

From Zines to MySpace: A Case Study of Media Infrastructures and Counter-power in the Puerto Rican Underground Punk Scene

Rubén Ramírez Sánchez
Universidad de Puerto Rico
ruben.ramirez1@upr.edu

Abstract

I examine the role of different media technologies in the construction of a punk media infrastructure in Puerto Rico. While punk cultures have always relied on media self production for sustaining a space that is explicitly against capitalist modes of production, the use of digital technologies such as Myspace have enabled the creation of meaningful networks of cultural production, seemingly resulting in media “counter-power.” However, punks’ use of digital technologies foregrounds an inherent tension of resisting within capitalism, as networks of information and exchange emerge, obey, and are sustained by a logic of globalized capital and its implications. I contend that this inherent tension must be theorized in order to build upon a useful ontology of resistance in capitalism.

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1. From Zines to MySpace: A Case Study of Media Infrastructures and Counter-power in the Puerto Rican Underground Punk Scene

The use of technology has been a fundamental aspect of punk media making since the beginning. Media tools are crucial to punk infrastructures in that they provide efficient and low-cost means for producing and disseminating punk commodities conforming to a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) philosophy. In many ways, punks use media technologies as neutral resources for achieving a production objective. However, this is problematic. While new media technologies have taken a central role in the development and sustainability of political practices of media self-production, such as that of punk, technologies are also crucial in the sustenance and expansion of global-capitalist modes of production. Punks' rejection of the capitalist logic is seemingly trapped within a broader system of production inasmuch as technologies epitomize a post-industrial machinery of global expansion, diversification, and branding.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of punks' uses of technologies and their fit within a politics of media use, I examine how Puerto Rican punks, by creating what I call media infrastructures, have incorporated different media tools into the development of an "independent" space of cultural production and examine the political implications and role of new media in relation to spaces of oppositional cultural production. For this, I draw on ethnographic and historiographic research on the Puerto Rico punk scene, focusing on two media platforms—fanzines and Myspace—in order to exemplify the ways in which punk media networks, as examples of self-production, articulate complex connections within the broader media landscape.

If, as Croteau (2006) asserts, "the interesting thing about self-produced media content is that, so far, it has largely evaded systematic study by media scholars," the foregrounding of the connections that contextualize people's media-making processes may prove insightful for locating, texturing, expanding, disseminating, and intervening in the conjunctures through and against which technologies and uses of technology converge or collide, secure or re-articulate larger networks of power and capital. I present the case of punk media infrastructures as an example of "mass self-communication," which Castells (2000a, 2000b, 2004, 2007, 2009) conceptualizes as

media-making practices within the context of the network society and through horizontal networks of communication (Castells, 2007, p. 239). I claim that, while media practices such as punk cultural production may be seen as examples of “counter-power,” such practices are always caught within an inherent tension of signifying resistance while relying on the mechanisms that, at broader levels, help secure power. I conclude by discussing the relevance of contextualizing the complexity of oppositional media making practices within capitalism and emphasize the theorization of paradox for any ontology of resistance within the network society.

2. New Media, Networks, and Punk Culture

Since the development of punk culture in the 1970s, punks have relied on many tools for constructing cultural spaces that serve to reproduce punk cultural production and ideology. Rudimentary media tools such as letters, pamphlets, posters, flyers, and graffiti have been part of the punk logic as sites of representation and expression. In his book about the 20 years of punk culture in Spain, Alfonso (2002) talks about the surprising development of punk, given the “disadvantage of using modes of transmission that are fundamentally subterranean.” He continues:

In Spain, punk’s evolution was absolutely parallel to its international development. This is outstanding, given that information was disseminated through letters. There were no magazines but fanzines of very limited circulation, records were not officially distributed as it is done today and, obviously, television was out of the question (a nightmare in itself). So how did the dissemination of music, styles, ideas, information, etc. come about so swiftly? That’s easy: It was the necessity prompted by difficulty; the fanzines; the merciless reproduction of tapes as the only way to listen to bands; word of mouth; and the progressive development of a scene which, through the years, became a vast worldwide network. (p. 5, translation mine)

Punk culture early on adopted a DIY logic of production that “championed musical amateurism [and] professed anarchist politics,” with bands releasing records on small

independent labels (Taylor, 2003, p.14). This DIY philosophy is still at the core of punk ideology, and the accessibility of new media technologies has brought new meanings and possibilities to it. Digital technologies of reproduction and distribution have made possible the configuration and propagation of punk media infrastructures at an amazing rate and with great efficiency. This is exemplified by O'Connor (2003, 2004), whose ethnographic research on punks' use of the Internet concludes that "it is possible to describe the conduits by which ideas and social movements travel. In the case of punk it is through the international circulation of recorded music, zines and bands on tour" (O'Connor, 2004, p. 44), which today mostly occurs electronically.

Thus, electronic/digital conduits are crucial to the sustainability of such networks. The networks, in turn, result in media infrastructures. Thus networks (of mediated relationships of production and exchange) power sub-systems of production that exist within larger corporate, political, and economic structures. Further, the fact that infrastructures work "within" larger structures (or networks) does not preclude them from being fully developed systems.

In punk, a *politics* of composition and realization should be at the base of the analysis. Technologies do not necessarily enable the DIY in punk; rather, digital technologies, echoing DIY characteristics in its design and accessibility, interpellate punks into incorporating and, therefore, articulating uses of new media technologies according to ideological prescriptions. Talking about the digitization of music culture, Sandywell and Beer (2005) emphasize that "the contemporary music scene is increasingly based upon the development and dissemination of computer-based software packages for homes and studios" (p.109). According to Hesmondhalgh (1999), such technologies have made it possible for the independent music business to develop "an aesthetic based on mobilization and access [that] encouraged the unskilled and untrained to take the means of musical production into their own hands" (p. 37). In this respect, digital technologies foment punks' adherence to a praxis of self-production. Such relative independence relates to Jones' (2002) discussion of "disintermediation," or the disentanglement of music production from the corporate webs of material production, distribution, and dissemination. Taken to the extreme, "disintermediation would

essentially result in de-industrialization, in individual control of all facets of the creative process” (Jones, 2002, p. 222).

The idea of network becomes fundamental to the development of punk media infrastructures, since networks function as one of the main mechanisms through which such infrastructures thrive. The notion of network has acquired different connotations as it relates to media and business practices. Manuel Castells has extensively examined the nature and functioning of networks. For Castells, informationalism and constant developments in micro-electronic technologies have led to profound transformations in human structures, such as economics, politics, communication, and social organization, resulting in what he and others early-on conceptualized as the network society. In this respect, networks are decentralized mechanisms that rely on nodes that are capable of being repositioned or reconstituted, and are supported by technologies that have the capacity to “self-expand their processing power because of their recurrent, communicative ability” (Castells, 2004, p. 10).

The network society, according to Castells (2000b), is founded on the “spatialization of flows” (p. 448), although networks themselves have to be seen as open structures that are in constant expansion and reconfiguration inasmuch as they share a common code (p. 500). This view evokes the complexity of networks, as exhibiting both a structural and decentralized character, as the network itself conforms the boundaries within which extensions and dispersions take place. In Castells, nonetheless, the complexity of networks does not necessarily represent unrestricted opportunity of configuration. According to Castells (2000a),

All there is in the network is useful and necessary for the existence of the network. What is not in the network does not exist in the network’s perspective, and thus must be either ignored or eliminated. If a node in the network ceases to perform a useful function it is phased out from the network, and the network rearranges itself—as cells do in a biological process” (p. 15).

The previous passage exemplifies the technological deterministic dimension (see Cardoso, 2006, p. 49) in Castells' analysis, which prompts a notion of networks as "intelligent" structures that, through an inherent organizing interconnectedness, prescribe directions of movement that do not necessarily emerge spontaneously, but are preconditioned by a finite assemblage of possibilities. Van Dijk (1999) has contended this view, and has emphasized not necessarily the mechanics of networks as a structural system, but the role of actors in shaping the dimension, directions, and ramifications of the networks themselves. In this respect, van Dijk highlights the human component behind networks, inasmuch as "the basic elements of the network society are not so much networks themselves but individuals, households, groups and organizations *linked by these networks*" (p. 24, emphasis in original).

The idea of network that can be observed in punk infrastructures combines these perspectives. Like any idea of network, it retains a sense of mechanic interconnectedness. However, it foregrounds a mechanism that is actively constituted by social actors and relations. Punk networks comprise diverse mechanisms that facilitate local and international relations in the service of a punk ideology, and their reliance on DIY as a mode of production is primarily made possible by the creation and development of social networks that power media making. These networks are supported by relations, practices, and technologies that make possible the dissemination and sustainability of the infrastructure. For instance, mail correspondence, flyers, zines, record labels, and touring have played a central role in the consolidation of networks in Europe and the United States. However, the emergence of technologies of interconnectedness has greatly contributed to the international growth of punk media infrastructures. Self-production hardware and software, such as digital recording and self-publishing technologies, have enriched the punk media infrastructure by facilitating the punk cultural production that is circulated through its networks.

3. Puerto Rican Punks and Media Making

The Puerto Rican punk infrastructure presents an important example of self-produced media. As observed by O'Connor (2003, 2004) in Mexican punk scenes, the Puerto Rican punk scene has developed in a subordinate relation to punk scenes in the United States, Spain, and England. While these "first-world" punk scenes have a solid history of punk culture that has been evolving since the early 1970s, the Puerto Rico punk scene only began to emerge in the late 80s and did not solidify until the early 90s. The evolution of Puerto Rican punk, contrary to these first-world scenes, grew and evolved despite a lack of cultural support, venues to play, and a culture of media making.

However, the Puerto Rican punk culture has rapidly grown into substantial cultural and media networks of production and exchange. Puerto Rican bands have successfully managed to connect to the international punk scene, with many bands having toured in Europe, Latin America, the United States, and Japan. In addition, the past years have seen a turn in Puerto Rican punk cultural production with the emergence of several independent, and relatively successful, record labels. Even if rudimentary technologies such as those described by Alfonso figured in the early development of the island's punk scene, most of these low-tech technologies were quickly replaced by more sophisticated ones, such as digital media. It is of great importance, then, that it has been mostly through the use of digital technologies that Puerto Rican punks have been able to build a strong presence within the larger international punk networks.

4. Low-tech: Zines

In the early development of the Puerto Rico punk scene, a handful of people developed consistent exchanges with bands from all over the world through correspondence. Through these first connections, Puerto Rican punks engaged in the exchange of material and cultural commodities, such as zines and records, which in turn made it possible for ideologies and philosophies to circulate. These exchanges served as cultural "exportations" and "importations" that contributed to, at one level, the

consolidation of a punk scene with an increasing punk cultural capital and, at another level, the insertion of that scene into a broader network of scenes.

Taína is among the first punks to have actively worked toward the construction of a Puerto Rican DIY punk media infrastructure. She was one of the first to engage in correspondence with bands from abroad, clearly contributing to the eventual insertion of the scene into the international punk circuit. Through the years, she has made numerous contacts in countries such as Venezuela, Finland, Germany, France, Spain, and Mexico.

“Pen-palling” (making friends through correspondence) was always an early punk means of communication. One of the main reasons that prompted Taína to pen-pal was “to get to know how other scenes are, what they do, what their bands sound like” (Interview).¹⁰ For instance, during one of my interviews, Taína recalled having found a letter from Cuba dating from 1995 which described the Cuban scene, a rare opportunity for punk cultural exchange.

Correspondence also entailed the exchange of commodities, in relation to which the fanzine gained a prominent role. Zines served as a cultural window to other scenes and, most importantly, as access to their cultural production. They also provided access to a network of exchanges and circulation, a “network of micro-communities,” as Duncombe (1997) asserts in his pioneering study about zines (p. 179). For instance, zines compelled Taína to write to people and connect:

I basically started reading fanzines—Maximumrocknroll and zines from other countries—because you already have all the addresses in the zine, so it’s just a matter of sitting down and writing. The faster and more letters you write, the more people you’ll meet and the more stuff you’ll get. I wanted to learn about other bands and music. I wanted to know how scenes were in other countries.

¹⁰ The research presented comprises unstructured interviews that took place during the months of May, June, July, and August of 2006 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. In addition, it is supported by ethnographic research around band practices, punk shows, and punk gatherings, on which I rely for context and analysis. I also collected and examined original cultural artifacts, specifically fanzines, as historical documents. All interview translations are mine.

And how does one learn about all that stuff? Through the “scene reports”—because all the zines had some form of scene report—and through music reviews and interviews. And that’s how you would make all your contacts. After a few years, you realize that you have some fixed friends. For example, that’s how *Cojoba* [her band] was able to organize [tours], through all these people with whom we’ve had contact over the years by means of conventional mail. Before the internet, we already had all these friends. (Interview)

Zines serve both as a point of convergence for cultural identification and as a medium for reproducing and actively circulating culture. David James writes that punk zines,

Apart from the music, are the main forum, not simply for communication about punk, but for its construction; they are the place where the nature of punk—the particular social vocabularies and ideological formations that constitute it—may be socially constructed, argued and clarified. (cited in Bloomfield, 1991)

One of the first zines to be produced in the island was *Zine Vergüenza*, produced, edited, and mainly written by Taína. The zine, published bimonthly, ran consistently for about three years (1997 to 2000)—contrary to many other local zines, which would produce from one to three issues and then disappear. What made *Zine Vergüenza* unique was its politics of production. First, it pioneered the DIY philosophy as mode of production in the local scene. For instance, the first seven issues of the publication were literally produced by hand by Taína and punk collaborators. This first stage in the production of the zine featured the use of the typewriter, handwriting, and collage as tools of design and production and the photocopier as a technology of reproduction. In this respect, each issue took effort to make, featuring drawings provided by collaborators, clippings from other publications and zines, and pasted-up text written with a typewriter. Each issue was then photocopied and assembled by hand. People could either buy it at shows or order it through the mail by sending one dollar and two stamps to Taína’s residence at the time—her parent’s house.

Second, it took political education and awareness as a paramount goal. DIY philosophy was not only present in the production politics of the zine but also in its content. On

many occasions, the zine—in editorials, articles, or exposure to other scenes—powered the idea that Puerto Rican punks should form their own bands, make their own records, and publish their own zines. In one particular example, the importance of subterranean economies and their connection to DIY philosophy is emphasized:

Subterranean economies are composed of many people. They are the [female] neighbors who sell *limbers*, *pasteles* [typical foods] or crafts. They are also those who mow lawns or paint houses. It's all about self-sufficiency. In the case of the punk scene, you can make your own T-shirts, publish/distribute zines, music, etc. You wouldn't be able to sustain yourself with what you get, but you would rescue the scene from its inertia... (*Zine Vergüenza* #7, 1998)

In addition to the dissemination of a DIY philosophy, one of the purposes of the zine was to “educate” its readers about civil rights, social resistance, and politics. Every issue of the zine included articles that discussed different critical topics, such as government corruption (*Zine Vergüenza* #2), xenophobia (*Zine Vergüenza* #7), famine in Africa (*Zine Vergüenza* #8), feminism, racism (*Zine Vergüenza* #9), homophobia (*Zine Vergüenza* #11), and religious manipulation (*Zine Vergüenza* #12), among other examples.

Another important dimension was its coverage of the scene in the form of interviews of local bands and record and show reviews. In this way, *Zine Vergüenza* served as a place of cultural convergence where bands could see themselves represented and where people could learn about the cultural commodities being produced. People could also learn about the latest venues hosting punk shows or when shows would take place. The zine served to construct the notion that all these interests, ideas, politics, music, and gatherings converged in one community: the Puerto Rican punk scene. Further, *Zine Vergüenza* greatly contributed to the legitimization and insertion of the Puerto Rico scene within the international punk community by providing a space for international scenes and labels to advertise, since advertising in the zine was free. For instance, *Zine Vergüenza* advertised and promoted either zines or records from countries such as

Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Malaysia, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Uruguay, and Venezuela and from many states including California, Illinois, Colorado, Florida, New York, Oregon, and Utah. In this respect, the production and exchange of commodities results in a social entity that maintains a cultural space, even if that space remains against the margins, helping to construct the idea of a punk scene that was united by common goals and politics.

5. High Tech: Digital media

With the advent of technologies that facilitate the management and reproduction of information—such as computers, word processing software, and personal printers—punk cultural modes of production began to adopt new strategies. This is more evident in the Puerto Rico scene, where the availability of personal computer technologies converged with the consolidation of the scene in the beginning of the 1990s. The zine, which started as a mostly low-tech endeavor, began to adapt to and rely on both low-tech and high-tech tools. Even *Zine Vergüenza* became reliant on computers as tools of production, as exemplified in an editorial: “As you may have noted, I have a computer now. I’m finally a modern girl! Once I have a phone line, I will have e-mail. For the time being, we will continue using the human mail” (*Zine Vergüenza* #8).

Low-tech tools, such as conventional mail correspondence, quickly became cumbersome and impractical. Even those who had been avid users of mail, such as Taína, made the transition to computers with ease. Others, such as José, creator of the label *Discos de Hoy* and guitarist of *Tropiezo*, saw in the computer an opportunity to facilitate matters. José and Wallo (former *Tropiezo* bassist), talked about their experiences with traditional correspondence:

José—When I started with *Tropiezo*, I received letters. Dude, it sucked big time.

I would answer them, but it was a burden to write to someone and send it.

Wallo—Do you remember this interview for a Belgian zine? It was done by hand. The guy sent us letters. I remember answering the questions, all tired. It was like taking a test, man. Just like taking a test! (Interview)

Digital technologies are at the core of the evolution of the Puerto Rican punk scene, and the scene's growth has been largely dependent on computers, the internet, and recording software and interfaces. The computer is a central technology in punk cultural production since it provides the necessary platform for the relatively inexpensive and simple creation of punk commodities. Not surprisingly, the internet is also crucial because its inherent logic—the possibility of network—reverberates in the punk logic. For José, the internet serves as the “nervous system” of his operation, the “brain” being the computer itself:

José—As far as technologies are concerned, the internet is the most valuable. You know, we can communicate five times on the same day. That helps me a lot. I mean, it helps everybody. If my computer breaks down, I'm fucked. I'd need to get me a new one. No computer means I can't record, you can't do anything. Right now, the computer in the studio controls everything: recording, the internet... But that's all basic technology. It's like having a TV or something like that. We're not breaking new ground here. To me, this is all basic. These are technologies that everyone has, “mandatory,” so to speak. It's like the computer, without one you can't do anything. I guess you could, but if you're going to have a job, get your things going, you've got to have a computer. (Interview)

This last excerpt exemplifies an undeniable trend in punk production in that computer technologies now play a central role in the creation, production, distribution, and promotion of punk commodities. Technology, in this respect, has become “naturalized” into the very foundation of punk praxis.

Punk's reliance on technology is predominantly underestimated by punks themselves. In many ways, digital technologies have *blended* with the punk logic to the extent that technologies are rarely questioned as tools of dominant descent. One of the reasons

technologies are accepted by punks with such facility is connected to the fact that digital technologies, for reasons not necessarily consonant with the punk project, seem to be in tune with a DIY ideal. That is, digital technologies of production and reproduction present a formidable opportunity for individuals to exercise creativity and relative self-determination (at least in terms of artistic creation and relative production capabilities). In this sense, digital technologies both interpellate and are interpellated by the values and attributes that constitute punk culture as an ideological formation.

6. Myspace and Punk Production

Myspace, and more increasingly Facebook, have come to be crucial platforms from which punks organize networks of production and distribution. Social networking platforms are key to cultural self production and organization because they enable synergistic social nexus creation through the sharing of information and media through an electronic interface environment that transcends space and time. The result is a “digital snowball,” a social network that self-reproduces itself at an amazing rate.

Even if Myspace’s popularity as a social networking platform continues to dramatically decrease vis-a-vis Facebook (a 2010 social network ad spending outlook by [eMarketer](#) positioned Myspace at \$385 millions worldwide compared to \$490 millions in 2009), I focus on it because, in the case of the Puerto Rican punk scene, it became the first and most pervasive social networking platform from which punks upgraded and expanded their networks of cultural production and exchange. Myspace has been particularly useful for bands (which is confirmed by a study evincing the site’s strong musician presence, see Suhr, 2010) because it is “static” enough for sharing media (contrary to Facebook, which is constantly “feeding in” information from a person’s entire network, which may be difficult to navigate), but also “socially interactive” enough for people to become friends and bring in networks of friends. Each portal is a multimedia event in itself, where one can display photos, music, videos, and blogs. Members of your extended network may post messages for anyone to see, which in itself becomes a form

of advertising for one's page. In addition, Myspace provides free space for streaming music. People can visit your portal, listen to your music, learn the history of your band, and connect you with other bands.

Puerto Rican punks actively use Myspace as a place of convergence, just as parks and plazas used to be places of convergence for the island's early punks. An overwhelming number of Puerto Rican punk bands keep a Myspace portal (increasingly, in conjunction with a Facebook band page), which has incredibly augmented the vitality of the scene by connecting people, bands, and punk projects both locally and internationally.

One of the first bands to use Myspace (and, consequently, diffuse the idea) was *Tropiezo*. When I asked José and Wallo about how they learned about Myspace, they quickly revealed their initial skepticism:

José—[Myspace] has been around for about two years now. When we went on tour last year, we were like “what is this shit?” you know.

Wallo—I remember that a girl I knew created [a portal] and there were photos of her in her bras and I thought “this is really lame.”

José—At first we thought it was something like *Vida Cool* [a Puerto Rican virtual community regarded by punks as a “yuppie” network]. But when we went on [our first US tour], *all* the bands had Myspace. So I decided to create one to see what the deal is. Now I have contact with *everyone*, people from other countries and all. And it's so easy. (Interview)

Myspace quickly became a standard tool for bands. Just as the personal computer “revolutionized” zine making, Myspace has “revolutionized” how bands represent themselves. In José's words, Myspace

Really works for bands. For example, you post the MP3s, four songs of your band. People go [to your page], they listen to them, if they like them, they can download them. They can contact you, they can type in “bands from Puerto Rico” and your [page] will show up. Anyone who *wants* to find you, will *really* be able to find you. There're no more excuses, as far as contacts go. Thousands

and thousands and thousands of bands are in Myspace. When I want to contact a band, I go directly to Myspace. (Interview)

Connectedness is at the core of a DIY punk philosophy and, without networks, punk economics cannot be sustained. Myspace provides an *exponential* mechanism through which networks are not only effectively sustained, but constantly *reproduced*. Furthermore, connections are not only limited to a closed realm, such as “punk,” but to any possibility of *affinity*, be it political, musical, or esthetic. Wallo describes this:

You know, in Myspace, I enter other people’s profiles, I see bands and shit, I click on them, and if I see something I like—it could be hip-hop or whatever—I add them [to my list of friends] and when they add me, I tell them “hey, check these Puerto Rican bands out.” And they *do* write back. Sometimes it’s very random people, like from Wisconsin. (Interview)

Just like the zine created a symbolic and material point of convergence for punk culture, Myspace creates a virtual space of convergence that is more powerful than any of the technologies and artifacts that figured in the early stages of punk. Where zines would describe music through reviews, Myspace permits its users to *experience* music first hand. Where the scene reports would portray “exotic” punk scenes, Myspace provides the space where *entire* scenes become alive. Where punk networks were created and stimulated through zine advertisements, Myspace becomes the ultimate network where virtually any band is immediately accessible.

Punk culture’s use of Myspace is directly connected to the very structure of its platform. First, Myspace provides incredible flexibility of dissemination. Bands can include almost any information they want, from history and lyrics to music and concert footage. Furthermore, it is not complicated to edit and transform its basic HTML encoding in order to customize pages. Second, Myspace seemingly provides a “commercial” media platform for punks without the associated costs. For instance, José talks about how Myspace makes it impractical to create a band website:

Like, right now I don’t want to maintain a Tropiczo.com website. I just create a Myspace page and I post shows, updates, our new songs. A lot of people contact

us there. For contacts is just fucking awesome. It serves the basic function of what a band website should be: post music, announce shows, and have a contact list. That's it. Why would you want to create a band website? I mean, the people who made possible our Florida tour I met through Myspace. (Interview)

Yet, aspects that are not apparent in these accounts have to do with the implementation, dissemination, and effects related to the political economy of the media industries that make possible counter-corporate media production such as punk. Although seemingly effaced from their cultural production, they are still a very real aspect of such production and thus must be considered within a complex analysis of oppositional media production in capitalism.

7. Contextualizing New Media: The political economy of Myspace

It cannot be overlooked that the political character of new media technologies has to be examined against the commercial mechanisms from which they emerge. Marshall (2004) points out to the economic determinations of new media as he foregrounds that the deployment of new media technologies, especially the internet, was not “entirely modalized around simple and utopian ideals of public good” (p.36), but around an infrastructure of mobility of capital that secures global capitalism. Thus, “we would call the internet a DIY media form in its invocation to users to fabricate their media practices; but it is important to understand that this development of a DIY media form is not freed from the operations of corporations” (p. 47). Even Jones (2000) understands that “capitalization and market power of major labels may significantly affect the degree of disintermediation and its consequences” (p. 219).

It is clear that punks are lured into Myspace because it provides a free way of consolidating and expanding the punk media network. This capability is precisely what has drawn millions of users to Myspace. In 2005 Myspace was drawing more than 150,000 users a day, making the website a gold mine for advertising investment (Rosenbush, 2005). Convinced by the potential of Myspace as a new trend in media, in the summer of 2005 Rupert Murdoch acquired Myspace for \$580 million. Since then,

NewsCorp has been working hard figuring out the marketing promise of Myspace given its yet potentially lucrative configuration.

In this sense, Myspace presents both a problem and an opportunity for the creation of a new media platform that capitalizes on the commodification of lifestyles. On the one hand, Myspace's success is founded on the principle that users have freedom to create, navigate, and promote themselves as *individuals*. Because there is no way to predict the different aesthetics, consumption habits, and desires of individuals, and because there is no way of controlling how individuals interact with each other, Myspace presents a dilemma for traditional marketing strategies that rely on consumer information and patterns in order to promote products. As Reiss (2006) writes in *Wired*:

The most obvious problem is that millions of profiles that are Myspace's main real estate violate just about every rule in the marketing handbook. The site's great strength—users' freedom to design their pages any way they like—is an advertiser's nightmare of scrolling, blinking, browser-crashing chaos. (p. 146)

As of today, “most mainstream marketing on Myspace has been kept to more structured areas of the site, such as the books, comedy, film, and games sections rather than on individual profile pages” (O'Malley, 2006, p. 4). However, the idea behind NewsCorp is to transform Myspace's marketing problems into a new commercial arena where users, not as consumers but as participants, *become* the source and conduit of marketing. Companies such as Myspace present advertisers with the golden opportunity to learn first-hand about new consumption trends by specifically looking at what people are doing. For instance, companies may learn how products are being put to use by people, thus enabling an avenue of marketing and capitalization. The capitalization of directly looking into people's “media lives” has enabled Myspace to create Myspace Records, which seeks to find and sign artists with the potential of becoming stars (Oser & Klaassen, 2005, p. 3). And yet another strategy that has been at work involves exploiting the potential of “immersive ad campaigns,” or “commercial Myspace profiles that publicize movies, albums, and consumer products” (Reiss, 2006, p. 147). Using this strategy, companies are able to blend into the Myspace community, spreading onto people's profiles. The type of media strategy sought by social media companies such as

Myspace could become to the commercialization of the internet what reality shows became to television: low-cost, high-profit platforms.

The political economy of Myspace demonstrates the multidimensional role that new media technologies play in DIY production. Even as technologies have become a necessary aspect of punk cultural production, they also belong to a broader arena through which capitalism thrives and is solidified into our lived realities. As Castells (2007) recognizes,

NewsCorp's strategy includes an understanding of the new rules of the game. The key to successfully integrating MySpace into the overall NewsCorp strategy, is to allow MySpace communities to remain free, and set up their own rules, indeed inventing new forms of expression and communication. (p. 252)

Digital technologies, be it for recording, networking, or reproduction, are primarily developed for their *consumption*, not *use*, value, but use value more and more determines the parameters of profit in networked markets. A political economy of new media, as exemplified by Myspace, points to the fact that network counter-power is, in effect, immersed in the very process of its incorporation into the logic of network society capitalism.

If one looks at some Puerto Rican bands' pages—*Tropiezo*, *Cojoba*, *Hay Silencio*—they feature banner advertisements of Verizon, T-Mobile, and Microsoft. In terms of a politics of communication, the articulations that punks make among DIY philosophy, media technologies, punk commodities, and politics seem problematic, contradictory, and perhaps potentially detrimental to a punk political vision. In this respect, punk media infrastructures are always caught within the contradiction of relying on the very system counter to which their production and exchange networks are built, an inherent tension of deploying opposition in capitalism.

8. Conclusion: Foregrounding the Complexity of Counter-power Media Production

As exemplified by the research presented here, the case of punk production networks offers many points of examination that may expand our understanding of the complex role of networks and new media in social practices that seek to counter dominant forms of media production, especially those that are deployed from capitalist societies. Castells has recently offered some perspectives on networks and media counter-power. One of his arguments is that the rise of what he calls “mass self-communication,” which can be thought of as an integral feature of the current network society, may exert “counter-power, the deliberate attempt to change power relationships, enacted by reprogramming networks around alternative interests and values, and/or disrupting the dominant switches while switching networks of resistance and social change” (Castells, 2009, p. 421). However, he also understands that “corporate media are fully present in the horizontal networks of communication, and that grassroots activists and social movements are not alone in the effective use of these networks to communicate among themselves and with society” (Castells, 2007, p. 257). In this respect, we still need to further evaluate the impact of some resistive social networks *within* capitalism as counter-power and examine the historical implications and effects of the spectrum of connections that make possible their power to self-communicate.

The concept of articulation becomes useful for an analysis of the historical complexity of network connections. I understand articulation as the means through which a dominant bloc fixes dominant ideological significations, which is not exclusive to a dominant bloc nor are its resulting significations absolute. Articulations have to be “positively sustained by specific processes” (Hall, 1991, p. 112) in order to maintain their representational status, and the fact that they have to be “sustained” opens the possibility of what Hall calls “re-articulations.” Through the articulation of technological tools—digital recording interfaces, Myspace, the internet—Puerto Rican punks are able to sustain a media infrastructure that works as part of a discursively connected network of scenes and centers of cultural production. People are at the core of new media articulations. As much as new media communication is enabled by a

power assemblage of economic and political relations, it is also the product of the ideological interpellations, experiences, identifications, historical positions, and creativity of technology users and their appropriations of technology. In the case of Puerto Rico, punks have articulated the potential of technologies to the needs of their project of cultural production, resulting in the optimization of resources and structural possibilities. Digital recording interfaces and software, the computer, the internet, and Myspace are strategically articulated to form an infrastructural base through which Puerto Rican punks are able to sustain their media project.

At the same time, by articulating technologies, punks also articulate aspects of the logic of exchange and production intrinsic to the capitalist system, such as mass production, economic expansion, and exploitation of labor and resources as media technologies do not emerge from a void, but from their need of reproducing, and being reproduced within, the capitalist logic. New media technologies such as Myspace are not neutral tools that are extrinsic to historical processes, and this non-neutrality *has* to be considered within any mapping of counter-power. If one of the major corporate goals of Myspace is to burrow into people's digital niches by exploiting the commercialization of lifestyles more effectively, to what extent are DIY politics of production undermined, trivialized, corporatized? Furthermore, to what extent are instances of counter-power self-communication beneficial to the corporate taming of horizontal networks of information and cultural production?

To various degrees, punks attempt to "mask" the mark of capitalism in their practices by the re-articulation of capitalistic significations that permeate the punk logic. This is what Thompson (2004) calls the "shame of exchangeability," punks' insistence on "detaching" their production practices from corporate conduits. Whereas the music industries turn musical products into glamorized commodities, punks make an effort to de-glamorize music by taking production into their own hands; whereas capitalism prescribes a formula for success based on sales and economic growth, punks devalue their commodities and favor micro-production over expansion. However, punks' often problematic "masking" of capitalism creates an important discursive tension as punks are unable to disentangle from their insertion into and reliance on capitalism as a

structural system. The punk discourse, codified as a vehement rejection to capitalism, is caught between the paradox of rejecting a system and fundamentally relying on that very system.

The paradox is crucial to an understanding of networked cultural production. As Ericksson (2005) asserts, “network is a place within which boundaries are drawn, but at the same time the network itself is constantly brought about as a result of this boundary-drawing” (p. 321). Uses of technology for self mass-communication may represent a re-articulation and re-territorialization of the mediascape, as uses of technology do have social effects. Nonetheless, these effects are always caught within a structurally-pervasive power logic with the sustained capability to build the networks of its reproduction upon networks of production and exchange. This inherent tension coexists with the act of rearticulation as punks attempt to create a micro-mediascape from which to signify. Punks’ engagement with new media foregrounds an avenue of social mobility as it also makes possible the reterritorialization of cultural spaces that tend to give primacy to tendential modes of production and exchange. However, as I have said elsewhere, “the inherent tension that is observed between [punks’] anti-capitalist logic, their implicit adoption of this logic and the incorporation of some of its tools of cultural production is neither a [political] triumph nor failure, but a *re-articulation*, a *directional possibility* (Author, year, page). It is in this recognition, and its serious evaluation, where the building blocks of an ontology of resistance in late-capitalism lies.

9. References

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