her description of the situation as being “complex”, Amico acknowledges the stress this puts individuals in and the limits of what one is able to endure, especially when escaping the situation is an option. Her decision to stay and confront the complexities of life in New Orleans is the result of her strive to align her individual choices with her values and the collective demands of the subculture.

In his account of moving to New Orleans, John Gerken relates similar observations about the requirement for personal commitment in the face of adverse experiences:

When I first moved here I feel like friends were a little wary, watching to see what I took into account, what I listened for, how I moved through this complicated place. Waiting to see how I took it once it wasn't just a new romance, once I encountered some of the difficulties of living here, the complex questions and punches to the gut that New Orleans is sure to deliver. (2007, 43)

He describes how, as a newcomer to the New Orleans scene, people were watching him carefully, viewing his residence in the city as only tentative until he would prove to be able to navigate its complexities and difficulties. Gerken's characterization of New Orleans is similar to Amico's: an initial tempting “romance” followed by “punches to the gut” that might very well lead you to abandon the city, resulting in a certain cautiousness of accepting new people into the scene because they might be gone quickly. The prevailing conception of New Orleans seems to be that it is a tough place that is not for the faint of heart, and that one needs to earn a place in the local punk scene by establishing a commitment to the city after having encountered its harsh realities. This rite of passage is probably an important factor in sustaining the local community and the extraordinary emotional attachment to New Orleans, as it is expressed by Shelley Jackson:

For those who don't know me or others from New Orleans, there are few places that inspire the type of devotion to a city like New Orleans does. It's the kind of place people love to tell stories about. But they are different than tales of other cities. Like the difference between telling stories about some acquaintance and telling stories about a long time lover. They are more close, more intimate. (2006, 6)

By using the strong term “devotion”, invoking images of religious worship, Jackson stresses her exceptional relationship to New Orleans. According to her statement, not only is this the case for virtually everyone in the local scene, but it is also evident to anyone who knows

someone living there because they love to tell stories about the place. These stories have a distinctive quality that she compares to the closeness and intimacy between “long time lovers”. Her choice of trope is similar to Amico and Gerken in referring to the city and its community in terms usually applied to people and this is indicative of the highly emotional and irrational bond. However, whereas Amico uses the idiom “fair-weather friend” to refer to the carelessness and unreliability of the place and Gerken states that one needs to go beyond the initial noncommittal and uncritical “romance” with it, Jackson compares it a “long time lover”, describing a relationship that is both settled and dedicated. This might have to do with the fact that she has been living longer in the city than Amico and Gerken.

5.3 “We are all packages of stories”:³² Narrative and Identity

The importance of stories for the zine writers has already become apparent in the quotes above. Knowledge about New Orleans is produced, circulated, and acquired through stories about the place. The subcultural position from which they are told is very important here, and John Gerken emphasizes the need for “keeping the stories circulating, because our stories are among those that are not often told. Certainly not with the truth and style that we tell them with. They're forgotten, radical, slandered, and dangerous” (2002). He understands the narratives of the punk subculture, “*our* stories”, as being marginalized because they deviate from the dominant culture and are perceived as dangerous in their radicalism. Gerken calls for these subaltern stories to be actively kept alive and circulated. Since he also expresses a sense of subcultural ownership of these stories it is unclear if he would in fact appreciate their diffusion into mainstream culture where they are in danger of being ridiculed, appropriated, and tampered with, or if the semi-public zine medium is in fact the only adequate way to transport them. His emphasis on “truth” and “style” as distinctive and characteristic qualities of these stories hints at the possibility that their deviance from the mainstream is not so much in the values they communicate, but in the very way they do this—or rather that it is the honesty, immediacy, and intimacy of these narratives that makes them valuable. This idea of communication can also be found in Hope Amico's explanation of her motivations to write zines:

Why do I write a zine? Because [I] want to talk with you about something. Why do I travel? Because someone has something [different] to tell me. The opinions of my neighbors are not invalid. Some days, I do accept the invitation from a stranger. (2003)

32 Shelley Jackson in Hope Amico's *Keep Loving, Keep Fighting* #4 (2004).

The fundamental theme here is conversation. To her, writing a zine is a way to initiate an exchange with others. She directly addresses her audience by writing that she wants to “talk to *you*”, inviting them to respond. As I have shown earlier in this paper, zines have always been a medium inviting reader response through letter writing or publishing zines themselves. What is interesting in her statement, and this mirrors and expands on my interpretation of Gerken above, is her interest in a direct mode of communication and especially in learning about the particular experiences of others that are outside of her subcultural context, the “stranger” and the “neighbors”. She stresses that their opinions are “not invalid”, arguing against the often exclusionary and elitist tendencies in subcultural formations, and arguing for transgressing the borders of peer groups and status groups—even physically by means of travel—and to engage with the ideas and realities of other people.

The cultural connotations of talking to strangers and neighbors are important here: while engaging with a stranger hints at chance, fatefulness, sometimes even romance, but also dangerousness, connecting with one's neighbor is arguably rooted in Christian and communitarian traditions (Bellah et al. 1985). However, these genuinely US-American ideals are usually understood as endangered or even having vanished in today's society. In the context of the punk subculture in New Orleans, the revival of the community ideal represents a novel take on an old tradition that is informed by a different politics. It aims at the reestablishment of a rooted and supportive urban community, but this is not understood to be limited to white punk kids—which would essentially only reproduce the concept of the gate community—but extends to include the local African-American community. Struggling with realizing these ideals given the realities of privileged whiteness, racism, and involvement in gentrification processes are recurrent themes in the zines.

Interaction with others and relating life-narratives through personal zines are recognized as an important tool in the formation of self-identity. John Gerken writes:

I can tell you about who I am, I can try to figure out for myself who I am, by telling about how the world around me is. [...] In conversation, in true conversation with someone else, is how the world is made sense of. [...] And so that's also why I tell stories, to reflect these people and to see my own reflections. In telling, maybe I can pull out the meanings, string all the moments together and see what makes sense. Boil down the amalgamation and see what's me. (2002)

His understanding of narrative identity construction reflects many aspects of the theories I discuss in chapter 3. Gerken describes self-identity as a narrative performance, as telling others “who I am” by giving an account of oneself, as well as in self-reflexivity. These narratives are influenced by the social environment and identity always contains “reflections”

of other people. Communication and narratives are instrumental and integral to the process of deriving meaning and making sense of “all the moments” that happen. To Gerken, narratives are a way to create coherence by “stringing together” the discrete events his life and then to consolidate them into an “amalgamation”, or, as I propose to read it, to find closure. At the end of this narrative process Gerken expects to “see what's me”, to find his self-identity. His conception of identity as the product of social interaction and narrative emplotment is inherently non-essential.

Shelley Jackson states a similar narrative identity concept when she writes: “We are all packages of stories, lives, with each our own inner communities” (in: Amico 2004). In contrast to Gerken, she is not so much looking for a consolidated and coherent narrative, but accepts that identity is made up of “packages” containing a number of stories. I interpret her reference to “inner communities” as a further indication of the complex heterogeneous and contingent nature of the self, consisting of multiple coexisting narrative strains that might very well be competing in the process of making meaning. She continues to write that the experiences which factor in the formation of her identity are either “chosen” or “have come by accident”, hence identity is the joint result of both her agency and the structural conditions and social context of her being. I think this idea of situated choice is comparable to how Hope Amico describes that one might make a conscious decision in choosing a place to live, even with a specific expectation of the effects this choice will have on one's self-identity, but that ultimately it is impossible to predict the transformations that will occur. Both Jackson and Amico have a particular idea of the person they want to be. The process of becoming that very person informs their choices and is the basis on which they retrospectively interpret their lives. When Jackson continues to write that she is “hopefully taking steps closer to being the me I have always wished I will someday be”, she is acknowledging that while she has the capacity to make informed choices about her life, the effects of each single decision are impossible to determine beforehand. After all, she can only speculate about “all those paths I chose not to take”, about how she cannot assume complete control of her life, but still her choices do have incalculable and sweeping effects. Amico captures this dilemma in poetical words: “I have a million possible futures letting all but one become ghosts” (2004). The metaphor of the ghosts representing the abandoned possibilities works well to convey the idea that they maintain a haunting presence in life.

5.4 “This is about the way we live”:³³ Politics and Identity

So far, I have shown that the zine writers have a non-essential and constructive understanding of identity formation in which narratives play an important role, that furthermore they are well aware of the complex and contingent consequences of their choices, and that they try to both direct and interpret their lives in accordance with becoming a specific person. Being part of the punk anarchist scene, this ideal identity is significantly informed by political values. Personal success is often measured in terms of accomplishment of political goals, similar to Teske's (1997) identity construction approach to political activism that I introduce in chapter 3.3. This is a difficult process, as political and personal requirements may conflict and the integration of collective and individual identities is sometimes hard to attain. John Gerken describes his struggle: “I get down on myself for not figuring out and doing *the one thing* that is most effective, meaningful, and rewarding to me. [...] I feel guilty for allowing myself simple pleasures when there is so much *work* to be done” (2002, italics original). He is apparently disappointed about not fulfilling his own expectations and passes a quite harsh judgment on himself for enjoying “simple pleasures” instead of completing necessary work. His position comes close to the rigor of Protestant work ethic and Puritan asceticism, especially when taking into account his feeling of guilt. While this might be surprising at first, considering that these are ethics of economic and religious values, it does indeed make sense if we accept that the basis of contemporary personal ethics is formed by individually defined personal and subcultural values. These values originate from the philosophy of expressive individualism and self-empowerment, and have replaced utilitarian and religious values to an increasing degree (see chapter 3.1). Also, the feeling of guilt when the enjoyment of pleasures is not thoroughly balanced by activism is rooted in the awareness of structural privilege that is fundamental to punk anarchist politics.³⁴ Yet, Gerken's use of italics might also indicate a measure of ironic self-awareness of the extremeness with which he judges himself, giving his statement a certain tongue-in-cheek quality.

Personal integrity and political accountability to the scene are important topics for Gerken. In his zine, he narrates the story of how he once told a man to leave the *Plan B* bicycle project because he had made a racist remark. The man defended himself by saying that he had only

33 Hope Amico in *Keep Loving, Keep Fighting* #2 (2003).

34 During the interview, Gerken worries if he is working hard enough for political goals considering his comfortable social status that allows him to “just hang out and play music” whenever he wants to without facing existential problems (2008, 44:00).

“slipped” and was not a racist. In a moral of the story of sorts, Gerken reflects on the event and questions his own behavior:

It was an awful experience [...] because it all resonated very strongly for me. I've slipped, and consistently. It's the times when I think I've got things figured out that I fuck up the worst. I let myself get complacent. [...] I believe in accountability to the community. That's why I'm writing this. It's difficult, because it's not an easily public issues; [...] because I'm scared of your reaction in a variety of ways. (2002)

He admits to have slipped himself and criticizes his self-righteous posture. Since this behavior is difficult to reconcile with his political self-identity, he poses a searching question to the reader: “Does making a violin mean one is a Violin Maker?”, meaning: do racist remarks make you a racist person? His question brings to mind Butler's discussion of hate speech (1997a). In my understanding of her theory of performativity, identity is fundamentally constituted through speech acts and there is no pre-linguistic intentionality, therefore using racist language does in effect make one a racist. It is not possible to excuse oneself by saying that one did not intend to make a racist remark, to just have slipped, and thus to retain the proclaimed non-racist identity. Even a single instance of a racist remark is significant through the power of citationality in its invocation of the general racist discourse. Gerken appears to think along the same lines. His response is to assume responsibility for his mistakes and to make himself accountable to the community, that is within the reaches of his zine, to counter his complacency. Although he expresses fear for the reactions of his peers, he has a positive outlook on the possibilities of working on oneself assisted by the community's critical support: “We forgive each other and ourselves and offer grace and strength along with a critical eye” (2002).

The theme of support within the scene is also prominent in Hope Amico's writings: “We fight in the streets but we also build our homes not like fortresses, but as support centers” (2003). This statement is part of her discussing effective forms of political protest in which she emphasizes the importance of basic social activities as crucial for providing a supportive environment in the scene that enables people to protest and do direct actions in the first place—and, as I would add, to enable the kind of self-improvement Gerken envisions. This idea of a subcultural scene functioning as an infrastructure for political action is similar to the analysis of Haunss and Leach (2004) I present in chapter 4.1.3.

Amico's concept of activism and politics is decidedly non-dogmatic and based on the importance of individual choice. She explains that she is not trying to tell people how to live politically correct through her zine: “This is not about choosing side of an issue this is not

about how to be an activist or how to do the right thing because I won't tell you what that is" (2003). To her, it is important that people realize they do in fact have options in how they live their life, as limited and small-scale as these choices might be: "The realization that you have options, some control." The resulting politics seek to integrate political values into "the way we live". In consequence, political concerns become an inseparable part of life and cannot be relegated to part-time activism. One of her examples is food politics, and she is careful to point out that a vegan diet is not about "eating healthy" but represents a profound and radical choice that aims to account for all the interconnected issues of production, consumption, and environmental impact. This distinction in motive is crucial because eating healthy is also well established in mainstream culture where it represents a depoliticized choice that is limited to the personal benefit of the consumer without any further consideration of its wider implications.

Shelley Jackson's account of how using a bicycle as her primary mode of transportation has had a significant impact on her life exemplifies how a small and rather simple personal change might hold the potential for greater social change:

[T]he bicycle showed me how to live more simply, and that life could be less complicated, that I could slow down, have less obligations [...]. It has made me feel more socially responsible, made me more aware of excess, privilege, of the tiny bubbles that people create for themselves to live in. [...] I have a hope that if this happens for enough of us there would be a revolution [...] where cooperation, simple mechanics and fresh air could work against the capitalism, technology and fear that threatens to wreck this world. (2008a, 133)

She describes how the bicycle has not only made her personal life more fulfilling in numerous ways but how it also raised her awareness about social conditions, ultimately leading to her conviction that this change on the micro level, if implemented by a large enough number of people, can have effects on the macro level of politics. Her idea of "revolution" is not based on political ideologies, collective organization, or militant action, but instead builds upon everyday practices and empowering DIY skills that are both positive for the individual as well as contributing towards social change. Even though Jackson seems to be sure of the inherently revolutionary potential of bicycles, she asks her readers to closely examine their involvement: "Is it a fashion statement, or a passion?" (2008a, 224). While a "fashion statement" would just represent an apolitical consumerist position, "passion" is seen as indicative of true dedication and commitment to the cause. Her distinction is similar to Amico's differentiation of motives behind a choice of diet. Jackson goes even as far as inviting a fundamental discussion on the potential of DIY bicycle culture to contribute towards social change: "Do you think bike

culture is inherently a DIY culture? Do you think it works to smash our capitalist upbringings, or do you think it is just another part of consumer America?” This illustrates her appreciation of critical discourse within the scene and her awareness of how the capitalist system is very potent and successful in turning initially progressive lifestyle choices into mere consumer options.

The complete absence of traditional political ideologies of the Left such as Socialism or Communism in these texts is quite remarkable given the thoroughly political nature of the reflections on personal values and choices. Conventional political theories do not seem to be of importance. Instead, it is the personal political ideals that provide motivation and that are understood as fundamental parts of self-identity and inseparable from “the way we live” (Amico 2003), everyday choices and conduct. When activism does take place in an institutional context, it is not a formal social movement organization but a self-organized collective, such as the *Plan B* bicycle community project. The accounts presented here fit well into the conceptual framework of diffuse social movement politics based on a shared culture and collective identity that I discuss in chapter 4.

5.5 “We are the forerunners of gentrification”:³⁵ Privilege

As it is the case in the punk anarchist scene in general, the activists in New Orleans generally enjoy a privileged social status. They live in the city by choice, do not face existential problems, and are by and large in the position to pursue a personally fulfilling life. Most importantly, the punk community is almost exclusively white, whereas the majority of New Orleans residents is not, in particular the people living in poverty.³⁶ John Gerken addresses the split between the two communities:

So a lot of the time, in the circles I find myself, when we say community we're talking about the mostly-white, punk-affiliated DIY community that has elected to share these values. [...] And that's okay, if you say community bike shop or book store and you mean by the punks, for the punks. But for one, it's important to think about physical location and your effect on the neighborhood around you. And two, think about if you mean any broader community—if you mean to include or try to make welcome the neighborhood around you. (2006)

He points out the problematic of using the label “community” for institutions of the punk scene that are located in neighborhoods with an ethnic and cultural composition different from

35 Hope Amico in *Keep Loving, Keep Fighting* #6 (2006).

36 See the photo on page 108 showing a typical group of local and national “bicycle punks”, and the photo of Hope Amico and John Gerken with children from a *Plan B* bicycle repair class on page 107.

the white punk DIY scene.³⁷ Even if these projects were only meant to be “by the punks, for the punks” as he suggests some people might understand them, they still have effects on the surrounding neighborhood. His second point addresses the need to create spaces that are accessible and welcoming to people outside of the immediate subculture if that is the actual political ideal behind community projects—and this is clearly only a rhetorical question for Gerken because he states repeatedly in his zines and in the interview that *Plan B* is a project that intends to serve the community beyond the punk kids. He also teaches a bicycle repair class, an after-lunch elective at a progressive charter school that intentionally selects the majority of its students from households below poverty level. He explains: “the school is important to me as an example of grassroots action and commitment. Working there helps me put down roots in the community” (2006), and the community he refers to is definitely not the white punk scene.

The issue of gentrification as an unintended but inevitable effect of privileged punks moving into less affluent neighborhoods is also a concern for Hope Amico: “Our presence is arguably invasive and though it is in the history of all cities for neighborhoods to change, we are the forerunners of gentrification” (2006, 24). By criticizing their presence in the neighborhood as “invasive”, she contextualizes it as part of a greater pattern of privileged mobility that is going to have a negative impact on the neighborhood. She establishes a distinction between herself, who is only a “forerunner” of gentrification, and the people who will follow her, the true facilitators of gentrification, who are more affluent and lack her political integrity. Nevertheless, she is aware that to be a forerunner of gentrification is to play a critical role in the overall process of gentrification. The Faubourg Marigny and Bywater neighborhoods where Amico and Gerken are living and the community projects *Plan B* and *The Iron Rail* are located have seen significantly increasing rents over the past years, even more so after Katrina because these neighborhoods experienced only minor damage.

Shelley Jackson addresses privilege on a global scale with a comparative study of bicycle usage in the US and India. In conclusion, she writes:

Because of Western privilege and prosperity, biking becomes a choice, not a necessity, for most people. Because it is a CHOICE, it becomes a political statement to ride a bike for transportation. It is a political statement because it is viewed as some kind of sacrifice to bike, because it is seemingly more difficult than maintaining and [acquiring] a vehicle

37 It is interesting to see Gerken referring to a “punk-affiliated DIY community” which I interpret as reflecting the emancipation of DIY philosophy from punk subculture to the effect that nowadays, one might use “DIY” instead of “punk” as the primary identifier for the scene. This represents the shift in focus from symbolic resistance to political action in punk subculture.

like a car. [...] I do think the ability to make such political statements gives us the responsibility to make them wisely and humbly. (2008a, 157)

Choice is enabled by privilege and therefore to exert choice is a political act. Riding a bicycle by choice instead of driving a car is a strong political statement in the US because it is understood as a sacrifice. The more privileged you are, the greater the responsibility to make these political choices. In her zine, Jackson connects her observations from India to the local situation in New Orleans where people are forced to use bicycles out of material poverty as well. Therefore, her decision to ride a bicycle and to volunteer at the community bicycle project are political statements. When I asked her about that specific piece of writing during the interview, she complained about the fact that no reader of her zine had ever commented on it before and how that has been very disappointing to her because it begs the question: “if young punk kids don't get the point, how much are other people not getting it” (Jackson 2008b, 44:00). She questions the efficiency of subcultural politics for privileged subjects who need not concern themselves with uncomfortable choices if they do not want to. Mainstream culture extends a persuasive invitation to abandon alternative ways of life and to assimilate, in particular to white activists: “As a white person, dominant culture continually holds the door open to me, beckoning, with forgiving smile and candy in hand” (Gerken 2006). Gerken's personal strategy to counter this threat is the assertion of radical difference: “I've got a Koo Koo the Bird Girl haircut and no money, I ride a bicycle everywhere and have a penchant for drag [...]. I don't think dominant culture is going to be knocking down my door anytime soon.” But is this strategy really effective, in particular when taking into account Traber's (2007) critique of self-marginalization in the Los Angeles punk community (see chapter 4.3)? The crucial difference is that the zine writers I study are very conscious of their privilege and the resulting complicity in harmful processes such as gentrification. They know they will continue to profit from their whiteness even when assuming a subcultural lifestyle and address this dilemma by emphasizing the need for awareness and personal accountability. While not representing a solution to the problem of whiteness and privilege in the strict sense, their concept of close integration of political values, self-identity, and tangible political action in everyday life goes quite a long way towards implementing on a small scale the fundamental cultural change that is necessary to overcome racism and structural discrimination.

6 Hurricane Katrina

When hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans on August 29th 2005, the insufficiently engineered levee system failed disastrously, allowing the storm surge to flood 80% of the city. More than 100,000 residents who had been unable to evacuate on their own were trapped in shelters, hospitals, nursing homes and on rooftops. Even as people were slowly moved to dry ground by search and rescue teams, they ended up stranded by the ten thousands on levees, highway overpasses and in the downtown Superdome and Convention Center without sufficient food supplies, sanitary facilities, and medical attention. Trapped in a dysfunctional city unable to provide even the most basic services and denied refuge in the mostly undamaged neighboring Jefferson Parish, just across the Mississippi River, flood victims were desperately pleading for help on the national media. The public watched the events unfold in disbelief at the slow and inadequate government response and the “third world” imagery that appeared out of place to them. It would take several days before a large-scale evacuation commenced, creating diasporas of displaced New Orleans citizens all over the country (Chester Hartman and Squires 2006; Heerden 2006; McQuaid and Schleifstein 2006; Brookings Institution 2005).

Katrina was the most destructive and second-deadliest hurricane in US history, leaving over 1,000 people dead in New Orleans alone, and hundreds more in the Gulf region. By June 2008, almost three years after Katrina, New Orleans had regained only 72% of its pre-storm population with significant parts of the city still devastated and largely uninhabited. Rebuilding proceeds unevenly, depending on the level of flooding and (former) residents' economic condition. An especially hard-hit area is planning district eight, comprising of the Lower Ninth Ward and Holy Cross neighborhoods, where by January 2008 just 19% of its pre-storm active residences had been recovered. The Lower Ninth Ward is also the poorest part of the city with 36% of its residents living in poverty pre-Katrina. Quite significantly, 98% of them were of African-American origin (Chester Hartman and Squires 2006; GNOCDC 2000b, 2000a; GNOCDC and Brookings Institution 2008).

The history of New Orleans is rather typical for a major Southern city in respect to a history of slavery, racism, segregation, “white flight” to the suburbs, and de-industrialization, factors that have established poor inner-city neighborhoods with largely African-American residents in many other places across the country as well. Pre-Katrina, 67% of the New

Orleans population was African-American, with 35% of them living in poverty. This drastic confluence of race and class became inescapably apparent in the media images of flood victims and evacuees. The 100,000 New Orleans residents who were trapped in the city after the storm were almost exclusively African-American, a fact television commentators struggled with: people taking supplies from shops were being labeled as either “looting” or “finding food”, depending on the color of their skin. Large segments of the national public seemed surprised by the persistent effects of racism that Katrina had brought (back) to their attention (Lavelle and Feagin 2006; Giroux 2006; Harriford and Thompson 2006; Jones-Deweever and Heidi Hartman 2006; Ruscher 2006; Sommers et al. 2006).

New Orleans has a history of flooding and is known to be highly at risk should a hurricane come close. In a book on disaster and risk published the year before Katrina, New Orleans serves as a case study: “Given its coastal situation and its location between a large lake and the Mississippi River, a direct hit on New Orleans would cost hundreds of billions of dollars and probably take thousands of lives” (Wisner et al. 2004, 248). In fact, the storm path illustrated in the book predicts Katrina almost exactly as a close miss to the East of the city. Wisner et al. also point out that hurricane relief operations in the US are notorious for their discrimination against low-income people (244). The fact that hurricane Katrina and its aftermath happened almost exactly as predicted and still authorities and residents have failed to adequately prepare for and manage it proofs the central point of their book: what is commonly called a “natural” disaster has in most cases an overwhelmingly social causation. People are at risk of falling victim to a disaster to the degree that they are vulnerable to a potential hazard. Vulnerability is defined as “the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of natural hazard” (11). Obviously, levels of vulnerability are unevenly distributed throughout the population and are “determined by social systems and power, not by natural forces” (7). This discrimination happens along the lines of class, gender, ethnicity, age, ability, immigration status and so forth.

The city of New Orleans as a whole is highly at risk of being hit by a storm because of its location close to the Gulf coast. However, the vulnerability to flooding differs by neighborhood according to how deep they are built below sea level, as in fact most of New Orleans is, the quality of the surrounding levees and the location in relation to the coast, Lake Pontchartrain, the Mississippi River, and artificial waterways and drainage canals. Where people live and their resulting risk is for the most part determined by socio-economic factors,

as the high concentration of poverty in the Lower Ninth Ward shows. On the more individual level, people differ in their capacity to afford and have the means for evacuation, coping with the disaster and its aftermath, and to return and rebuild their homes or pay rent. In the case of hurricane Katrina, the actual disaster for New Orleans was not the storm, which did not cause much damage since it missed the city, but that too many people had not been able to evacuate, the flooding of the city due to poorly engineered levees, and the mismanaged relief operations. A collection of academic articles on Katrina is thus aptly titled *There Is No Such Thing As a Natural Disaster* (Chester Hartman and Squires 2006).

6.1 Post-Katrina Zines

The disaster has had significant effects on the local punk scene, on both the individual level through homes and belongings destroyed, as well as on the collective level through severe damage to *Nowe Miasto*, a collective warehouse that had been home to many people involved in the scene and also served as an important convergence space. Zine writers Shelley Jackson and John Gerken both lost their homes and most of their possessions to the flood while Hope Amico's house remained virtually undamaged. They evacuated before or shortly after the hurricane and returned once the city had been pumped dry again. Today, September 2008, Jackson and Gerken are still residents of New Orleans. Amico moved to nearby Baton Rouge this summer and has started art school there.

The anthology of pre-Katrina zines, *Stories Care Forgot*, was edited by Ethan Clark who had moved from New Orleans to Asheville, North Carolina, just a few months before Katrina. After the city flooded, he hosted a number of evacuees and, upon a suggestion from Jackson, started to work on the collection only weeks after the storm. The intent behind the book, besides documenting the New Orleans punk subculture through its own writings, is to raise funds for grassroots relief organizations in New Orleans. In a letter from Clark appearing in the November 2005 issue of *Maximum Rocknroll*, a popular large circulation punk fanzine, he calls upon the punk community to help with the project that “could be a great way to show that punks can stand up, do something, and make a change” (Clark 2005).

There are three post-Katrina zines by these authors. Jackson published *New Orleans... My Love* in February 2006 about her evacuation and returning to the city. Amico published issue number six of *Keep Loving, Keep Fighting* in May 2006, it is primarily about Katrina and the months afterwards but also contains some writing about her travels to Guatemala and Mexico during the summer, just before the flood. In spring 2007, Amico and Gerken published a joint

zine combining *Keep Loving, Keep Fighting* #7 and *I Hate This Part of Texas* #7.³⁸ In this zine, Gerken writes about his evacuation and life in New Orleans after the storm. Amico continues her life narrative from the previous issue of her zine. Jackson does not plan to resume publication of her pre-Katrina zine *Chainbreaker* because the typewriter and art supplies used in the production of the zine were destroyed in the flood and there was no way for her to receive mail from contributors since postal services did not operate properly for some time after Katrina. Recently, she has been wondering if the post-storm changes in her life made her lose interest in the zine in general: “I lost the ability to make a Chainbreaker zine again! Perhaps with all of the changes, I simply lost the desire to do it” (Jackson and Clark 2008, 131).³⁹

The zines published after Katrina are more formal and simpler in style. They are paginated and were typed on a computer. There is almost no handwriting and no use of manual typewriters. The design is more straightforward, without much use of cut and paste layout (see appendix chapter 9 to compare examples from both pre- and post-Katrina zines). Jackson writes that she felt uncomfortable using a computer to write her zine, but that she did not have a choice: “I have suddenly been shot into the 21st century” (Jackson 2006, 1).⁴⁰ As I will explore in the next section, a major motivation to publish zines about Katrina was to provide information to the punk scene across the US and to do it quickly. Therefore, the usually time-consuming elaborate process of zine making was probably cut short.

6.2 “The letter I have neglected to write”:⁴¹ Motivations

In the November 2005 issue of *Maximum Rocknroll*, there is a long letter from Shelley Jackson describing the situation in New Orleans, printed right next to Ethan Clarke's aforementioned letter announcing the *Stories Care Forgot* zine anthology project. Both letters combined constitute the first several pages of the publication, consuming the complete letters section. In the interview, Jackson explains that it had been imperative to write the letter at the

38 Amico published issue number eight of her zine in September 2008. Unfortunately it did not reach me in time to be taken into consideration here.

39 All four issues of *Chainbreaker* have been reprinted in the book on bicycle maintenance published by Jackson and Clark (2008).

40 In the interview, Shelley Jackson says that going back to using a typewriter to do a zine, like she had missed being able to do directly after Katrina, now feels too “contrived” and “fake”, as if “pretending to live in the woods” (2008, 9:00).

41 Shelley Jackson in *New Orleans... My Love* (2006, 2).

time because the punk scene outside of New Orleans had not been sufficiently aware of the extent of destruction and how it was also severely affecting the local punk scene and not just the “poor people on the news” (2008, 3:30). This is an interesting point because it reveals how people simply assumed that the storm did not have a significant effect on the punk scene as a result from its privileged social position. Furthermore, the coverage by the national media that had been extensive at first quickly waned, prompting Hope Amico to worry about New Orleans being forgotten just a few months later: “what does the rest of the country remember?” (2006, 29). In *New Orleans... My Love*, Jackson describes which aspects of New Orleans culture and history she is afraid might be lost:

What troubles me most is how to keep the real New Orleans that was unseen by the world alive through all of this. [T]he real New Orleans is hidden behind borders that hotels and tourists maps warned not to cross. It brings the fear in me, that these places, their people, and their stories will be brushed under the rug, forgotten forever with the city I know and love for its beauty, faults and eccentricities. (Jackson 2006, 39)

It is not just her own subculture that is threatened, but the “real” New Orleans are those parts of the city which are deemed to dangerous for tourists to visit. This refers to essentially everything outside of the French Quarter and the Garden District, especially the Faubourg Marigny and Bywater neighborhoods where many artists and people from the punk subculture are living. To Jackson, the people and culture of these places is what she values most about the city for their “faults and eccentricities” that stand in contrast to the official culture presented to the tourists. The motivation of zine writing in this respect is to provide a documentation of subcultural and subaltern history as well as to preserve a personal history of the place. Amico says that while she had a hard time to even talk about Katrina, she really felt it was crucial to put out first-hand information about what was going on in the city as fast as possible and she still feels that way even today, more than two years after the flood (2008, 3:00). Therefore, the joint zine she co-wrote with Gerken has a much larger print run than usual, achieved by Microcosm copying the zines while Amico and Gerken only supply the printed covers.

The concern for the preservation of local history is not only limited to the subcultural and alternative realm. In her zine, Jackson worries if her favorite musicians and artists will be able to afford to live in the city considering the lack of housing and increasing rents after Katrina. This is important to her because they are the ones who are maintaining “the culture that people come from all over the world to experience” (2006, 36). As I describe in chapter 5, the notion of the cultural uniqueness of New Orleans is well-established amongst both residents

and people across the country. In Spike Lee's documentary film on hurricane Katrina, *When the Levees Broke* (2006), popular traditions of New Orleans culture such as Mardi Gras, Jazz funerals and second line parades play a prominent role in what I interpret to be a stating of the case that the city needs to be rebuilt and preserved primarily because of its cultural heritage.

The other major function of post-Katrina zine writing is therapeutic, a common feature of personal zines (Bailey and Michel 2004). When I asked him about the special significance of publishing a zine after the flood, Gerken said it was mainly written out of his need for “healing” and that it felt “heavier” than the zines he had written before (2008, 1:30). For Jackson, writing the letter to *Maximum Rocknroll* helped her to “process” her experience and to “get the frustration” out, the zine then evolved from there rather “unintentionally” as she had never written such a long personal piece before (2008, 1:30): it is “the letter I have neglected to write to anyone” (2006, 2). The zine writers are expressing the desire to find closure by composing a narrative out of the events. The description of this process provided in Amico's zine captures her feelings of sickness and being emotionally overwhelmed by the situation. She understands the process of writing as a technique to release emotional pressure and find relief, even though she is aware of the limitations of language: “Verbal vomit, [...] I've got so much inside that words aren't enough” (2006, 1).

The motivation to make sense of the events and to grasp the implications is not limited to the individual level alone but addresses a collective need as well:

Hopefully it will help explain for me and for all others who are here what the hell we have been doing for all this time, and why are we living in a city with no grocery store open after dark, where the trash continues to pile up on the streets, where many of us are still living with no power. (Jackson 2006, 2)

Jackson is looking to explain why people have returned to the city and are clinging to it despite its disastrous condition and, implicitly, the ability to go elsewhere. I understand her objective as twofold: for one, to explain the resilient commitment to New Orleans that might be perceived as plain stubbornness by outsiders who are unaware of the special dedication to the city I describe in chapter 5.2, and two, to contribute to a shared narrative that might help readers from New Orleans to both frame and understand their individual experiences and current situation in the post-disaster city. The latter aspect is also referred to by Gerken in his analysis of why people are still telling each other their evacuation stories even months after having moved back to the city: “An act of affirmation, of shared understanding. We have been through this, we can relate.” (2007, 23).

6.3 “The diluvial wasteland”:⁴² Coping and Symbolism

After returning to New Orleans, the amount of damage to the city and the consequences for herself and her friends are deeply unsettling yet hard to grasp for Hope Amico: “We depended on an unreliable city. The lives we loved were altered and we couldn't begin to grasp how” (2006, 13). John Gerken's (2007) description of the devastated city as a “desolate” and “rotting” desert illustrates how it is devoid of people and has turned into an environment hostile to human life. He calls the city “mummified”: while it still physically exists, it looks dramatically different and carries no life. The place that used to be so familiar to him is now experienced as alien and unreal, like “standing in an altered photograph” (2007, 5).

To Shelley Jackson, the view of the city from the roof top of *Nowe Miasto* is “totally stunning, totally apocalyptic” (2006, 31). The conflicting impressions of amazement and shock run strong in her account. On the one hand, this reflects the desperation and despair in face of the extent of destruction and complete collapse of the social structure, while on the other hand she notices a strange kind of excitement and even attraction to the post-disaster situation that she describes as “almost like living in the city I had always wanted—quiet, secret, beautiful” (2006, 44). This strategy to reconstrue the horrible situation as something beautiful and even desirable resonates strongly with Hoffman's (2002) findings on creative coping mechanisms after large-scale disasters. In her study on a major urban firestorm, she describes how survivors stressed the beauty of the flames and the necessary warning about misguided urban development the fire had delivered.

Jackson struggles with the surreality and inappropriateness she feels during even brief moments of respite from the grueling reconstruction work during the first weeks after having returned to New Orleans. Spending the evenings with friends, they cook and eat outdoors, using tiki torches for lighting and are only sparsely clad due to the oppressive heat:

[I]t was just slightly morbid to feel like we were re-living, re-creating some Jazz Fest party from the past for just one last time. It was like the beach parties in Vietnam during the war—having some fun seemed glaringly inappropriate, yet so essential to keep from getting [too] emotionally bogged down in it all. (Jackson 2006, 28)

With her reference to the Vietnam war she invokes a major trauma of US-American culture and a strong symbol for violent and pointless destruction, social crisis and chaos, and the inability of people to cope with these situations. Her association is furthered by the presence of military forces and helicopters, transforming New Orleans into a place resembling a war

42 John Gerken in *I Hate This Part of Texas* #7 (2007, 42).

zone. Jackson is reminded of the tense times after the September 11 attacks and an instance of political unrest she encountered during a stay in Nepal, expressing her disbelief to have witnessed “so much mass destruction, tragedy, and political insanity” within a period of just a few years (2006, 31).

A large number of volunteers has come to New Orleans after Katrina, some of which Gerken criticizes for their truncated view of local history and especially for their inappropriate and naive excitement about the apocalyptic situation:

Their histories here begin with adventuresome tales of the diluvial wasteland they encountered upon first arriving here. I remember speaking with people in September, October, the months just after the flood, activists who expressed their excitement at this post-apocalyptic endeavor, seemingly excited at the prospect of reinventing things in their anarcho-fantasy image. (Gerken 2007, 42)

While the perceptions of the activists seem similar to Jackson's on the superficial level, there is apparently a grave difference between the situation of the newly arrived people who did not experience any loss and the residents who are struggling to rebuild their lives. Gerken's comment highlights the significance of shared narratives for communities of people: the narratives of the volunteers are very different from those of the residents, precluding a common interpretation of the situation. Gerken explains that he has problems to relate to the newly arrived people and often feels uncomfortable around them because they “share none of the common history” of the place (2007, 41).

For Amico and Gerken, spending most of their waking hours at the *Plan B* bicycle project was an important part in their struggle to cope with the situation and to regain some comforting aspects of their pre-Katrina lives. The warehouse where the shop is located was practically undamaged and one of the few places with electricity after the flood. They worked there almost non-stop in the weeks after returning to New Orleans, joined by other volunteers, some of them even from out of town. Bicycles were donated to them by other community bicycle projects from across the country, repaired at the shop and then sold inexpensively to the local community. Hence, through the work, they were able to obtain a much-needed sense of purpose. Gerken writes: “this was what felt sane and normal, this was a vestige of our previous lives and it was still functional, still helpful to others” (2007, 12). In the interview, Amico says that it had been important for her to be around other people as much as possible. Working at *Plan B* helped her to deal with the “nervous energy” that was plaguing her (2008, 27:00). Gerken describes a similar function the work fulfilled for him: “It was something to do to exhaust ourselves so that we didn't have to think about any of the rest” (2007, 12).

In February 2006, six months after the flood, Amico describes the first tentative signs of a returning normality: “Outside a man on a bicycle is picking through our trash [...]. This is the first time I feel things are a little normal. This man taking what we don't want which all came from other people's trash” (2006, 28). Amico's idea of normality is interesting here because it reflects political values of the punk anarchist scene: DIY, recycling, and “dumpster diving”, the retrieval of goods from the trash.⁴³ Her position is different from most other people who are unlikely to appreciate a person picking through their trash. Her observation might also point out an unusual indicator for the recovery of the city: the availability of normal and even valuable household trash instead of the debris, rotting refrigerators, and toxic waste that had lined the streets after the storm.

Getting back to her normal life has been difficult for Jackson and one of the reasons had been the skewed gender composition in the city after the storm: “it's been quite a dude party going on with all of these out of town contractors, construction guys, FEMA⁴⁴ dudes, army corps⁴⁵ men, military boys making it no fun on my desolate bike ride from the home I have been staying in to like, anywhere in the city” (2006, 41). In the interview, she describes how in the beginning most of the returning residents were men and that there were also very few children because of a lack in infrastructure for families. The predominance of men in the city, many from out of town, caused uncomfortable situations for her, such as repeatedly being mistaken for a prostitute when moving about the French Quarter (2008, 15:30). Her experience confirms academic research ascertaining that the vulnerability to disaster and its impact differs significantly by gender (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, and Davis 2004; Jones-Deweever and Heidi Hartman 2006; Stockemer 2006).

6.4 “Everything you feared is true”:⁴⁶ Politics

As I mention in the beginning of this chapter, hurricane Katrina has impacted the people of New Orleans very differently according to their individual level of vulnerability, for the most part determined by their social status. The zine authors and the punk scene in general have fared relatively well in terms of being able to evacuate, returning to the city, and mobilizing

⁴³ See footnote on page 59.

⁴⁴ FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) is a sub-agency of the Department of Homeland Security and responsible for federal disaster prevention and relief. FEMA and its former director Michael Brown have received harsh criticism for the way Katrina was handled.

⁴⁵ The Army Corps of Engineers is responsible for the construction of the levee system around New Orleans.

⁴⁶ Hope Amico in *Keep Fighting, Keep Loving* #6 (Amico 2006, 17).

resources for rebuilding. Hope Amico notes how being part of a nationally networked and well-traveled scene has made it easy for them to find places to live during evacuation: “Being part of a transient culture, it was easy to arrive suddenly at friends' doors, to be offered a couch. We have connections all over the country” (2006, 9). These connections have been especially strong for the New Orleans zinesters because the city had always been a popular temporary destination for people traveling, building up the networks more quickly than in other places, and since zine culture entails a tradition of letter writing and keeping in touch with other people's lives even though they might live in a different place. John Gerken writes about the role of privilege during evacuation and how access to technology helped them stay in touch with each other afterwards: “Fortunate and privileged, my friends and I were mostly not separated, or at least not lost from one another; we have located most by way of computer and cellphone” (2007, 7).⁴⁷

Personal wealth also played an important role in their capacity to return to the city and during the initial time of recovery: Amico, for example, did not have to work for money for a whole year after the storm, enabling her to focus on volunteering at *Plan B* (2008, 40:00). She says that since Katrina she has become more critically aware of issues of privilege. At *Plan B*, they needed to think a lot about “how to stay relevant when things change rapidly” (24:00), to adapt to the new circumstances and requirements and to find effective ways to provide useful services to the community. Gerken writes that he had been hoping the activist scene would contribute to the recovery process and “come up with creative ways to support relief and renewal efforts” (Gerken 2007, 23). Yet after living in the largely dysfunctional city for a year, it became obvious they had underestimated the extent of how much the post-flood situation would impact them and its heavy emotional toll. Amico soberly notes how they have not been able to realize many of their plans and that her personal resources are exhausted:

[W]e thought we could bring residents back by the truck load, ride back from the FEMA trailer parks⁴⁸ in Baton Rouge on donated bicycles. We encouraged volunteers to come

47 Shelley Jackson refers to a list of people and their whereabouts after the storm that was circulated on the internet (2006, 13). A copy dated September 6, 2005 (a week after the storm hit New Orleans) can still be found on the web today. This list is very interesting because it contains information on everyone from my sample of zine authors as well as many other people from the local scene, that are characterized in the preface to the list as “mostly 9th Ward circus kids, *Nowe Miasto* folks and their respective networks of friends and cohorts” (Anonymous 2005).

48 FEMA has allocated mobile trailer homes to some people who lost their home due to Katrina. People either live in a trailer next to their house while rebuilding or in trailer parks when they cannot return to the city or do not own real estate.

here, help out, stay at our houses, eat and drink with us. Now I am tired of houseguests; only my closest friends stay. I am reclusive have little energy to spare. (Amico 2007, 26)

I have already mentioned that it had been emotionally trying for some of the original New Orleans residents to relate to the many activists who came to the city to volunteer after Katrina. Apart from the lack of shared narratives that makes mutual understanding difficult, Gerken also advances a political critique of the way the volunteer operations are run:

A sea of volunteers has come through here over the past year and a half, organizers and scrappy activists and clean-cut college kids. Mostly white and liberal or radical. All the structural critiques apply—the colonialism and gentrification of do-gooder white folks working in a poor black neighborhood, no emphasis on political education for the volunteers, no anti-racist perspective as part of their experience. (Gerken 2007, 41)

Since the volunteers are not different from him in terms of their whiteness and working in a black neighborhood, the main thrust of his argument is the lack of political awareness and anti-racist education. Due to the special circumstances after the storm, the black neighborhoods are much more vulnerable to gentrification, and the symbolism of affluent white volunteers working there weighs more heavily. Similar to Amico's distinction between different degrees of contributing to gentrification I discuss in chapter 5.5, Gerken seems to imply that the motives of the long-time residents are more benign than those of the new volunteers when moving into a less affluent neighborhood. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that some of his negative feelings towards the out of town volunteers have personal reasons: “it's also just the feeling of our toes being stepped on, our friends being replaced” (2007, 41). In the interview, Gerken says that the situation has significantly improved because nowadays some volunteers are staying in the city and become part of the community. He also feels that it is not so important anymore if a person he talks to is new to the city (2008, 22:30).

Recent research on disaster emphasizes the revealing quality of social crisis for understanding the normal operations of a society: “Disasters unmask the nature of a society's social structure” (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002, 9). However, the interdependence of race, class, and vulnerability to disaster that became apparent during and after Katrina had been surprising and shocking to large parts of the US public. While the zine writers were aware of the racism and poverty in the city, they were still appalled by the images of tens of thousands of people trapped in the city without being taken care of by the government: “everything that has happened has been the realization that everything you feared is true. Residents were on the front pages of newspapers begging for water” (Amico 2006, 17). Although the media coverage of the flood was extensive, Amico is convinced that most people “see only the event, not its roots” (2006, 18) and thus will not understand the problems exposed by the storm in

New Orleans as representative of the persistent structural discrimination everywhere in the US. As Gerken points out:

Everything that happened here during the flood, and thereafter, is happening in slow motion in cities around the country. It seems accelerated here, the spotlight is glaring, but that doesn't mean it's all that removed from the normal way of things anywhere else. The same lack of resources, the same institutionalized racism and systemic violence. (Gerken 2007, 43)

While Katrina might have intensified and highlighted the situation in New Orleans, the problems already existed before the storm, and are also present in other place, just at a slower pace and less apparent. Jackson blames the federal government for having failed to allocate sufficient funds for flood protection to the city. In her opinion, the South has been neglected by the current administration because it is “too poor to give a shit about” (2006, 38) and Republican politicians were sure that racism would secure the vote anyways.

Jackson dedicates a special section of *New Orleans... My Love* to what she calls “the big evil picture” (35). She contrasts these thoughts on the macro level of politics with her personal concerns, referring to the latter as being “minuscule” in comparison, indicating her awareness of how privileged she has been in comparison to many other residents. The distinction Jackson makes between the political and the personal is rather surprising given the political philosophy of the punk anarchist scene. She offers an explanation of her position: “I know full well I have a thin grasp on history and politics. But these are the things I see and feel when talking to friends and neighbors about our worries” (2006, 37). While she admits to not having a good knowledge of history and politics in the conventional sense, commonly understood as a requirement for participation in the public discourse, her concept of politics is not grounded in these categories, but instead emphasizes attention to the concerns of friends and neighbors. Amico is also hesitant to write about public matters not directly accessible to her: “I am no expert on what is happening [in] the [Lower] 9th ward” (2006, 17).

In Jackson's opinion, Katrina gave the New Orleans punk scene the opportunity and the privilege to stop caring about the typical pleasant and leisurely punk pastimes such as “cookies and parties” and instead to get involved in vastly more important issues (2008, 48:30). She thinks it is “a waste” to create a subcultural community as strong as the punk anarchist scene only to have it revolve around parties and vegan pies: “people need to grow up a little” (49:30). Gerken says that he has recommitted to his political ideals because Katrina brought back the “brutal realities” of the place while at the time the flood happened he had been in the process of settling into a more comfortable life (2008, 29:00). Katrina has

indeed been a turning point in the lives of these zine writers—not in the sense of turning away from their idealism or in the sense of turning down the city and the community when it was in need of their help, but in the sense of turning back and recommitting to their political values and implementing them with a vengeance.

7 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to study personal zines as autobiographical narratives in the context of a subcultural scene and situated in a specific locale. Studying personal zines and interviewing their authors has been a way to privilege their subjective perspectives to avoid forcing them into overly generalized identities. I understand the personal zine medium as the radical outcome of the process of individualization and personalization of representation and politics. Personal zines provide a unique semi-public space where people can express their personal concerns and search for self-identity on their own terms, yet always embedded in a social and (sub-)cultural context. I have then explored the concept of the diffuse social movement scene based on shared culture and collective identity. Individuals in these contexts negotiated and integrate the values and requirements of the scene into their self-identity. The punk anarchist scene, the subcultural location of my zine sample, is exemplary in this respect. It cannot be adequately captured by traditional subcultural codes such as musical genre or clothing style, but instead the cultural and political practices and values of the scene need to be analyzed: the empowering philosophy of DIY (Do It Yourself), direct political action, and non-hierarchical principles of association and organization.

My analysis of personal zines and interviews has illustrated how the zine authors are thinking about their everyday life, self-identity, and subcultural politics. They are very conscious of the social privilege they enjoy because of their whiteness and the resulting, if unwanted, complicity in harmful processes such as gentrification. Even though they are engaging in acts of subcultural self-marginalization, they know they will continue to profit from their whiteness even when assuming a liminal lifestyle. Their response to this dilemma is to emphasize the need for critical awareness, personal accountability, and the obligation to do useful community work. Volunteering at the *Plan B* bicycle community project and teaching classes for children from underprivileged families are important ways to achieve this. Political values are seen as fundamental to self-identity and inseparable from the way of life, informing everyday choices and conduct. Their general idea about political transformation is to first implemented changes on the individual level. From there on, they will hopefully propagate to number of people that is large enough to generate effects on the macro level of society.

Narratives play an important role in identity construction in the zines. One idea is that narratives create coherence out of the discrete events in life and lead to closure, helping to find one's self-identity. Another slightly different view states is that subjects are heterogeneous bundles of narratives that need not necessarily be reconciled. While they are well aware of the complex and contingent consequences of their choices on self-identity formation, the zine writers still exhibit a great amount of agency, for example in the process of deliberating to move to New Orleans that is ultimately motivated by a desire to be transformed by the place. They direct and interpret their lives in accordance with the goal of becoming a specific person, informed by their political values.

Living in New Orleans plays a major role in the life of the zine writers. They are extraordinarily emotional in their attachment to the city and substantially about the place, their relationship to it, the process of moving there, and, in particular after Katrina, the paramount importance to remain committed to the place and to stay there. Zines play a major part in the creation and circulation of subcultural knowledge about New Orleans in the national punk anarchist scene. The stories told about the place are special in their intimacy and fervor. There is a prominent theme of New Orleans as a dangerous and trying place to live and that one needs to earn a place in the locale punk scene by proving the commitment to the city after having encountered its harsh realities. This rite of passage contributes to the strong bond between the city and the people in the scene, as well as strengthening the ties within the scene. Community is an important issue to the zine writers who are looking to establish a rooted and supportive urban community, also serving as an infrastructure for political action. They are pursuing the ideal to go beyond the usually exclusionary subcultural community of white punk kids by seeking to actively connect with the African-American neighborhoods.

Studying the impact of hurricane Katrina had basically two reasons. For one, as an exemplary case of a socially caused disaster, completely preventable in its tragic extent, it reveals the normality of the discriminating social structure in New Orleans. Katrina affected the city's residents to very different degrees, according to their individual vulnerability as determined by social status. The zine writers display great awareness of this situation and their own privileged position that became glaringly apparent during evacuation and by their capacity to return to the city.

The second reason for exploring the effects of Katrina is that questions of self-identity and the making of meaning are especially salient in times of social and personal crisis. The most immediate and important motivation to write zines after Katrina has been to provide

comprehensive first-hand information to the punk scene outside of New Orleans quickly. To the people who have returned to the city, these accounts contribute to their shared narrative for framing and understanding the individual experience of the storm and the situation in the post-disaster city. The importance of a common narrative as a coping mechanism and constituting factor of the post-flood community is especially apparent in the description of the problem of relating to the out of town volunteers whose narratives about the place are very different from those of the old residents. Nevertheless, post-Katrina zines do not only serve to describe what has been happening to the authors personally, but they also document the subcultural and subaltern history of the city that is threatened to become lost as a result of the flood and the uncertain prospects for recovery.

Coping with the aftermath of Katrina is a prominent theme in the zines. The very act of writing a zine is described as a powerful therapeutic device. The authors refer to their urgent need to process the events in order to be able to start their healing process and how zines have helped them to verbalize the unspeakable. Several stories illustrate the struggle to grasp the surreality of the post-flood situation in the city by invoking metaphors or through cultural reference to other instances of social crisis and trauma. Continuing and intensifying their pre-Katrina community activism has been very important for the returnees. Working at the *Plan B* bicycle project played a central role in their recovery of a sense of purpose. It helped the people volunteering there to cope with the situation by being among their friends and keeping busy with work. Initially, there were high hopes for the activist scene to be able to contribute to the recovery process in their own self-organized and grass-roots ways. Unfortunately, it turned out that they had underestimated the extent of how much the post-flood situation would impact them and eventually drain their emotional and material resources. To answer one of my research questions, Katrina has indeed been a turning point in the lives of the zine writers, in the sense of being reminded of the prevalent structural problems in New Orleans and their privileged position and the resulting obligation to help. It has led to a recommitting to political values. Returning to New Orleans despite its disastrous condition has reconfirmed and strengthened their dedication to the city.

In conclusion, I would like to point out some additional issues of interest for further research. Unfortunately, I could not explore queer and gender politics as part of this study. However, these are prominent topics in the zines, especially with John Gerken writing about drag and queerpunk identity, and Shelley Jackson discussing the gender politics of bicycles and mechanics. There is also the questions of genre conventions and what is deemed to be an

appropriate topic for a personal zine. Also, I have only accounted for the author's perspective in personal zines. I am convinced it would be very interesting to investigate how the readers of zines make use of the narratives presented to them for their own identity construction.

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9 Annotated Zine Reprints

This chapter presents scanned reproductions of details from several zines that are discussed in this paper, along with annotations and explanations of their format, contents, and context.

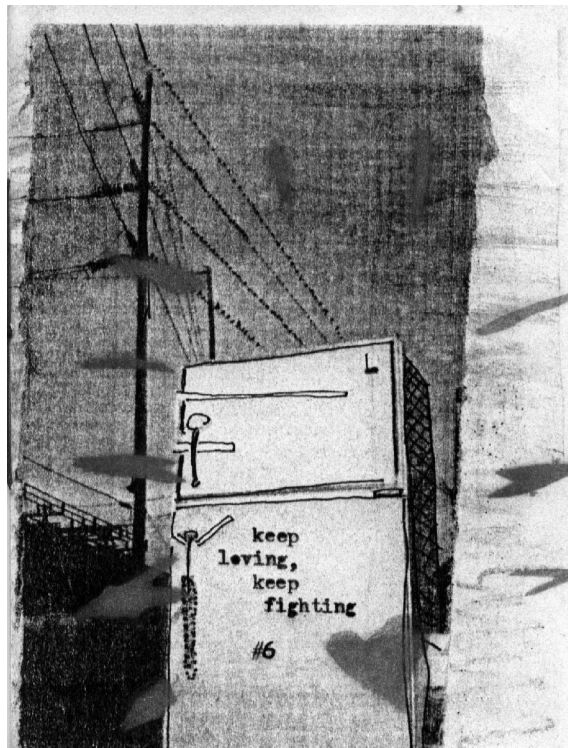


Illustration 1: Cover of *Keep Loving, Keep Fighting #6* (Amico 2006)

Refrigerators with their doors taped shut were a common sight on New Orleans streets after Katrina. Left without electricity, all food contents went bad and the appliances had to be discarded due to the mold and stench inside. The object hanging from the handle of the lower door is probably a string of *Mardi Gras* beads.

The halo of rays around the refrigerator and the heart on the bottom of the page has been manually added to the photocopied cover with golden spray paint using a stencil.

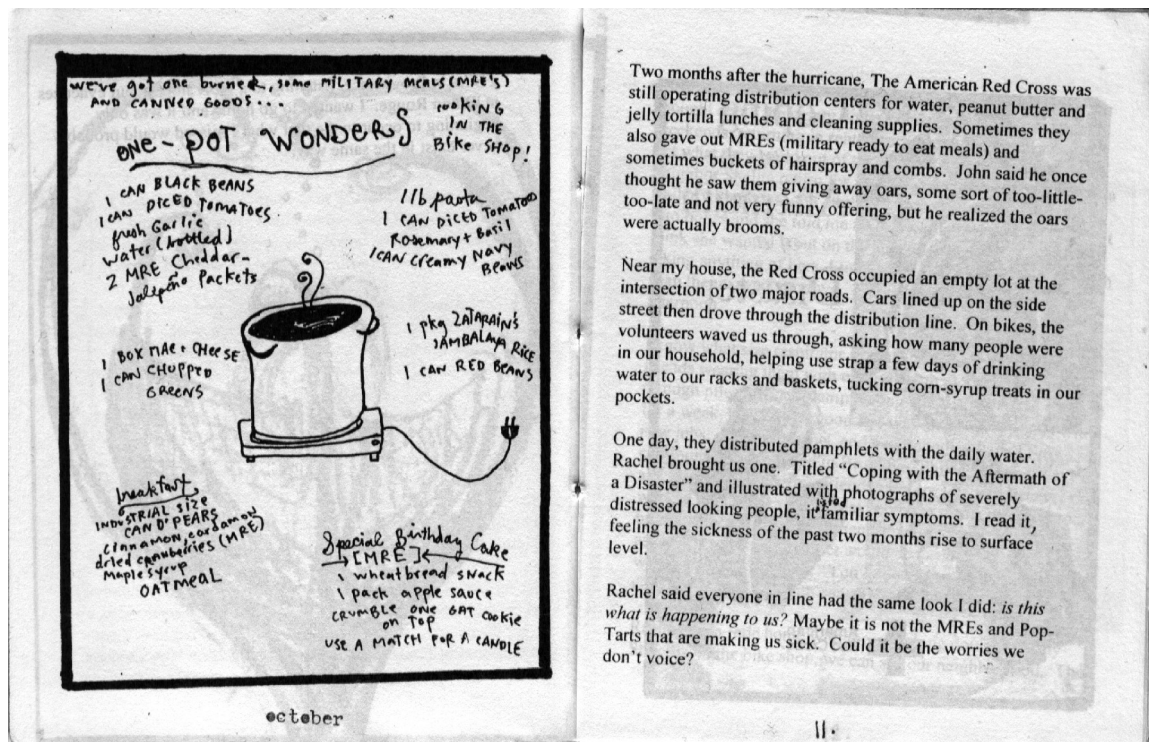


Illustration 2: Detail from *Keep Loving, Keep Fighting #6* (Amico 2006, 11)

Left page: “One-pot wonder” recipes making creative use of military “Meals Ready to Eat” (MRE) that were distributed to people in New Orleans after the storm as emergency food rations. “Bike shop” refers to the bicycle shop collective *Plan B* where volunteers were fixing bicycles to be sold inexpensively as affordable mode of transportation for the people in the city. As one of the few places with available electricity, meals were often cooked there during the months following the hurricane. The name of the month on the bottom of the page (“October”) is the title of the chapter beginning on that page.

Right page: Note how in the second sentence of the third paragraph a word has been added in handwriting (“listed”) where it was missing in the printed text.

Interestingly, this zine is paginated, like all zines in my sample that directly deal with Katrina. Page numbers are only allocated to pages with written text whereas illustrated pages remain unpaginated. As can be seen in the middle of the page, this zine features a classic manually binding with a simple string.

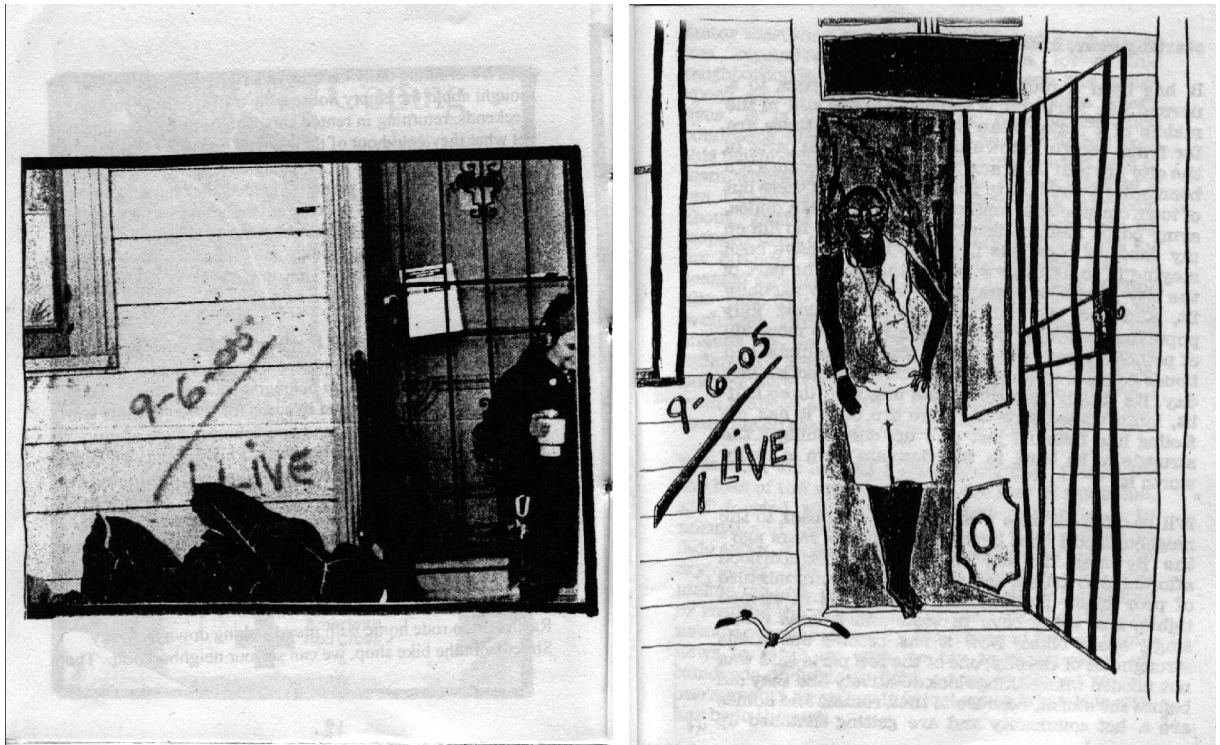


Illustration 3: (Left) detail from *Keep Loving, Keep Fighting* #6 (Amico 2006, 13);
 (Right) detail from *New Orleans... My Love* (Jackson 2006, 40)

Left: The photo pictures *Keep Loving, Keep Fighting* zinester Hope Amico in front of her house post-Katrina. The spray painted mark left of the door is from one of the search and rescue teams that checked all houses for flood victims.⁴⁹ These markings have a highly symbolic and emotional meaning for the people of New Orleans and can be found on many houses even today.

Right: An illustration of the same house, drawn from an almost identical perspective by Shelley Jackson in her post-Katrina zine *New Orleans... My Love*. This illustrates quite well the close relationships between the zine writers in particular and the New Orleans scene in general, especially in the months after the hurricane. Also, since Amico's house was practically undamaged by the hurricane and had electricity, it served as a prominent place for people to meet and cook food.

⁴⁹ These marks follow a set schema: two vertical lines crossing each other, with the date of search noted on the top, the identifier of the team on the left, the number of bodies found on the bottom, and health hazards on the right side. The first line is drawn before entering the building, the second after the search has been completed. In the case pictured above, there is only one line, the date of search, and the note "1 live" because the team did not enter the house since there was a survivor present.

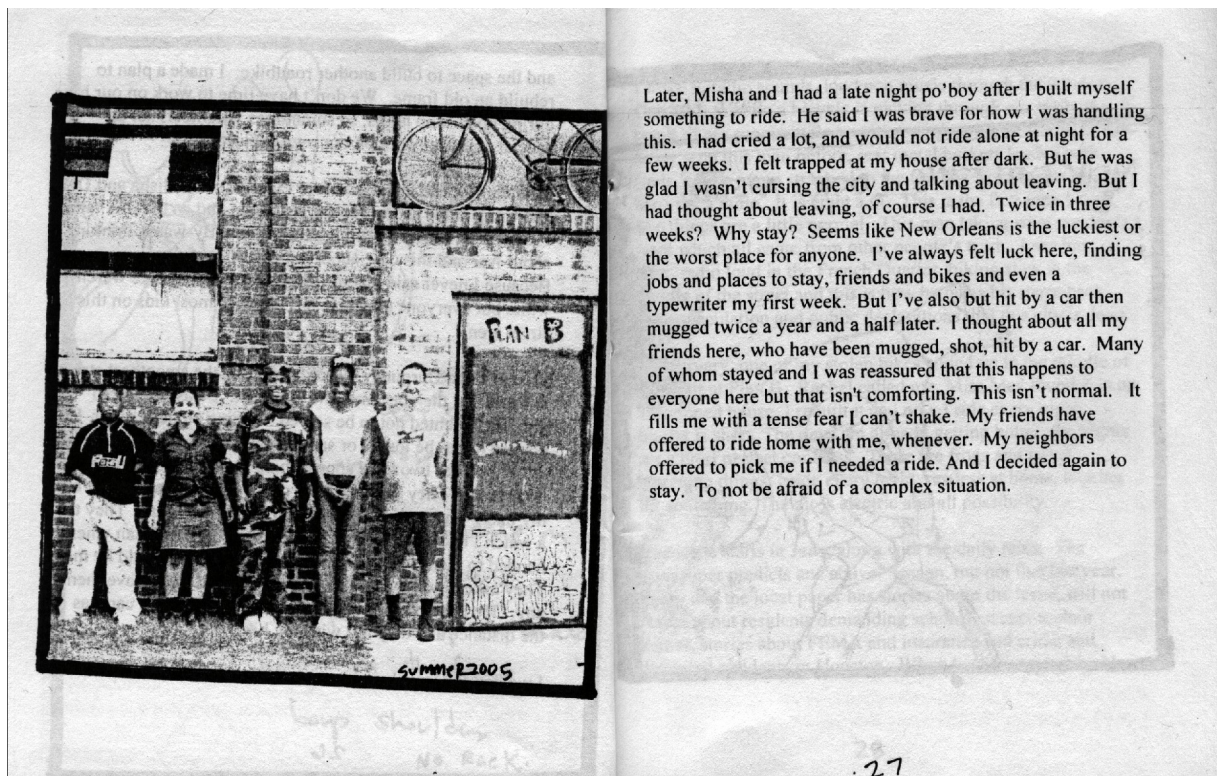


Illustration 4: Detail from *Keep Loving, Keep Fighting #6* (Amico 2006, 27)

Photo of Hope Amico (second from left) and John Gerken (right) in front of the entrance to the *Plan B* bicycle project, the children are probably from one of the bike class they teach and/or volunteers. The text on the door reads: “Plan B - The New Orleans Community Bike Project”. The same warehouse also houses *The Iron Rail* book store and library project.



Illustration 5: *Bike! Bike!* 2004 attendees, *Chainbreaker* #4 (Jackson 2008a, 228)

This photo is taken inside the *Plan B* space. *Bike! Bike!* is an annual meeting of people from community bicycle projects around the US and Canada that was hosted for the first time in 2004 by *Plan B* in New Orleans. According to the original announcement in *Chainbreaker* #2, the aim has been “to exchange ideas and share skills & knowledge, discuss problems and goals, workshops, and socializing with other radical minded bike geeks” (Jackson 2008a, 180).

This photo is interesting as it pictures, according to my own observations and the zines I have studied, a rather typical punk anarchist activist crowd in style of clothing, accessories, grooming, age, and ethnicity.



Illustration 6: Introduction to *I Hate This Part of Texas* #5 (Gerken 2006)

Even though the circumstances of publication post-Katrina are extraordinary (note the headline “special disaster cover issue” and the production-related notes), this page nevertheless is a characteristic zine introduction. The zine writer apologizes for the issue being late and elaborates on the context of publication, locating the issue in his current personal life. The introduction ends with several dedications, signed with the date of publication. On the bottom of the page is a call to write letters since the author just discovered that his post office box is receiving mail. This is noteworthy, because after Katrina, many residents have been unable to receive mail for months for lack of a working postal service infrastructure, hence the need to reassure readers of this zine that it is indeed possible again to send letters.

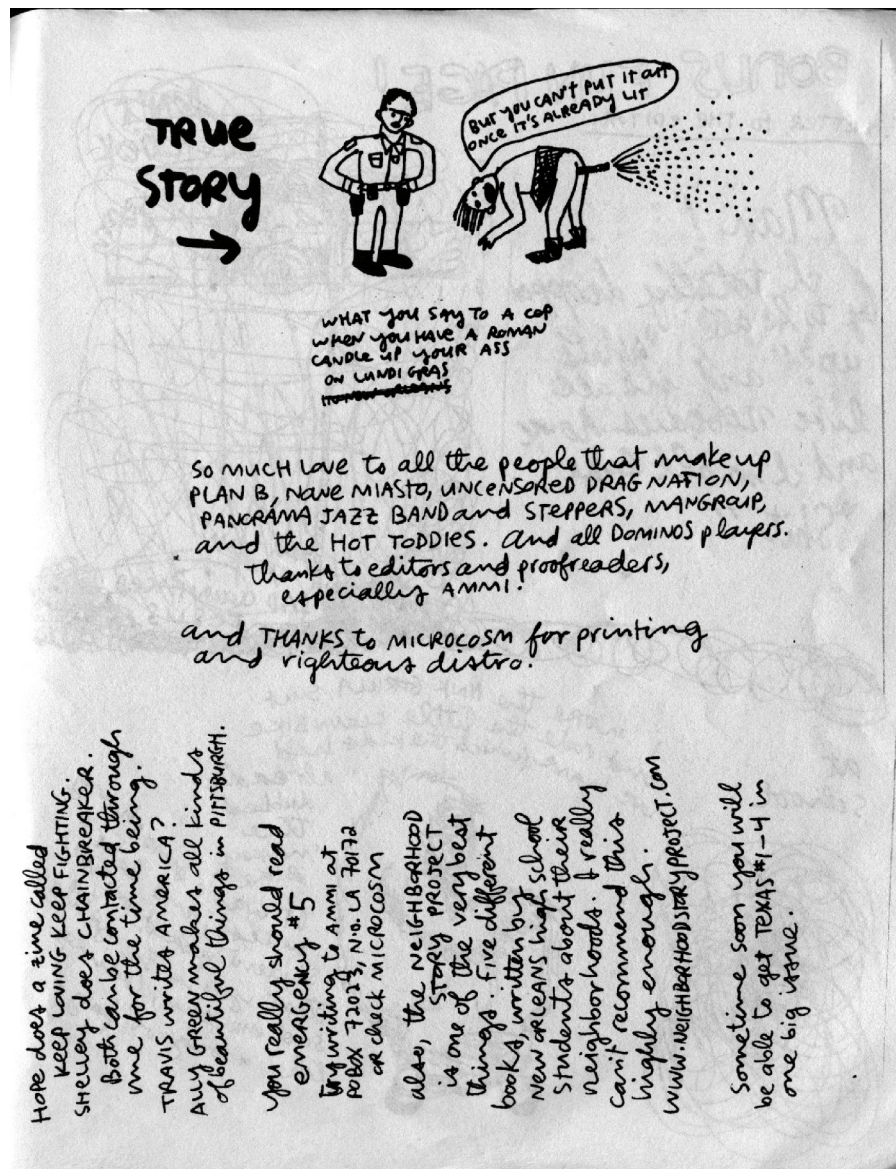


Illustration 7: End notes of *I Hate This Part of Texas* #5 (Gerken 2006)

This concluding page to is typical for a zine in several respects. The zine writer thanks people who have contributed to the zine and helped to produce it, including the publisher and distributor *Microcosm*, as well as acknowledging projects and communities of importance to him, such as the people from *Plan B*, *Nowe Miasto* and *Uncensored Drag Nation*. He also enumerates several music bands he likes. At the bottom of the page, he recommends other zines and a community history project. He also promises a collection of his previous zines, which to date has not become available.

On top of the page, *lundi gras* (“fat Monday”) refers to the day before *mardi gras* (“fat Tuesday”) which is the last day of the *Mardi Gras* celebrations New Orleans is famous for. It is often the time and place of many stories of transgressive carnevalesque celebration, such as the one pictured on top of the page.

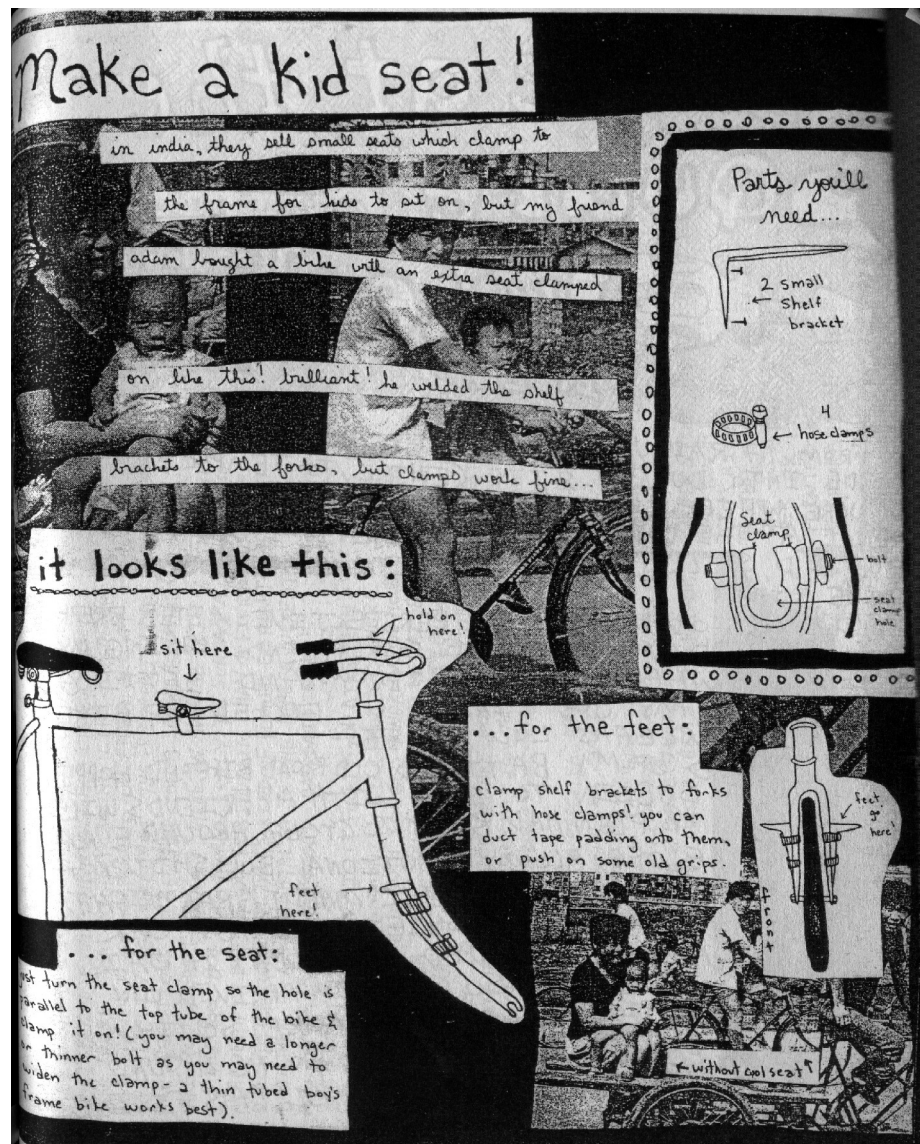


Illustration 8: Detail from to *Chainbreaker #2* (Jackson 2008a)

These instructions for constructing an extra seat for children on a bicycle nicely illustrates the classic "cut and paste" layout that has been the typical design of most zines since it was popularized by the first punk fanzines (cf. chapter 2). DIY guides like this are a feature of many zines, especially in bicycle themed ones.

References to bicycle culture in India, comparatively to the US as well, can be found throughout Shelley Jackson's zines because she has been spending extended amounts of time in the country.

10 Interviews

During my research trip to the US in January and February 2008 I have conducted seven interviews in English. The interviews were recorded digitally and are on file. All interviewees consented to the use of the interviews as part of my thesis.

The following list contains the interviewee, date, location, and duration of each interview, as well as the respective citation reference used in the text. When directly quoting an interview throughout this thesis, I have included an approximate time marker in the citation. For example, *Duncombe 2008, 12:30* refers to a section of the interview with Stephen Duncombe starting at twelve minutes and thirty seconds from its beginning.

10.1 Experts of Zine Culture

These interviewees are experts of zine culture, either by virtue of being zine writers themselves, through academic work on zines or professional involvement with zines.

- Stephen Duncombe (professor at New York University)
20 Jan 2008. New York, NY. 51:14. (Duncombe 2008)
- Joe Biel and Sparky Taylor (Microcosm publishing)
24 Jan 2008. Bloomington, IN. 1:13:20. (Biel 2008)
- Sparky Taylor and Joe Biel (Microcosm publishing)
25 Jan 2008. Bloomington, IN. 1:06:02. (Taylor 2008)
- Ethan Clark (zine writer, book author, and editor of *Stories Care Forgot*)
9 Feb 2008. New Orleans, LA. 57:19. (Clark 2008)

10.2 Research Sample

These three zine writers from New Orleans are my primary research sample.

- John Gerken
12 Feb 2008. New Orleans, LA. 50:36. (Gerken 2008)
- Hope Amico
13 Feb 2008. New Orleans, LA. 54:13. (Amico 2008)
- Shelley Lynn Jackson
16 Feb 2008. New Orleans, LA. 54:32. (Jackson 2008b)

11 Zusammenfassung in Deutscher Sprache

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht *Personal Zines*⁵⁰ (selbstproduzierte und photokopierte nicht-kommerzielle Heftchen kleiner Auflage über das alltägliche Leben der schreibenden Person) als Mittel subkultureller narrativer Identitätskonstruktion in der anarchistischen Punk-Szene in New Orleans (USA). *Personal Zines* bieten einen einzigartigen, halböffentlichen Raum für subkulturelle autobiographische Narrative. Ihre Analyse ermöglicht die Privilegierung individueller Subjektivität und spezifisch geographisch und sozio-kulturell verorteter biographischer Prozesse. *Personal Zines* sind das Resultat einer bereits in den 1930er Jahren mit den Science-Fiction Fanzines begonnen Entwicklung eines speziellen persönlichen Mediums, das seit spätestens den 1990er Jahren dem Ausdruck eines auf kultureller Differenz und Distinktion begründeten expressiven Identitätsverständnisses dient. Anhand von Theorien narrativer und performativer Identität wird dieser Prozess erläutert.

Meine Betrachtung neuer Formen diffuser politischer Organisation basierend auf kollektiver Identität und gemeinsamer Kultur der Beteiligten trägt der wachsenden Rolle von Identität im postmodernen Politikverständnis Rechnung, nicht nur im subkulturellen Bereich. Ich analysiere in diesem Zusammenhang *Personal Zines* von drei verschiedenen Autor_innen, ergänzt durch Interviews, die ich vor Ort in New Orleans führte. In diesen *Personal Zines* lässt sich die Verschränkung politischer Werte und Selbstidentität als Grundlage politischer Praxis im alltäglichen Leben nachzeichnen. Die Autor_innen weisen dabei eine hohe Sensibilität für ihre privilegierte sozioökonomische Lage, die vornehmlich auf ihrem Weißsein beruht auf.

Der Orkan Katrina, der 2005 die verheerende Überschwemmung von 80% der Stadt zur Folge hatte, führt den Zusammenhang zwischen sozialer Privilegiertheit und dem Grad der Betroffenheit durch die Katastrophe sowie der Fähigkeit zu deren Bewältigung drastisch vor Augen. Weiterhin untersuche ich den Einfluss der Ereignisse auf die persönliche Lebensgeschichte und die politischen Einstellungen der Autor_innen.

50 Im deutschen Sprachraum ist die Bezeichnung Ego-Zine üblicher als *Personal Zine*, ich verwende hier den englischsprachigen Begriff aus Gründen der Einheitlichkeit (Schmidt 2004).