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# ANDROGYNOUS PUNK AS POSTFEMINIST SIGNIFYING STRATEGY OF TRANSGRESSION WITHIN SUBCULTURES: PUNK AESTHETIC AS GENDER DE[CON]STRUCTION IN THE TRILOGY FILM SERIES “*THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO*” AND THE ANIME SERIES “*KINO'S JOURNEY*”

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## Abstract

This paper will investigate contemporary representations of androgyny and the strategic possibilities of punk-androgyny within a post-feminist imaginary. In looking at the characters Lisbeth in the Swedish film trilogy, *The Girl With A Dragon Tattoo*, and *Kino* in the Japanese anime series, *Kino's Journey*, I am interested in connecting the metonymy of punk dress to representations of transgressions of gender norms. My investigation will look at the concept that gender is “unread” through androgyny which manifests as visual signifiers that make up the punk metonymy. The subjects (characters Lisbeth and Kino) erase the signifier of gender, through punk-androgyny, in order to reclaim power and identity within a (masculinized) subculture and mainstream society. Androgyny is not the desire to be the opposite sex as in a transgender subjectivity. Instead, androgyny is a strategy of aesthetics that transgresses the normative structure of language and signifiers that refer girls and women as less than or as Other through the normative codes of feminizing. In addition to arguing that punk metonymy erases explicit or readable/normative gender signs, I will analyze how the motorcycle is situated as an extension of the body. The use of motorcycling propels the literal and figurative androgynous bodies through space in overt transgressive actions against the establishment; it provides agency, motility and ultimately new subject positions for the female protagonists. Through a critical analysis drawing from cultural and post-feminist theory and through the examination of specific scenes, this paper aims to investigate punk aesthetic as a post-feminist strategy.

## Keywords

androgyny, feminism, punk style, popular culture, anime, film, transgression, motorcycle

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In the 1984 song “Androgynous” by the American punk band The Replacements, gender equity and ambiguity are characterized as feminist tenets and utopian possibilities within a punk subculture. The opening verse reveals transgressive cross-dressing and androgynous sameness as an ideal expression of identity for both men and women. The words move from marked maleness to strong femaleness, merging in the lyrics “Same hair, revolution. Same build, evolution” and culminating in a utopic tomorrow that embraces an expression of “Androgynous” (Westerberg, 1984). Like many punk bands, The Replacements sing about a punk aesthetic that promises a revolution and subversion of established hegemonic practices (Laing, 1978, p.124). Scholars of subcultural theory argue that this ideal of gender equity never really manifested and that the punk subculture of the 1970s and 1980s merely mirrored mainstream patriarchal culture, giving women two options in which to belong; one, adopt hypermasculinized dress codes and behavior or two, adopt hyperfeminized dress codes and behavior (Laing, 1978, p. 128; Leblanc, 2001, p.140; Williams, 2011, p. 60). According to cultural theorist J. Patrick Williams “[w]hile punk and hardcore have contained feminist style discourse for years, their content has been diffused largely by males, and few bands or scenes have done as much as they could to actualize gender equality” (2011, p. 61). As the twentieth century neared its end, post-punk transformations like goth-punk, emo-punk and cyberpunk emerged as altered hybrid signs of the strict punk binary of hyper-masculinized or slut-hyperfeminized aesthetic. Within these “new” subcultures, girls and women practiced alternative expressions of gender and transgressed “punk” expectations of masculinized signification. Music and cultural movements like the riot grrrls helped usher in the concept of third-wave feminism in the 1990s (Budgeon, 2011, p. 283; Williams, 2011, p. 61). Many second-wave feminists took (and continue to take) issue with terms such as “third-wave.” Through postmodern and poststructural lexicons, feminism from the 1990s on has been characterized as in a state of “postfeminism,” suggesting the wave or movement of second-wave feminism is dead. Feminism is not dead as this term “postfeminism” suggests, but it has been complicated by popular culture production, technological performances of identity and the condition of postmodernity. In their essay “Skater Girlhood: Resignifying Femininity, Resignifying Feminism,” Dawn H. Currie, Deidre M. Kelly and Shauna Pomerantz write that the new category of “girl power” reveals an empowered, self-constructed subjecthood:

While there is general consensus that ‘gender’ is a socially and theoretically significant identity category, there is less agreement on exactly how. Disagreement reflects the emergence of previously unthinkable possibilities and an accompanying sentiment-expressed in both popular and academic thought – that identities are now self-constructed. As traditional markers of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ are being challenged, what it means to be a ‘gendered subject’ is a matter of everyday as well as scholarly speculation. (Currie, Kelly & Pomerantz, 2011, p. 293)

In this essay I argue that androgyny (achieved through subcultural style and through bodily relationships to clothing, dress and motorcycles) is a form of resistant politics, punk aesthetic and transgressive identification that not only destabilizes binaries but offers women and girls alternative modes of expressing gender identification outside of dominant and normative codes of femininity or masculinity.

The androgynous “girl” figures in the anime series *Kino’s Journey* (2004), Kino, and the Swedish film trilogy: *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* (2009), Lisbeth, exist and challenge the status quo (as film characters) in what might be called the postfeminist era of cultural production from roughly 1997-2007 (McRobbie 2007). Postfeminism as noted by McRobbie (2007) is a

re-instantiation of gender binaries. I suggest that androgyny is a productive strategy to counter hegemonic adhesion of binary structures. In *Kino's Journey* and *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, the key "girl" figures' androgyny and punk style are indicative of the ambivalence over postfeminism's contradictory claims of empowerment for women in a global and convergent media society where girl power is rooted or reiterated in the performance of gender codes (Butler, 1990, p. 25). Disrupting the re-performance of codes through a countering of girl culture and countering of the feminization of the political subject, Kino and Lisbeth are characters whose aesthetics transgress waves of feminism and complicate postfeminism as feminine, revealing in its assault a strategy for women and girls (grrrls) to cross and uncross gender boundaries and binaries inside and outside of representation through a practice of androgyny.

As a matter of clarity and perhaps contradiction, I would like to highlight how the terms "punk," "postfeminist" and "transgression" will be used in this essay. It is first important to denote how the term punk is employed as a reference to clothing, hairstyle, and attitude or affect within a post-punk timeline, specifically punk style of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. I am not tracing a history of the social movement or scene of 1970s punk rock, but, instead I am entering into "punk" as a post-punk anti-establishment strategy, despite its commodification, glamorization and general dilution as a musical weapon over the past forty years. As style and as an aesthetic, punk continues to change, morph, and adapt with each generation of youth culture. Thus, phrases like emo-punk, steam-punk, and goth-punk arise out of the co-mingling and hybridization of styles and subversive practices of subcultures in various geographic locations. As a result, punk can refer to a large swath of possibilities: from burgeoning and reactive music scenes in the U.S. and the U.K. in the 1970s to a style of dress popularized in youth culture post-1970s, post-1980s and beyond. Punk, while rooted in these specific historical, cultural and geographical trajectories, has been reabsorbed and continues to be exploited or expressed across a global popular culture and local youth subcultural scenes (Hebdige, 1979, p. 26 ; Williams, 2011, p. 85). What the term "post-punk" does is to situate punk beyond its historical narrative and open the door to a reclamation of DIY aesthetics and tactics for movements or phenomenon such as seen with the riot grrrls of the 1990s, or other late-20<sup>th</sup> century and early-21<sup>st</sup> century subversive girl culture. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the riot grrrls opened up visual and acoustic possibilities for girls (Williams, 2011, p. 63). Hence, punk as style and as subversive practices has been taken up by various subcultural and social groups over the past forty years. There is no easy, single definition of what a punk looks like or is. However, punk does refer to style, and I will draw from its messy history of dress as well as the tactics of androgyny used by post-punk girls in the 2000s (post-riot grrrl movement). The second term which also holds contradictory and even contested definitions and trajectories is postfeminist. Postfeminism, though most notably popularized as a negative term by cultural theorist Angela McRobbie in 2004, has had a more recent recuperation as well as continued articulation within conservative politics and the media (Milestone & Meyer, 2012, p. 13). The term postfeminism encompasses simultaneous repudiation and embracing of feminist tenets, which points to another instantiation of the difficulty in defining complex, historical movements. With "post" meaning after or beyond, conjoining with the term feminism; postfeminism assumes an achieved level of gender equality (p. 11). Through this convenient conjunction of "post" and "feminism", the term postfeminism points to an ideological contradiction and a continued reassessment of what feminism is in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Milestone & Meyer, 2012, p. 13; Gill & Scharff, 2011, p. 5). While I am not arguing that androgyny is representative of postfeminism, I maintain that androgyny as expressed through punk style and within a postfeminist era resists both normative aesthetics (gender expressions), and is a mode of subversion (resistant to iterative codes) inside the subculture itself. Punk as

style, as Dick Hebdige argues, is a by-product of the resistant youth subculture of the 1970s. The punk aesthetic of this period (1970s) was intricately tied up with the desire to disrupt and even transgress mainstream culture and popular music (form) despite its eventual commodification and popularization (Hebdige, 1979, p. 18; Laing, 1978, p. 124).

Transgression is a necessary tactic in challenging and crossing over normative boundaries of society. As Chris Jenks argues in his book *Transgression*, at the core of acts of transgression is a necessity to go “beyond the bounds or limits set by commandment or law or convention, it is to violate or infringe” (Jenks, 2003, p.2). Jenks points out that the spatial boundaries and the limits of “normative” behavior must be crossed in order to be transgressive. In their book, *The Poetics and Politics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (1986) write that in order to transgress political boundaries, in order to activate change, socially and politically, one must challenge the hierarchies of society. “Transgression becomes a kind of reverse or counter-sublimation, undoing the discursive hierarchies and stratifications of bodies and cultures which bourgeois society has produced as a mechanism of its symbolic dominance” (Stallybrass & White, 1986, pp. 200-201). Punk culture is both a challenge to normative society, transgressing ideas of beauty and gender norms. Punk is also a replication of normative hierarchies, at least for girls and women. While on the surface punk may seem to challenge the gender norms as Lauraine Leblanc (1999) argues in her book *Pretty in Punk: Girls’ Gender Resistance in a Boys’ Subculture*:

My peers, the other punks in my high school, understood this, and didn’t have to ask what I was doing, or what I had to say. With ease and simplicity, they adopted me as one of their own, just another rebel in the ranks of the high school rejects. As a matter of fact, no one ever asked me, not even the administrators of my high school on the day they expelled me for transgressing their (gender?) norms. (Leblanc, 1999, p.4)

Punk does not offer girls and women the complete utopic freedom that is signified by the vestimentary and sonic accouterments so associated with the punk aesthetic. In her introduction, Leblanc writes about one of her research subjects, “Like me, she felt troubled about the male-dominated gender dynamics in the punk subculture, a subculture that portrays itself as egalitarian, and even feminist, but is actually far from being either” (Leblanc, 1999, p. 6). Many girls transgress gender norms by adopting the aesthetics, poetics and politics of punk culture, only to find that the same sexism and violence occur in this new community. Within punk culture, girls and women must transgress a second set of boundaries.

The punk movement, through its myriad manifestations since its inception in the 1970s, continues to mark youth culture. Despite its changes, developments, and radical expressions, punk culture replicates the hegemonic practices of mainstream culture by marginalizing women and producing hypermasculinized imagery. (Williams, 2011, p. 58). In her essay “The Expansion of Punk Rock: Riot Grrrl Challenges to Gender Power Relations in British Indie Music Subcultures,” Julia Downes (2012) writes “Punk music and culture are not essentially male but are socially (re)produced as masculine within a set of contested gendered spaces, discourses, and practices. Punk corporeal practices and sounds become vital sites of the construction, exploration, and consolidation of heterosexual masculinities” (p. 207). Punk as a form of resistance to mainstream masculinity could then be seen as a feminist strategy despite its problematic replications of gender binaries. However as J. Patrick Williams explores in his book *Subcultural Theory: Traditions and Concepts*:

Some subcultures, especially punk hardcore, and hip-hop, contain critical elements that

align with feminism and thus may attract girls and women who are searching for alternative communities of support. Yet the men who dominate these subcultures, numerically and hegemonically, actually reproduce many aspects of the dominant gender order, thereby offering women little change from the status quo (Williams, 2011, p. 63).

As a result of her extensive ethnographic research within the subculture, Leblanc (1999) argues that:

punk girls, by positioning themselves outside of the mainstream culture, engage in active resistance to the prescriptions and proscriptions that overpower many contemporary adolescent girls. In negotiating between the norms of femininity and the masculinity of punk, these girls construct forms of resistance to gender norms in ways that permit them to retain a strong sense of self (p. 13).

Thus, the punk female figure is ambivalent about masculinity and femininity, simultaneously, which aids in the further destabilization of gender binaries, and fixed signs of either masculinity or femininity.

This sense of self and the positioning of oneself outside of mainstream culture while also transgressing the norms of subcultural codes found in punk style are key in reading the gender de-signification of the characters Lisbeth in the film trilogy *The Girl With A Dragon Tattoo*, and Kino in the anime series *Kino's Journey*. Lisbeth and Kino are visually rendered as powerful emo-punk and post-punk transgressors within violent patriarchal systems. I use the term emo-punk to situate both characters within postfeminism and in a post-punk adaptation of style, referring to their hair style, mode of dress and time period in which both series were created (2006-2009). The characters' employments and performances of androgyny allow the characters to transgress gender norms and displace coded images of the pre-pubescent youth as less than or victim. The styles of dress (punk, emo-punk, goth-punk and cyberpunk) used in both *The Girl With a Dragon Tattoo* and *Kino's Journey* extend the performances of androgyny and destabilize the gender codes represented by the other characters in the respective stories.

In *The Girl With a Dragon Tattoo*, the character Lisbeth adapts her style across various aesthetics of punk; at times the character wears goth-punk infused dress/clothing and in certain situations employs more post-punk or emo-punk attire. The blending of emo, goth, and post-punk complicate and dismiss punk as something fixed, static, or even original. It is within these tropes that Lisbeth and Kino are able to suture androgyny, male to female or female to male, as exterior surface skin and interior tactical identification. Underneath the surface read of these metonymic devices lies a postmodern feminist power (post-postfeminist) and a post-punk expression which transgress gender norms and even transgress the norms of a post-punk subculture. Emo-punk and goth-punk are read through visual signifiers of dress where the punk aesthetic is used to mask the normative readable signs of femininity through the use of clothing, hairstyle, fashion, and accessories. These signs allow the body to be read as masculine and feminine simultaneously, a body which would otherwise not be read.

As Roland Barthes (1983) describes in *The Fashion System*, "[t]he body cannot signify; clothing guarantees the passage from sentience to meaning; it is, we might say, the signified par excellence" (p. 258). The signifying system of punk clothing has a systemic organization or layers of semiological meaning. Thus, the dominant group determines one set of meaning, and then the subculture determines a second order of meaning (Hebdige, 1979, p. 21, Barthes, 1972). Lisbeth and Kino use clothing signifiers to resist normative structures and to align themselves with a

subculture that challenges the existing hegemony.

We can expect clothing to constitute an excellent poetic object; first, because it mobilizes with great variety all the qualities of matter: substance, form, color, tactility, movement, rigidity, luminosity; next, because touching the body and functioning simultaneously as its substitute and its mask, it is certainly the object of a very important investment; this 'poetic' disposition is attested to by the frequency and the quality of vestimentary descriptions in literature (Barthes, 1983, p. 236).

Characters adapted from books, Lisbeth and Kino, wear costumes that propel the stories of renegade girl, transgressing normative codes of beauty and behavior, ultimately fulfilling the roles of "hero" and "leading lady."

The costumes and the accouterments or wearable objects; leather jacket, spiked jewelry, facial piercings, and tattoos used and worn by Lisbeth, poetically and semiotically pierce the surface of the objectifier and the objectified, smashing the gender norms that perpetuate violence against women within patriarchal systems of power such as the state, mental institutions, and the military (Foucault, 1977). Through the use of punk aesthetics, the subject self-erases any set signs of femininity and replaces it with signs of power and transgression. The punk subject reverses and mirrors itself, confusing, contradicting and declaring a revolution on fixity or the fixed positions of victim, usurping this position through a new self-construction via the fashion system or punk style. Kino's hair emphasizes the androgynous mask that she uses as a tactic in escaping, surviving, and most importantly, while in movement or traveling.

In both fictitious worlds the main characters are victims of violence perpetrated by men. As rebellious actions they both appropriate aspects of punk-gothic, and emo-punk style. This is most overtly reflected in their costuming or dress and visual appearance, an appearance that triggers the masking of their femininity and directly challenges normative representations of female and feminine fashion, dress, and expression. Their transgressive acts are specific acts of resistance against the status quo, challenging patriarchal power by displacing and removing the position of the male perpetrator as the active subject position and removing themselves as the object that is acted upon. In *Kino's Journey*, Kino's father tries to kill her and she escapes. In *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* trilogy, specifically *The Girl Who Played With Fire*, Lisbeth Salander sets out to kill her father who has also been trying to kill her. Lisbeth, like Kino, was a victim who is now converted, self-configured into a "subject" with agency and intention. The punk objects dress and style play integral roles in how the bodies perform transgressions.

### **Lisbeth, The Girl With A Dragon Tattoo**

In *The Girl With a Dragon Tattoo*, the main character, Lisbeth, who is a high-tech hacker and information specialist, sports a postmodern punk and sometimes goth aesthetic. The first time we see her in the film she is walking down a corridor to the subway. The camera follows her from behind. Her silhouette is defined by a black hoodie worn underneath a black leather motorcycle jacket. As Lisbeth rounds a corner and descends the stairs, we get a glimpse of her profile, barely present as the hood and goth hair obscure a clear view. In the original text from which the film is based, the author Stieg Larsson describes Lisbeth's footwear as Doc Martens. Lisbeth's shoes are a part of her punk style and her androgynous expression. The next scene that we "see" a full representation of Lisbeth is at a seemingly conservative security firm. Lisbeth turns to meet a client. Introduced by her employer, Lisbeth is juxtaposed to the conservative dress of the

“corporation.” She is wearing a black leather jacket, black turtleneck, and goth makeup (heavy black eyeliner and black lipstick). Her hair is cut short with long bangs that hang down across her face in an obligatory three-quarter emo style. Dressed in black, she sports a spiked necklace which is reminiscent of shark teeth or other aggressive and potentially dangerous iconographic adornments. She has multiple piercings in her face and ears. In later scenes, she wears her hair in an even more transgressive style, a mohawk.

The effect of the punk aesthetic renders the visual gender the same as if she were a “he” wearing punk style clothing. Thus the style becomes a signifier of androgyny as the “male” and “female” figure are read as the same. Androgyny is not the desire to be the opposite sex. Androgyny is a strategy or tactic that transgresses the normative structure of visual language and signifiers that refer girls and women as less than or as Other. Androgynous punk style negates and neutralizes the codes of normative gender. These codes that exist in a binary are conflated and merged to create confusion, misreading and ultimately an “unread.” The use of a punk aesthetic is a strategy for being unread as either masculine or feminine. In this unreadable state, the body mirrors the opposite; it absorbs itself and projects the other. Lisbeth lives in the realm of androgyny including digital spaces that afford true hybridization and masking or erasure of gender signs. She is a post-punk hacker (information specialist) who works for a security company uncovering secure information and data through legal and illegal means. Through an embodiment of the other, the androgynous figure is in a constant flux of being read as male, then female, then male, then female, caught in a distorted feedback loop of unreadable signs or constantly changing signs, as in a flicker of individual frames that blend out their own specificity when they are run through a projector at a rapid speed.

In the second film, *The Girl Who Played With Fire*, in the scene where Lisbeth searches for documents at her social worker’s country home, Lisbeth wears an oversized sweatshirt hoodie with a baseball cap. As Lisbeth finds the wanted documents, the camera cuts to the gang members riding up on their loud custom chopper motorcycles. As the gang members pull up to the house, the view of the camera closes in on Lisbeth. She is no longer “unreadable” as the gang members’ proximity to her body decreases. In a series of verbal exchanges, Lisbeth is confronted by both men who are wearing their colors, their motorcycle club affiliation on their backs.<sup>1</sup> The verbal confrontation turns into a physical altercation in which Lisbeth disables the bikers from pursuing her. The next shot starts high above a horizon line, at a tree line moving with the sound of a motorcycle. The camera pans down revealing Lisbeth wearing a biker helmet, sunglasses, leather jacket and the gang members’ patch which is now on her back. Disguising her already masked self, she cruises along the road on the chopper, leaning with the curves of the road and the squiggly lines of the lanes. As she pulls up to a parking spot, we see her flip down the kickstand, dismount effortlessly, and then she disrobes, removing the bikers’ clothing, placing them in a trash receptacle. She turns toward the commuter train, putting a baseball cap on, pulling her hood up and walking away, melting into the oblivion and anonymity of the public space.

Lisbeth as a character rejects normative expressions of gender by using the tropes of punk style to mask her perceived weak body, Lisbeth manifests a body and image capable of protecting herself against attacks by hoodlums, biker gangs and assassins (her father). Trained in martial arts and self-defense (a moniker of second-wave feminism), Lisbeth triumphantly “kicks ass” in the spirit of the riot grrrl movement and other representations of third-wave feminists (1990s). Further complicating her punk style and readable gender, Lisbeth’s androgyny moves

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1 One percenters refers to criminal bikers; 99 percent of bikers are upstanding citizens, and only one percent are involved in crime, i.e. the Hell’s Angels – this was a term coined after the infamous incident in Hollister, CA- the incident upon which the film *The Wild One* (1953, director László Benedek) was based.

between a “softer” punk aesthetic, using makeup techniques that both men and women wear, including black lipstick, heavy black eyeliner, and various hairstyles. She (re)constructs her visual identification and reconstructs it at will depending on the situation and circumstance. She is the embodiment of transgression.

### **Kino, Simply Kino**

The girl who cannot remember her original “female” name, is an eleven year old who, as she claims, is tall for her age, perhaps approaching the height of an adult. She befriends a traveler named Kino who is unfamiliar with the rules and customs of her home land which is called “The Country of Adults”. The girl escorts the traveler to her family’s hotel, where he rents a room for two nights. Over the next three days the traveler learns about the customs of the land, specifically, how on a child’s twelfth birthday he or she will be escorted to the country’s hospital to undergo an operation that transitions the child to an adult, taking all the “child” out of her or him. The traveler questions this custom and the girl seems perplexed as she has never questioned it. During his stay, the traveler finds a junked motorrad and proceeds to restore it, as he plans on leaving the country on the third day of his stay.<sup>2</sup> It just so happens that the day of the traveler’s departure is the girl’s twelfth birthday and the day of her “operation.” The girl asks her parents why she must undergo the surgery. Upon questioning authority, her parents and an inspector agree that the child must be destroyed. As the father approaches the girl with a carving knife, the traveler comes out of the alleyway pushing the newly restored motorrad that he has meanwhile named Hermes. The traveler asks what is going on and the father insists that he must go as he probably polluted the child’s mind and that he, the father, must now destroy the child.

The inverted trope of a father killing an adolescent female child is a reversal of the Japanese Asaje complex, as illuminated by scholar Carol Sorgenfrei (2005) in her book *Unspeakable Acts*. Sorgenfrei points out that “the Japanese child learns moral behavior by ‘guilt penitence.’ Rather than forsaking sexual desire for his mother, he forsakes his hatred and resentment of her” (p. 61). Similar to *The Girl With A Dragon Tattoo*, *Kino’s Journey* features a deadly familial relationship between father and child. This trope is echoed throughout *Kino’s Journey* as Kino visits countries where rulers have killed their wives and children in order to maintain power.

The girl’s transformation into the character Kino comes at the price of the death of the traveler and exile from her homeland. After her father kills the traveler, Hermes, the motorrad, whispers to the girl, “Hurry if you want to live, can you ride a bicycle? We must go now, if you want to live?” The girl jumps on the motorrad and escapes the country. After riding for a while, the girl slows down and accidentally drops the motorrad in a field of flowers where she tumbles to the ground. The motorrad asks her, “What’s your name?” and she replies, “Kino,” while thinking of the brave traveler who sacrificed his life for hers. From that moment on she is known as Kino. She can no longer remember her other name.

Not remembering and renaming oneself is a significant feminist transgressive act. In her essay “Bodies of Work,” punk academic Kathy Acker (1997) writes:

Though I couldn’t be named, ...That is, the name *female* acts to erase the presence of women. When I was a girl, I wanted to do anything but be a girl, for both *girl* and *woman* were the names of nothing, Now that I am no longer nothing, now that I have run away

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<sup>2</sup> Motorrad is the German word for motorcycle, specifically used in *Kino’s Journey* to describe Hermes, even though Hermes is a British bike, the Brough Superior, manufactured between 1919 and 1940, dubbed the Rolls Royce of motorcycles.

and so thrown off the names *girl* and *woman*, I am left not even with that. Not even with nothing (pp.161-162).

Kino is not nothing now. She has thrown off her former prepubescent girl-self and has renamed herself Kino. At times Kino corrects others who address her as “Miss” or when they call her boy. In the episode “Coliseum,” one of the guards laughs and says, “Let the little boy play.” Kino turns and replies, “Please don’t call me little boy, my name is Kino” (Nakamura, 2008, episode 8; Spicer, 2012). Kino rejects a static gender through language and clothing. She is “simply Kino.”<sup>3</sup>

The character’s physical transformation, as seen in the first episode, sets up a stark gender erasure through style; hair, clothing, and vocal quality. The first episode tells the backstory of how Kino arrives at being Kino, depicting her as a prepubescent girl or “shojo” (little female) (Napier, 2005, p.148). She wears “cute” dresses, deploying methods of “kawaii” or cuteness (p. 29). She has a delicate and sweet voice. After she becomes Kino, her voice lowers compared to what it was before. Her hair transforms from long, girlish mode to short, jagged emo-punk style. She wears loose-fitting cargo pants, a white long-sleeved shirt, a military like belt with holsters and guns. She dons a duster coat and a felt-lined aviator-like hat and goggles. Kino’s transformation is both interior and exterior as she becomes the traveler. Like Lisbeth in *The Girl With A Dragon Tattoo*, Kino’s form of subversive semiotic resistance includes methods of changing the sign system itself. Leblanc (1999) remarks that “[s]ymbolic resistance to a semiotic system, which is itself constituted of symbols, can change that system. In challenging the system, changing the rules through play, women and girls can win the femininity game...in challenging the ideologies of punk and femininity, and in reconstructing the norms, values, and styles of both, punk girls create such changes” (p. 140). Kino challenges the norms, first by asking about the “operation,” then by running away, outfitting herself in androgynous clothing, an emo hairstyle, and learning to ride a motorcycle.

Mainstream anime often represents and reinforces gender norms while sometimes subtly critiquing elements of (Japanese) society (Spicer, 2012). By using girls in the tradition of the “shojo” and using the strategy of “kawaii” or cuteness, mainstream anime tries to appeal to a girl demographic (Napier, 2005, p. 29). *Kino’s Journey* challenges these conventions of mainstream anime by representing Kino as an androgynous figure, perhaps following in the tradition of other androgynous heroines like Oscar from the hugely successful 1970s Japanese manga series and the 1980s anime series *The Rose of Versailles* (Napier, 2012). Oscar is a cross-dressing heroine who as Napier (2012) argues retains some coded female traits despite her disguise as a man. Where Oscar and Kino differ is in the expression of romantic love. Kino does not become romantically involved with men or women, a detail that could relate to Kino’s age (as she left her homeland “The Country of Adults” at age twelve). However, the notion of time in *Kino’s Journey* is fluid and despite Kino’s rule of only staying in one place for three days, many of her adventures stretch time, stop time, and forget time (Cavallaro, 2011, p. 77). Within the narrative of *Kino’s Journey*, Kino throws off the name “girl” and escapes the world of the feminized prepubescent “shojo”, transgressing the concept of “kawaii”. She is neither sexualized nor feminized; instead, she is empowered as she rejects the norms of her homeland. Through this transgression, she becomes the wise traveler capable of protecting herself in battle and also capable of bringing change to places out of balance.

The similarities between Lisbeth in *The Girl With A Dragon Tattoo* and Kino in *Kino’s Journey* are

3 From *Kino’s Journey*, episode 7, Coliseum.

visually and thematically linked in the sense that they illustrate a feminist resistance and potential challenge to hegemonic practices in mainstream culture as well as subcultural representation. Both Lisbeth and Kino reject feminine dress codes. Their dress style expresses aesthetics of emo-punk, post-punk and even militarized clothing, all of which attribute to an unreading of gender and an expression of androgyny. Both characters handle firearms with agility and ease. They ride motorcycles as a means of escape and travel. Lisbeth travels into cyberscapes as a hacker, mapping out forbidden locked landscapes of laptops and computers. Kino travels through futuristic dystopian landscapes where she is challenged physically, intellectually, and emotionally. Lisbeth's father is a violent perpetrator who wants her dead. Kino's father tries to kill her because she questions authority. Both characters are victims of violence, but invert the position of being the object through self-empowerment. The androgynous aesthetic enables both characters to move freely within the normative patriarchal systems. By adopting "male" clothing and the hypermasculinized styles of post-punk culture both characters challenge the status quo through androgynous appearances.

As products of a postmodern, post-postfeminist, and new femininity, Lisbeth and Kino reject the binaries of masculine and feminine. Shelley Budgeon (2011) traces this type of girl power and subversive approach through a third-wave feminist idea or desire to transgress norms. In her essay, "The Contradictions of Successful Femininity: Third-Wave Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Femininities," Budgeon writes, "[t]he theme of empowerment runs through third wave discourse drawing both upon critiques of gender inequality and postfeminist discourses which emphasize the establishment of female success" (p. 282). Budgeon argues that "by refusing to deploy straightforward codes to designate contemporary gender ideals in terms of simple binaries such as 'good' or 'bad', third-wave feminism insists on the necessity of straddling binaries and working with the contradictions that result" (p. 280). So, in other words, by breaking down binaries, riding out binaries, and engaging with and against binaries, women have wider, more powerful choices of gender expression. Through emo-punk, goth-punk and cyberpunk style Lisbeth, the girl with the dragon tattoo, and Kino, "simply Kino", who rides a rare and powerful motorcycle, resist social norms through the negotiating of the contradictions inherent in post-punk culture. The implications of androgyny for these fictitious characters is what fuels the revolution.

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