# Radical Media, Radical Culture:

## Technology and Social Change in 20th and 21st Century America

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# INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines how political and social movements in the second half of the 20th and first part of the 21st centuries have used new and emerging—and often hybrid—media technologies to challenge dominant social norms and contest what they saw as the status quo, while also trying to win over the public and/or attract new recruits and reshape American life according to their ideals. It will show how these media technologies were much more than a way for these movements to spread their messages; rather, they were also the tools each movement used to try and change the public's thinking so that it would accept their beliefs. Likewise, these media technologies had a profound impact on the language and rhetoric of each movement, and on how these movements thought about themselves. As mentioned above, some of these media technologies—like zines, which drew from newspapers and magazines, but also from handwritten letters, pamphlets, and fan publications—were inherently hybrid in character, while in other cases, movements like the 1960s counterculture brought together a whole host of media technologies to produce something new. Other movements, like the alt-right, also used hybrid forms of discourse—in this case, viral irony, which combined the relativism and disavowal characteristic of earlier forms of irony with the language of online communities like Something Awful and Weird Twitter—to take advantage of emerging technologies like social media platforms.

Over the course of the next three chapters, this dissertation will take up each of these examples: that is, it will look at the relationships between the counterculture and mixed media (and New Journalism, the genre to which the counterculture's multimedia experiments gave rise),

Riot Grrrl and zines, and the alt-right and viral irony. I have not chosen these particular examples because I think they are the only socio-political movements to have been defined by their use of media technologies; indeed, I would argue that there are hardly any movements that have not been shaped by the mediums with which they've worked. The reason I have focused on the counterculture, Riot Grrrl, and the alt-right is that all of these movements have in varying ways redefined what political participation can look like and what it means to be involved in activism. The counterculture made explicit the idea that the personal was political, and demonstrated how aesthetic choices and mixed media could be used to challenge the myth of national consensus and effect on-the-ground change; the New Journalists, in turn, argued that the only genre that could make sense of this movement was one that also pushed back against convention and combined multiple forms of media. Like the counterculture (and second-wave feminism), the Riot Grrrls also insisted that the personal was political, and used the disclosures they made and solidarity they found in zines to create textual communities where young women could find solace away from the pressures and abuses of the patriarchy. While this might seem like a modest accomplishment, especially since the Riot Grrrls' stated goal was to end sexism and remake American culture, I will argue that the creation of these spaces was not only a lifesaving intervention for many girls, but also showed that an economy could operate successfully outside of patriarchal and capitalist logics. Further, however abhorrent we may find the alt-right, their strategy of using viral irony to carve out a presence on social media, and then leveraging that presence to put their ideas at the center of the national conversation, showed what political influence could look in the digital age, and laid out a roadmap that other extremists could use to gain power.

Indeed, for the alt-right, and the counterculture and Riot Grrrl, too, a large part of the appeal of these hybrid discourses and media technologies was that they seemed particularly well-suited to being used to push back against the status quo, and to introduce radical ideas into the mainstream and encourage those who encountered them to question their existing beliefs. As the example of the alt-right shows us, however, this kind of change-making was not always progressive, as these discourses and technologies could also be used to challenge the powers-that-be in favor of reactionary interests, from white supremacy to Richard Nixon's presidential campaign. Even zines—the media technology that the Riot Grrrls used to such great effect, and the features of which gave young women an unprecedented amount of control over how they shared their stories and allowed them to create an independent print economy—are morally neutral, and, in theory, could also have been utilized by a far-right group to build their movement. Nevertheless, I want to make it clear that I am not arguing that other groups would have been just as successful if they had used the media technologies discussed here, or that the counterculture, the Riot Grrrls, and the alt-right would have had the same outcomes if they had worked with different mediums. Rather, one of this dissertation's central claims is that each movement opted for particular media technologies because they identified them as uniquely suited to their goals.

For example, in my first chapter, "'All This American Mayhem': New Journalism, Media Technologies, and the Counterculture's Political Vision," I show how the counterculture's use of media technologies like television, film, radio, recorded music, and even light shows was a key part of its plan to get the public to question social and political norms. Writers like Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer noticed that this new youth movement was taking advantage of, and

combining, these media in a process that I call *juxtapastiche,* and that it was using them—as well as its members' aesthetic choices—in an attempt to influence American culture and politics. These writers believed that the only way the spirit of this movement could be captured was if they wrote in a way that also combined, and sought to reproduce the effects of, different mediums; thus, the genre of New Journalism was born. In this chapter's first section, I look at Wolfe's attempt to cover Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters in one of the foundational works of New Journalism: *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test.* I assess how the text tries to make its readers feel like they, too, are experiencing the group's multimedia Acid Tests through a combination of literary techniques like run-on sentences, extended description, onomatopoeia, and stream-of-consciousness. In the next section, I explain how the Merry Pranksters' juxtapastiche was their attempt to disrupt the existing social order, and how other parts of the counterculture, including the hippies, used similar tactics to signal their opposition to, and to urge other Americans to speak out against, the war in Vietnam. I explore all of this through a reading of Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night,* which is his account of the 1967 March on the Pentagon. Mailer frames the hippies' juxtapastiche clothing style as an effort to disrupt the myth of American consensus, and shows how Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman tried to leverage newspaper coverage of their exorcism on the Pentagon to change the way the public thought about the institution. As this chapter will show, the exorcism—and, even more importantly, the photographs that were published of soldiers brutally beating protesters—set off a chain of events that led to President Johnson cancelling a planned troop deployment, public opinion turning against the war, and eventually, the release of the Pentagon Papers.

While up to this point, the use of media technologies had worked in the counterculture's favor, section IV of this chapter will demonstrate how the television coverage of the 1968 Democratic National Convention had a disastrous effect on the movement. The convention took place ten months after the March on the Pentagon, and against the backdrop of the social and political upheaval of 1968. The events of that year had made the American people much less sympathetic to the idea of radical change than they had been in 1967, and when they saw the footage of the protesters in Chicago being assaulted, they sided with the police rather than the counterculture. This section uses Mailer's *Miami and the Siege of Chicago,* which covers both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions, as a lens through which to understand what happened at the DNC. Though Mailer had shown himself to be in touch with the counterculture in *The Armies of the Night,* he finds himself out-of-step with, and much less favorably disposed to, the movement in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago.* As I will argue, however, this was actually Mailer's attempt to reflect his audience's attitudes about the counterculture back to them, and to encourage them to think critically about their response to the footage from the DNC. In so doing, Mailer fulfills his role as an interpreter of emerging cultural attitudes, which was a key part of how the New Journalists defined themselves. He also shows how television can make the viewer feel detached from what they see onscreen, and how reactionary forces like the Nixon campaign could also take advantage of juxtapastiche. Indeed, in demonstrating how Nixon used a combination of media technologies to get the public to embrace right-wing views—and crucially, ones that were very different from the direction in which the country seemed to be trending—Mailer anticipates the way the alt-right would be able to use emerging media technologies to bring their ideas into the mainstream.

Though this chapter seems to end on a rather dismal note—with the public having turned against the counterculture and elected Nixon, and, as the conclusion will show, the counterculture's aesthetic choices having been co-opted by major corporations—I will argue that the counterculture's use of media technologies, and insistence that the personal was political, would serve as a model for many of the progressive protest campaigns of the next sixty years. It certainly had an influence on the Riot Grrrl movement, which insisted that its members sharing their personal stories was a political act; this was also an indication of how much Riot Grrrl drew on second-wave feminism, and particularly on its consciousness-raising practice. Riot Grrrl, which had its heyday in the 1990s, was made up of young women who were tired of the sexism they faced in their everyday lives, and the culture of misogyny in the United States. Its members fought back against the patriarchy by forming all-girl bands, founding Riot Grrrl chapters, and, most significantly, creating and publishing zines. Zines were sites where young women could open up about their trauma, explore their creativity, and find communities of like-minded girls; as such, they were central to the movement. In section II of my second chapter, "The Revolution Starts Here + Now Within Each One [Of] Us: Solidarity, Radicalism, and Refuge in the Riot Grrrl Zine Economy," I will explain how Riot Grrrls' decision to share their stories redefined what activism could look like. By refusing to be silent about the catcalling, sexual harassment, sexual abuse rape, and incest they had faced, the Riot Grrrls challenged the cultural norms that shamed survivors and sanctioned these violences; in so doing, they made it much more difficult for abusers to operate, and empowered other women to come forward with their experiences.

In this chapter's third section, I explore why so many Riot Grrrls chose zines as sites to discuss their trauma. This had much to do with the unique features of zines as a media

technology, and specifically, how much control they gave their creators over the production and distribution process. This made zines especially appealing to Riot Grrrls who were marginalized along multiple axes of oppression, as well as those who had experienced sexual violence. For the latter, being able to tell their stories on their own terms—sharing only what they wanted to, and holding back any details they didn't feel comfortable disclosing—was a way to reclaim a sense of agency and control over what had happened to them. In the next section, I show how zines' material properties also gave Riot Grrrls a chance to form lasting emotional attachments to other young women. These bonds often blurred the lines between friendship and romance, and were a large part of what motivated Riot Grrrls to keep publishing their zines, even though almost none of them made a profit. Rather, Riot Grrrls made zines because they valued being part of the community to which their zines gave rise: a network of like-minded young women that stretched across the United States, and that was a particularly essential resource for girls who lacked other sources of support. Indeed, I will argue that the creation of this zine economy was Riot Grrrl's most important political intervention. By providing young women with a space where they could exist outside of patriarchal control—where they could share their stories without being shamed for what had happened to them, where they didn't have to police their emotions, and where they could build supportive relationships with other girls while also exploring their own creativity—the Riot Grrrl zine economy gave girls both a refuge from and the tools they needed to survive a world that was actively hostile to them. In turn, by creating an economy that was held together by pleasure and emotional ties rather than profit, and a culture that uplifted young women and allowed them to thrive, the Riot Grrrls proved that other, better ways of organizing society were possible, and modeled what they could look like.

In this dissertation's third chapter, "Violent Ironies: How the Alt-Right Used an Online Discourse to Try to Take Over the Mainstream," I look at another movement that wanted to radically redefine the values that governed American life. I am speaking, of course, of the alt-right: a white supremacist movement that began in the early 2010s and reached the height of its power in 2017, and that was able to use the presence it established on social media platforms like Twitter to put itself and its ideas at the center of the national conversation in a way white supremacists had not been able to do in at least fifty years. The alt-right managed this by taking advantage of specific features of these social media technologies, which it achieved by using a popular online discourse that I call viral irony. Viral irony, which relies on absurdist language and over-the-top, surreal scenarios, makes it difficult to tell whether a person who employs it is kidding or not; by couching their beliefs in viral irony, the alt-right could insist that their racist posts were only a joke, and make it less likely that moderators would remove their content. This meant that the alt-right could circulate white supremacist ideas on mainstream platforms, where millions of Americans would encounter them. In section II of this chapter, I look at the history of viral irony to explain which of its characteristics made it particularly suited to the alt-right's goals, and to explore how the movement itself developed on message boards where viral irony was the discourse *de jour*. I also explain how the alt-right used viral irony to distinguish itself from other white supremacist groups; though the alt-right had KKK members and neo-Nazis in its ranks, it insisted that its use of humor made it much less serious and threatening than these other movements, and that Americans should be more comfortable with its members being present in mainstream spaces.

Indeed, as I show in section III, the alt-right used viral irony to gain access to parts of the Internet that other white supremacist groups had not been able to infiltrate. The alt-right capitalized on the fact that viral irony was already a popular mode of discourse on Twitter, which allowed its members to blend in with other posters and, as I have already mentioned, to avoid being banned. The alt-right hoped that couching its beliefs in a discourse with which social media users were already comfortable would make those users much more receptive to its ideas. Many of its members recognized, however, that they would not be able to convert everyone on these platforms, and saw mainstreaming their ideals as an equally important goal. What they wanted was for even those people who disagreed with their beliefs to see them as just another part of the discourse: as something that was to be opposed, but that wasn't so aberrant that it couldn't be tolerated in American political life. The alt-right referred to this as shifting the Overton window, and saw it as the first step to achieving lasting power. When the alt-right allied itself with, and entered the upper echelons of, Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, it seemed like this might come to pass; suddenly, the alt-right was at the center of the national conversation, igniting a debate over whether its members were actually white supremacists. As section V will show, however, the Unite the Right rally on August 11 and 12, 2017 put an end to this question, and to the alt-right's political influence. The countless acts of violence at the protest—including James Alex Fields Jr.'s murder of Heather Heyer—showed that the alt-right was willing to fight and kill in the name of white supremacist ideals, and that they were no less serious or dangerous than any other white supremacist group. This made its viral irony-based strategy—which relied on social media users being unsure as to whether or not members of the alt-right meant what they posted—useless, and this, combined with activists' efforts, forced the

alt-right out of the mainstream. Nevertheless, the fact that social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit proved unwilling to ban some of the alt-right's most prominent members even after the Unite the Right rally was a warning sign for how it easy it would be for other extremist movements to follow in the alt-right's footsteps and use these platforms to spread their ideas. Indeed, as I discuss in this chapter's conclusion, groups like QAnon and the COVID-19 disinformation campaign have been able to take advantage of these social media technologies' weakness—namely, their reluctance to remove disinformation—and to leverage the influence they gained on these sites into spectacular acts of violence like the January 6, 2021 rally.

This new version of political power—one that uses social media to smuggle extremist ideas into mainstream discourse, and that sees those ideas adopted by politicians and used as justifications for terrorism—is one that would not be possible without these media technologies, and that also seems likely to dominate the national landscape in the near future. In turn, while I don't mean to suggest that there is a direct through line from the counterculture's beliefs about what constitutes meaningful action to this vision of politics, I think that studying these ideas together—along with Riot Grrrl's theory of activism, too—can tell us something useful about the past sixty-odd years of political life in the United States. Unlike other academics, I do not see the move towards aesthetics as a form of protest as a neoliberal turn; symbolism, after all, has been a vital part of protest movements for hundreds if not thousands of years, and while signaling one's political beliefs with one's personal choices is a form of individualism, the goal of doing so is also to identify oneself with a movement, with a whole. Instead, I think it is more productive to see all of the movements in this dissertation as attempting to reckon with, and in varying ways being shaped by, the media technologies that were becoming increasingly dominant parts of their

lives—and of American life more broadly—and thinking through what that meant, and how those technologies could be leveraged for, activism and political participation. The Merry Pranksters were born in an era of, and obsessed with, a thousand new technologies, and as they had seen these technologies change so much about the way Americans lived, they believed that they could change the public's thinking as well, and make them open to new lifestyles and ideas. The hippies believed this, too, as did Abbie Hoffman and the Yippies, and the New Journalists saw it as essential to understanding the counterculture. The Riot Grrrls, who were bombarded with sexist advertising and misogynistic portrayals of women in magazines, newspapers, film, and on TV, responded by creating their own forms of media—that is, zines—over which they had total control and could use to push back against negative cultural messages; eventually, they were able to build their own alternative media economy. Against the backdrop of the rise of not just the Internet, but social media platforms specifically—platforms that were not only used by millions and millions of people, but made it a very real possibility that, if you wrote a post that got enough traction, a large percentage of that audience might see it—the alt-right coalesced, and then figured out how to manipulate those platforms to gain the kind of visibility white supremacists had not achieved in a very long time. The forms of political action in which the counterculture and the Riot Grrrls engaged would not have been possible without each movement's chosen media technologies, either: one could not use aesthetics as a way to change the American people's minds about the war in Vietnam if media technologies did not broadcast images from protests to the public, and it was the unique features of zines as a medium that made Riot Grrrls feel like they could share their stories and allowed them to create the independent print networks that sustained them.

Thus, while this much focus on television and radio and social media platforms might feel out of place in an English dissertation, I want to argue that it is impossible to understand these movements or their rhetoric, or the print genres like New Journalism to which they gave rise, without paying a great deal of attention to these media technologies. Indeed, as more and more writing and theorizing and organizing is being done online—a trend that, at this point, seems unlikely to change—I think the field must necessarily become more open to seeing the Internet as part of our milieu. In turn, while much of what appears on the Internet is text, I believe we can only understand this content if we acknowledge its hybridity: that is, if we analyze it in the context of the images and videos and pop-up ads and designs in which it appears. This is in line with this dissertation's emphasis on hybrid media technologies and aesthetics and discourses, which is motivated not only by the fact that these movements drew on a multitude of different elements, but also by a belief that their visions of political and social change cannot be fully grasped unless we consider the influence of the technologies with which they worked. If I have one regret about the way I approached this dissertation, it is that it is not nearly enough of a hybrid text as I would like it to be; though I analyzed the literary techniques the New Journalists used to reproduce the effects of certain media technologies, I did not incorporate them into my own writing, nor did I turn parts of this dissertation into a zine or publish any of it on social media. Instead, my most substantive effort towards making this dissertation a multimedia project has been including an appendix of images from Riot Grrrl zines, though I did not include these images in the text of the Riot Grrrl chapter because the formatting changes required to do so would have disrupted the dissertation's readability. If I were to start this project over from the beginning, I would most likely revise its form entirely, so that it

would be just as much of a hybrid as the movements it analyzes. Doing so would allow for an even more comprehensive understanding of these movements, as, just as they should not be written about without considering the multiple forms of media on which they drew, so is any analysis of them that is not in itself a multimedia production is necessarily incomplete: a contention with which the New Journalists would surely agree.

Still, I have done my best to grapple with these movements' relationships with media technologies, and how this was an essential component of their visions of a different kind of politics: one that broadened the definition of political participation well beyond electoralism, and pushed back against—and tried to radically reshape—the views of most Americans. Over the next two hundred pages, this dissertation will show the counterculture challenging the myth of national consensus and the idea that the public should support the Vietnam War; the Riot Grrrls standing up to cultural attitudes that sanctioned violence against women and shamed survivors; and the alt-right trying to force white supremacist beliefs that had largely been driven out of mainstream spaces back into the center of the national conversation, and to make them acceptable to hold once again. It is my hope that, as a result of this dissertation, we will be able to better understand why and with whom these movements resonated, and, perhaps even more importantly, where and how they failed. It is the latter, I think, that can give us some of the most crucial insight into how these movements shaped American life, and change how we think about our political landscape. In so doing, I also hope to answer why these movements are still able to capture our attention years—and in the case of Riot Grrrl and the counterculture, decades—after they ended. It may be, as one Riot Grrrl wrote in a letter to the zine *Girl Germs,* because "voices

like [these] can't be stopped": because, indeed they continue to inspire those who encounter them to "keep writing and working on our own revolution."[1]

# "ALL THIS AMERICAN MAYHEM": NEW JOURNALISM, MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES, AND THE COUNTERCULTURE'S POLITICAL VISION[2]

## I. Introduction

"Though many historians would look much farther back than the 1960s for the origin of American youth culture," writes David Farber, "what is more important in understanding the 1960s is the fact that so many people believed that the youth culture around them was new, even unprecedented. And they believed that it portended revolutionary change."[3] This chapter will track the relationship between that youth culture, or counterculture—a loose collection of young whites rejecting their parents' middle-class mores in search of more radical lifestyles—and another movement with its own revolutionary potential: New Journalism. Both New Journalism and the counterculture had their first rumblings in the early 1960s, and would coalesce in the mid-to-late part of the decade. In fact, New Journalism arose in large part because its authors believed that neither journalists nor novelists were doing an adequate job reporting on the counterculture—or, for that matter, any of the other contemporaneous phenomena of social change. These authors responded by rejecting the so-called "objective" style of journalism and embracing techniques that were usually associated with the novel, including stream-of-consciousness, first-person narration, and a focus on "the way we live now" (that is, emerging styles and social behaviors). However, unlike other literary movements, New Journalism didn't grow out of a coterie of authors working together to develop a new form. Though the various New Journalists were aware of one another, there were "no clubs, salons, cliques; not even a saloon where the faithful gathered."[4] While many New Journalists, including Tom Wolfe, Joan

Didion, Gay Talese, and Jimmy Breslin, had gotten their start as newspaper reporters, others—most notably Norman Mailer and Truman Capote—were novelists and literary men. What held the movement together was its members' shared conviction that a new genre had to be developed to cover what was happening in that moment, and a vision of themselves as interpreters. In fact, the central premise of New Journalism was that its authors not only understood these emerging social phenomena, but could make them legible to their readers.

One of the reasons the New Journalists believed they could do so was that they made their viewpoints explicit—and themselves characters—in their texts. Unlike most reporters, whose insistence on objectivity meant that, in theory, they were only giving their readers the facts (and leaving those readers to decide how to interpret them), the New Journalists not only described what they saw, but gave their opinions on it as well. They also made the role they played in their stories visible: in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test,* for example, Tom Wolfe is as much of a central figure as any of the Merry Pranksters, and spends much of the text discussing how the group reacted to him, and his complicated feelings about them. Understandably, much of the scholarship on New Journalism has focused on this aspect of the genre: on the New Journalist as a character, and how the New Journalists used this as a device to tease out and blur the distinctions between fiction and nonfiction, and journalism and other forms. However, while this chapter will foreground the idea of the New Journalist as interpreter, it will pay more attention to another reason the New Journalists believed that they were the only ones who could represent, and make their readers understand, the era's new social phenomena.

I am speaking, of course, of the emphasis that New Journalism placed on the counterculture's use of media technologies, and how the New Journalists attempted to reproduce

these technologies' effects in their writing. This chapter will show how New Journalists like Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer took note of how the counterculture looked to television, film, photography, radio, and music to get the public to question the status quo. By using devices like onomatopoeia, stream-of-consciousness, and extended description, these New Journalists mimicked what it felt like to encounter these technologies, and gave their readers a sense of what it was like to be a part of this movement. One of the primary techniques the counterculture used in working with all these different media was something I want to call *juxtapastiche.* While this is an original term, it owes much to Roland Barthes' and Dick Hebdige's scholarship on pastiche, and describes how the counterculture borrowed from and combined multiple media technologies and aesthetic elements.[5] For them, juxtapastiche was a political tool: for example, as we will see in this chapter, the Merry Pranksters put together unexpected combinations of TV and audio recordings, light shows and music, to challenge their audience's expectations and force them to look for other ways of interpreting the world. In turn, so as to recreate the countercultures's multimedia experiments for their readers, the New Journalists had to develop their own forms of juxtapastiche. As we will see in this chapter's reading of Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test,* writing about the Merry Pranksters meant figuring out how to make your audience feel the same sense of confusion and wonder—and to get them to start asking the same questions—that came out of the Acid Tests. Wolfe's solution was to use the literary devices listed above to reproduce the effect of the Pranksters' mixed-media experiments. Indeed, I want to argue that many of New Journalism's signature stylistic elements—its run-on sentences, over-the-top descriptions, and repetition—came out of its authors' attempts to mimic the counterculture's juxtapastiche.

It is important to note, however, that while much of that juxtapastiche—whether it was the counterculture's or New Journalism's—had to do with media technologies, juxtapastiche often involved other elements. Indeed, many of the counterculture's most visible practices were acts of juxtapastiche, including the way its members dressed. As we will see throughout this chapter, these members wore wild costumes and mismatched pieces as a way to push back against the insistence on conformity, and to contest the idea that there was anything like a national consensus. While a few New Journalists would paint these acts as shallow and divorced from politics, other New Journalistic texts would demonstrate that the counterculture was engaging in these practices in an attempt to expand the definition of what political action could look like and where it could be carried out. All of this was a part of the counterculture's philosophy that the aesthetic was the politics: that the clothes you wore and how you looked were a way to protest against the norms of American socio-political life. This focus on aesthetics would also extend to the moments when the counterculture engaged in more traditional acts of protest, like the 1967 March on the Pentagon. In this chapter's reading of *The Armies of the Night,* Norman Mailer's Pulitzer Prize- and National Book Award-winning account of the March, we will see how members of their counterculture used their clothing to challenge the idea that the nation was united in support of the Vietnam War. The thought behind one of the most infamous parts of the March—Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman's attempt to exorcise the Pentagon—was similar. They wanted to create a spectacle that would rob the Pentagon of its symbolic power, and that would be so exciting and outrageous that the news media would have to cover it. The exorcism attracted a great deal of public attention, as did the photographs of unarmed demonstrators interacting with, and being beaten by, the soldiers at the March. These

demonstrators engaged in another act of symbolic protest—by offering the soldiers flowers, they transformed themselves into a symbol of peace—and the message that these pictures sent was so obvious, and so striking, that it turned many Americans against the war.

Of course, there were also downsides to engaging in this sort of protest, and to assuming that media coverage would necessarily benefit the counterculture. This will come through most clearly in this chapter's reading of *Miami and the Siege of Chicago,* which is Mailer's account of the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Because of several outside factors (including President Johnson's decision not to run for re-election and the turmoil of '68), the demonstrators were unable to stage a protest with a clear symbolic message, and the public reacted negatively to their attempts. In fact, those who watched TV footage of the protests, which showed the protesters being beaten by Chicago police, overwhelmingly sided with the officers. Interestingly, while Mailer had admired the demonstrators at the March on the Pentagon, he does not feel much sympathy for their counterparts in Chicago; rather, he spends much of the book emphasizing how detached he is from the protesters. He is nowhere to be found during their key battles with police, and, like much of the public, he fears the radical change they might bring. While this seems like a betrayal of New Journalism's central premise—that its authors were in touch with, and could explain, new social movements—I will argue that *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* actually had its finger on the pulse of what was then an emerging phenomenon. By adopting an attitude that is so similar to the American public's (and to much of his audience's) Mailer makes the logic behind their thought process visible, and is able to explain why so many Americans had turned against the counterculture, and would embrace Nixon's promises of normalcy and security. Even as he embodies this tendency, however, Mailer also manages to

critique it: he uses a description of observing the protesters through his hotel window to get his readers to think critically about the lack of empathy they felt while watching the demonstrations on TV. When read alongside his discussion of Nixon's speech at the Republican National Convention—in which Nixon draws on the power of multiple media technologies—it becomes clear that this is a cautionary tale about media and juxtapastiche. While we have seen the counterculture employ these techniques and technologies to get the public to question the powers-that-be, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* shows that they can just as easily be co-opted by reactionary forces, and used to shore up support for a return to the status quo.

In many ways, this seems to be what happened to the counterculture itself: that, after 1968, its aesthetics were seized by corporate interests and, in being sold as commodities, were stripped of their revolutionary power. Tie-dye shirts and beads became available at department stores, while Wall Street types began smoking marijuana and listening to the Grateful Dead. This is often seen as the end of the counterculture, and as proof that it had little lasting political impact. However, this chapter will demonstrate that the counterculture actually had a significant effect on some of the most important political issues of the late '60s and early '70s, including playing a major role in changing troop movements in Vietnam and eventually bringing the war to an end. It also laid the groundwork for an aesthetics- and media-driven style of protest that continues to dominate the activist landscape to this day. Likewise, while some critics were writing New Journalism off as passé by the mid-1970s, its influence is still being felt on contemporary media. Still, it is true that the New Journalists' writing was often overshadowed by their celebrity status, thanks to their many appearances on television, in magazines, and in film. This is similar to what happened to some of the counterculture's most important figures, whose

fame came to detract, and distance them, from their on-the-ground work. It is also another reason that I believe it is impossible to understand either the counterculture or New Journalism without considering their relationships with media.

In order to shed light on this dynamic—and why it should be at the center of our study of both movements going forward—this chapter will look at three New Journalistic portrayals of the counterculture: Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test,* and Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago.* Section II will examine how Wolfe used juxtapastiche to immerse the reader in the Merry Pranksters' mixed-media experiments, and to get that reader to understand how, all across America, young people were questioning the establishment and searching for new ways of thinking and living. It will also look more closely at New Journalism's origins, and how *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* was Wolfe's attempt to prove that New Journalism was the only genre suited to covering the present moment. Indeed, in section III, I will show how New Journalists like Wolfe and Mailer were some of the only writers who grasped that the counterculture's juxtapastiche was part of its political practice. My reading of *The Armies of the Night* will focus on how Mailer understands the demonstrators' attire as an act of protest against the idea of American consensus, and his emphasis on the role of juxtapastiche in Rubin and Hoffman's exorcism. It will also develop a theory of why the photographs on the March had such a strong effect on the American public, and how the fallout from the demonstration impacted the nation's Vietnam policy in both the short and the long term. In section IV, I will turn to a much less successful protest: the one at the 1968 DNC, and will explore how Mailer's first-person perspective in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* helps us understand the country's reaction against the counterculture. This section will pay special

attention to the role of television, and how it was both central to, and the downfall of, the counterculture's strategy in Chicago. In my conclusion, I will look at the immediate aftermath of that failure, and then at both the counterculture's and New Journalism's long afterlives.

Ultimately, this chapter will argue that, while the New Journalists' engagement with media posed several risks—including threatening to overshadow the genre itself—paying such close attention to, and approximating the effects of, the counterculture's use of media technologies was what allowed New Journalism to capture the spirit of the age. In so doing, they could give their readers an inside look at the counterculture's new form of politics, much of which centered media technologies and their ability to shatter dominant schemas. This went hand-in-hand with a focus on aesthetics and personal choices as political action, which would shape the American political landscape for the next sixty years. This context is just as, if not more, important for understanding New Journalism as its authors' positions in their narratives and their status as characters—and, I will contend, it is this engagement with media technologies and the counterculture's politics that made the New Journalists the interpreters that they always claimed to be.

## II. "A very Neon Renaissance": New Journalism, the Merry Pranksters, and Juxtapastiche[6]

It was the spring of 1963, and Tom Wolfe was at a loss. With no idea how to turn the notes he'd gathered on the world of custom cars into an article, he sent those notes, rather than a draft, to his editor at *Esquire.* Instead of mailing back suggestions, however, Wolfe's editor chose to print the notes almost verbatim in the magazine. The piece, entitled "There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored (Thphhhhhh!) Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby (Rahghhh!)

Around the Bend (Brummmmmmmmmmmmmmmm)," "was a garage sale" made up of "vignettes, odds and ends of scholarship, bits of memoir, short bursts of sociology, apostrophes, epithets, moans, cackles, anything that came into my head, much of it thrown together in a rough and awkward way." But, Wolfe later mused, that haphazard quality "was its virtue. It showed me the possibility of there being something 'new' in journalism." Its appeal, according to Wolfe,

> was not simply the discovery that it was possible to write accurate non-fiction with techniques usually associated with novels and short stories. It was that—plus. It was the discovery that it was possible in non-fiction, in journalism, to use any literary device, from the traditional dialogisms of the essay to stream-of-consciousness, and to use many different kinds simultaneously, or within a relatively short space…to excite the reader both intellectually and emotionally.[7]

This discovery would set Wolfe off on a path of experimentation: one that would culminate in the formation of New Journalism as a genre. Indeed, by 1963, the social and political factors that would convince Wolfe—along with authors like Norman Mailer, Joan Didion, Gay Talese, and Jimmy Breslin—that new styles and forms were needed were already beginning to emerge.[8] "The pace of social change had accelerated, encouraging a wider interest in public affairs," and "[c]ollege enrollments were booming, enlarging the audience of educated readers." As a result, there was an "exploding market for paperback books," which "created more opportunities for free-lance careers in long-form journalism, with writers building on articles they had originally published in magazines."[9] These magazines—either redesigned, like *Harper's,* or new, like *Esquire,* and seeking a share of that educated audience—were published monthly, rather than daily or weekly, which meant they couldn't compete with newspapers to break stories. Looking for a way to make readers want to revisit events they'd already heard about months before, these magazines attempted "to cultivate writers who seemed *au courant* and could take an event that had already passed and made it interesting." The delay gave these

authors the time to conduct "in-depth research," and the need to provide a fresh take on events pushed them to explore new techniques.[10]

These opportunities were especially attractive to those print reporters who not only wanted to spend more time on (and make more money from) their stories, but who were also growing disenchanted with their publications' insistence on objectivity. Objectivity as a mode of journalism had arisen out of the crises of the 1930s, when citizens were still reeling from the government propaganda of World War I and journalists were struggling to turn "the dislocations of politics, economics, and society into intelligible news."[11] By developing a style that framed itself as objective—that was not "the one-sided truths of the press agent and the double-edged truths of the politician," but ostensibly a presentation of the facts—journalists could "portray their work as professional, scientific, nonpartisan, and ethical."[12] Although a series of subjective decisions undergirded each article (including choosing who to interview and which of their quotes to include, which details of a story were relevant, and how to frame that story), the conventions of the objective mode "ban[ned] discussion of the procedures necessary to transform into news," thus naturalizing the account it presented as objective truth.[13] This went hand-in-hand with a prose style that tried to call as little attention to itself as possible, so as to obscure the reporter's intermediary role and to give the impression that the reader was getting direct, unfiltered access to the events at hand. This meant that, while reporters' views and biases inevitably shaped their coverage, those reporters were forbidden from openly stating their opinions on the news they covered.

However, by the early 1960s, journalists were starting to question whether this was the best way to write about the news. They had seen Joseph McCarthy take advantage of the fact that

most reporters were hesitant to refute the claims that public figures made, lest they be seen as editorializing. He had bombarded journalists with a series of absurd "charges and counter-charges" that he knew they would print without pushing back, and turned newspapers into the engine of his propaganda machine. This wasn't the only reason for the crisis around objectivity, either: there was also the issue of whether objective reporting was the appropriate way to cover the growing Civil Rights Movement. The demands of balanced coverage would have meant giving the same amount of page space to segregationist voices as Civil Rights leaders, and not taking a side on issues like voting rights, integration, and anti-Black violence: something many journalists weren't sure they could stomach.[14]

With mainstream journalism in the middle of a reckoning, it seemed like the perfect opportunity for another form to capture the *zeitgeist.* In Tom Wolfe's eyes, this should have been the novel—but, as he saw it, most fiction writers weren't interested in the task. Wolfe believed the "richest terrain of the novel" was "society, the social tableau, manners and morals, the whole business of 'the way we live now.'" But while "[t]he Sixties was one of the most extraordinary decades in American history in terms of manners and morals," very few novelists were writing about what was happening around them.[15] Instead, they were focused on more abstract types of writing: ones that drew on, and seemed much closer to, "myth, fable, parable and legend."[16] As a result, when Wolfe arrived in New York City in the early '60s, he found that, "as a writer, I had it practically all to myself. As fast as I could possibly do it, I was turning out articles on this amazing spectacle that I saw bubbling and screaming right there in front of my wondering eyes." "[A]ll the while," he tells his reader, "I just knew that some enterprising novelist was going to come along and *do* this whole marvelous scene with one gigantic daring bold stroke. It was so

ready, so *ripe*—beckoning…but it never happened."[17] When Wolfe traveled to the West Coast, he found that the same thing was true there. California was "the very incubator of new styles of living," but no fiction writers were making these changes the subject of era-defining novels. "[T]hese styles were right there for all to see, ricocheting off every eyeball," he writes, "and again a few amazed journalists working in the new form had it all to themselves."[18]

That "new form" was, of course, New Journalism. While no one, including Wolfe, was calling it that yet, he sensed that a new mode was emerging, and he had a good idea of what he wanted his version of it to look like. It would resemble the writing in his *Esquire* piece on custom cars: that is, it would be current events journalism, but it would cover those events using a "garage sale" of techniques meant to "excite the reader both intellectually and emotionally."[19] It would also give up any pretense of objectivity, to the point where the author would be made a part of the story, and would share their opinions on the events at hand. Wolfe intended to use this method to write about the "whole crazed obscene uproarious Mamon-faced drug-soaked mau-mau lust-oozing Sixties," starting with a band of psychedelic wanderers known as the Merry Pranksters.[20] The Pranksters would be the subject of two articles Wolfe published in the magazine *New York,* and then of the book he called *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test.* Their leader was Ken Kesey, author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,* who had eschewed the life of the literary wunderkind in favor of cross-country trips in a Technicolor schoolbus and LSD-fueled Acid Tests. Wolfe portrays Kesey as intent on capturing the supersonic promise of post-WWII America, and leaving any mundanity behind:

> —it was very Heaven to be the first wave of the most extraordinary kids in the history of the world…with all this Straight-6 and V-8 power underneath and all this neon glamor overhead, which somehow tied in with the technological superheroics of the jet, TV, atomic subs, ultrasonics…to be very Superkids! the world's first generation of little devils—feeling immune, beyond calamity. One's parents remembered the

> sloughing common order, War & Depression—but Superkids knew only the emotional surge of the great payoff, when nothing was common any longer…A very Neon Renaissance—And the myths that actually touched you at the time—not Hercules, Orpheus, Ulysses, and Aeneas—but Superman, Captain Marvel, Batman, The Human Torch, The Sub-Mariner, Captain America, Plastic Man, The Flash…It was a fantasy world *already*, this electro-pastel world of Mom&Dad&Bud&Sis in the suburbs…so why not move off your smug-harbor quilty-bed dead center and cut loose—go ahead and say it—Shazam!—juice it up to what it's already aching to be: 327,000 horsepower, a whole superhighway long and *soaring, screaming* on toward…Edge City, and ultimate fantasies, current and future…Billy Batson said *Shazam!* and turned into Captain Marvel. Jay Garrick inhaled an experimental gas in the research lab…And began traveling and thinking at the speed of light as…The Flash…the current fantasy.[21]

Crucial to Kesey's vision is a fascination not only with the souped-up engine, or the "technological superheroics" of the jet or the atomic sub, but cutting-edge *media* technology: the TV that Wolfe alludes to, plus film, tapes, light shows, and electronic-inflected music. The revelation that Kesey's house is a mess of "tape recorders, and pieces of tape recorders, and pieces of pieces of tape recorders, and movie equipment, and pieces of pieces of pieces of movie equipment, and tapes and film running all over the place," is hardly a surprise, since *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* puts great stress on the Pranksters' experiments with media and their aesthetic possibilities.[22] When the Pranksters set off across the country, they are committed to capturing their journey on film: they tape "hour after hour in the bouncing innards of the bus," and even start conceptualizing their experiences on the trip as if "[t]hey were all now characters in their own movies or the Big Movie" (that is, the one the Pranksters plan to make out of the footage).[23] They endlessly edit the "forty-five hours of color film" in the hopes of achieving "a total breakthrough in terms of expression…but also something that would amaze and delight many multitudes, a movie that could be shown commercially as well as in the esoteric world of the heads."[24] Their editing process is communal, and evolves into the group screenings that are the direct predecessors of the Acid Tests. Just like the Tests themselves, these screenings involve multiple forms of media, layered atop and intersecting with one another, such as when the Pranksters:

> play a tape against a television show. That is, they turn on the picture and the TV, the *Ed Sullivan Show*, say, but they turn off the sound and play a tape of, say, Babbs and somebody rapping off each other's words. The picture of the *Ed Sullivan Show* and the words on the tape suddenly force your mind to reach for connections between two vastly different orders of experience. On the TV screen, Ed Sullivan is holding Ella Fitzgerald's hands with his hands sopped over her hands as if her hands were the first robins of spring, and his lips are moving, probably saying, "Ella, that was wonderful! Really wonderful! Ladies and gentlemen, another hand for a great, great lady!" But the voice that comes out is saying to Ella Fitzgerald—*in perfect synch—"The lumps in your mattress are carnivore spores, venereal butterflies sent by the Combine to mothproof your brain, a pro-kit in every light socket—Ladies and gentlemen, Plug up the light sockets! Plug up the light sockets! The cougar microbes are marching in…*
>
> Perfect! The true message!—[25]

The last line is a joke at the Pranksters' expense, but Wolfe's crack gestures at what the group is trying to achieve: multi-media forms capable of expressing, and inducing, brand-new ways of living and thinking. The Pranksters splice and re-splice the footage from the bus trip in the hopes of producing a film that will make the journey's hallucinogenic affect legible to a mainstream audience. They play the Prankster Babbs and his interlocutor against Ella and Ed because, as Wolfe points out, "The picture of the *Ed Sullivan Show* and the words on the tape suddenly force your mind to reach for connections between two vastly different orders of experience." Perceiving those connections requires a new way of looking at the world, a new schema that links objects and provides meaning. Wolfe makes it clear that it is juxtapastiche which sets this process in motion: it only happens because the disparate content, and forms, of the tape and the TV footage are juxtaposed against one another. Accordingly, the Pranksters design the Acid Tests—the goal of which is to jolt the attendees into a psychedelic mindset—around the principle of juxtapastiche. Wolfe is rarely as explicit as he is when discussing this: "'Mixed media' entertainment," he tells the reader, "—this came straight out of the Acid Tests' combination of light and movie projections, strobes, tapes, rock 'n' roll, black light."[26] The Tests bombard the participants with a multimedia barrage:

> Lights, movies, video tapes, video tapes of themselves, flashing and swirling over the dome from the beams of searchlights rising from the floor between their bodies. The sounds roiling around in the globe like a typhoon. Movies and tapes of the past, tapes and video tapes, broadcasts and pictures of the present,

> tapes and humanoid sounds of the future—but all brought together *now*—here and now—*Kairos*—into the dilated cerebral cortex.[27]

Writing, too, is a component of this patchwork: the Pranksters regularly draw from comic book stories (which are themselves mixed media) and esoteric novels like Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End*. Wolfe even quotes from the latter to describe the mode of perception the Acid Tests look to engender: "[s]timulation of all the senses" would ideally induce a state in which "the audience forgot it was an audience, and became part of the action."[28] Despite the Pranksters' practice of pulling from literature, however, Kesey himself has stopped writing. Well before the Acid Tests, "Kesey was already talking about how writing was an old-fashioned and artificial form."[29] He explains to a reporter, "'Writers are…trapped by artificial rules. We are trapped in syntax. We are ruled by an imaginary teacher with a red ball-point pen who will brand us with an A-minus for the slightest infraction of the rules."[30] Wolfe is skeptical of Kesey's decision, as evidenced by his gloss on the interview. "LSD was never mentioned," he tells us, and so "Kesey came off chiefly as a visionary who had forsaken his riches and his career as a novelist in order to explore new forms of expression."[31]

Wolfe implies that Kesey's choice to forego writing was inspired less by a sense that the form was creatively exhausted, and more by LSD. His frustration is also telling because it points to one of *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*'s central ambitions. Wolfe wants to use the book to show that some forms of writing *can* capture the zeitgeist: that, while mainstream fiction and journalism might not be up to the challenge of depicting the current moment, New Journalism is. It can do so because it uses juxtapastiche: a technique which violates the "artificial rules" Kesey derides, and mirrors the Pranksters' mixed-media experiments. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* not only incorporates newspaper articles and shifts, at the start of several chapters, into verse; it

also looks to infuse writing with the techniques of media like psychedelic music, light shows, film, comic books, and television. In other words, it tries to represent the Pranksters and their mixed-media ethos by combining conventional narrative techniques with writing that approximates the same media the Pranksters utilize.[32] For example, Wolfe matches the fragmentary effect of the Acid Test strobes by describing not only the disintegration process those people perceive, but also by sketching the people themselves piece by piece. They are "[e]cstatic dancers—their hands flew off their arms, frozen in the air—their glistening faces came apart—a gleaming ellipse of teeth here, a pair of buffered highlit cheekbones there—all flacking and fragmenting into images as in an old flicker movie—a man in slices!"[33] When Kesey hides out from the authorities in Mexico, he begins to imagine his ordeal as a cops-and-fugitives film: "COME ON, MAN," Wolfe renders his thoughts, "DO YOU NEED A COPY OF THE SCRIPT TO SEE HOW THIS MOVIE GOES? YOU HAVE MAYBE 40 SECONDS LEFT BEFORE THEY COME GET YOU."[34] Accordingly, Wolfe frames Kesey's hallucinatory wandering across the Mexican countryside as if a director were shooting it on a back lot:

> Nighttime and he had gone out to the water, high on grass, and sat down and the light from the electric signs—Coca-Cola?—and in the town came across the bay, and every line of light came off straight, the primitive line, Stone Age, the line of grass
> CUT TO
> nighttime, same spot, high on acid, and the lines come off not straight but in perfect half circles, the acid line, the line of the present, the perfect circle, like the spiders they injected with acid, and they wove perfect little round webs
> CUT TO
> nighttime, the same spot, high on opium, the only time he ever took hard dope….and this was the line of the future, completing the circle without having to go all the way every time, getting there by knowing the beginning of the trip
> CUT TO
> Nighttime and an electrical storm in the Mexican heat flashes, high on acid…[35]

On the other hand, to reproduce the feel of the Grateful Dead's psychedelic rock and its impact on the Acid Test audiences, Wolfe relies on stream of consciousness meant to shock and

shake up the reader, much as the music knocks the listeners around the venue. "[F]uses blow," and there is "blackness—wowwww!"; things "shake and vibrate and funnel and freak out" until "somebody slaps new fuses in and the old hulk of a house shudders back, the wiring writhing and fragmenting like molting snakes…fuses blow, minds scream, heads explode."[36] Even the comic book style is represented, from the punch-a-minute, onomatopoetic diction that dominates the text (formulations like "*whirrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr*" "[s]*heeroooooooo*" and "*cheeeakkk*" abound) to the emphasis on the Pranksters' affinity for outrageous costumes and nonstop action.[37]

Crucially, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* employs juxtapastiche not only to portray the Pranksters, but also in an attempt to achieve the same schema-shattering effect that the Pranksters aim for with their multi-media experiments. When the Pranksters use juxtapastiche, it is to upend their audience's expectations: there will be no Ed Sullivan coming out of the speakers, even though all the time you've spent watching the show has conditioned you to assume that, when you see his affable face, his voice will follow. Instead, you hear Babbs' voice going on about carnival spores, and the effect is unsettling because it is a violation of the unspoken contract between you and the show, of the comfort and familiarity Ed's face is supposed to promise. You are forced to reconsider your assumptions about the meaning of Ed Sullivan's presence, and how it operates on you. In order to understand what's happening, you have to believe that somehow, there's a way that Ed's face and Babbs' voice might fit together. The juxtapastiche Wolfe generates in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* has much of the same function. To the contemporary reader, the Pranksters' way of life might seem pointless as well as ridiculous; indeed, it is all of those things if interpreted according to the schemas guiding mainstream white middle-class midcentury American existence. But if the reader is continually

prodded to see connections between unexpected elements and disparate forms of media for which their established schemas cannot account, then those mainstream schemas will, if not break down completely, erode a little, and new ways of thinking will have to be developed in order to interpret the text. These new ways of thinking will give the reader a means of making sense of the Pranksters' psychedelic, mixed-media existence—to the extent that "*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* can best be described as a decipherment of the Pranksters' communication and social codes for the 'outside world'"—as well as the broader counterculture that they at least in part inspired.[38]

This was the project not only of *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, but also of New Journalism as a whole. Its goal was to position itself as a mode that could decipher the counterculture for its readers: that could tell college-educated professionals the reason their younger peers were dropping out and heading for their coasts, and explain to white upper-middle class parents why their children were fraternizing with draft-dodgers and growing out their hair.[39] Understanding why all this was happening, New Journalism suggested, required these readers abandon their usual ways of thinking about the world. To get them to do so, New Journalism used juxtapastiche, bringing together unexpected elements and forcing readers to look for new ways to connect them that were outside their typical interpretive processes. This mirrored what the draft-dodgers and Haight-Ashbury refugees were attempting: abandoning the ways their white middle-class existence had conditioned them to think about the world, and searching for new frameworks that they could use to understand life.

These frameworks, these ways of thinking—old and new—are sometimes referred to as cultural forms, or schemas. They "organize experience by providing a particular perspective or

'frame' for seeing and knowing the world, and by establishing conventions and standards of expectation for communicating knowledge."[40] Dominant schemas—the ones propagated by, and that propped up, the groups whose racial, class, and gender status led to their hegemony over the rest of the American public—were often naturalized, which was the source of their power. They were never named as mere frameworks for interpreting events, but were instead thought of as the natural way—the only way—of looking at life. However, even the most entrenched schemas can be denaturalized, especially when the ways they teach a person to think do not line up with what that person watches unfold in front of them. This denaturalizing process happened *en masse* in the United States in the mid, and especially the late, 1960s. At the time, the dominant schema under which the white middle-class public operated was that of Lyndon Johnson's "'great American consensus,'" a way of thinking which framed reality as follows:

> America was a land where the basic economic, social, and political problems had been solved, where only liberal reform was necessary to deal with the few outstanding problems (like civil rights)…America had solved the basic problems of industrial society or was at least on the verge of such a solution if only communism could be contained and a few pieces of domestic reform could be enacted…Everyone seemed to know his place. Workers might agitate for higher wages, and responsible "Negro" leaders might lead nonviolent demonstrations for civil-rights legislation, but few dreamed of challenging the ultimate worthiness of the great American enterprise itself.[41]

Yet no sooner had Johnson articulated this vision than "it was dramatically shown to be irrelevant to the realities of American life." Almost all at once, "the dream fell apart," as "[o]n the international front the Vietnamese would not yield in their struggle for independence from American empire," and "[o]n the home front blacks began to demand not just token reforms but real power and ultimately liberation." Watching this unfold on television and in the streets, "many young people," and particularly young whites, "began to reject the ideologies they had been taught in high school and college and to seek new ways of understanding their situation." The idea was that, "[i]f American society could be challenged by the Vietnamese and by blacks,

if the given reality was not the only possible one, then perhaps it would be possible for white youth as well to construct themselves a new identity and possibly even a new world."[42]

These white youth, recognizing the inadequacy of dominant schemas to describe and interpret the world at hand, sought out fresh ways of thinking and existing. In order to understand them, the New Journalists argued, their parents and peers would have to seek out fresh perspectives as well. It was no use turning to novels, as no one was producing any definitive fictional accounts of the era. If they wanted writing that combined literary techniques with commentary on "the way we live now," their best—and really, only—option was New Journalism.[43] They could certainly look at newspapers, but, the New Journalists warned, they would do little to explain the reasoning behind what was happening in the present moment.[44] By the late '60s, most major papers were printing articles about the counterculture; however, the New Journalists argued that, as long as these publications maintained their objective style, they would never be able to understand the new youth movements. After all, objectivity as a mode was just another schema: a way of looking at the world that tried to present itself as natural and unbiased, but that was actually the result of a series of deliberate choices. It had the same flaws as the idea of American consensus: both tried to smooth over fissures, to suppress or omit any perspective that didn't fit in with the narrative it wanted to present. It was, in other words, precisely the kind of thing that young people were trying to destroy—and, as such, there was no way it could capture the spirit of, or explain the mindset behind, these new movements and styles.

The irony here is that, while New Journalism's critique of mainstream journalism's claims to objectivity were well-founded, the specific technique the New Journalists cited as

evidence that they were more in line with the counterculture was also one that most newspapers employed. New Journalists argued that they could interpret these youth movements because they, like these young people, used juxtapastiche to get others to look for new ways to think about and understand the world around them. But juxtapastiche was also a defining characteristic of newspapers: they were literal mashups, cut-and-paste collages. They had personal ads bordering articles, pictures against text, whole pages of cartoons, jumbles of fonts, and stories reprinted from other publications. Even straight news pieces were, in some sense, juxtapastiches: they incorporated multiple perspectives, and their supposed facts were really a compilation of various sources' accounts. However, when considered more closely, it becomes clear that New Journalism's argument against mainstream journalism was more complicated than a claim that they used juxtapastiche and most newspapers did not. Rather, it was that, while newspapers were juxtapastiches, these papers did their best to obscure that this was the case. Instead, they presented themselves as providing a cohesive, unified, and singular set of facts, and did not call attention to—and often, tried to smooth over—the divisions and ruptures that were present both in their physical forms and in their coverage.

New Journalists, on the other hand, wanted to show their readers that writing a story was a "mode of production."[45] There was no thing as objective fact, and putting together an article was, literally, a process of assembly: it meant picking out quotes and editing text, not to mention deciding on an angle and choosing which viewpoints to include. The best way to make this clear, the New Journalists believed, was to write pieces that "call[ed] attention to [themselves] both as a report of an actual situation and a mode of discourse."[46] In other words, if they could publish stories that were so obviously constructed—which combined a whole host of perspectives and

styles and techniques so often, and so openly, that one couldn't help but notice—then their readers might start think about how more seamless, and ostensively more objective, articles had been assembled too. There are few better examples of this kind of juxtapastiche than *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*: indeed, by incorporating elements from comic books and light shows, talk show tapes and acid-fueled rants, movie scripts and psychedelic music, it is constantly undermining any sense of a cohesive narrative. In so doing, it suggests that if we want to tell the Merry Pranksters' story—and, by extension, if we want to understand the era itself—then we have to recognize the need for multiplicity and variance, and refuse one-sided or 'objective' narratives.

*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*'s emphasis on the Pranksters' multimedia experiments, and the way it reproduces the effects of other media in the text, also implies that there was something important about the Pranksters' aesthetic choices, whether it was how they edited their "Big Movie" or the look and feel of the Acid Tests. In the next section, we will see that this was also true for the counterculture at large: that is, the idea that the aesthetic was the politics was one of the counterculture's central tenets. While many newspaper writers and cultural commentators—and even some New Journalists—believed that most of the counterculture was apolitical, section III will show that members of the counterculture saw their aesthetic choices as political acts. This is a radical reimagining of what political action could look like: one that insists we acknowledge the extent to which politics acts on Americans' everyday lives, and shapes the way they think and what, if any, possibilities they can imagine for dissent. Members of the counterculture believed that, by making aesthetic choices that were outside the mainstream, they could jolt their fellow citizens out of their complacency, and force them to

realize that there were other ways of thinking and living that the dominant hegemony did not sanction. The counterculture was also convinced that they could use this strategy on a broader scale: that they could stage protests at which their individual aesthetic choices, seen all together, would send a message that would shatter the myth of American consensus, and signal what kinds of dissent were needed. This was the approach that was taken at the 1967 March on the Pentagon: a protest against the Vietnam War that would become the subject of one of the most famous works of New Journalism, Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night.* The section will focus on the March and on *The Armies of the Night,* and will pay special attention to how Mailer's text imagines these scenes of protest, and what impression they made on the public. Ultimately, I will argue that the March was proof that the counterculture's aesthetics-as-protest strategy could actually work: not only did it turn many Americans against the war, but it also succeeded in preventing even more troops from being deployed to Vietnam. It was a sign that the counterculture's ideas had come to fruition: that, as Mailer writes, "the aesthetic at last [had become] the politics."[47]

## III. "Our Revolutionary Culture is Our Most Powerful Tool": Aesthetics as Protest at the March on the Pentagon[48]

"Just in case anybody's still got his head stuck in the sand," wrote *Life* magazine columnist Loudon Wainwright, "something is happening with American youth."[49] It was the spring of 1967, and Wainwright had just returned from a trip to San Francisco; his half-joking, half-serious tone reflects his audience's anxiety. *Something* was going on, undeniably—there had to be new social forces at work, for how else to explain the sudden exodus of otherwise-

respectable white middle-class teens out of their homes and into Haight-Ashbury? Wainwright, fresh off his field expedition, tries to parse the phenomenon for his readers. "The most sensible thing we straight types can do," he tells them, "is to take a good look at this bizarre new scene."[50] His piece has all the hallmarks of mainstream journalism covering what would evolve into the Summer of Love: initial skepticism ("As a not-so-youthful square, I guess I thought it would repel and outrage me. As a parent engaged in the endless struggle to defend the worth of hard work and the merit of an orderly existence, I was prepared to suffer my own indignation"), tempered admiration ("The hippies jarred me, but there is much about them that is distinctly appealing"), a healthy dose of 'hip' slang ("'that's *your* trip, man'"), and, finally, sanctimonious concern ("What about those who weren't there, the families of the hippies?…And the girl who thought she was pregnant…would she feel bitter and swindled and angry at herself for having once had the courage of her folly?").[51]

There is another feature of Wainwright's article that would also appear in almost every other piece on the hippies: an extended description of their attire. Wainwright recounts seeing "wild combinations of capes, boots, turbans, necklaces, bells, chinos, earrings" on Haight denizens who, "bearded or not, long hair and short…parade and lounge in such big and colorful numbers that carloads of sight-seers create weekend traffic jams."[52] However, while their outfits are radical enough to stop traffic, Wainwright insists that the hippies lack political commitments to match. "A lot of the hippies," he writes, "as opposed to the equally long-haired but busy and activist young students at Berkeley across the bay, are not really doing *anything*."

In making this claim, Wainwright was in good company. The mainstream press tended to divide the counterculture into two camps: the politically-active (which included the National

Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, the Students for a Democratic Society, and the rest of the New Left), and those uninterested in politics (groups like the Merry Pranksters and the hippies). Surprisingly, some New Journalists also bought into this distinction. Covering Haight-Ashbury for *The New York Times*, Hunter S. Thompson insisted that the hippies "reject politics, which [for them] is 'just another game.'"[53] In "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," Joan Didion depicts the hippies as both the symptom and the victims of a splintered society, but also implies that the majority are politically ignorant, and that any activism they might generate is misguided.[54] The hippies may have been experimenting with new lifestyles, these accounts suggest, but these were merely personal choices, and had little to do with real political action. However, as this section will show, not only did many hippies engage in activities that fit the mainstream definition of political participation, like marching in protest on the Pentagon, but their aesthetic decisions were actually an attempt to change American politics and culture. "To live an alternative that is totally outside the alternatives [afforded by] this culture is a profoundly political act," claimed Coyote, a member of the underground performance art troupe known as the Diggers.[55] "The revolution," went the counterculture refrain, "is the way you live your life."[56] In other words, the hippies believed that "[p]olitics was no longer simply the private business of casting a vote once every other year," but rather "a public affair, revealed by the buttons you wore everyday, the length of your hair, [and] the signs you carried down the middle of city streets."[57] Because power was located not only in the White House and on Capitol Hill, but also operated on, and shaped the direction of, Americans' everyday lives, the hippies were convinced that you could fight back against the dominant hegemony by changing the way you lived, and that your behavior and aesthetic choices were particularly effective weapons.

Clothing, in particular, was "perhaps the clearest expression of what the Underground revolutionary is for and what he is against."[58] The hippies' juxtapastiche style of dress—the "wild combinations of capes, boots, turbans, necklaces, bells, chinos, earrings" Wainwright describes—was a tendency that went all the way back to the Merry Pranksters, who were famous for their mishmashed attire. One Prankster is reported to have worn "a blazing disk on his forehead…and a whole necktie made of Indian beads…and a white butcher's coat with medals from the King of Sweden on it," and Kesey an "orange Day-Glo coat and [a] World War I helmet."[59] Wolfe not only pays close attention to the Pranksters' aesthetic choices, but recognizes their political potential. When he writes about the Pranksters' cross-country trip, he notes that their Technicolor schoolbus had "great possibilities for altering the usual order of things."[60] He goes on to detail what would happen whenever a police officer tried to pull over the Pranksters and ticket them for a traffic violation. The officer would ask something like, "What are you, uh —show people?" to which Kesey would reply:

> "That's right, officer…We're show people. It's been a long row to hoe, I can tell you, and it's *gonna* be a long row to hoe, but that's the business."
> "Well," says the cop, "you fix those things and…" He starts backing off towards his car, cutting one last look at the crazies. "…And watch it next time…" And he guns on off.
> That was it! How can you give a traffic ticket to a bunch of people rolling in the brown grass wearing Day-Glo masks, practically Greek masques, only with Rat phosphorescent *élan*, giggling, keening in their costumes and private world while the god Speed sizzles like a short-order French fry in the gut of some guy who doesn't even stop talking to breathe. A traffic ticket?[61]

It would be impossible to ticket the Pranksters, this passage suggests, because they exist so far outside the boundaries of the system in which there are traffic tickets and speed limits and even police officers. Wearing "Day-Glo masks" and driving a brightly-painted schoolbus, rolling around and "keening in their costumes," they are like emissaries from a different world, and it would be pointless to try and issue them a citation. What this excerpt demonstrates, then, is that

making certain aesthetic and behavioral choices can be a way to circumvent the established system of law and order: a philosophy to which the hippies who would march on the Pentagon would also subscribe.

Indeed, while the Pranksters themselves paid little attention to what we usually mean when we talk about American politics—elections, lawmaking, and foreign and domestic policy—the members of the counterculture who participated in the March on the Pentagon believed that aesthetics could also have an influence on this sphere. In this way, then, the March was not only a collaboration between the counterculture and what were considered the more political parts of the New Left—namely, the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, also known as the Mobe—but also a demonstration that the counterculture, too, was invested in politics. The March was an attempt to pressure President Johnson and the American military brass to bring the war to an end; as such, it was held at the headquarters of the military-industrial complex, or the Pentagon. In planning the event, the Mobe worked alongside creatives and performance artists like Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, and the March's participants—which, by some estimates, numbered over 100,000—were not just the usual student protesters: there were also "a great number" of hippies in attendance.[62]

All of this is the subject of Norman Mailer's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Armies of the Night,* which was printed in two parts in *Harper's* and *Commentary* magazines before being published as a book.[63] The text, which is considered one of the formative works of New Journalism, details Mailer's time at the March, his observations about the attendees and the protest, and his eventual arrest alongside some of the demonstrators. Like Wolfe, Mailer

recognizes the political significance of the counterculture's attire, and describes in great detail what the hippies wear while participating in the March:

> Buster Keaton and W.C. Fields could have come to the ball; there were Martians and Moon-men and a knight unhorsed who stalked about in the weight of real armor. There were seen to be a hundred soldiers in Confederate gray, and maybe there were two or three hundred hippies in officer's coats of Union dark-blue. They had picked up their their costumes where they could, in surplus stores, and Blow-your-mind shops, Digger free emporiums, and psychedelic caches of Hindu junk. There were soldiers in Foreign Legion uniforms, and tropical bush jackets, San Quentin and Chino, California striped shirts and pants, British copies of Eisenhower jackets, hippies dressed like Turkish shepherds and Roman senators, gurus, and samurais in dirty socks. They were close to being assembled from all the intersections between history and the comic books, between legend and television, the Biblical archetypes and the movies…*the aesthetic at last was the politics.*[64] [emphasis mine]

Like the Pranksters, the hippies' outfits are pure juxtapastiche: they have mixed and matched pieces from "surplus stores, and Blow-your-mind shops, Digger free emporiums, and psychedelic caches of Hindu junk." Indeed, their clothing represents so many different styles and time periods that "[t]hey were close to being assembled from all the intersections between history and the comic books, between legend and television, the Biblical archetypes and the movies." What is especially key, I think, is that their outfits represent so many *contrasting* ideas: not only are they dressed as Turkish shepherds and Foreign Legion soldiers and Japanese samurais, but there are hundreds of hippies wearing Confederate and Union uniforms. This last detail seems the most significant; in fact, I want to argue that it is Mailer's most explicit commentary on the political effect of the hippies' costumes. In coming to the March in such foreign-looking attire, and wearing uniforms from the internal conflict that almost tore the nation apart, the hippies' outfits explode the myth of American consensus. Instead, they present the image of a divided people, who not only carry with them the traces of non-American origins and ideas, but who may very well be as split in their attitudes towards the issues of the day as the country was during the Civil War. In fact, the presence of these Civil War uniforms is powerful proof that something like an American consensus has never existed. All of this, in turn, is a

comment on the issue that the myth of American consensus was being used to support: the Vietnam War. The point of turning up in such great numbers to the March was to demonstrate that there was a large portion of the American public that was opposed to the war. By embodying intra-national conflict through their clothing, the hippies are making it impossible to ignore that there was significant dissent within the nation. This was an act of symbolic warfare: one that used aesthetic choices to weaken a myth upon which the Johnson presidency and the military-industrial complex relied, and that encouraged those who encountered it to consider possibilities for dissent and rebellion.

This was also the goal of what would become the most infamous part of the March: the attempt to levitate, and perform an exorcism on, the Pentagon. The exorcism was the brainchild of Abbie Hoffman and especially Jerry Rubin, who was at that point already "the most militant, unpredictable, creative—therefore dangerous—hippie-oriented leader available on the New Left."[65] Rubin, Hoffman, and their friends believed that the March should include an event which would draw a great deal of media and public attention. Thus, they announced that they would "encircle the Pentagon with twelve hundred men in order to form a ring of exorcism sufficiently powerful to raise the Pentagon three hundred feet." In theory, Mailer writes in his account of the event, the building would "turn orange and vibrate until all evil emissions had fled this levitation. At this point the war in Vietnam would end."[66] Of course, neither Rubin nor Hoffman actually expected that the Pentagon would rise off the ground, or that their stunt would end the war. Rather, as Allen Ginsberg explained in the aftermath of the March, their intent was to use the exorcism to change the way Americans thought about the Pentagon. "The levitation of the Pentagon," Ginsberg declared, "was a happening that demystified the authority of the military.

The Pentagon was symbolically levitated in people's minds in the sense that it lost its authority which had been unquestioned and unchallenged until then."[67]

In other words, Ginsberg is suggesting that, by performing this very public and well-publicized ritual on the Pentagon—for indeed, Mailer notes that "the papers had made much of the" attempt—Rubin and Hoffman were able to rob the Pentagon of some of its symbolic power.[68] The building was a symbol of the American military-industrial complex, which the nation had been conditioned not only to respect, but to revere. However, by staging this exorcism at the center of the March on the Pentagon, Rubin and Hoffman made the March's purpose explicit: it was meant to challenge the military-industrial complex and its influence over the American people, and to give the public permission to start thinking critically about, and opposing, the American war machine. An exorcism, after all, was meant to stop an evil spirit from controlling someone; Rubin and Hoffman hoped that their ritual, and the March as a whole, would challenge the Pentagon's ability to control the narrative around the war in Vietnam, and make Americans realize the institution was fallible.

Mailer also recognizes the significance of the exorcism—and indeed, he finds himself in the center of the event. He notes that, like the crowd of hippies he described earlier, the exorcists are also wearing juxtapastiched attire. "They were dressed in orange and yellow and rose colored capes," he writes, "and looked at once like Hindu gurus, French musketeers, and Southern cavalry captains."[69] However, as Mailer's depiction of the exorcism demonstrates, this is not the only form of juxtapastiche the group employs. "Now while the Indian triangle and the cymbal sounded," he tells his reader, "while a trumpet offered a mournful subterranean wail, full of sobs,

and mahogany shadows of sorrow, and all sour groans from hell's dungeon, while finger bells tinkled and drums beat, so did a solemn voice speak something approximate to this":

> In the name of the amulets touching, seeing, groping, hearing, and loving, we call upon the powers of the cosmos to protect our ceremonies in the name of zeus, in the name of Anubis, the god of the dead, in the name of the lives of the soldiers in Vietnam who were killed because of a bad karma, in the name of the sea-born Aphrodite, in the name of Magna Mater, in the name of Dionysus, Zagreus, Jesus, Yaweh, in the unnamable, the quintessent finality of the Zoroastrian fire, in the name of Hermes, in the name of the Beak of Sok, in the name of scarab, in the name, in the name, in the name of the Tyrone Power Pound Cake Society in the sky, in the name of the flowing living universe, in the name of the mouth of the river, we call upon this spirit…to raise the Pentagon from its destiny and preserve it.[70]

The repetition Mailer uses in this excerpt is yet another example of a New Journalist employing literary techniques to reproduce the effect of a countercultural practice for his audience. The phrase "in the name of" appears fifteen times in this passage, and reading the same words over and over makes one feel as if they are being hypnotized. However, while Mailer is delighted by the "hypnotic" effect of the ritual, the way he writes about the invocation makes it clear that the hippies are not using it to lull their audience into complacency; paradoxically, they hope that it will wake people up—and, in a sense, *un*-hypnotize them—to the evils of American militarism.[71] In order to counter the tremendous power of the nation's military-industrial complex, Hoffman and Rubin and their friends have decided that they need to call on every god or spiritual force that exists outside, or challenges the myths of, the American empire. This, I think, is why we get the references to Greek and Egyptian and Hebrew and Zoroastrian and Hindu deities and religious concepts, as well as to the Tyrone Power Pound Cake Society (an allusion to gay men) and the soldiers killed in Vietnam (the human cost of the war that the Pentagon insists Americans support). In drawing on all of these elements, the ritual also becomes a juxtapastiche; it does with language what the hippies from the earlier passage were trying to do with their costumes, which is bring together, and make visible the contradictions between, as

many different sources as possible, so as to counter the myth of national consensus. This is why Mailer believes that the hippies have become "Revolutionary Alchemists": because they have figured out how to stage these public demonstrations of juxtapastiche that encourage other Americans to defy the dominant powers.[72] Indeed, this ritual ends with yet another invocation of a Greek god, in whose name the exorcists ask the soldiers and leaders at the Pentagon to repent:

> "In the name of the generative power of Priapus, in the name of the totality, we call upon the demons of the Pentagon to rid themselves of the cancerous tumors of the war generals, all the secretaries and soldiers who don't know what they're doing, all the intrigue and bureaucracy and hatred, all the spewing, coupled with prostrate cancer in the deathbed. Every Pentagon general lying alone at night with a tortured psyche and an image of death in his brain, every general, every general lying alone, every general lying alone."[73]

What's remarkable about this part of the ritual is that it actually seems to have worked: that is, there was at least one person in the Pentagon who changed their mind about the war. An employee named Daniel Ellsberg, "who was drafting plans with Secretary of Defense McNamara for an invasion of North Vietnam…began to revise his own thinking" after the March on the Pentagon. "[T]he rumors about the levitation," and "[t]he sight of marshals brutally clubbing pacifists," would help convince Ellsberg that he had to leak a set of secret documents about the Vietnam War, which would become known as the Pentagon Papers. The Papers, which were published in 1971, "unmasked the inconsistencies of the country's Vietnam policy"—demonstrating, most importantly, that the government had been misleading the public about the war for years—"and thereby helped to end the war."[74] The act of symbolic warfare that was the exorcism, then, had a major impact on foreign and domestic policy: it destroyed the last shred of public support for combat operations in Vietnam, which accelerated the United States' eventual withdrawal.

"The sight of marshals brutally clubbing pacifists," which was the other factor in Ellsberg's decision to release the Pentagon Papers, would also turn many Americans against the war. Mailer, who was in the crowd when these assaults occurred, noted that, as the March went on, the protesters were treated much more roughly than the situation required, and that "[a] startling disproportion of women were arrested, and were beaten in ugly fashion."[75] Ellsberg also witnessed this firsthand, as he was at the Pentagon during the March; however, most of the public learned about the violence thanks to photographs published in magazines like *The Washington Star* and *Look.* When Hoffman and Rubin had tried to get as much press coverage as possible for their exorcism, it was because they believed that the more people who were exposed to their symbolic protest, the more Americans would question the military's authority. They had wanted to use media technologies to spread images that would convey their ideas—which is exactly what happened with the photographs of the protesters. While many of the pictures showed the actual beatings, some of the most famous images were taken shortly before the assaults took place; they resonated, then, because they drew a powerful symbolic contrast between the demonstrators and the military. One of these pictures features seventeen-year-old Jan Rose Kasmir, who is holding up a chrysanthemum in front of a line of National Guardsmen who are pointing their weapons at her.[76] In another, eighteen-year-old George Harris inserts a flower into a soldier's rifle; this image was a finalist for the 1967 Pulitzer Prize.[77] In both photos, the disparity between the military and the demonstrators could not be clearer: the hippies have come armed only with flowers—the ultimate symbol of peace—while the soldiers have guns and look prepared to fire.

Unsurprisingly, the public reacted very strongly to these images—even more strongly, indeed, than they did to the news of the exorcism. While President Johnson's approval rating rose immediately after the March, as photographs of the violence began to spread more widely, the national mood began to turn against his administration.[78] Before long, "[p]olls showed that more Americans than ever favored an immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of troops."[79] Interestingly, it wasn't only civilians that were affected by these images; "[o]n military bases around the country and in Vietnam, too, soldiers began to identify with the protesters and regard their own officers as the enemy."[80] That these pictures could convince soldiers to side with, and see themselves in, the demonstrators is proof that the counterculture's aesthetics-as-politics strategy could have a powerful impact. In facing down the soldiers with chrysanthemums, the hippies had not only symbolized their rejection of violence, but had challenged one of the most enduring myths in American culture: that the military was acting in its citizens' best interest. If soldiers were willing to attack peaceful protesters—and their superiors had no problem ordering them to do so—then why should one trust those soldiers' or superiors' judgement, or trust that they were doing the right thing in Vietnam? Once one started asking these questions, they were only a few steps away from openly speaking out against the war. In fact, the Johnson administration was so afraid that the March would cause an outpouring of anti-war sentiment that they cancelled a planned troop surge in Vietnam. When the Pentagon Papers were eventually leaked, they revealed that Johnson and his allies had become so paranoid that "'domestic crisis' would mount and there would not be 'sufficient forces…available for civil disorder control" that they decided to keep the additional troops that they had intended to send to Vietnam in America.[81]

It is no surprise, then, that even before the March's role in preventing the planned surge was revealed—indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the March—the counterculture and its leaders were celebrating the demonstration as a success. It was clear that the momentum was on their side, as each day, more and more "Americans were burning their draft cards, disrupting public places, and shouting down government speakers."[82] The events at the Pentagon had "rejuvenated the peace movement and brought together almost all its factions," which were now committed to the idea that—to reuse an important quote—"[p]olitics was a public affair, revealed by the buttons you wore everyday, the length of your hair, [and] the signs you carried down the middle of city streets."[83] If aesthetic decisions could have this much of an impact on politics—if the outfits you wore could challenge the myth of American consensus, and the flowers you brought to a protest could turn the public against the war—then the anti-war movement would have to pay close attention to how it used these elements in its future protests. Indeed, having recognized the importance of establishing a clear symbolic contrast between the anti-Vietnam protesters and the forces in charge of the war, both the Mobe and Hoffman and Rubin—who had begun calling themselves the Yippies—chose a very specific target for their next major demonstration.[84] They decided that they would "confront the head war maker himself, LBJ, at his renomination party in Chicago": that is, the 1968 Democratic National Convention.[85] As almost everyone assumed that President Johnson would be the Democratic Party's nominee, it looked like the protest would be similar to the March on the Pentagon, with anti-Vietnam demonstrators marching against a symbol of the war and its architects.

Of course, as anyone familiar with the 1968 Democratic National Convention is aware, this is not what happened. After he and anti-war Senator Gene McCarthy tied for first in the New

Hampshire primary, Johnson decided to withdrawal from the Presidential race, meaning that there would be no obvious symbol of the war at the convention.[86] Though both the Mobe and the Yippies decided that they would still hold demonstrations at the DNC, the absence of President Johnson, who had been so closely associated with the war, would make it unclear what, exactly, they were protesting.[87] Indeed, while this section has shown that the counterculture's strategy of symbolic protest could be incredibly successful, the next section will show what can happen when the meaning behind this kind of demonstration is uncertain. Though the Yippies would attempt to turn their protest into a vision of their ideal world, and then into a symbolic clash between protesters and police, the public would not respond with the same outpouring of sympathy that they had felt for the demonstrators at the Pentagon. To understand why, we must examine what else happened in 1968, and how the chaos of that year changed the national mood. In order to do so, the next section will take up another one of Norman Mailer's works: *Miami and the Siege of Chicago.* Not only does Mailer's ambivalence towards the protesters mirror his audience's reluctance to embrace seemingly-inevitable social change, but the fact that he misses out on the most important moments of the convention, while newspaper and television reporters are in the thick of things, casts doubt on one of New Journalism's central assertions: that its practitioners are the ones best suited to covering, and interpreting, the major fault lines of the era. This is a moment, indeed, when both New Journalism and the counterculture seem to have stumbled, and when the basic tenets of both movements—that New Journalism had its finger on the pulse of youth activism, and that new media technologies would shatter the myths of the dominant powers—would be called into question.

I want to end this section with a note on that last point: that is, to highlight the kinds of assumptions the counterculture was making about the media. As we have seen throughout this chapter, everyone from the Merry Pranksters to the Yippies believed that harnessing the power of media technologies could be to their benefit, whether that meant combining them to produce the Acid Tests or using them to publicize their demonstrations. The March on the Pentagon lent credence to this theory: the newspaper coverage of the exorcism, and, to a much greater extent, the photographs of the protesters and their confrontations with soldiers, had resulted in an outpouring of sympathy for the demonstrators, and made many Americans reconsider their stance on the Vietnam War. It is important to note, however, that this reaction came from what was published in newspapers and magazines, and what people saw in photographs: all of which are very specific types of media. Many members of the counterculture, including people like Abbie Hoffman, were confident that they could harness different media technologies to produce the same effect. They believed that they would be able to use television coverage—and specifically, TV footage of the Democratic National Convention—to win even more of the public over their side, and convince them of the need for the radical change.[88] But as the next section will demonstrate, media technologies were not as interchangeable as many in the counterculture seemed to believe. While photographs were able to fix the viewer's attention on a single image—making it much easier to understand its symbolic resonance—*Miami and the Siege of Chicago* will show how television, with its images that move and are separated from the viewer by a sheet of glass, can make one feel detached from what they see onscreen. This is a sense that Mailer will try to reproduce in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, and that, in the context of the chaos of 1968 and the unclear meaning of the protests, goes a long way towards explaining the public's

reaction to the DNC. In so doing, Mailer will also highlight a troubling aspect of one of the counterculture's favorite practices: juxtapastiche. As it turns out, the Merry Pranksters and the hippies and Yippies weren't the only ones who knew how to use juxtapastiche, nor was it only useful for challenging dominant schemas and the powers-that-be. Instead, we will see that reactionary interests could also combine multiple media technologies, and that doing so could get the public to buy into counter-revolutionary ideas—including Richard Nixon's presidential campaign.

## IV. "The Whole World is Watching": The New Journalist as Interpreter at the 1968 Democratic National Convention[89]

"Media is free," insisted Abbie Hoffman. "Use it. Don't pay for it. Don't buy ads. Make news."[90] This would be the central theme of his memoir, *Revolution for the Hell of It,* which was published in 1968: the same year as the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. A little over twelve months after the convention, Hoffman and the six other members of what became known as the Chicago Seven would be on trial, facing charges of conspiracy and crossing state lines with the intent of starting a riot.[91] These charges were a result of what had happened in the Chicago, and both the convention and the trial would become the center of a media firestorm that Hoffman himself worked very hard to drum up. As his biographer Jonah Raskin writes, while Hoffman had "always aimed to make the personal political, he never did so with more panache than at the conspiracy trial."[92] He and his fellow defendant Jerry Rubin donned outrageous costumes (at one point, they "came to court in judicial robes that covered Chicago police department shirts," to make the point that the judge presiding over the case was little more than

"a cop in disguise"), and he gave "an extraordinary theatrical performance on the witness stand," "winking, sighing, gasping, stretching, waving, making eyes at the judge and the jury, and hugely enjoying the whole thing."[93] When the trial was over, Hoffman and four of the others would be found not guilty of conspiracy, but guilty of crossing state lines with the intention of creating a riot," and sentenced "to the maximum penalty: five years in prison and five thousand dollars in fines."[94] An appeals court reversed their convictions in 1972, but Hoffman continued to call attention to, and profit off of, the infamy he had gained from the trial. For example, one later edition of *Revolution for the Hell of It* would be advertised as "The Book That Earned Abbie Hoffman a Five-Year Prison Term at the Chicago Conspiracy Trial."[95]

However, while the trial and the convention that preceded it made Hoffman a celebrity, it could hardly have been more disastrous for the counterculture that he was a part of, and the revolutionary politics for which he stood. Of course, Hoffman could not have predicted this when he and the other Yippies started planning their demonstration; at that point, they had believed that President Johnson would be re-nominated at the DNC, and that the symbolic meaning of their protest would be both obvious and effective. After Johnson dropped out of the race, the Yippies decided that, while they would still hold a demonstration in Chicago, it would be centered around an event called the Festival of Life. The Festival was to be another example of how lifestyle choices could be a means of protest, with attendees free to behave however they wished. "People will visit the [Chicago] Zoo," Hoffman predicted, and "people will sell newspapers, and others will debate your ideology and march on the Amphitheater and dance in the park and give out food, and swim, and smoke dope, and fuck, and fight cops and give cops flowers and get pregnant."[96] In other words, the Festival was to be a microcosm of the Yippies'

ideal society, and proof that it was possible to build a better world. But as the DNC grew closer, and Hoffman worried that he would not be able to attract enough attendees to the Festival, he began to change the way he talked about the protest. He shifted his emphasis from the contrast between "the dreary, old-fashioned Democratic 'Convention of Death'" and the Festival of Life, and started emphasizing the possibility that protesters would get involved in altercations with the Chicago police.[97] Hoffman believed that seeing demonstrators brutalized by the Chicago PD would have a similar effect as the images of the National Guard beating up hippies at the March on the Pentagon: that is, it would expose the nation's divisions and the violence inherent in the state. "We want to fuck up their image on TV," Hoffman announced. "It's all in terms of disrupting the image…of a democratic society being run very peacefully and orderly and everything according to business." In fact, as the convention drew closer, Hoffman began to speak about these clashes at the convention as if they were inevitable. There would be "rock 'n' roll," he promised prospective attendees, "guerrilla theatre, violent confrontations, and, of course, bloodshed in the streets."[98]

Norman Mailer, who would travel to Chicago to write about the convention, agreed with Hoffman on that particular issue: there would certainly be violence at the DNC. He doubted, however, whether it would turn out well for the counterculture. After all, the national mood was very different than it had been in October of 1967, when the hippies had marched on the Pentagon. At that point, shattering the myth of national consensus and making room for dissent and protest had been vital work, as the public needed to realize that they didn't have to revere the military and could oppose the war in Vietnam. But nine months later, Americans no longer needed a march or a Festival of Life to show them that the country was divided, or that its

institutions were fallible: the evidence was all around them. The first half of 1968 had been incredibly chaotic: there were riots and protests, looting and assassinations, all of which had been covered extensively in the newspapers, and, even more importantly, broadcast on national television. On January 31, the North Vietnamese had launched the Tet Offensive, and "[j]ust a day later, photographer Eddie Adams captured one of the most memorable photos from the war when he snapped General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a Viet Cong protester with a pistol shot to the head. For Western audiences…the scene epitomized the raw brutality and senselessness of a war an increasing number of people no longer wanted to fight."[99] The chaos would only escalate, both at home and abroad, over the next few months, as Mailer himself explains as he prepares to cover the convention:

> On April 4 Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated by a white man, and violence, fire, and looting broke out in Memphis, Harlem, Brooklyn, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Detroit, Boston, and Newark over the next week. [Chicago's] Mayor Daley gave his famous "shoot to kill" instruction to the Chicago police, and National Guard and U.S. troops were sent to some of those cities.
> On April 23 Columbia students barricaded the office of a Dean. By another day the campus was disrupted, then closed, and was never to be comfortably open again for the rest of the semester. On May 10, as if indicative of a spontaneous world-wide movement, the students of the Sorbonne battled the Paris police on barricades and in the streets…
> On June 3, Andy Warhol was shot. On June 4, after winning the California primary 45% to 42% for McCarthy, and 12% for Humphrey, RFK was shot in the head and died the next day.[100]

It's no surprise, then, that by the time the convention began, many Americans had gone from believing in the myth of national consensus to being convinced that they were living in an increasingly dangerous and divided country. For the counterculture, this was intensely exciting, as they believed that the center could not hold, and that the collapse of American society really might be imminent; they hoped that they would be able to build a better world out of the ashes of the old one. However, even many of the people who agreed with at least some of the counterculture's goals, particularly ending the war in Vietnam, found the current social upheaval, and the potential for even more radical change, disturbing. Mailer himself admits that he is one

of them: speaking in the third person, as he does throughout *Miami and the Siege of Chicago,* he writes, "He liked his old life. He wanted it to go on, which meant that he wanted America to go on—not as it was going, not Vietnam—but what price was he really willing to pay? Was he ready to give up the pleasures of making his movies, of writing his books? They were pleasures he finally did not want to lose."[101] Indeed, all throughout the text, Mailer finds himself caught between his sympathy for the counterculture and his worry that they are going too far. In so doing, he comes to stand in for his readers: the older, educated, upper-middle class Americans who have left-of-center politics, but who are unsure as to whether they can support this recent upheaval. "It was as if the historical temperature in America went up every month," he muses. "At different heats, the oils of separate psyches were loosened—different good Americans began to fry. Of course their first impulse was to hope the temperature would be quickly reduced…But if it continued…his life could not go on as it had."[102]

These readers were not only looking for Mailer to reflect their anxieties back to them, however: they also wanted him to interpret, and give them a way to make sense of, the present moment. This is Mailer's project all throughout *Miami and the Siege of Chicago,* but over and over during the convention, he finds himself missing out on, or unsure of what to say about, what is taking place. For example, during the first violent clash between the police and the Yippies—for indeed, the two groups would come to blows—Mailer is nowhere to be found, as he has already left the park where the skirmish would later occur. "[H]e did not wish to spend hours in this park," Mailer writes, "[f]or what was one to do when the attack came? Would one leave when asked—small honor there—why wait to offer that modest obedience. And to stay—to what end?—to protest being ejected from the park, to take tear gas in the face, to have one's head

cracked?"[103] Mailer departs, then, to attend a party, where he "enjoyed himself until the morning when he discovered the attack by the police had been ferocious." Not only had the Yippies themselves been beaten, but "[s]eventeen newsmen had been attacked by police," including "a photographer for *The Washington Post,* two reporters for the Chicago *American,* one for the Chicago *Daily News,* two photographers and a reporter for the Chicago *Sun-Times*, a reporter and a photographer for *Life,* cameramen for three television networks, and three reporters and a photographer for *Newsweek.*"[104] Since Mailer admits that he—or "the reporter" himself—"was not there," he is forced to quote from a *Washington Post* story to describe the incident.[105]

When Mailer initially makes the decision to leave the park, he justifies his reluctance to remain and almost certainly be beaten by the Chicago police alongside the Yippies by claiming that "[t]he justifications of the March on the Pentagon were not here. The reporter was a literary man," he writes:

> symbol had the power to push him into actions more heroic than himself. The fact that he had been marching to demonstrate against a building which was the symbol of everything he most despised—the military-industrial complex of the land—had worked to fortify his steps. The symbol of the Pentagon had been a chalice to hold his fear; in such circumstances his fear had even flavored his courage with the sweetest emotions of battle.

"But in Chicago," he claims, "there was no symbol for him."[106] "He could not make the essential connection between" protesting "being ejected from the park"—and, as a result, taking "tear gas in the face" and having "one's head cracked"—"and Vietnam."[107] That Mailer feels uninspired by the Festival of Life, and finds nothing in Chicago that can match the symbolic power of the Pentagon, is a reasonable critique. However, the fact that the other reporters—from mainstream outlets, no less—were the ones risking their physical safety to get the story, while Mailer was enjoying himself as a hotel party, troubles the image that the New Journalists had worked so hard to cultivate. New Journalists had always promised that they would immerse themselves in the

action; that, unconstrained by the conventions of traditional print reporting, they would be able to tell their readers exactly how they felt about, and what they made of, the things they saw. Mailer had done exactly that in *The Armies of the Night;* not only had he marched on the Pentagon, but he had been arrested alongside some of the protesters. While he had cited reports from other print outlets in that book, too, he had done so in order to provide a fuller picture of events, not as a substitute for his personal experience, or because he wasn't on the ground when the most important action was taking place. But when he includes articles like the one from the *Washington Post* in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago,* he is doing so out of necessity: because he is unable to give his readers a firsthand account of the convention's most important moments. This is not the only time this happens in the text, either: the next night, Mailer drives to Lincoln Park and finds that "everything seemed calm. A few police were still about, and one or two boys walked along holding wet handkerchiefs to their mouths. The streets were acrid with old tear gas. The reporter did not know that the worst battle of the week had taken place not an hour ago." To give the reader an idea of what had happened, Mailer includes "a long account but an excellent one by Steve Lerner in the *Village Voice.*"[108]

The *Village Voice* is not a mainstream outlet, but the effect is the same as when Mailer quotes the *Washington Post* to explain the clash between the Yippies and the police in the park: it is clear that he has missed out on the action once again, while other journalists were there covering it.[109] As the convention goes on, Mailer begins to attribute his failure to participate in these events to his personal cowardice. For example, when the more liberal members of the caucus march through Chicago to protest Humphrey's nomination, Mailer admits that he "did not join them. He had felt an unmistakable pang of fear at the thought of marching with these people

through the Black Belt of Chicago or even the Polish neighborhoods in the immediate surroundings, and worries that they could be "attacked by gangs." As "he went off by a different route to his car," he reports feeling "agitated, ashamed, overcome with the curiosity that these liberals whom he had always scorned had the simple dedication to walk tonight through strange streets, unarmed, and with candles. Was it remotely possible that they possessed more courage than himself?"[110] In this moment, he seems again to embody the fears of his readers: those who may insist they stand for racial equality, but hesitate to walk through a black neighborhood; however, as many of them may have identified with the marching liberals, who were older and far less radical than the Yippies, he risks coming across as overly conservative and out of touch.

What makes this particularly interesting is that, the day before, Mailer *had* actually tried to take action. However, instead of participating in a march that had already been planned by the Yippies or the more liberal convention delegates, he had attempted to put together his own event. After being invited to give a speech to the protesters in the park, Mailer announces that he will organize "two hundred delegates" and members of the counterculture and get them to march on the Amphitheater where the convention is being held, so as to disrupt Hubert Humphrey's nomination and give the nod to one of the other candidates.[111] Mailer spends much of the following day trying to organize the march, but by nightfall, he is forced to concede that it is a "total failure." He "never was able to keep the meetings" he had planned with delegates, "never [got] to see McCarthy quite alone, nor McGovern," and while "[h]e ran back and forth over Chicago, [and] sent messages," he "could reach no soul." Ultimately, Mailer admits, "he was defeated":

> He could put nothing together at all. Hung-over, drained, ashen within…he went back to Grant Park in late afternoon to make a speech in which he would declare his failure, and discovered the park instead

> was near empty. Whoever had wanted to march had gone off already with Peterson of Wisconsin, or later with Dick Gregory. (Perhaps a total of fifty Democratic delegates were in these walks.) Now the Park was all but deserted except for the National Guard. Perhaps a hundred or two hundred onlookers, malcontents, hoodlums, and odd petty thieves sauntered about. A mean-looking mulatto passed by the line of National Guard with his penknife out, blade up, and whispered, "Here's my bayonet." Yes, Grant Park was now near to Times Square in Manhattan or Main Street in L.A. The Yippies were gone; another kind of presence was in. And the grass looked littered and yellow, a holocaust of newspapers upon it. Now a dry wind, dusty and cold, gave every sentiment of the end of summer. The reporter went back to his room. He had political lessons to absorb for a year from all the details of his absolute failure to deliver the vote.[112]

This passage shows Mailer at his lowest, as he has not only failed to get involved, but his belief that he was the only one who could marshal the Yippies and the delegates to save the convention has been destroyed. What's even more devastating is that it isn't as if these two groups are unwilling to take action: as we have seen, the Yippies have been demonstrating for the past several days, and the same delegates Mailer has tried and failed to recruit are the ones who will march down the Chicago streets in the excerpt cited earlier. They want to protest; they just aren't interested in the event that Mailer was trying to organize. In announcing his march, Mailer had believed, at least for a moment, in the promise each New Journalist makes to their audience: that they have their finger on the pulse of the movement they're covering, and understand what drives its members. However, when not a single Yippie or delegate shows up to join his protest, Mailer is forced to concede that he really may have no idea what these people want, or how to make sense of them. The image of the nearly-deserted park, which Mailer only visits after everyone has left, and where there is not even anyone to whom he can deliver a speech declaring the march a failure, only underscores this sense: once again, he is too late.

Indeed, there is only one scene in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* in which Mailer actually witnesses a protest. He does not participate in it, nor does he join the reporters in the crowd who are hoping to be as close to the action as possible; rather, he observes it through the window of his high-rise hotel. "[W]atching in safety from the nineteenth floor" as the Chicago

police "attacked [the protesters] with tear gas, with Mace, and with clubs," Mailer notes that he "could understand now how Mussolini's son-in-law had once been able to find the bombs he dropped from his airplane beautiful as they burst":

> [Y]es, children, and youth, and middle-aged men and women were being pounded and clubbed and gassed and beaten, hunted and driven, sent scattering in all directions by teams of policemen who had exploded out of their restraints like the bursting of a boil, and nonetheless he felt a sense of calm and beauty, void even of the desire to be down there, as if in years to come there would be beatings enough, some chosen, some nowhere, but it was as if the war had begun, and this was therefore a great and solemn moment, as if indeed even the gods of history had come together from each side to choose the very front of the Hilton Hotel before the television cameras of the world and the eyes of the campaign workers and the delegates' wives, yes, there before the eyes of half the principals at the convention was this drama played, as if the military spine of a great liberal party had finally separated itself from the skin, as if, no metaphor large enough to suffice, the Democratic Party here had broken in two before the eyes of a nation like Melville's whale charging right out of the sea.[113]

What's noteworthy here is not only the kinship Mailer feels with Mussolini's son-in-law, but the fact that he alludes to "the television cameras of the world." Mailer describes the scene as if he is watching it on TV: observing the chaos through the glass, he is able to distance himself from it emotionally. Instead, he experiences it on an almost purely aesthetic level—which makes the line about Mussolini's son-in-law even more resonant, as it calls to mind Benjamin's claim that fascism is the aestheticization of politics, and that the fascists saw something beautiful about war.[114] The image of "children, and youth, and middle-aged men and women…being pounded and clubbed and gassed and beaten" induces in Mailer "a sense of calm and beauty," as he is detached enough from the violence to regard it as if it were a work of art. He is also almost certainly aware of the connotations of what he is writing: indeed, it is very unlikely that he would not expect his reader to recoil at these references to Mussolini's son-in-law and Benjamin's theory of fascism. They seem designed to make his audience feel uneasy not only about the events at hand—the protesters being beaten, the Democratic Party breaking in two—but also how that Mailer, and, by extension, his reader, is witnessing them. There is something *off* about

watching such extraordinary violence in a way that allows you to emotionally detach from it; about experiencing this human drama at such a remove that you don't feel pity for the people involved. This, I think, is Mailer's way of mimicking—and getting his audience to think critically about—the medium through which most Americans watched these events: television. As David Farber notes in his excellent book on the convention, *Chicago '68,* the DNC received an enormous amount of coverage on the major TV news networks. CBS "carried twenty-eight hours and three minutes of convention coverage," while NBC devoted "thirty-five hours" to what was happening in Chicago. Comparatively, the protests themselves did not receive all that much screen time: only "thirty-two minutes and twenty seconds" of the almost forty hours CBS spent on the convention involved the demonstrators, whereas they made up a slightly larger percentage of NBC's coverage, with "sixty-five minutes" devoted to the violence.[115]

However, while very little footage of the protests was actually shown, the moments that did make it on air made a significant impression on the public. The images from the March on the Pentagon had made many Americans sympathize with the protesters; the reaction to the television coverage from Chicago, on the other hand, was very different. Though in both cases, agents of the state had beaten and assaulted demonstrators, the American people sided with the police after the convention, as a Survey Research Center poll taken shortly after the DNC shows. "[O]nly a little better than 10% of all whites thought that the police or the Mayor," who gave them their orders, "had used too much force," while "25% of respondents thought that not enough force was used." Incredibly, "[e]ven among those who opposed the Vietnam War, 50% reacted negatively to the Chicago protesters and 23% reacted with extreme hostility."[116] That half of the people who opposed the Vietnam War were not sympathetic to the protesters in Chicago

implies that this negative reaction was driven by something other than an impulse to back those in power. A better explanation, I think, is the one laid out earlier in this section: that, after six months of turmoil, Americans were increasingly wary of radical change, and less inclined to side with anyone who looked like they wanted to start a riot. The police, in this context, could be seen as trying to restore order, and their use of force proportionate to the violence the protesters may have intended to cause.

I also believe there is something to Mailer's assertion that "[t]he justifications of the March on the Pentagon were not" present in Chicago, and that the DNC was far less powerful of a symbol than the Pentagon had been. The Mobe and the counterculture with which they'd worked had chosen well when they'd decided to make the Pentagon the focus of their march: because it was the headquarters of the military-industrial complex, it was an obvious symbol for the war, and protesting it had channeled, and provided a focal point for, the unease many Americans were feeling about combat operations in Vietnam. The images of soldiers assaulting protesters also had a clear symbolic dimension: these were, after all, the same armed forces who were deployed in Vietnam, and watching them assault unarmed civilians without hesitation made the claims that American troops were committing war crimes in Vietnam feel much more believable.

In protesting the DNC, however, it was much less obvious what the demonstrators were opposing: was it Humphrey's nomination, the Democratic Party, or the American political system as a whole? If they were once again marching against the war, then the DNC wasn't a very good symbol, as its architect was not being re-nominated. The Yippies, at least, had made it very

obvious what they wanted. They insisted on "[a]n immediate end to the War in Vietnam," along with a whole host of other demands, including:

> 3. The legalization of marijuana and all other psychedelic drugs…
> 4. A prison system based on the concept of rehabilitation without punishment…
> 6. The total disarmament of all the people beginning with the police…
> 7. The Abolition of Money. The abolition of pay housing, pay media, pay transportation, pay food, pay education, pay clothing, pay medical help, and pay toilets…
> 11. Free birth control information…abortions when desired.
> 12. A restructured educational system which provides the student power to determine his course of study and allows for student participation in all-over policy planning…
> 13. Open and free use of media…
> 15. We believe that people should fuck all the time, anytime, whomever they wish…
> 16. …a national referendum system conducted via television or a telephone voting system…a decentralization of power and authority with many varied tribal groups[117]

In theory, the Festival of Life would have symbolized all of these demands: it would have been a microcosm of the Yippies' ideal society, in which people used drugs, had sex, and lived in whatever way they wanted to, without punishment. However, the introduction of the Chicago police into this dynamic—and Hoffman's insistence that the Yippies should not shy away from conflict, but instead actively seek it out—complicated and muddled the symbolic dimensions of the Festival. When Americans turned on their televisions and watched footage of the protesters in the park, they did not see people modeling the kind of society the Yippies believed their demands would produce. Instead, they saw Yippies confronting and being beaten by the police, which sent no other message than that the country was deeply divided, which the public already knew. In other words, Farber writes, the Yippies "failed because [their] reliance on image produced no reality to match it."[118]

It's ironic that Hoffman, who considered himself the master of symbolic protest and earned media—who had insisted that "I fight through the jungle of TV"—so badly miscalculated how the violence he encouraged would impact the public's perception of his demonstration.[119] Indeed, even after the convention, he refused to acknowledge that his plan had backfired. "I felt

we had won a great victory," he wrote. "The lines between 'us,' the people and the streets, and 'them,' the people in authority, had clearly been established."[120] Of course, from a certain standpoint, that was true: it was just that the American people had sided decisively with "the people in authority." That they made this decision based on what they watched on television also says something very important about the medium. Up until this point, television had been an asset for the anti-war movement: after all, it was footage from Vietnam that had awakened Americans to the reality, and the horror, of what was happening in the combat zone. The protest at the DNC, however, was one of the first times that a demonstration from members of the anti-war and counterculture movements had received so much coverage on television. The dangers of watching an event like this on TV—especially one in which so many protesters were beaten—is the reason, I think, why Mailer makes so much of the detachment he feels in viewing the protests from the television-like vantage point of his hotel window. Observing the protests through glass, or a TV screen, makes it easy to distance yourself from what you're seeing: it can be a purely aesthetic experience, one that doesn't force you to think about the humanity of the people being assaulted, or to try to relate to how they feel. All of this makes it much easier to side with the police, as the empathy you would feel with the protesters, and that may very well have won you over to their cause, is no longer a factor. This, Mailer's passage implies, is intensely dangerous: it brings you closer to the Mussolini's-son-in-laws of the world.

This is one instance, then, in which New Journalism both reproduces the effect of a certain media technology, and demonstrates how it has the potential to negatively impact, rather than help the cause of, the counterculture. Taped-over TV shows were an essential part of the Merry Pranksters' project of opening people's minds; television footage from Vietnam worked to

turn many Americans against the war. But as Mailer shows, one can't assume that television—and, by extension, any emerging media technology—will automatically benefit the counterculture. The symbolic meaning of the protests at the convention was already unclear, and the kind of event coverage that news stations tended to run—full of fast-moving images and shots of crowds in which it was difficult to make out individual subjects—was not going to do anything to make that symbolism any less muddled or more powerful. Indeed, in the CBS News footage of the protests, it is hard to get anything more than a glimpse of the protesters themselves: they are either overwhelmed by dozens of blue Chicago police helmets, or barely more than blurry flashes in the dark.[121] Unlike photojournalists, whose goal is to capture a few carefully-framed pictures that will convey the feel or symbolic significance of an event, TV news cameramen have much less control over the composition of their footage, and have to produce a continuous series of images. Indeed, perhaps if photography were the medium through which most Americans experienced the Democratic National Convention, then their reaction to it would have been more like the public response to the March on the Pentagon. However, when they watched it on television, they did not see the kind of clear symbolism, or humanization of the protesters, that had once made them side with the counterculture.[122]

This is not the only point at which *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* complicates the counterculture's assumptions about media technologies. In fact, in the first section of the book—which covers the Republican National Convention—Mailer writes about how, in his speech accepting his party's nomination, Richard Nixon is able to draw on multiple forms of media. Mailer chooses to watch the speech on television, and observes that Nixon—who had so famously struggled in his televised debate with John F. Kennedy in 1960—has now become "the

spirit of television." In Mailer's mind, "[m]ass communication was [Nixon's] disease—he thought he could use it to communicate with masses."[123] While Nixon is speaking to the delegates in the room, he also knows that his speech will be broadcast on TV, and he attempts to use it to win over the public. Notably, he doesn't just use techniques that have been proven to work on television; he also employs strategies from other media technologies. For example, at one point, his tone shifts "to the high-dramatic-operatic of a radio actor's voice circa 1939 in a Norman Corwin play."[124] "Every orator's art which had lately worked would become Nixon's craft," Mailer observes over the course of the speech. And yet, because Nixon has delivered an address made up of themes and techniques taken from other people, Mailer is unable "to come away with an intimation of what was in [Nixon's] heart."[125] While it was a perfectly competent speech, Mailer thinks that it felt oddly mechanical; indeed, he writes, "a better speech could not have been written by any computer in existence, not even Hal the super-computer in *2001*."[126]

Nevertheless, something about Nixon's speech must have resonated with the American people, because he defeated Hubert Humphrey in the 1968 Presidential election. It is not difficult to see why many Americans found Nixon's appeals to the Silent Majority, and his promise to restore law and order—which became central parts of his campaign—appealing. They voted for him for much of the same reason that they had sided with the Chicago police: because, after so many months of turmoil, the idea of a stable authority, and that things could return to normal, was hard to resist. It is important to note, however, that Nixon wasn't promising that everything would go back to the way it had been before 1968. In his nomination speech, he had pledged "to bring an honorable end to the war in Vietnam," and he would also promise to end the draft.[127] This was in line with what much of the public seemed to have wanted: for the war to be over, but

for the kind of drastic change that the Yippies and other radical groups were pushing for to be avoided. Indeed, despite his promise to end the Vietnam War, Nixon was not advocating for the overturn of any hierarchies or political systems, or for the dominant schemas that governed American life to be destroyed. In fact, the implication behind all of his rhetoric about law and order was that these hierarchies would be strictly (and perhaps even violently) enforced. It seems, then, that he had brought together all of these different media technologies in his nomination speech to do precisely the opposite of what the counterculture had used juxtapastiche to achieve. They had wanted to open Americans' minds and put an end to the status quo; Nixon, on the other hand, was looking to impose his own version of the great American consensus.

It was Nixon's vision, not the counterculture's, that the public ended up endorsing—which is why I want to suggest that there may be another way of looking at *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*: one that does not see it as a failure of New Journalism. As we already know, New Journalism positioned itself as the only genre that could interpret the new styles and ideas and movements that were emerging out of the cultural ferment of the 1960s. Most readers—and indeed, most New Journalists—assumed that this meant the genre would mostly cover the counterculture. But I think so much more about *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* makes sense if we read it not as an explanation of the counterculture's mindset in the summer of 1968, but instead as a reflection of what those members of the public who were considering voting for Richard Nixon were thinking and feeling. This, too, was a new social movement: one that longed for stability rather than upheaval, but that represented a development in American political life which needed to be made sense of and interpreted. As I have argued all throughout this section, many of Mailer's readers would have been familiar with this mindset, as it was their own;

however, by making himself the representative of it on the page, Mailer forces his readers to confront this way of thinking, and perhaps to regard it critically. Like his readers, he is out of touch and out of step with the counterculture; he feels he cannot understand them, and while he agrees with the radicals about ending the war, he cannot endorse their hopes for total social change. He never observes the protests up close, but watches them from a distance, through the television-like glass of his hotel window, in much of the same way as his readers would have viewed the footage from the convention on their TVs. But the fact that Mailer makes his detachment from the bloodshed seem so disturbing—compares it, indeed, to the fascist aestheticization of violence—seems designed to make to make his reader take a step back and think about their own inability to empathize with the protesters. If they see so much of themselves in Mailer, and Mailer's reaction to the protests is clearly meant to be unnerving, then is there not something wrong with their own—and likely very similar—feelings about the footage? Mailer's description of Nixon's speech functions slightly differently, but also tries to get the reader to interrogate their response. Mailer watches the speech on TV, just like his readers; even though he will go on to discuss his resistance to radical change—the same resistance that Nixon was counting on to win voters—Mailer's emphasis on the uncanniness of the speech, and his inability "to come away with an intimation of what was in [Nixon's] heart," encourages his readers to question whether Nixon is the right man to lead the country, however much they might be attracted to his promises.[128]

What I want to argue, then, is that while so much of *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* seems like a concession that New Journalism cannot cover this particular moment as well as photographers and newspaper and TV reporters, the book can also be read as proof that New

Journalism can explain what happened in, and shortly after, Chicago better than any other genre. Unlike the reporters and photographers who were beaten by police, Mailer was not on the ground covering the protests; he was unable to provide a firsthand account of most of the violence, while these other reporters could write about and broadcast it to their audiences. As we have already seen, however, the public had an extraordinarily negative reaction to the footage from the DNC. Incredibly, they responded negatively not only to what was shown on film, but also to the fact that it was broadcast at all. CBS alone "received nine thousand letters" after the DNC, which were "by an eleven to one ratio…against the network's coverage," and there were "two days of public hearings" in front of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence "to determine if the print media or television [had] contributed to the violence in Chicago." ("In the end," though, "the press went formally uncharged.")[129] What all of this shows is that, while these cameramen and reporters were in the thick of things during the DNC, they and their superiors at the major TV stations did not understand the public's mood well enough to anticipate that they would face this sort of response. In *Miami and the Siege of Chicago,* however, Mailer shows that he knows what the American people are thinking: they are scared of further change, and tired of seeing so much violence onscreen. In this case, it was not the counterculture's mood that New Journalism was interpreting; instead, it was shining a light on the *majority's* thought process. In so doing, it provided a way to understand why the the public would react so negatively to the protests, and why so many people would vote for Nixon in the 1968 election.

This, I think, makes a more compelling argument for the idea of New Journalist as interpreter than if Mailer had been in touch with the counterculture and able to explain their mindset to his readers. In *Miami and the Siege of Chicago,* Mailer proves that the genre can do

much more than represent the present moment: it can also give the people in that moment a way of understanding themselves. He can do more, too, than approximate the effects of the technologies the counterculture uses; he can use his representations of those technologies to show how they might work against the counterculture, and, just as importantly, how they may negatively impact the public. This is representation *as critique,* and it is why we can say that Mailer was not just mirroring, but giving his reader a way to think through, what was happening all around them. It is ironic, of course, that a genre that was so focused on shattering schemas was most effective when—and indeed, was premised on—providing readers a framework for interpreting current events. But in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago,* that framework is one which asks its audience to question their first reactions and easy narratives, and to interrogate themselves. It does not offer any solutions or comfort; instead, it tells its readers—many of whom were longing for some peace, some security, after so many months of turmoil—that the struggle is far from over. "[W]e will be fighting," Mailer thinks as he turns away from the convention, "for forty years."[130]

## V. Conclusion

Anyone who is interested in what happened to the counterculture after Nixon's election quickly becomes familiar with a certain narrative: that, with the public having turned away from the possibility of radical change, the counterculture found its influence waning. If it had not lost its innocence after Chicago, then the 1969 Altamont Speedway Free Festival—at which there were "hundreds of 'bad trips'" and "four deaths," including one murder committed by a Hells Angel—was the moment that did it, as it seemed to disprove the idea that the counterculture

could build a more peaceful society.[131] The counterculture then began to splinter, with some of its members returning to their previous lives, and others joining the back-to-the-land and Jesus movements. The aesthetics that the hippies had pioneered remained (and indeed, became even more) popular, but the young people who wanted to look like they were a part of the counterculture no longer had to go to "surplus stores" and "Digger free emporiums" to find their clothing.[132] Major department stores and retailers had started selling the kind of psychedelic, mishmashed attire that the Merry Pranksters and the protesters at the March on the Pentagon had worn. However, while these clothes may have looked radical, the fact that they came from corporations looking to make a profit, and were no longer meant to reflect the nation's divisions or get the public to question dominant schemas, meant that they had lost their subversive power. This phenomenon—in which major corporations co-opted the counterculture's aesthetics and repackaged them as if they were merely the latest trend—repeated itself across all areas of the culture. The bands the counterculture had enjoyed—like the Grateful Dead, who had gotten their start playing the Merry Pranksters' parties—entered the mainstream, while the counterculture's lifestyle choices, like taking psychedelics and pursuing non-monogamous relationships, no longer indicated anything about one's politics, but merely showed that they were aware of what was hip.[133] Indeed, "[b]y the early 1970s," even Abbie Hoffman would find it "difficult to tell hip capitalists from hippie revolutionaries since they both wore the same brands of faded jeans, uttered the same countercultural phrases…bought the same long-playing albums, smoked the same marijuana, and enjoyed the same liberated sexuality."[134]

I am not breaking new ground here when I say that all of this shows the downside of the philosophy that the aesthetics was the politics, which was that these aesthetics could be seized by

the dominant powers and stripped of their revolutionary valence. When a counterculture's cultural products are "removed from their private contexts by the small entrepreneurs and big fashion interests who produce them," Dick Hebdige writes, they "become codified, made comprehensible, rendered at once public property and profitable merchandise." Thus, while these styles "may begin by issuing symbolic challenges…they must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions."[135] In other words, while the counterculture had been trying to use their aesthetics and lifestyle choices in order to counter the norms of the dominant culture, the dominant culture was able to co-opt those choices and make them the new cultural norms. Importantly, though the public was adopting many more of the aesthetic choices that had been associated with the counterculture, the counterculture's actual political beliefs—anti-imperialism, anti-authoritarianism, and increased freedoms and civil liberties—were becoming less and less popular with the general public. At the 1972 DNC, the counterculture was welcomed with open arms into the Democratic Party:

> There were beards and beads, long hair and Afros, buttons that read "Citizen Power" and T-shirts that read "GAY.' Moreover, this time there was a peace candidate and a peace plank. Allen Ginsberg chanted; Dick Gregory told jokes and led the delegates into the singing of "We Shall Overcome." Abbie [Hoffman] couldn't afford not to be on the inside, and with the benefit of a more or less legitimate press pass, he made it to the floor, where he rubbed shoulders with Gloria Steinem, Germaine Greer, Shirley MacLaine, and Norman Mailer. He even approached Hubert Humphrey, who admitted that there had been "problems in Chicago," whereupon Abbie replied, "Yeah, *you, you* were the problem." They were still at odds, but now Abbie was kibitzing with Humphrey.[136]

While all of this was a sign that the Democratic establishment—which had once been so threatened by the counterculture and its protests that Humphrey's ally Mayor Daley had been the one to order the Chicago police to attack—had come around to the counterculture's presence and many of its demands, the fact that the Democrats were defeated so decisively in 1972 (with Nixon winning 49 states) showed that the general public was not at all receptive to the party's

counterculture-influenced political platform.[137] Many Democrats would see this as confirmation that the party had gone much too far to the left to appeal to the American people, and that, in order to ever win the presidency again, they would have to abandon these radical policies *and* this aesthetic.[138] The only bright spot was that opposition to the Vietnam War continued to grow —though, while Nixon maintained that he was trying to bring the conflict to an end, his decision to invade Cambodia, and the fact that he would not end the draft until 1973, was seen as an indication that he was not really committed to peace.[139]

It's ironic, then, that while the country's foreign and domestic policy moved rightward, and the counterculture's political goals looked dead in the water, the public figures who had once led the movement were only becoming more famous. Abbie Hoffman and his wife Anita hobnobbed with John Lennon and Yoko Ono, and Tennessee Williams came to his apartment and dubbed him a saint. Hoffman received "major coverage" in *Rolling Stone,* was named the "Rhett Butler of the Revolution" by *Mademoiselle,* and was called "the contemporary American Shakespeare"—the author of "at least five master works of Theater of the Apocalypse"—in *The New York Times.*[140] As we have seen, however, Hoffman's inclusion into more mainstream circles did not mean that the counterculture was having much political success. In fact, Hoffman was becoming increasingly removed from the movement and the principles that he had championed. While he had once designed his performance art so that it would make the public pay attention to his anti-war and anti-capitalist ideas, it now seemed like whatever demonstrations he staged were meant only to promote Abbie Hoffman: media icon and counterculture celebrity.[141] "[B]y the late eighties," Jonah Raskin writes," Hoffman "was increasingly part of the system," until he became something like "a movie revolutionary and a

matinee idol of defiance."[142] Jerry Rubin's fate was even more ironic than Hoffman's: he became a registered broker and started working on Wall Street.[143] (On the other hand, Ken Kesey of the Merry Pranksters remained an outsider and revolutionary until his death in 2001.[144])

It is Hoffman's trajectory, however, that has the most in common with what happened to many of the New Journalists after the genre's heyday in the late 1960s. In *The Armies of the Night,* Mailer wrote about feeling trapped "in the sarcophagus of his image," or the larger-than-life legend of Norman Mailer, celebrity author and rabble-rouser.[145] It makes sense that Mailer would have felt this way even while writing *The Armies of the Night,* as his 1948 novel *The Naked and the Dead* had brought him a significant amount of attention. With the publication of *The Armies of the Night,* though, he would ascend to another level of fame; indeed, New Journalism made Mailer and his compatriots "literary rockstars." "[T]heir bylines [were] familiar to most," and "their lectures [were] standing-room sellouts in universities across the country," while "[f]ans of their work came to regard the New Journalists' output as holy writ."[146] Their fame was cemented by their appearances in and across many forms of media: Capote became a fixture on talk shows, where he could "be counted on to say something provocative" and "took guilty pleasure in cutting everyone else down to size"; Wolfe, with his white suits and pocket squares, gave off the image of the eccentric southern gentleman; Didion's curt remarks and impeccable style led to her ascendance as a magazine icon.[147] Mailer, more than anyone, both catered to and became a mainstay in the press. His 1969 candidacy for Mayor of New York and his brawls with Rip Torn and Gore Vidal (he bit Torn's ear on the set of the film *Maidstone* and head-butted Vidal backstage at *The Dick Cavett Show*) not only kept his name in the news, but threatened to eclipse his literary output.[148]

It's not surprising that the New Journalists, who were so adept at incorporating, and reproducing the effects of, multiple forms of media in their articles and books, would become sought-after guests on television, film, and radio. However, the fact Mailer was not the only New Journalist whose status as an author-celebrity came to overshadow their written work—for, arguably, the same thing also happened to Wolfe, Didion, and Capote—is another example of how we can't always control the impact of the media we employ. Indeed, the New Journalists, who spent so much of their time covering movements that tried to break down the myths of the dominant culture, ended up becoming mythologized. The more they appeared on talk shows and in magazines, the more they became known as media icons, while less and less attention was paid to their writing. This is a large part of the reason why so much of the scholarship on New Journalism focuses on the New Journalists themselves: not only because they were characters in their works, but because the idea of the New Journalist-as-character came to be seen as more important than what that New Journalist was using their presence in the text to say. This chapter, on the other hand, has tried to map out a different way of studying New Journalism: one that explores the New Journalists' attempts to cover emerging social movements, and that understands their experimentation with different genres and media technologies as part of their efforts to make these movements legible to their audiences. For example, it has analyzed Norman Mailer's presence in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* through the lens of what it reveals about the relationship between New Journalism and other media like newspapers and television, and how Mailer's decision to make his fear of change such a large part of the text is an attempt to explain why so many Americans were reacting against radicalism, and to get his readers—who might have seen themselves in his fears—to think critically about how they were responding.

Indeed, if we look at New Journalism in this context, we can come away with a much better understanding of the role it played in the late 1960s. It seems like, in many cases, New Journalism's central premise was largely correct: it was a genre extremely well-suited to interpreting the present moment. It was not the only medium that was able to cover these events: as we have seen, photography, newspapers, and television could also do so. But only New Journalism could explain the logic behind the counterculture's decisions *and* the public's reaction. It could illustrate how the symbolic protest of the Merry Pranksters and Pentagon marchers worked, and, in so doing, make Americans understand their own responses to what they saw. It could also recreate the effects of technologies like television, so as to show the public the potential dangers of interpreting protests through these mediums. In fact, while the New Journalists themselves may have had their literary output overshadowed by their appearances in other media, their work remains a compelling exploration of the advantages and risks of making these technologies a central part of one's movement. This was because the New Journalists were not only committed to reproducing the effects of multiple forms of media in their texts, but also to interrogating their impact: whether that meant breaking down how the Merry Pranksters used juxtapastiche to challenge their audience's expectations, or how television aestheticized violence and could be co-opted by reactionary interests.

In this dissertation's third chapter, I will take a much closer look at the relationship between new media technologies and ultra-right wing movements, and will demonstrate why it is so important to understand that these technologies are not inherently progressive. However, I would also like to reiterate that *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* and *The Armies of the Night* showed that the counterculture also had quite a bit of success using these technologies to contest

dominant schemas, and to make their aesthetics-as-politics strategy visible to the general public. It is the context in which these technologies are employed, and the ends to which they are put, that matter—which is why I don't think we can say that the counterculture's use of technology, or their aesthetics-as-politics vision, was a failure. It is true that the public turned away from the idea of radical change, and that Nixon was elected in 1968; it is also true that the counterculture fell apart at the end of the decade, and that its specific aesthetic was co-opted. But the counterculture did get so many Americans to question the status quo, and to consider other ways of thinking and living, even just for a moment; it also played a major role in convincing the public to oppose the Vietnam War, and both impacted deployments and set a chain of events in motion that would help bring the war to an end. In turn, even as the counterculture's cultural signifiers were made into commodities, the fact that they were adopted by so much of the public *did* change American life. The growing acceptance of free love helped to usher in the sexual revolution, while the pushback against the idea that conformity was a virtue made America a safer place for those who thought, and wanted to live, a little outside the box. In so doing, it opened up space for a thousand new subcultures which used their aesthetic choices to signal that they were challenging the mainstream. Indeed, the idea that one's lifestyle choices—what they wore, how they acted, who they loved—constituted a political intervention would animate many later protest movements. The gay rights movement, for example, tried to secure civil protections while publicizing real-life examples of queer parents and unions to get Americans to reconsider and revise their definitions of marriage and the family.

In the end, then, that the counterculture was able to provide the blueprint for this sort of protest was one of its most lasting achievements. While the specific objects and aesthetics the

counterculture had used to signal its break from the status quo may have been co-opted, the notion that activists could use lifestyle choices to challenge political and cultural norms proved incredibly influential. In the next chapter, we will see how second-wave feminists—and Riot Grrrls, too—made the idea that the personal was political a cornerstone of their movement. In turn, the rise of social media has made using aesthetic choices as a sign of one's political affiliations a popular strategy. On Instagram, for example, it is common for young people to share graphics signaling their support for the latest campaign against local and global injustice, whether it is abolishing police and prisons, ending the war in Yemen, or opposing legislation that targets queer youth. Posting these sorts of images is often critiqued as performative—which, in this context, means that it does little to bring about real change, and is more about showing that one cares about all the 'right' social issues. However, these graphics often include links to donate organizations doing important on-the-ground work, and call attention to campaigns that are often overlooked by mainstream outfits, which points to their usefulness. Moreover, the fact that it is almost expected for young people to show support for these causes is a sign that the socio-political climate in the United States has shifted left. Almost sixty years after the events of 1968 and the country's move rightward—and the decision many liberal activists and politicians made to tone down or eliminate their more left-wing proposals so as to have any hope of winning popular support—the kinds of ideas that the counterculture would have supported are once again a part of American political life. Ironically, as we will see in this dissertation's third chapter, all of this is taking place at the same time that ultra-right wing and white supremacist movements are experiencing a resurgence. In many ways, this feels like a redux of what Norman Mailer discovered in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago:* that, while new media can help left-wing

movements spread their messages and gain support for their ideas, these reactionaries can just as easily use these technologies to try and win over the public.

Still, that both the aesthetics-as-politics protest style and the left-wing beliefs of the counterculture have returned complicates the narrative that the movement lost most of its influence after 1968. This is not to say that the counterculture wasn't in a dark place in the early '70s; instead, it is to suggest that we can get a better idea of its impact if we look at its trajectory over a longer period of time. Indeed, if we do so, it becomes clear that many of the counterculture's goals were eventually achieved. The Vietnam War ended in 1975, and no American soldier has been drafted since; medical marijuana is legal in 38 states, and recreational use in 18; non-monogamous lifestyles are increasingly accepted; psychedelics are becoming more mainstream, and even used in psychiatric care.[149] There is increased surveillance, but also more pushback to it than ever; politicians support defunding the police and reimagining prisons; and there is increased awareness of imperialism and war as a tool of empire.[150] In other words, while the counterculture as it was in 1967 no longer exists, its influence is still felt in almost every part of American life, and its beliefs about what political action can and should look like continue to shape our contemporary protest movements. This is another one of the ways in which it resembles New Journalism, which many people believed had died out by the mid-'70s. Not only had its authors become so famous that their literary output was obscured, but many of them had stopped writing about the counterculture. As the counterculture itself was in decline, this makes sense; nevertheless, as as New Journalism was no longer focusing on the movement that it had been developed to cover, it seemed like the genre had lost its identity. In 1975, the reporter

Tom Powell even published an article that asked, "Whatever happened to the New Journalism?"[151]

However, the fact that the New Journalists had turned away from the counterculture didn't mean they'd stopped writing about, and trying to interpret, other alternative lifestyles. In fact, most of the later works of New Journalism deal with experiences that would have been foreign to most Americans, and, like the texts that have been the subject of this chapter, try to make them legible to a mainstream audience. Mailer's *The Executioner's Song*, for example, is an in-depth look at the life of a convicted murderer, while Wolfe's *The Right Stuff* takes up the question of why anyone would want to endure all the trials necessary to become an astronaut.[152] In other words, the New Journalists were once again positioning themselves as interpreters: as the only ones who could represent the inner workings of a killer's mind, or explain why the astronauts would volunteer for their missions. This was the promise that had fueled the movement since its beginning: that. while other reporters from more mainstream outlets could cover these events, only the New Journalists could give their readers an inside look at, and explain the real significance, of what was taking place. In turn, while most of the later New Journalistic texts dealt with events that the majority of Americans would not have experienced, a few attempted what Mailer did in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago:* that is, to represent its audience in a way that would get that audience to think critically about itself. Joan Didion's books, I think, are an excellent example, as they continually push the reader to interrogate their own position and assumptions.

Interestingly, it was Didion's later works—and Wolfe's and Mailer's, too—that ended up becoming some of the most popular examples of the genre. Tom Powell had written New

Journalism off in 1975, but it came roaring back only a few years later, when *The Executioner's Song* and *The Right Stuff,* plus Didion's *The White Album,* were all published in 1979.[153] While the New Journalists remained celebrities, the critical acclaim and attention these books received helped to shift some of the focus back on their writing. Though it was true that the genre would never again feel as coherent as it had in the late '60s, its influence—like the counterculture's—would continue to be felt over the next several decades. David Foster Wallace's long-form journalism is one example, as is much of what *The New Yorker, Texas Monthly, GQ, Esquire,* and *The New York Times Magazine* have published over the last fifty years. New Journalism's impact is also clearly visible if we look at online journalism: a great deal of which analyzes an event or phenomenon, however global or local it may be, through the lens of the author's personal experience. Less obvious but equally important, I think, are the connections between New Journalism and the recent rise of multimedia reporting. The New Journalists had tried to represent the effects of other media in their writing, as they believed it was the only way to accurately represent the events they were covering. In the present day, many reporters and online outlets publish features that put written accounts alongside different media, like interactive maps, videos, podcasts, and GIFs. In so doing, they hope to give their readers a fuller understanding of phenomena like the Hong Kong protests, Haiti's attempts to rebuild after the 2010 earthquake, the Syrian civil war, and the ice shelves melting in Greenland.[154] This, I think, is the future of journalism: it will be full of multimedia, interactive projects that incorporate many forms of information and multiple perspectives. This will move us farther away from the idea of a singular author whose perspective is the primary one we get in the text, and who serves as the only interpreter of events. While this might seem to contradict the spirit of New Journalism, I would

argue that it is merely another example of what Wolfe and the other New Journalists were attempting in the late '60s. They had wanted to develop a new genre that would match the spirit of the age—and, by doing this kind of multimedia storytelling, its practitioners are working within a form that can represent and make sense of our diverse, globalized world.

Indeed, it is Wolfe's idea about what New Journalism could offer that I want to return to as I conclude this chapter. It is a simple definition, and one that I find strangely compelling, even though it lacks much of the nuance that I have tried to tease out over the past seventy pages. Like the early novelists before them, Wolfe writes, the New Journalists were beckoning to their readers, telling them:

> "Hey! Come here! This is the way people are living now—just the way I'm going to show you! It may astound you, disgust you, delight you or arouse your contempt or make you laugh…Nevertheless, this is what it's like! It's *all* right here! You won't be bored! Take a look!"[155]

# "THE REVOLUTION STARTS HERE + NOW WITHIN EACH ONE [OF] US": SOLIDARITY, RADICALISM, AND REFUGE IN THE RIOT GRRRL ZINE ECONOMY[156]

## I. Introduction

If there ever was an ideal time and place to be a teenage girl, it certainly wasn't the United States in the early 1990s. The decade-long backlash against second-wave feminism, during which the movement had "suffered a series of national defeats on issues from the Equal Rights Amendment to abortion funding," had left many mainstream feminist groups "on the ropes," and had convinced much of the public that the fight for women's rights was no longer relevant.[157] One study cited in a 1989 *Time* article found that "76 percent of American women paid 'not very much' or 'no' attention to the women's movement, and that only 33 percent of women considered themselves feminists."[158] Other studies, however, showed that women were still very much at risk, and that the situation for girls in their teens was especially dire. One 1992 report found that girls had "higher rates of anxiety and depression," and that their "self esteem" took a "nosedive…during adolescence."[159] It wasn't hard to see why: in a survey of women who had been raped, 61% indicated that they had been "younger than eighteen at the time of their attack."[160] There were also "hallway gropes and sidewalk heckles, leering teachers…sexual double standards, [and] ubiquitous warnings against walking certain places and dressing certain ways."[161] Even if a young woman survived all this, she had little to look forward to in her professional career. That Clarence Thomas had made it onto the Supreme Court even after Anita Hill's testimony demonstrated that, no matter how much success a woman achieved or how much bravery she showed in speaking out, she would always be seen as less credible than the

men she accused. That these men were the ones who got to decide women's rights only added insult to injury; indeed, Thomas and the rest of the Supreme Court were set to rule on *Planned Parenthood v. Casey,* a case many "feminists feared would spell an end to *Roe v. Wade.*"[162]

It was against this backdrop—the pervasive climate of misogyny, the likelihood that women's rights would be rolled back, and the constant threat of emotional and sexual violence—that Riot Grrrl emerged. It was a movement made up of young women who had grown up in the shadow of the second wave: who had been raised by feminist mothers and told "they could do anything they wanted." As they had entered their teenage years, however, "they had found out this wasn't true." "They could do anything *except* walk down the hall by the shop classroom, anything *except* stop shaving their legs, anything *except* wear that skirt to the party….anything *except* choose sex and not get whispered about like a slut."[163] These were girls who were sick of "trying with all [their] might not to hate themselves, trying not to get harassed or raped…trying not to be discouraged from joining a sports team or math club or shop class or school newspaper, trying not to let [their] family's crippling disfunction (and the confounding irony of enduring domestic cruelty in an age of Family Values) make [them] want to fucking *die.*"[164] They were also unwilling to stay quiet about the "rape, incest, [and] domestic violence" that many of them had endured.[165]

Their frustration found a voice when Kathleen Hanna and Tobi Vail—two feminist musicians who had been influenced by second-wave theory and institutions, as well as punk and underground culture—started a band called Bikini Kill. Their songs took aim at abusers and harassers, called out sexist stereotypes, and tried to break the silence, and stigma, around incest and rape. Unsurprisingly, their music resonated with a number of young women, and earned

Bikini Kill a devoted fanbase.[166] When the band moved from Olympia, Washington to Washington, D.C., Vail and Hanna joined the city's punk scene, and, together with some of the other girls they had met there, they started publishing a zine called *Riot Grrrl.*[167] This was an inflection point for the movement: not only because it was when people started referring to it by its name, but because it made it clear that zines would be an essential part of what Hanna and Vail were trying to accomplish. Zines are "noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves," and they are "filled with diatribes, reworkings of pop culture and iconography, and all variety of personal and political narratives."[168] It's important to note that Riot Grrrls were not the first zinesters; in fact, the history of zines stretches back to the "informal publications—from scrapbooks to women's health brochures to mimeographed feminist pamphlets"—that women made "throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."[169] The first examples of what we might call the modern zine came out of the science fiction fan communities of the 1930s, and zines would become especially popular in the '70s punk scene, and in the '80s and '90s counterculture.[170]

As Hanna and Vail were embedded in the punk scene, it isn't surprising that they turned to zines to set down the principles of, and spread the word about, Riot Grrrl. In fact, by the time the first issue of *Riot Grrrl* was released, Tobi Vail had already been publishing her own zine, *Jigsaw,* for about three years.[171] However, the fact that the earliest Riot Grrrls were already making zines wasn't the only reason they became an integral part of the movement. As it turned out, zines were some of the only spaces where young women could push back against a culture that was actively hostile to them. They were sites where they could discuss the trauma of life as a teenage girl, from sexist advertisements to street harassment to assault, and could talk about

experiences they were ashamed of without anyone demanding they be silent or call them a slut. Zines also offered young women the opportunity to participate in consciousness-raising: a second-wave practice that would become a significant part of Riot Grrrl. Consciousness-raising meant opening up about one's traumas and encouraging other women to do the same, until everyone realized that their experiences were so similar because they were all suffering under the patriarchy. Consciousness-raising also took place at in-person Riot Grrrl meetings, but it was especially powerful when it happened in zines. Because Riot Grrrls controlled everything about the zine-making process, from what their zines looked like to who received it to what parts of their stories they wanted to share, many young women saw making zines about their traumas as a way to reclaim ownership over what had happened to them.

When Riot Grrrls decided to trust their readers with their stories, or when a young woman opened a zine and read about its author's experiences, it created intense feelings of emotional attachment between zinesters and their audiences. This was an example of the "girl love" that Riot Grrrls tried to foster, and that they believed was the key to undoing the patriarchy's harms. They thought that if one could learn to stand in solidarity with their fellow girls, then they could take on the patriarchy as a united front. This meant pushing back against sexist stereotypes, calling out abusers, and supporting other women when they discussed their trauma. Indeed, Riot Grrrls believed that the best way to make the world safer for young women was to change the culture around them. They wanted to find solutions that would improve girls' everyday lives: that would keep men from catcalling them, put an end to sidewalk groping, and make their abusers too afraid to act again. Trying to get more women elected and building support for pro-choice legislation—which was the focus of feminist groups like NARAL and NOW—was all well and

good, but it didn't feel like it would do much to address the problems that made teenage girls' lived unbearable.[172] Instead, Riot Grrrls tried to find ways for young women to fight the misogyny they encountered on a daily basis.

As we will see throughout this chapter, these solutions included learning self-defense, forming all-girl barricades at punk shows, and reappropriating imagery that tried to tell young women how they should look and behave. However, I want to argue that one of the most important ways Riot Grrrl was able to improve girls' lives was through the zines and zine communities that its members created. Zines were sites that operated outside of patriarchal logics: where young women could explore their creativity, talk about their experiences, and bond with other girls without sexism holding them back. In other words, they were a microcosm of the ideal world Riot Grrrl was trying to create. This was a world that could be inhabited while its members tried to change the dominant culture, and that gave them a chance to experience what life would be like if the patriarchy didn't exist. The bonds of girl love that fueled these zine networks would keep them running long after the movement itself was said to have ended, and would make zines accessible to young women who would otherwise never have been able to participate in Riot Grrrl. These were girls who had no one to confide in, or who lived in places where it felt like the culture would never change; when they found Riot Grrrl zines, however, they discovered a place where they could tell their stories without fear or judgement, reclaim the narrative around their trauma, indulge in their creativity, and form relationships with other girls. While this wasn't exactly turning the world upside down, it was nevertheless an outlet and source of support for thousands of young women.

I want to argue, then, that while the achievements of Riot Grrrl zine communities may seem insignificant when compared to the Riot Grrrls' stated goal of remaking the dominant culture, these communities actually accomplished what the movement had always wanted: that is, they made young women's lives more bearable. This is the central argument of this chapter, and it will be the focus of each of its four remaining sections. Section II will look at how, despite calling themselves "Riot Grrrls"—not to mention writing about forming girl gangs and beating up abusers—these young women did very little actual rioting; indeed, there often seemed to be a disconnect between what the Riot Grrrls claimed to be doing and the tangible steps they took towards change. However, I will show how making art about standing up to one's abusers was actually a vital act in itself, and will underscore Kathleen Hanna's claim that there was something revolutionary about young women sharing their stories with one another. By speaking up, they were helping to end the stigma around revealing one was a survivor of abuse, and making it more difficult for predators to operate in the open. In turn, when discussing their experiences with their fellow Riot Grrrls, young women were also free from the cultural expectations of how survivors should behave. They didn't have to forgive their abusers, or act like the perfect victims; they could be as angry and irreverent as they wanted to be, which, in the context of a culture that placed such unrealistic expectations on survivors, was incredibly subversive.

In turn, in section III, I will examine why so many Riot Grrrls chose zines, rather than in-person meetings, as the sites where they would open up about what they'd experienced. I will attribute this to the amount of control zine-making gave young women over how, and to whom, they wanted to tell their stories. This made zines especially appealing to Riot Grrrls who had

survived sexual assault, or who were marginalized upon multiple axes, as they could regain their sense of control over what parts of themselves they wanted to share with others and prevent abusers and outsiders from accessing their zines. It was just as important, too, that their zines made it into the *right* hands: that they would be read by young women who could relate to what they'd suffered. This was all part of the consciousness-raising process, during which Riot Grrrls realized they hadn't been abused or harassed because they'd done anything wrong, but because the patriarchy conditioned men to harm women. This was a shared political consciousness much like the one second-wave feminists had developed through their own consciousness-raising practices. Indeed, all throughout this chapter, I will stress that, while many scholars see Riot Grrrl as a rejection of second-wave principles, Riot Grrrl and the second-wave feminism of the '70s and '80s actually had a great deal in common. Not only did both groups embrace the revolutionary potential of their anger, but they also recognized that getting their members to realize that they had all suffered similar traumas was a key part of building solidarity.

In the case of Riot Grrrl, this solidarity was also compounded by the material properties of its members' zines. As this introduction has already noted, Riot Grrrl zines produced strong emotional attachments between their creators and readers. This was partially because they contained such personal disclosures, but also had to do with their status as physical objects: specifically, the fact that they were handmade. This meant that many readers saw zines as stand-ins for their creators' bodies, which brought the romantic possibilities of girl love to the fore. At the same time, zines were also spaces where Riot Grrrls—especially Riot Grrrls of color—could call out the movement when it failed to live up to its ideals. Riot Grrrls also used their zines to critique the dominant culture; they combined magazine excerpts with personal writing, and

photos with cut-outs from ads, to reframe sexist images and symbols. This collage-like, pastiche quality had much to do with why readers kept ordering their favorite zines; they felt like a handmade present from a trusted friend. The emotional and affective ties that these zines produced helped ensure that the networks in which they circulated remained strong. Indeed, the fact that many Riot Grrrls made their zines for pleasure rather than profit, and that readers interpreted being given a zine as an act of care, meant that these zine networks functioned much more like gift economies than capitalist systems.

In section V, I will delve deeper into the mechanics of this gift economy, and argue that it became the primary locus of the movement long after Riot Grrrl was said to have ended. The Riot Grrrl zine economy only continued to expand throughout the mid-to-late '90s, incorporating more diverse perspectives and giving rise to an imagined community of girls that stretched across North America. As an economy divested from capitalism and the patriarchy, it was an instance of what Janice Radway calls "prefigurative politics," or the act of creating new practices and structures that are meant to serve as an alternative to the systems by which society is organized. Indeed, the Riot Grrrl zine economy showed that there could be another way of doing things: that young women could build a world where they were supported, where their talents and creativity thrived, and, above all, where they—and everyone else—were much safer from violence. As the Riot Grrrls worked to refashion the real world in this image, they could also inhabit the world of their zines; in so doing, they could undo much of the damage the patriarchy inflicted. In this way, Riot Grrrl zines and zine networks functioned as the better world Cindy Crabb imagines when she tells her readers why she created the zine *Doris*. "Doris," she writes,

> is about finding a life worth living and creating a world that will allow us to live. Creating a world full of meaning, that we can thrive in, that we can come together in, where we will be heard, where we will be

> able to believe in ourselves, where we won't think our thoughts and emotions are crazy. A world where we will know for real that we are not alone.[173]

## II. "I'd never seen a girl scream like that": Anger and Political Action in Riot Grrrl[174]

The name "Riot Grrrl" came from what might seem like an unlikely source: the protests that erupted across Washington, D.C. in early May of 1991, after city police shot Salvadorian immigrant Daniel Enrique Gomez. For several days, D.C. raged in the throes of what zinester and Riot Grrrl scholar Mimi Nguyen calls a race riot.[175] When Jen Smith, a University of Maryland student living in D.C., sat down to write a letter to her friend Allison—that would be Allison Wolfe, member of the all-girl band Bratmobile—the protests had subsided. Still, the memory was fresh in her mind, prompting her to include a line that went something "like 'This summer's gonna be a girl riot' or 'We need a girl riot' or 'I want a girl riot.'"[176] Though "[y]ears later, she wouldn't remember the exact sentence, the letter would be gone, and nobody's memories would line up," the gist of the phrase would be memorable enough that, when she and Wolfe—along with Wolfe's bandmate Molly Neuman and Bikini Kill frontwoman Kathleen Hanna—made a zine two months later, they decided to name it *Riot Grrrl* (fig I). The title was "a blend of Jen's 'girl riot' and the growling 'grrrl' spelling that [Bikini Kill drummer] Tobi [Vail] had recently made up as a jokey variation on all the tortured spellings of 'womyn/womon/ wimmin' feminists liked to experiment with."[177] In bringing the anger inherent in the word "riot" together with Vail's lighthearted crack at second-wave discourse, the name "Riot Grrrl" synthesized playfulness and rage: two of the registers that would come to define the movement.[178]

Of course, it also feels ironic that Riot Grrrl—which, in the public imagination, would become heavily identified with young white women—got its name from a race riot. Indeed, while Jen Smith was outraged at Gomez's shooting, she didn't go out and join in the protests. Rather, she "stayed home, watching the melee on the news and listening to the helicopter…over [her] neighborhood." Her rationale was that, were she to involve herself, she would be overstepping boundaries on which she had no right to intrude. "'I felt like, as a white person from a middle class background, for me to go up there and participate was like me being a cultural interloper,' she said. 'I feel anger about the police state too, but it was another community's tension."[179] Smith's unease captures many white Riot Grrrls' attitude towards racism: they condemned white supremacy, but weren't sure what their place was in working to eradicate it, and their attempts to do so were often clumsy and occasionally harmful. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Riot Grrrl was far from an all-white or even middle-class monolith, despite mainstream media coverage that framed it as such.[180] Women of color were behind some of the best-known early Riot Grrrl zines, like Mimi Nguyen, who wrote *Slander,* and Ramdasha Bikceem, creator of *GUNK.* They were also responsible for many influential later publications, like Nguyen's *Race Riot* and Bianca Ortiz's *¡Mamasita!* In turn, while Riot Grrrls of color often called out white Riot Grrrls who exhibited subtle and at times outright racism, their contributions went far beyond serving as Riot Grrrl's conscience. Not only did their theorizing help define Riot Grrrl, but their rhetoric did much to undermine the norms of the dominant culture and to position themselves as alternate sources of authority both on their own lives and possibilities for a better future.[181]

At the same time, that Jen Smith was inspired to come up with the phrase "girl riot" in the wake of D.C. residents venting their rage over police brutality, yet did not join in the riots herself, highlights the difficulty many Riot Grrrls faced in figuring out what action they should take to bring about that more just world. More specifically, there often seemed to be a gap between Riot Grrrls' fury—their anger towards abusers, patriarchal structures, and white supremacy—and what they did with it. One of the best examples of this anxiety can be found in the girl gang, which was a frequent trope in Riot Grrrl zines. The girl gang was figured as a pack of tough girls roaming the streets, beating up rapists and harassers and protecting any girls threatened by male violence. "'Can't you picture it—gangs of girls—teenage girls in gangs all across america, breaking through boundaries of race and class and sexual identity,'" Tobi Vail asked in *Jigsaw* #4 (fig II). These gangs would be made up of "'girls so strong together that they don't listen to people who tell them that they are stupid…girls so strong together that no one dares to fuck with them when they are walking down the street—girls so strong together that they learn to help out their moms and help them to get away from their dads when necessary… GIRL SOLDIERS.'"[182] Many Riot Grrrls wrote as if these gangs actually existed. Zinester Erika Reinstein declared that she "'was in a secret girl gang that beat up rapists cause we knew there was no justice for girls in this world,'" while one anonymous Olympia, Washington Riot Grrrl claimed she and her friends "'made up a secret plan and carried it out….We laughed and held hands and ran around in the dark and we were the ones you should be looking out for'" (fig. III).[183] Because of her girl gang, "'i feel i can't be raped and I feel so fuckin' free.'"[184]

This last account is notable for how it combines playfulness and rage: that is, in much of the same way as the rationale behind the name "Riot Grrrl." Obviously, the Olympia zinester is

furious at perpetrators of sexual violence, but there is also great joy in her account. Taking out her anger on rapists and harassers is not only cathartic, but *pleasurable.* She can do so because of the presence of the other girls in her gang: together, they have power, and they know it. The knowledge that they are "the ones you should be looking out for" inspires in them an almost childlike glee—or, more accurately, the freedom of an unthreatened girlhood. At the same time, the delight that the girl gang takes in carrying out their mandate reminds us of the paradoxical joy that can be found in riots: the satisfaction of finally releasing one's anger, the gratification of smashing anything in sight. However, unlike the rioters in D.C., most Riot Grrrls did not actually take to the streets to engage in violence or even to break things. In fact, evidence indicates that very few, if any, girl gangs really existed. While some Riot Grrrl zines did give self-defense tips, "[f]ollow through on [girl gang] fantasies was comparatively rare."[185] As Sara Marcus writes, "[t]he girls invoked, praised, and defended the *idea* of the feminist vigilante far more often [than] they became her."[186]

To say that Riot Grrrls almost never forming girl gangs constitutes a failure is, I think, to overstate the case. Nevertheless, it *does* show is that there was sometimes a gap between the Riot Grrrls' dreams of action and what they ended up doing on the ground. Of course, when one considers the obstacles Riot Grrrls would have faced in assembling these groups—the risk of arrest, the danger of being harmed by someone they tried to attack—it's easy to see why they didn't materialize. Still, the allure of the girl gang is undeniable, and that is what makes the excerpts from Reinstein and especially the Olympia Riot Grrrl so fascinating. These passages suggest that the pleasure the authors derived from living out the girl gang fantasy on the page was an end in itself. Both Reinstein and the Olympia Riot Grrrl talk about girl gangs not as Tobi

Vail does—as a dream for the future—but as if they exist and their exploits have already taken place. Because we know that Riot Grrrls were not going out and doing these things on the streets, it is as if what allows Reinstein and the Olympia Riot Grrrl to treat their escapades as real is that they are writing them down in their zines. The act of writing, in other words, is what enacts the girl gang: it is what makes it a (textual) reality, so that Reinstein and the Olympia Riot Grrrl can talk about it as if it exists. The joy of running through the dark with one's friends, of beating up anyone who dares cross you and protecting one's fellow girls, is exchanged for the gratification one gets from bringing this fantasy to life on the page.

All of this can, and I think to a certain extent should, be read as a way to compensate for not being able to go out and form a girl gang. But it also suggests that Riot Grrrls found something valuable—something cathartic, and even fun—in living out their rage through the act of making art. After all, it was the intensely angry, and electric, songs of Bikini Kill that were in many ways the opening salvos of the movement. Take "Suck My Left One," from their first EP:

> Daddy comes into her room at night
> He's got more than talking on his mind
> My sister pulls the covers down
> She reaches over, flicks on the light
> She says to him
>
> Suck my left one
> Suck my left one[187]

In seven short lines, "Suck My Left One" performs an impressive feat: calling up the threat of incest, then dispatching it by providing a solution to the violence—or, at least, what functions as a solution within the boundaries of the song. The speaker's sister can tell the father who is attempting to assault her to "Suck my left one," which means to fuck off.[188] That it is incest which earns this rebuke, rather than any other type of sexual assault, seems integral to the

song's logic. While shame and guilt often weigh heavily on sexual assault survivors, and is a reason many do not discuss or report their trauma, the stigma that comes from revealing one has experienced incest is especially intense. That the song features an incest survivor shouting at her abuser to "Suck my left one" is thus a way to enact, and then to break, the compulsory silence under which many incest survivors suffer. Indeed, not only does the sister speak up and tell her father to go to hell, but this outcry also apparently stops the attack. In so doing, the song acts out a fantasy that many girls experiencing incest have had: the dream of telling their abusers to fuck off, and having it work. While talking about their trauma in their real lives, let alone confronting their abusers during an assault, may have seemed impossible, listening to "Suck My Left One" became a way for girls experiencing incest to live out the scenario in the song, and to achieve catharsis, vicariously. By singing along, these girls could imagine themselves telling off their abusers, even if they could not do so when the actual abuse occurred. There was even the chance that saying the words might make confronting their abusers feel like a possibility: that, as hard as it would be to do, they too could speak up.

The anger in every line, every chord, of "Suck My Left One" didn't come out of nowhere. It was inspired by the girls Hanna met interning at a domestic violence shelter, as well as at her bands' shows: girls eager to share their stories, to tell Hanna about their trauma.[189] Its affect also had its roots in the emotional registers of second-wave feminism and in the screw-you attitude of punk. Excerpts from some of the more explicit second-wave publications like the *SCUM Manifesto* wouldn't be out of place in a Bikini Kill song, and, like the punk scene in which Hanna and and Vail were embedded, Bikini Kill used profanity and an in-your-face attitude to give authority the middle finger.[190] However, when Bikini Kill talked about authority,

they meant something more specific than the shadowy forces of conformity and consumerism most punks maligned. Their target was the patriarchy—and that included how it manifested in punk. Punk was notorious for the way female fans were forced to the back of the room at shows: because men took up the space in front of the stage (thrashing to the music, fighting one another, and groping any girl who got near them) those hoping to avoid assault had no choice but to find refuge far away, against the walls. Hanna and the rest of Bikini Kill were determined to put an end to this phenomenon, and, in this case, anger at an injustice *did* drive change on the ground. Bikini Kill's unofficial mantra became 'girls to the front,' meaning that at their shows, they encouraged all the girls in the audience to come right up to the stage, forming a barricade of Riot Grrrl power.[191] Not only was Hanna forever surveying the crowd, always ready to call out any man who harassed one of the girls or displayed suspect behavior, but she also encouraged those girls to follow in her footsteps by starting bands and creating zines, so that they, too, would have a place to vent their rage and to tell their stories.[192]

A great many Bikini Kill listeners took Hanna's advice, though far more turned to zines than founded their own bands. Despite Bikini Kill's efforts to democratize music-making and to decouple it from expertise, guitars and drums were expensive, and making a zine was easy and cheap.[193] Many of these zines displayed a confrontational attitude and vocabulary similar to that which could be found in Bikini Kill's song catalogue. "'I riotously swear to rage in glorious anger against everything that even slightly pisses me off,'" wrote the author of "The Splendiferous Oath of Riot Grrrlz Outer Space." "'I swear to be loud, vulgar, obnoxious, illogical, and emotional whenever I damn please.'"[194] The impulse to take something that seemed girly and harmless and shoot it through with anger characterized much of the discourse in Riot

Grrrl zines.[195] It also extended to the way these zinesters treated Hello Kitty: a Japanese cartoon cat whose image was used to market all sorts of products sold to young women. Each issue of *Action Girl Guide,* one of the most famous Riot Grrrl publications, featured a modified version of Hello Kitty, shown wearing a "RIOT GRRRL" dress and holding "a teddy bear with an anarchist symbol printed on its jumper" (fig IV).[196] In her zine *¡Mamasita!,* Bianca Ortiz took a different approach: whereas the character's canonical design showed her without a mouth, Ortiz's Hello Kitty was drawn with one—which, Ortiz explained, was a deliberate choice. She wrote that,

> For years now Hello Kitty has lacked a mouth—her voice never heard, her face emotionless. But now, Hello Kitty is pissed cuz she doesn't like to be told what to do and how to do it. She doesn't like people telling her she's too ugly or too fat or too dumb or too weak or too masculine or too snobby or too loose. Hello Kitty has grown a mouth, cuz she can repress her anger no longer. Hey! **HELLO KITTY IS FUCKING PISSED!**[197]

In the excerpt above, Ortiz collapses the distinction between Hello Kitty and the figure of the teenage or young adult girl. Hello Kitty is said to have been subject to the same critiques—that she is "too ugly or too fat or too dumb or too weak or too masculine or too snobby or too loose"—that girls receive whenever they are perceived to have stepped out of line. The corporate symbol designed not only to appeal to girls, but to exhibit the qualities they are expected to embody—always adorable, forever silent—can now be weaponized by those girls as a way to articulate, and to protest, the impossible standards the patriarchy forces upon them. In reading this passage, Adela Licona identifies it as an instance of what she calls *reverso:* a practice in which zinesters turn "the penetrative power of the gaze…back on society," often through an engagement with and reconfiguring of popular cultural figures.[198] In so doing, *reverso* "reveal[s] the sicknesses inherent in [the] societal contexts" its practitioners analyze, and "create[s] spaces

where 'expert' knowledges can be critically reexamined, practices and discourses resignified, and new knowledges gen/d/erated."[199] In other words, by writing Hello Kitty as if she were criticized in the same way that girls are, and then showing that, were this to be the case, Hello Kitty would be so furious that she would have to grow a mouth just to express how frustrated she felt, Ortiz exposes how oppressive this constant policing of girls is—and, in so doing, opens up a space for her to vocalize her *own* anger. Having Hello Kitty announce to the world that she is "**FUCKING PISSED**" is a way for Ortiz herself to declare that she is fed up with being told how to present herself and to behave, and that she, too, will no longer be silent: that, like Hello Kitty's, hers is a voice that deserves to be heard.

When Riot Grrrl scholars discuss passages like this one from *¡Mamasita!*, there is often a tendency to emphasize the "rhetorical excess and flamboyance" of these excerpts, their "exaggerated" quality.[200] While Licona is an exception, Piepmeier suggests this is what characterizes the lines I've cited from "The Splendiferous Oath of Riot Grrrl Outer Space." Her thesis is that the author of this passage, as well as many other Riot Grrrl zinesters, wrote this way because they were borrowing from punk, with its penchant for conflict and hyperbole. She endorses Celeste Kearney's claim that Riot Grrrl "brought together punk and second wave feminism," but argues that the wryness of passages like this are also what distinguishes the movement from the second wave.[201] "For the most part," Piepmeier writes,

> second wave feminists were more comfortable operating within a rhetoric of sincerity, while Riot Grrrls and third wave feminists were and are part of a cultural climate that is so relentlessly marketed to and so self-consciously savvy that they don't expect or offer straightforward points of view. Instead, these wild claims are mapping out a new terrain, challenging the terms of the conversation, using over-the-top language to counter staid, encrusted gender ideologies. To "rage in glorious anger against everything that even slightly pisses me off" and "to be loud, vulgar, obnoxious, illogical, and emotional whenever I damn please" are much more fun than being the well-behaved good girl or the "humorless feminist."[202]

Though I agree with Piepmeier that highlighting the play at work in Riot Grrrl zines is important, I want to challenge the distinction that this passage makes: namely, that second-wave feminist writing was "operating within a rhetoric of sincerity," while Riot Grrrls relied primarily on hyperbole and irony. I'm not claiming that Riot Grrrls couldn't be sarcastic, or that they didn't use exaggerated rhetoric. Rather, I want to point out that when Riot Grrrls did the latter, they seemed to be motivated by an attempt to find language that would capture the intensity of their feelings. In the next section, we will see how zinesters like Cindy Crabb wrote about their experiences with abuse and harassment using language that was intense, that was emphatic—and that they chose because it matched the force of their anger. Even the *reverso* cited above is a way to convey its author's rage: though it's clever to use Hello Kitty to point out the hypocrisy of a society that expects its girls to be silent and sweet even as they're attacked from all sides, Ortiz, like her version of Hello Kitty, really does seem "**FUCKING PISSED**."

What I want to argue, then, is that, rather than representing a break from second-wave sincerity, this language actually demonstrates the continuity between second-wave feminism and Riot Grrrl. Both movements insisted on the legitimacy of its members' anger and were looking for rhetoric that would convey the intensity and urgency of these feelings. In turn, just as second-wavers argued that their fury at the patriarchy went hand-in-hand with wanting to fight for their fellow women, so did the Riot Grrrls insist that their rage made them more empathetic towards other girls. As Sarah Barber writes in her zine *Tater Taught,*

> this anger, this hatred has forced me to stand up for myself and my rights as a woman. i am not fighting with hatred. i am using it as an outlet for my happiness. i think my anger is healthy, it's a process that can be productive. love too. girl love. when women around me complain about their weight, feeling ugly, and all the other aspects of our society that have hypnotized women of their rights, i feel hurt. this compassion and love also helped to stir a revolution.[203]

What Barber is suggesting here is that embracing her anger has not only made her feel empowered on the individual level, but that it has also taught her to care for other women and the pain they must suffer because of sexist standards. In fact, when Barber listens to those women engage in negative self-talk, *she* is the one who feels hurt. It is this pain—and the implied longing for a world in which women wouldn't hate themselves because they don't look a certain way—that makes her realize the importance of revolution. Crucially, when such a revolution is mentioned, it is not in the future, but the past, tense. It is as if Barber views her anger and its capacity to foster empathy not as precursors to starting an uprising, but rather as having been the first steps in that insurgency. Recognizing the power of her rage and seeing other women as allies *is* revolutionary, Barber implies—an idea with which Kathleen Hanna would agree. Hanna, as has already been mentioned, was used to young women approaching her with tales of trauma and abuse. It happened first during her internship at the domestic violence shelter Safeplace, where "[s]he had started a discussion group….for teenage girls."[204] Inspired by "hearing those girls talk openly with one another about their past traumas" and "watching how supportive the girls were of one another," Hanna started her pre-Bikini Kill band, Viva Knievel, in which she wrote music "most[ly]…about sexual assault," and listeners responded by sharing their stories.[205] Sara Marcus recounts how,

> [a]fter shows, girls from the audience would come up to Kathleen, wanting to talk about their own abusive fathers, violent boyfriends, and incest flashbacks. Kathleen would switch gears from performer to counselor; she'd find a quiet place away from the crowd to listen to each girl in turn, tell her it wasn't her fault, help her identify supportive people in her life, and urge her to call a local crisis center. "Essentially," she said, "I was doing the same work that I did at the shelter."[206]

Like Barber, Hanna saw listening to and empathizing with other women's experiences as revolutionary practice. Though she would follow this up with advice and resources, it was these girls' decisions to talk about their trauma in which she was most interested. Specifically, it was

the *reciprocity* that fascinated her: the idea that, if she got onstage and spoke up about rape and sexual harassment, it would trigger something in other girls that made them feel heard—that learning someone else was going through similar things would make those girls realize that they, too, could break their silence and speak up. This would be the motivation for Hanna to seek out feminist rocker Tobi Vail and to start a new band with her: Bikini Kill.[207] With Tobi—"the only other girl rocker [she knew] who saw how much gender mattered"—Hanna hoped to create a band that "was going to be a revolution. [She and Vail] would settle for nothing less."[208] Marcus recounts an interview that Hanna, along with Molly and Allison of Bratmobile, did with Mark Andersen, "who helmed the punk activist group Positive Force":[209]

> "I've had so many people come to me with stories of sexual abuse and being battered by their parents," [Hanna] said. "People talking about sexual abuse and getting beat up and emotional abuse in their houses is so important, and making bands around that issue is, to me, the new punk rock—can be the new punk rock. And I want to encourage people—"
>
> "To break their silence?" Andersen suggested. "Yeah, to break their silence," Kathleen allowed. She went on: "I'm really interested in a punk rock movement—an angry girl movement—of sexual abuse survivors … I seriously believe it's the majority of people in this country [sic] have stories to tell that they aren't telling for some reason. I mean, with all of that energy and anger, if we could unify it in some way—"[210]

That Hanna breaks off just as she reaches what would seem to be the most critical part of her vision—when she is about to detail how, and at what target, those survivors would unleash their anger—tells us something interesting about the relationship between Riot Grrrls' feelings and actions. From one angle, it seems to confirm the reading that sees Jen Smith's decision to stay out of the D.C. riots and the lack of girl gangs on the streets as indicative of Riot Grrrls' inability to channel their anger into activism on the ground. Hanna is able to detail what it would look like for survivors to come together; she can visualize, too, the process of sharing their stories, but where her plan falters is when it comes time to develop a framework for waging war on the forces responsible for their traumas. However, Hanna's decision to put more of an

emphasis on survivors talking about their experiences, and feeling united in their "energy and anger," than on what exactly should be done with all that emotion, can also be understood another way. Rather than interpreting it as a failure, we can read it as a statement of the movement's values. Riot Grrrls saw telling their stories not as a precursor to revolution, but instead as a revolutionary act in itself. In a society in which girls weren't supposed to discuss misogyny or incest or rape, speaking up—whether that meant tracking Hanna down after a show or making your own zine—was deeply subversive. This could lead to taking other action, but there was nonetheless inherent value, and real power, in disclosing what they had experienced.[211] These young women would be 'growing a mouth' in much of the same way that Hello Kitty did in *¡Mamasita!*—and, like her, they would be using it to speak up about how furious they were with how they had been treated.

Indeed, in giving young women a space where they, like Ortiz's Hello Kitty, could be "**FUCKING PISSED**," Riot Grrrl was doing something else revolutionary. Not only did it encourage girls to share their stories, but it didn't pressure them to forgive their abusers, or to put all their rage behind them and move on. In Riot Grrrl, young women could be as angry as they wanted about what had happened to them; they could be sad or amused or cynical, too, or whatever and however much they needed to feel. In the face of expectations that teenage girls would brush aside the traumas they had experienced, or hide their reactions, or prioritize others' comfort over their own, letting oneself feel whatever one wanted—and take up space with those feelings—was radical. So was taking pleasure in one's emotions: enjoying, and even reveling in, however one felt. "The revolution is about going to the playground with your best girlfriends," Hanna, Vail, and Kathi Wilcox write in the first issue of *Bikini Kill* (fig V). "You are hanging

upside down on the bars and all the blood is rushing to your head. It's a euphoric feeling. the boys can see our underwear and we don't really care." To feel this sort of euphoria was groundbreaking, they argued, because "[t]his society doesn't want us girls to feel happy or powerful in any way."[212] And if telling that society it was wrong—if breaking it down so as to make the world a safer place for other girls—meant using the anger you also had inside you, then so be it. As one contributor to issue #3 of Molly Neuman and Allison Wolfe's zine *Girl Germs* writes, "I don't think I'm irate. But I am angry and I am aware" (fig VI). She promises,

> I don't feel inclined to point the finger but I am not afraid to give the finger when need be and if that's alienating than that's really tuff shit because somethings need to be done. And it is my intention to put this issue right in yr. face, SEE, so we'll be face to face, SEE, with the fact, SEE that sometimes, we stand against one another wrongly…[F]or now I take this ardent stand, to stand by my woman: to be for her and then maybe she can be for me. And I hear these girls, girls I don't know, girls I have never met, make these same promises and these same threats. They speak to me and I speak to you and I know our time has come…revolutionary girl soul force…wow.[213]

## III. "i've never told [this] to anybody before": Consciousness-Raising and Disclosure in Riot Grrrl Zines[214]

By the time Kathleen Hanna sat for her interview with Mark Anderson, the Riot Grrrl movement had already held two in-person meetings: the first on July 24, 1991, and the second just a week later.[215] Though the term "Riot Grrrl" had only been coined earlier that month, and Bikini Kill was still settling into the success it had found in the D.C. punk scene, Hanna was determined to expand the scope of her crusade beyond her band's performances. She thus planned and advertised an in-person gathering of girls to be held at the Arlington, Virginia home of Anderson's activist group Positive Force.[216] The first meeting, which had roughly twenty attendees,

> started off with a go-round. It took hours for each person to say what she had come for and what she wanted to get out of the meeting…. [T]he biggest appetite was simply for talking and listening—especially

> among the younger girls…. These girls had never been invited to discuss and dissect the way they experienced the world as girls, and they were stunned at what came pouring out. "It wasn't until the option was in front of me that I realized how much I needed it," Ananda [one of the attendees] said.[217]

At the second meeting, "it was mostly [those] teenagers who came back, suddenly aware that they were desperate to find a community of girls to help them make it through late adolescence unmaimed."[218] Over the next year, the members of what became Riot Grrrl's first chapter settled into a familiar rhythm. Though "[o]ccasionally there would be a project to work on, like silk-screening Riot Grrrl T-shirts or…spray-painting women symbols on sidewalks,"

> [m]ostly, the girls just talked. Their stories ranged from extremes of rape, incest, and child sexual abuse to those widespread indignities of female adolescence, so common that girls seemed to be expected to take them in stride: the makeup and hair-mousse ads warning girls that they would never get a date unless they looked like models; the supposedly cool boys who forced a kiss at a party and acted like nothing had happened; the English teacher who everybody knew gave better grades to girls in short skirts; the man on the bus who said, "What's your number, sweetheart?" and wouldn't back off.[219]

This excerpt makes clear how much Riot Grrrl's emphasis on talking about one's experiences owes to second-wave feminism's consciousness-raising practice.[220] Consciousness-raising grew out of the idea that the personal was political, and its goal was to get women to realize that their daily lives did not exist outside of politics, but were in fact determined by, and in every way a part of, the political sphere. The first and most critical step in consciousness-raising was having women in feminist spaces go around and share their personal experiences. The hope was that, by disclosing what they had been through, and then listening to other women's stories, attendees would see that, though their experiences differed in detail and degree, they were remarkably similar in that they all showed the patriarchy structuring how they moved through the world. In other words, it was not a coincidence that attendees seemed to have countless tales of abusive boyfriends and acquaintances and relatives, or that so many of them had endured rape and other assaults. Instead, this was a sign that America was a patriarchal society: one governed by a series of underlying misogynistic practices and behavior designed to

systemically privilege men and hold back women. Not only did the patriarchy encourage women to see themselves as weak and unworthy, but it also told men that they could abuse women with impunity. What all of this meant, then, was that the patriarchy was responsible for the traumas the women at these meetings had endured—rape, assault, and other abuses—and also for what Marcus calls "widespread indignities," including sexist ads and street harassment.[221]

When the women in second-wave consciousness-raising groups realized that the patriarchy was the common denominator in all of their stories, and that each one of them was oppressed to varying degrees by the same misogynistic system, they were said to have developed a shared political consciousness: a common understanding that the patriarchy was their enemy, and that they should direct their efforts at bringing it down. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the resemblance between second-wave consciousness-raising groups and Riot Grrrl meetings, the members of Riot Grrrl D.C. quickly reached a similar awareness. As the girls went around and discussed what they had been through, and then listened to their peers reveal they had experienced much of the same, they stopped seeing each of their traumas as "individual trials," and began to perceive them as "a system of unfairness," or "a room that could be torn down from the inside."[222] However, Riot Grrrl D.C. was not the only space where Riot Grrrls could share their own, and hear each other's stories, or where these exchanges gave rise to a shared political consciousness. Instead, even as other Riot Grrrl chapters sprang up around the nation, zines were becoming increasingly popular sites for discussing one's experiences, learning about what other girls had endured, and becoming radicalized against the patriarchy.

At first, it might seem like zines were little more than a substitute for going to Riot Grrrl meetings and having these conversations in person. However, the fact that many zines were

made by young women who were also very active in their local Riot Grrrl chapters suggests that they offered something different—and perhaps more satisfying—than what could be found at a Riot Grrrl meeting. Like Riot Grrrl chapters, zines were sites where girls could reveal their deepest secrets; however, they also gave those girls the opportunity to play with what and just how much they wanted to disclose, in ways that would have never been possible in person. Indeed, zines not only gave Riot Grrrls the chance to 'speak up'—to say whatever they wanted, in whatever register, on the page—but also promised them something that was not attainable in almost any other space: the chance to control the environment at hand. Though in reality, the communities Riot Grrrls formed through their zine exchanges meant that they were accountable to their readers, the allure of a site where each young woman decided what she would and would not tolerate, and what she wanted to disclose, was considerable. In a world in which teenage girls' boundaries were not at all taken seriously—and that often encouraged their violation—being able to make and enforce one's own rules was no small thing: in fact, it was yet another part of Riot Grrrl that felt revolutionary.

At the same time, one could be forgiven for looking at a zine and assuming it was not subject to any rules, nor to any mediation, period. Zines' frequent spelling errors, handwritten paragraphs, and staple-secured seams seemed to suggest they were made as hastily as possible, as if their creators could not wait another second before getting their stories off their chests. Indeed, many zinesters went to great lengths to give the impression that this was the first time they had ever disclosed what they were about to share. "i have a little story to tell that really pisses me off," Nomy Lamm writes in issue one of her zine *I'm So Fucking Beautiful.* "i've

never told it to anybody before" (fig VII). She goes on to recount what happened when she and a group of friends went to a Denny's restaurant in Seattle:

> our waiter was really funny, and made good jokes and everybody really liked him. all my friends ordered meals, and i just had some french fries or something. when he took my order, he looked surprised and said "that's all?" i didn't really think anything of it, and i assured him that that was all. then he came back and a couple of my friends ordered desserts. to me, directly, he said "and what'll it be for you?" i smiled and said nothing. he said "our little sweet tooth doesn't want *anything* tonight?" nobody else heard him. i knew what he was implying, but because i was so self conscious, and because i felt in a way that i must deserve it, i didn't say anything to him or my friends.

Lamm's story, like the ones in many Riot Grrrl zines, deals with the way misogyny intersects with other elements: here, it is sizeism, while in other zines, it is racism, homophobia, and/or ableism. Like many Riot Grrrls, too, Lamm presents her zine as the only place where she can talk about how she really feels about a given experience. "i guess i must have carried that feeling with me, because i never did tell anybody about it," she continues, "and when my friends laugh about that night and say what a cool waiter we had, i smile and agree, but inwardly i seethe."[223] These lines, combined with the earlier statement "i've never told [this story] to anybody before," double down on the intimacy the story itself fosters. In opening up to the reader, Lamm suggests they are someone she can trust—and, indeed, that she is more comfortable being vulnerable with the reader than with her real-life friends. However, in a later interview, Lamm would trouble the assumption that her zines gave her readers an unmediated look at how she thought and felt. "'I really hated when people would be like, "Oh, [zinesters are] all just girls in their bedrooms, sprawled out writing their diaries, and then they'll send them to each other,"'" she told Allison Piepmeier. "'I'm like, that's an aesthetic choice. You're still constructing something when it looks like a diary entry. I wasn't photocopying my diary, or if I was, it was for a specific reason.'"[224]

Lamm's comments invite us to read the encounter with the Denny's waiter in a different light. That is, they force us to acknowledge that as much as stories like hers are deeply personal experiences taken from the lives of real young women, they are also at the same time strategic disclosures. While Lamm was indeed breaking her silence about a trauma, she was also making a series of conscious choices: deciding what to include and to exclude, how to frame the story, and even what to write about. That the story's framing seems like an attempt to foster intimacy with that reader suggests Lamm has chosen this anecdote because she views it as an experience with which her reader can connect. Though it is not a safe bet that all readers would be able to see themselves in the experiences of rape and incest other Riot Grrrls shared, it is a reasonable assumption that almost everyone in Lamm's audience had, at some point, downplayed their hurt or told themselves they deserved it after a man made them feel uncomfortable or insecure. By breaking her silence about this encounter—and indeed, by deeming it significant enough to include in her zine—Lamm tells her readers that their feelings *do* matter, and that experiences like this aren't something to be brushed off. It is important that she was made to feel lesser, she implies, and, as her reader has been primed to identify with her, it is as if they are being told that their encounters with misogyny are also significant and worthy of outrage.

Of course, all of this depends on Lamm's readers feeling intimately connected with her—and *that* hinges on those readers believing that, in telling the story about the Denny's waiter, Lamm is not only entrusting them with privileged information, but laying herself bare. And yet, because of her interview with Piepmeier, we know that Lamm was curating everything she shared with her readers: that, rather than typing out stream-of-consciousness confessions, she was picking and choosing what she wanted to disclose. This is not to say that in doing so, Lamm

was being in any way dishonest; instead, it is to point out that she was making the same editorial choices all writers and artists must confront in deciding how to present their work to an audience. Still, as Lamm suggested in her interview, and scholars like Janice Radway and Piepmeier have pointed out, there is a tendency to believe that, because Riot Grrrl zinesters were young women writing about their own lives, they were not making strategic decisions about how to frame what they discussed.[225] What this overlooks, of course, is not only how deliberate many Riot Grrrl zinesters were in writing about their experiences, but also that, in exercising their authority over how they presented their most traumatizing encounters, as well as how they talked about their everyday lives, they were reclaiming the control that they had so often been denied.

This was one of the reasons zines were so popular with a particular segment of the Riot Grrrl community: those who had experienced emotional and sexual abuse.[226] Many of these girls saw zine-making as a way to reclaim their agency over their own bodies—and their own stories—which their abusers had tried to take from them. When they wrote about their experiences in a zine, they were the ones who decided what and how much they shared; they were taking back the narrative around what had happened to them, and also their right to only say and do what they felt comfortable with. Perhaps unsurprisingly, sharing stories about surviving abuse was also one of the primary ways Riot Grrrls engaged in consciousness-raising. One of the best examples of how this worked comes from the zine *Doris,* which was one of the most popular publications of the Riot Grrrl era. In the excerpt cited below, Cindy Crabb—*Doris*' creator—opens up about her trauma, and does so in a way that encourages her readers to consider how sexism and abuse has also shaped their lives (fig. VIII). "I'm sick of feeling like prey like boobs and a cunt and ears," she writes:

> maybe ears after the fucking is done I'm tired of feeling like lips like tongue like choking and moans. of having to wonder who is talking to me
> because they want to fuck me who is smiling at me because they want to fuck me. who is becoming my friend because they want to fuck me. I am tired of women coming into my house and seeing vultures come out. and them having to deal with the prey they have become. and we deal with it it we deal with it in different ways and I resent it all I am bitter about it all. every guy we fuck because we need to survive, every time we laugh at their jokes -
>
> I am sick of having to second guess, i am sick of having to doubt intentions, of having to question everyone who is nice to me, of having to mistrust everyone who smiles at me are they thinking about my cunt. are they thinking about whether or not i'd suck them off. are they thinking about patriarchy and what we are put through every day what has been put into our heads, what has defined our worth, how our bodies have defined us as bodies. What we have to go through every day even if we don't leave the house and walk down the street jeered at, even if we wear blindfolds to keep away the advertisements, even if we wear earplugs to keep out the words. even if we become crazy because it is the only option left the only way maybe the only way out. the only thing left to give in to.[227]

I think many young women can relate to what Crabb describes: to the experience of wondering which men are being nice to you because they genuinely like you or because they want to sleep with you, of having to second-guess every interaction and friendship with a man—and wondering, through it all, if men spend even a *second* thinking about all these calculations women have to make. What Crabb wants her reader to realize, of course, is that men don't have to worry about any of this, as they are the driving force behind women's anxieties. Women, on the other hand, must constantly be on alert—and indeed, when Crabb shifts from the "I" of the first passage to the "we" and "us" of the second paragraph, one is meant to understand that she has gone from describing her individual experiences to discussing what all women face. Women are not alone, she suggests, in "what we are put through every day what has been put into our heads, what has defined our worth, how our bodies have been defined as bodies." These are structural, systemic violences—and if any woman thinks she is the only one who endures them, this is because the stigma against calling out the patriarchy has kept other women from sharing their stories. In fact, Crabb claims that this is why she's started *Doris:* to push back against the idea that women shouldn't discuss their trauma. Writing *Doris,* she explains,

> is like how sometimes when I walk down the street, this particular street that's all tables and stuff to

> buy and people buying stuff and incense making my head hurt and people dieing and I can't get around and get through to where I'm going and I hollar at the top of my lungs, and a small girl in front of me turns around and says "I know just how you feel" and maybe she does, and maybe she doesn't, but maybe next time, she'll be the one yelling.[228]

Interestingly, while it is speech that is at the center of this metaphor, Crabb has not actually chosen to share her story out loud; rather, she has written about it in her zine. While she never offers an explanation for why she has done so, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that the properties of zines that this section has already explored—the control they gave young women over their stories, the chance to reclaim the narratives around their abuse—would have appealed to Crabb and many others like her. Indeed, a good number of *Doris*' readers would assume the role of the girl in the passage above: that is, they would relate to Crabb's disclosures, and choose to share their own stories. Like Crabb, they would do so in zines; in fact, many of the young women who read the first wave of Riot Grrrl publications (*Jigsaw, Bikini Kill, Girl Germs, Gunk,* and *I'm So Fucking Beautiful*) would go on to found their own zines. Like these earlier publications, the zines that came out of this second wave were intensely personal. However, several of their creators would admit that they—like Nomy Lamm—were mediating what went on the page, and that this was part of the reason they had decided to start a zine. For Mimi Nguyen, zines were appealing because they allowed her to exercise an amount of control over how she presented herself, and how others perceived her, that she was not afforded in any other space. She is "tired of being asked to expose myself to prying eyes," she writes; thus, she had made "[e]verything" in her zine *Slant* "completely strategic. I agonized long and hard, debated endlessly, over every word" (fig. IX).[229] As a Vietnamese-American woman, and a visibly racialized and gendered subject, Nguyen has had to endure others' constant attempts to define and circumscribe her, and their demands that she open herself up to their gaze. In *Slant,*

however, she is the one who decides what to share, and who sets the boundaries for what others can know about her. Even if she were to have talked about her experiences at Riot Grrrl meetings, she would not have been able to control how the attendees read her mannerisms, appearance, and speech; only by producing a zine can she ensure that, if an audience was going to get its hands on any part of her, it would be one that she had curated in every way.

This was another one of the reasons zines appealed to so many Riot Grrrls: because zinesters were in charge of who had access to their stories. "I have this anal retentive *need* to know just *who* gets access to my zine," writes Menghsin, author of *Sidetracked.*[230] As she distributes her zine by hand, she hopes that she can keep it out of the hands of unwanted readers, especially her abusive father. Indeed, while there was always the chance that the wrong people would be able to obtain a copy, zines gave Riot Grrrls a much better chance of controlling their audience than they would have had with almost any other medium. Most Riot Grrrls gave their zines out to their friends and at shows, while others sent them to Riot Grrrl zine distributors. For many creators, making sure their zines reached the right people was just as important; indeed, as Sinor writes, "[t]he importance of a like-minded audience cannot be overstated."[231] Almost every Riot Grrrl zinester hoped that her publication would reach an audience of other young women who could understand; that, even if their readers had not endured similar trauma, they would be able to empathize with their feelings of isolation and frustration and shame. This is "[t]he beauty of writing a zine," explains Cheryl Tapper, author of *Merge Disorder*: that, "hopefully, I will get the chance to communicate with other people who relate to me."[232]

Like Cheryl, Neely Bat Chestnut—author of the zine *Mend My Dress*—also hopes to find a like-minded audience. However, she wants her reader to do more than be able to relate to her;

in her mind, sharing her experiences might also help that reader recover from their own trauma. "when i was younger," Chestnut writes, "i was raped/molested by my father. when i was twelve or so me and my step brother ~~had an affair~~…when i was sixteen i got in an abusive relationship with a boy that lasted around four years." In attempt to move on from this abuse, Chestnut has started "reading the book the courage to heal." *The Courage to Heal* encourages its audience to journal about the abuse they have suffered, and this is one of the reasons Chestnut has chosen to write about her experiences in a zine. However, she also tells her reader that the part of the book she found most useful was the testimonies from other survivors. She feels that reading these stories set her on the path to healing, and hopes that her disclosures can have the same effect on her audience. "[I] thought, maybe i should just put all of my writings together in zine format," she tells her reader, because "maybe it will help someone else along the way." In other words, if someone who's also lived through abuse reads *Mend My Dress,* perhaps they "will take on the challenge of healing."[233]

This, more than anything, is what I see as the true power of these zinesters' confessions: that, in opening up about their experiences, Riot Grrrl zinesters created an environment where other young women could begin to heal. While consciousness-raising was an integral step in this process, it also went beyond the development of a shared political consciousness. By reading zines, girls could become radicalized against the patriarchy; what was even more important, however, was that these zines were a space where they could reclaim their agency, and help one another recover from abuse. Ironically, it was the almost unprecedented amount of control that zines afforded their individual creators that enabled them to facilitate such collective healing: as they were some of the only spaces where the most marginalized Riot Grrrls felt they could speak

out, they were where other Riot Grrrls in similar circumstances, or who had gone through the same traumas, could find stories to which they could relate. Above all, they were sites where almost all Riot Grrrls could feel safe, which is what differentiated them not only from Riot Grrrl meetings, but also all the other spaces in these young women's lives. Finally, these young women had a sense of security—and, now that it had been established, they could begin healing and supporting other Riot Grrrls as they figured out how to live. It is Cindy Crabb, in one of her other zines, *Support,* who says it best:

> this is a zine about supporting people who have been sexually abused. no formulas, no simple answers, just trying to peel back the layers—the heart of it, the hurt and fear and aloneness, the helplessness and failures and how we have pulled through, what we have learned, how we have grown, what we can teach each other.[234]

## IV. "this thing, a labor of love": Riot Grrrl Zines and the Aesthetics of Intimacy[235]

The first time Kathleen Hanna decided to write Tobi Vail, it was the summer of 1990, and Hanna's pre-Bikini Kill band Viva Knievel was on tour: a two-month, "low-budget" trip across the country that the group spent "playing in basements and sleeping on floors."[236] This was the same tour mentioned earlier in this chapter—the one that had girls flocking to Hanna to share with her their traumas—and it had convinced her that, when she returned to Olympia, she needed to get started on fomenting a revolution. It was also when she first read Vail's zine *Jigsaw:* a "thick and hyperliterate" text that took "the stuff of everyday life, snacks and walks and little one-off bands and art projects" and made "them sound like the most exciting thing in the world," incorporating them "into an exuberant and revolutionary worldview" (fig. XI).[237] Though Vail and Hanna had met a few times before, "[n]one of [those early moments had] coalesced into a friendship." The more time Hanna spent with *Jigsaw,* however, the more obvious it became that

"she and Tobi were meant for each other."[238] Because she knew she still had to make Vail see that they were kindred spirits, Hanna decided to mail her something she hoped would do the job: a personal note from her to Vail, plus copies of "interviews [Hanna had done] with musicians she met on the road."[239] "'I read Jigsaw and it made me so happy,'" the letter read:

> I felt like we are/were trying to do some similar type things and I felt validated. I know what it's like to have a girl tell me that she doesn't think it really means anything that she's a girl. I could tell you were nice and wouldn't laugh at me, too much, for writing to you.

Vail's reaction was even better than Hanna could've hoped. She came away convinced that, when Hanna returned to Olympia, the two of them had to collaborate. "Reading that letter, Tobi said, 'I knew we were going to start a band when she came home from tour.'"[240] It was a textual exchange, then, that brought two of Riot Grrrl's founders together: while a friendship hadn't blossomed any of the time they'd met in person, getting their hands on each other's written work made them realize that they were "meant for each other." That Hanna hoped to persuade Vail to be her friend by mailing her a letter, and providing her examples of her interviews, implies that she recognized how important it was that her affection for Vail had come out of reading a text the latter had produced. Hanna knew that, in order to make their relationship reciprocal, she had to send Vail a textual offering of her own, so that, just as she had connected to Vail through *Jigsaw,* Vail could develop a bond with Hanna by going through what she'd written. This suggests that, while the content of these texts was important, there was also something critical about their status as material objects. Indeed, I see Vail and Hanna's textual exchange as an example of the phenomenon that Piepmeier describes when she argues that zines can foster not only emotional, but also embodied, ties. "Zines instigate intimate, affective connections between their creators and readers," she argues, "[b]y mobilizing particular human experiences

that are linked to the body," leveraging "their materiality into a kind of surrogate physical interaction and offer[ing] mechanisms for creating meaningful relationships."[241]

What this means is that, when Hanna rifled through *Jigsaw,* she was doing more than reading what Vail had written. She was also developing an attachment to Vail that was borne out of the zine's material properties. *Jigsaw* was something tangible, an object Vail had made by hand: it may have carried her scent, or her fingers could have smudged its ink, or she might have licked the stamp on its envelope. It was marked, in other words, by traces of Vail's physical presence—and as such, it came to stand in for her body. As Kate Siegfried writes, because "[t]he handmade zine object literally carries the marks of the creator's embodiment, whether it be through the smells picked up by the paper, the particular creases of the tape, the handwritten notes, or the aesthetic of the drawings….[t]ouching the zine comes to stand in for touching the girl."[242] In other words, it was not just an emotional bond that Hanna had developed with Vail; it was also an embodied connection, one that Hanna hoped to reproduce by sending Vail a letter and copies of her interviews. Not only did Hanna's endeavor succeed—and indeed, kick off Riot Grrrl—but it also foreshadowed how zines would create and sustain affective ties between Riot Grrrl writers and readers. To read a zine in which another girl discussed her secrets was intimate enough, but to know that zine's creator had run her hands across its pages, and to have its physical properties evoke her body, only heightened this feeling of closeness. As such, the bonds formed through zines were especially powerful: grounded in shared trauma and consciousness-raising work, and also in strong feelings of attachment between the young women who exchanged them. A zine was a gift, a pinky-swear, a promise, something that seemed to have been created for the reader alone. It was, as Mimi Nguyen writes, "the feeling that someone

somewhere used scissors and glue and their mother's old typewriter to make this thing, a labor of love."[243]

None of this was accidental on the part of these zines' creators, who worked hard to make their readers feel like these zines were put together with only them in mind. Many zines were shipped in "hand-addressed envelopes," often covered in stickers and doodles and "accompanied with handwritten notes from the zine creator so that they, too, became acts of creativity, generosity, and expression." One of the envelopes in which Nomy Lamm sent out the first issue of *I'm So Fucking Beautiful,* for example, had "for my dear sweet friend" written above the lines for the reader's address. It was accompanied by a stick-figure sketch of a girl with a windbreaker and bows in her hair, next to which Lamm had drawn a handwritten arrow and labeled "me!" This pastiche aesthetic—which was essentially Riot Grrrls' house style—also extended to the inside of their zines. One can see it, for example, in the third issue of Molly Neuman and Allison Wolfe's *Girl Germs,* which combines band photos, magazine cutouts, hand-drawn notes, and typewritten text (fig. XII). In the section describing how Wolfe and Neuman met, the story itself is typed-out and bracketed off with thick black lines; above it, there is a photobooth snapshot of Neuman making a playful kissy-face (fig. XIII). The reader knows this is Neuman because, next to the picture, someone has drawn an arrow and written "Molly"; on the next page, there is a picture of Wolfe from the same photobooth, which someone has labeled "Allison" (fig. XIV). Below Wolfe's photo, there are instructions "for girls who want to start a fanzine," which reads, "a) have something to write about (i'm not even sure if this is essential) b) lay it out in a format you like c) print it up d) get people to read it." If any member of their audience has "specific questions," Wolfe and Neuman encourage them to "write to us and we'll tell you how we did it."

All of this makes Neuman and Wolfe, and zine-making itself, feel friendly and accessible. To be given a firsthand account of how they met, and to have that story accompanied by photobooth snapshots—the kinds of pictures friends exchange and keep in their lockers—is to get the sense that the two girls are inviting the reader into their relationship. In some ways, this is exactly what Wolfe and Neuman are doing, as they're asking their audience to join the sisterhood of zine-makers. If their readers do decide to become zinesters, then they know that Neuman and Wolfe will be there to support them in this endeavor. These readers can write to them at any time, the two girls explain, and though they're free to ignore their advice—"you can either take our suggestions of throw them out the window"—they emphasize that zine-making is, at its core, an enjoyable and low-stress endeavor. "[I]t's mostly a case of trial and error," Wolfe and Neuman write, "'cuz mucho trial + mucho error can = mucho fun."

That zine-making is fun, creative, and collaborative—and also a way to connect with other like-minded girls—is also the sense one gets from reading Tammy Rae Carland's *I ❤ Amy Carter* (fig. XV). Carland explains that she has "start[ed] this zine again" because she "recently moved to southern CAL and [is] feeling isolated, bored, lonely, and wanting to meet rad dorky egg-head kinda girls." She tells her reader that she would "love it if you would send me any AMY STUFF, and I mean anything; sightings, stories, memories, drawings, comix, photos, paraphernalia, ANYTHING," and also asks them to "send me info on your favorite AMY TYPE PERSON — whoever this may be." In other words, not only has she returned to *I ❤ Amy Carter* because she sees the zine as a way for her to make friends, but she is inviting her readers—the "rad dorky egg-head kinda girls" with whom she hopes to bond—to participate in her zine-making process, and to make *I ❤ Amy Carter* a collaborative project.

In turn, while the zine is ostensibly about Carland's interest in the former first daughter, telling her readers "send [her] info on [their] favorite AMY TYPE PERSON," is also a request for them to fill its pages with stories of the girls they love and admire—and to whom they might be romantically attracted. Indeed, as Siegfried writes, *I ❤ Amy Carter*'s "playful aesthetics of girlhood and articulations of desire…exemplif[y] the oscillation and overlap among friendship, desire, and intimacy that created the conditions for political relationships and solidarity in the Riot Grrrl movement." Siegfried notes that Carland admits to having "had an instant crush on [Carter] only the crush had more to do with wanting to be her," and sees this as a model for how, within Riot Grrrl, admiration and eroticism frequently overlapped. Feeling connected to another girl through her zine, and wanting to join her in the zine-making process, was often driven by a sense of admiration, which could also blur into, or overlap with, romantic attraction. Carland often plays with this ambiguity, too; for example, the same page of *I ❤ Amy Carter* from which these excerpts are taken is formatted like a love letter. She writes the date in loopy cursive, decorates the top margin with black stars, and begins with the address, "Dear sweet readers, friends, + future dates." The entire zine is also printed on pink paper: another touch that shows Carland toying with love letters tropes.

While Bikini Kill's self-titled zine may seem less queer than publications like *I ❤ Amy Carter*, as it frequently mentions boyfriends, and contains the line, "my girlfriends aren't owned by me BUT have cringing and choking on boy cum in common," it too hints at the erotic potential, and revolutionary possibilities, of girl love.[244] "We vow to struggle," its authors write, "against the 'J' word (jealousy) the killer of GIRL LOVE…ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE FACE OF INSECURITY is a slogan of revolution" (fig. XVI).[245] In turn, the paragraph in which

the authors mention “choking on boy cum” is actually an ode to their relationships with their female friends. “My girlfriends help me stop crying and start looking towards whats important (revolution),” they write. “[M]y girlfriends know the revolution (sex)…MY GIRLFRIENDS WANT REVOLUTION GIRL STYLE NOW.”[246] A few pages later, some of the phrases from the passage cited earlier are repeated in a modified form, so that they now read, “STOP the J word jealousy from killing girl LOVE” and “encourage IN THE face OF INSECURITY” (fig. XVII).[247] They appear beside a black-and-white, comic-book style drawing of a woman in a superhero outfit, who is laying flowers on the head of another woman in a similar costume. It is unclear whether this second woman has blond-and-black hair, or is wearing a veil, and this ambiguity makes the image ripe for queer readings. That it can so easily be seen as either one woman placing a garland on another as a gesture of friendship, or as a bride putting the finishing touches on her soon-to-be-wife’s wedding attire, highlights how readily Riot Grrrls’ relationships could slip back and forth between—and indeed, encompass both—friendship and romance, and thus explodes these terms as useful categories. Girl love wasn’t ‘just’ being friends, but it wasn’t quite dating, either; it was something new, built on supporting and learning from and longing for other young women. Indeed, Siegfried writes, “[b]y expressing and enacting an overlap and oscillation between friendship and eroticism, the grrrls created space to imagine new ways of being together that existed apart from heterosexual relationalities that discourage feminist solidarity and questions of queer eroticism.” To practice girl love was to push back against the way the patriarchy tried to condition you to treat other women, and to stand in solidarity with them, to treat them with respect and care. It was also to reject patriarchal definitions of what

sexual orientation and romance should look like, and to "imagine and enact new ways of being together."

Of course, as Mimi Nguyen points out, these ideals could also prove problematic. "[W]hereas the insistence on intimacy may indeed be a revolutionary change within the circumstances from which riot grrrl emanates," she writes, "(including girl jealousy or subcultural cool)….when viewed in light of histories of desire for access and attachment to racial, colonial others, may turn out to be the reiteration of those histories in new idioms."[248] To put it simply, Riot Grrrl's emphasis on closeness and understanding tended to ask more of some young woman than others. In practice, it meant that Riot Grrrls of color were often asked to be patient with, and forgiving of, white Riot Grrrls who made racist remarks, as to critique them may have been seen as violating the dictum of always supporting, and never tearing down, other girls.[249] The constant insistence on intimacy also meant that Riot Grrrls of color could feel forced to share some of their most personal experiences with girls who may have been able to relate to their experiences of gender-based oppression, but who had little to no context for understanding the racist violence they endured.[250]

This was hardly the sort of supportive relationship Riot Grrrls idealized—and, as such, it ended up driving many girls of color away from Riot Grrrl, and dissuading even more from ever signing on. However, there were also other young women of color who decided that their best course of action was to critique Riot Grrrl from inside the movement. Many of these girls, including Nguyen and Ramdasha Bikceem, author of *Gunk,* used their zines to critique the racism they saw operating under the girl love banner (fig XVIII).[251] For example, in *Gunk's* fourth issue, Bikceem recounts her experiences at the Riot Grrrl Convention in the summer of

1992, and recalls how disappointed she was to realize "how…dare I say 'white bread' everyone was. I mean mostly all Riot Grrrls are white and only a few asians were there. I think I was one of the only 3 black kids there I mean Riot Grrrl calls for a change, but I question who it's including" (fig. XIX). She worries, in fact, that Riot Grrrl is "growing very closed to a very chosen few i.e. white middle class punk girls," and that it will turn off girls who "don't look punk or…[have] never heard of Bikini Kill." Though she rushes to let her reader know that there is much about Riot Grrrl that she likes—"I'm not all negative about Riot Grrrl," she writes, "cuz there were so many aspects of this whole convention that were so fuckin rad!"—the text and images in the rest of the zine force that reader to confront the violence of whiteness.,[252] For example, later in the issue, Bikceem tells the story of how, when she was hired to clean an older white woman's house, the woman followed her around while she worked and eventually asked her, "'why don't you dress like an American girl'" (fig. XX). When she heard the question, Bikceem remembers,

> a wave of "I knew this was coming" came over me & I replied, "I am an American girl." As soon as I said that she immediately started going into hysterics about how I wasn't an American girl & how I just better get out of her house that instant or else she'd call her son.

Instead of being cowed, however, Bikceem pushed back against the woman:

> Now I am not the kinda person who is easily intimidated by a little old woman about to keal over any minute. So I sat down & made myself comfortable in her easy chair & said firmly "Listen I came here to clean your shitty toilets & get paid not to get a lesson in how to be American just give me my paycheck & I'll leave"…The old hag sat there flabberghasted with her hand over her heart gasping for air like i was causing her a heart attack or something. I suppose she realized I wasn't going anywhere until she wrote me my check.[253]

In the middle of this story (literally, pasted in the center of the page) is a photo that looks like it was cut out of an old magazine ad, featuring a young white girl smiling, wearing 1950s-style clothing, and holding up a full glass of milk. Most striking is what Bikceem has added to this image: she has written, in the center of the glass, "100% white." With the same marker—at

the top of the page, above the image and the story—she has also printed the words "Amerikkan GURL." The juxtaposition of "Amerikkan GURL" and the modified ad with the story calls the reader's attention to the fact that the idealized "American girl" is a stereotype that can be used as a way to police those who, because they are not white, are seen as not belonging. In some ways, this echoes Riot Grrrl attempt to point out that standards for how girls should look and behave not only came from, but reinforced, the patriarchy. However, I see Bikceem's collage as also calling out Riot Grrrl itself. By changing "American girl" to "Amerikkan GURL"—a switch that not only evokes Black nationalist spellings of America (and the KKK), but that also calls to mind the way Riot Grrrls modified the word "girl"—and by putting this in the same issue as her musings on Riot Grrrl being too white, Bikceem invites her reader to question what racist hierarchies Riot Grrrl might be holding up. In the eyes of white women like the one in the story, Bikceem doesn't dress or look like an American girl, but she also doesn't look like the typical American "GURL"—that is, the standard for a Riot Grrrl—either.

And yet, just as she insists to the woman in the story that "I am an American girl," Bikceem also continues to situate herself within the Riot Grrrl movement and to claim her identity as a Riot Grrrl. She does not cede the category of "American girl" to the racist white woman, but instead insists on expanding it so that she can make a place for herself inside it. Similarly, she still identifies with Riot Grrrl, and is pushing back against it so as to make it more inclusive and to carve out a place for other girls like her. In so doing, she disrupts her readers' assumptions about what Riot Girls should look like and what it means to be a Riot Grrrl, about who the movement should consist of and whose issues it should speak to. Just as she will not back down from the racist white woman, and will not leave until the woman's house until she

gets what she is owed, so does Bikceem insist that she is a Riot Grrrl and an American girl, and she is not going away.

What Bikceem offers here, then, is not a repudiation of Riot Grrrl and girl love, but rather a corrective to the movement's tendency to work primarily for white women and to exclude women of color, even as it claimed to advocate on behalf of all girls. In so doing, she models a more productive relationship between zinester and reader—and a different, and more honest, type of girl love. In turn, while she could have put all of this in writing, she gets her point across much more effectively by juxtaposing printed text with magazine cutout with her own annotations. Sharpieing "100% white" on the milk ad, and contrasting it with the story of her former employer, forces readers to confront images that embody and critique racism and whiteness. Most of Bikceem's readers probably would not have thought twice about the smiling girl in the milk ad were they to have encountered her in a magazine or on a poster; however, seeing her at the center of the story about Bikceem's racist employer, and with "100% white" written across her glass, pushes them to consider how the smiling milk girl as a symbol works to reinforce, and to naturalize, the mechanisms of whiteness.

Bikceem was hardly the only Riot Grrrl to use this sort of pastiche to get their audience to question the social norms they took for granted. Many zinesters would cut out an image from a magazine or advertisement or comic—often one that was originally meant to evoke idealized and/or sexualized girlhood—and edit it so as to reveal how that image was used to reinforce harmful tropes, and/or would change its meaning so that it pushed a pro-Riot Grrrl message. One example of the latter comes from *Bikini Kill* #2, which includes a cartoon image of a smiling cheerleader wearing a tight turtleneck and holding pom-poms (fig. XXI). The cheerleader has

been drawn mid-jump, so that her skirt has ridden up to reveal her underwear. In its original context, this image was most likely another example of the idealized cheerleader trope, with a bit of titillation thrown in for male audience members. The zine's creators, however, have edited the image so that it sends a much different message. The cheerleader's turtleneck now reads BIKINI KILL, and she is surrounded by a message written by hand, in huge, messy letters: "Punk Rock Fem-inism rules okay."[254] The cartoon has now been converted into a symbol of support for a movement that pushes back against men's insistence that girls everywhere be available for and conform to their desires, and refuses restrictive and one-size-fits-all beauty standards for young women.

Indeed, zines offered girls one of the only mechanisms they had to fight back against harmful cultural messages, and that gave them the chance "to become producers and facilitators of the culture they wanted to consume, rather than consumers of the music, media and art offered by the mainstream cultural industries."[255] Young women could take the images by which they were surrounded and paste them into their zines, then write their own commentary over them, or modify them so they sent radically pro-women messages.[256] That many zinesters borrowed and then reworked existing images, rather than making new ones from scratch, is evidence that the Riot Grrrls didn't just want to create their own cultural icons; they were looking to show why the ones that were already out there were harmful. To come up with one's own likenesses was one thing, but to modify existing cultural archetypes so as to demonstrate the exact ways they hurt young women was a much more direct critique of patriarchal systems and their representations. As one Riot Grrrl explains, the movement is about "'taking over the means of production.

Together we create and re-create actions and images which actively challenge the status quo in our lives.'"[257]

The sense of empowerment that came from doing this sort of work was coupled with the pleasure many Riot Grrrls experienced when putting together their zines. "Many critics have asked zine makers why they do what they do," Piepmeier writes, as "zines are time consuming to produce, and they don't generate any of the commodities that our culture generally values, including money, power and prestige. One of the answers that zinesters routinely offer…is that making a zine is fun." She tells us that "[z]ine makers will explain the way their awareness of time slips away while they're creating a zine, or how putting together a zine is a 'tactile rush.'" "[T]he pleasures of tactileness" are cited by many zinesters, with one remaking, "'I found I enjoyed rubber-cementing the pieces of my zine to their backgrounds, watching the zine become a concrete product before my eyes.'"[258] What these zinesters valued, then, was both the product *and* the process, which was another reason that zine-making appealed to Riot Grrrls who had survived abuse. While these young women had learned to associate their bodies with trauma, the tactile pleasures they experienced while making zines "locat[ed]" them in their bodies, and "help[ed] them connect" to themselves as physical beings. This process also encouraged zinesters to think about their bodies as worthy of care. If a zine was a symbol of its creator's body, and zines required so much attention and effort to make, then didn't a zinester's actual body deserve the same kind of special treatment? If zinesters kept asking themselves this question, and started believing they were worthwhile, then they would be unlearning everything the patriarchy wanted girls to believe about themselves. They would realize that their bodies

weren't a source of shame, or something to be used and discarded, but "a site of care and pleasure," that should be treated with respect.[259]

These feelings of care and pleasure that zinesters experienced were also felt by their readers, who often compared receiving a zine to "getting a personal letter from a friend." One reader of *The East Village Inky* cited the "personal quality" of that zine's "illustrations" and "narrative," along with its "hand-made ethic" and the fact that "the size and shape…feel like getting a letter not a magazine," as the reason why it felt much more like they were "corresponding with someone" than reading something that had been shipped out indiscriminately.[260] Many zine creators emphasized that they felt like their readers *were* their friends, and that, in putting out their zines, they believed they'd established real and meaningful bonds. For example, in a passage that echoes Hanna's letter to Vail, zinester Kristen writes about how grateful she is "'for all my dear friends i've made because of [her zine *Bomb*] in the past year.'" While she's "'had so many people being mean to me before,'" the girls she's met through *Bomb* are different. "'[E]veryone I have encountered with this zine so far has been so nice and sweet to me,'" she tells her audience, that "'it just makes me want to cry sometimes.'"[261]

These connections—these bonds with young women who were so kind, so understanding, that it made Riot Grrrls like Kristen want to burst into tears—were the real rewards of zine-making. Indeed, there was very little money to be earned from zines; most Riot Grrrls charged almost nothing for an issue, and some even gave away their publications for free. Despite the modest costs of producing and distributing a zine, then, it wasn't uncommon for zinesters to operate at a loss. However, the vast majority of Riot Grrrl zinesters weren't looking to benefit financially; their real goals were to use their zines to share their experiences, and to connect with

other young women. In other words, then, Riot Grrrl zine-making was motivated by girl love: by the mix of friendship and eroticism that was often exciting and sometimes troubled and constantly being revised. Riot Grrrls made zines because they wanted to give other women something of themselves, and their readers received them as gestures of care. This was an act of love, as well as of trust: zines gave readers access to their creators' stories and bodies, with the assumption that the significance of doing so—and the vulnerability it required—would be understood and appreciated.

As such, I see the making and receiving of zines as functioning less like a capitalist exchange, and more like a gift economy. As Piepmeier writes, the zine "operates outside of economics of scarcity and hierarchy and creates, instead, 'economies based on pleasure, generosity, and the free dispersal of goods and services.'" Riot Grrrl zines were made by young women who were deeply connected to, rather than estranged from, the fruits of their labor, as they were involved in every aspect of the production process. While the work they put into their zines far exceeded the money they received for them, they were more than adequately compensated in terms of what they actually wanted to get out of zine-making: catharsis and emotional connection. "We give gifts," Piepmeier tells us, "because we care for someone and want to make a connection with them," and because we get joy out of "imagin[ing] the pleasure of the person receiving them," and "in imagin[ing] this received, we create a connection that the physical artifact—the zine as 'present in the mailbox'—makes material. The zine-as-gift, then, is quintessentially an act of community-building." This is a community that, as we will see in the next section, would sustain Riot Grrrl long after the movement was said to have died out.[262] It would spread outside the coastal cities and college towns that had been the original loci of Riot

Grrrl, and would reach and connect with racially and ethnically-diverse young women who would continue to push for more expansive and inclusive versions of girl love. In so doing, it would prove that girl-led spaces were a viable alternative to patriarchal and capitalist systems, and that better futures could not only be imagined, but were actually possible.

## V. Conclusion

In 1993—three years after Kathleen Hanna first sent her writing to Tobi Vail, and two years after Jen Smith coined the phrase "girl riot"—some of Riot Grrrl's biggest stars turned to print to express their frustrations with the movement. Erin Smith of Bratmobile did an interview with *The Guardian* in which she claimed, "'Riot Grrrl by name is destined to flop. The whole thing has become diluted. Like now it's popular, it's not cool any more.'" Her bandmate, Molly Neuman, "drafted (though never published) a piece for *Jigsaw* titled 'Revolution Grrrl … You Disappoint Me.'"[263] Unlike Neuman, Tobi Vail went ahead with printing her thoughts: in a "zine [released] in mid-February" of that year, she disclosed that Riot Grrrl "no longer interested her much…except as 'just one small example of how something which was once mine and genuinely meaningful to me had been taken from me and made into something quite else than was initially intended.'"[264] Vail was especially angry at what she saw as media outlets and corporations trying to co-opt Riot Grrrl: to ignore its revolutionary ideas about taking down the patriarchy, and to market it as if it were just another fashion trend. While she had once dreamed of coming up with "a look that communicated…'I'm a revolutionary feminist and I won't rest until sexism is obliterated,'" she was now seeing retailers and magazines divorce that style from its radical message, and then selling its components as if wearing skater skirts and Doc Martens was all it

meant to be a Riot Grrrl. This was "'lame corporate youth identity bullshit,'" she wrote: an emphasis on "'identity, and an illusive one at that, rather than action'" that had nothing to do with the goals she and her friends had been aiming for when they started Riot Grrrl. "'[E]verybody's talking about what kind of girl,'" she warned—who Riot Grrrls were, how they looked, what they wore—but, in so doing, they were missing the spirit of the movement: "'nobody,'" she pointed out, was "'starting a riot.'"[265]

Some of Vail's other comments, however, were a little less perceptive—and indeed, seemed more like someone who had gotten in on the ground floor of a movement looking down on those who hadn't been in-the-know enough to get involved earlier. For example, she characterized many of the young women who had heard about Riot Grrrl from the media, and had now adopted the Riot Grrrl moniker, as "'posers or maybe just well intentioned and hopelessly enthusiastic extremely isolated young girls living in small town america who read dumb articles in dumb magazines written by dumb people.'" Though she would later clarify that she hadn't intended to be "'mean, like "Oh I'm so much cooler than these people,'" and had only wanted to stress her opposition to corporate cooptation—"'to say look, we exist in the underground, we oppose capitalism'"—her remarks still seemed out of line with the girl love spirit of the movement. She wasn't the only one with this attitude, either: many of the other young women who had been with Riot Grrrl from the start also didn't feel the need to associate with its new adherents. As Marcus tells us, these original Riot Grrrls "had stripped their souls raw to one another at [those] earlier meetings. They had formed close relationships, and if they still talked about Riot Grrrl being important to them, they were usually saying that they couldn't imagine who they would've become without those friendships, how they [wouldn't have] pulled

through if it hadn't been for those other girls." They had developed such supportive bonds with their fellow early adopters, in fact, that they felt "[t]hey didn't really need to meet anybody new." As such, they saw no reason to keep attending meetings—meaning that, by 1994, those who still "maintained their affiliation" with Riot Grrrl "were less and less tied to organized chapters."

This on its own would have been troubling enough, but there was also other bad news on the horizon: Bratmobile split up that year, and another Riot Grrrl band, Heavens to Betsy, would follow soon after. At the same time, "many original adherents" were "distanc[ing] themselves from the movement," and "most chapters had stopped holding regular meetings" ("though," Marcus notes, "the New York and DC groups managed to hold on until 1996"). Bikini Kill broke up in 1997, but even before that—"[b]y the mid-'90s, in fact"—"it was common knowledge among punks and indie rockers that Riot Grrrl had been dead for two years, if not longer." These groups were less sure than Vail had been about who exactly was to blame—"The media attention had killed it, people said. Or grunge had killed it, or [noted Riot Grrrl opponent] Courtney Love had killed it, or maybe it had never existed in the first place except as a mirage dreamed up by the press"—but regardless, there was a consensus that Riot Grrrl was finished.

I want to encourage us, however, to see these events in a different light: to realize that, while we should acknowledge that this period saw the demise of many noted Riot Grrrl traditions and institutions—in-person meetings, Riot Grrrl chapters, its most famous bands—and that Riot Grrrl's increasing visibility in corporate contexts and in the media did risk watering down its radical nature, it was not the end of Riot Grrrl itself. Riot Grrrl undoubtedly changed, but these changes didn't mean that it was over. In fact, I would argue that we should see this period as a *restructuring* of Riot Grrrl, and read the events I have outlined above as indications that Riot Grrrl was undergoing a shift in the way it was organized and which networks held it together.

Starting in 1993, Riot Grrrl began to change from a movement that had been centered on both zine-making and in-person events to one that would be organized almost entirely around networks of zine production, distribution, and readership.[266] Not only did this shift not mark the end of Riot Grrrl, but it actually worked to *expand* the movement, as girls across the country who would never have heard of Riot Grrrl had it not been picked up by the media, but who learned about it through advertising and the press, were able to get and stay plugged into Riot Grrrl through ordering, and then reading and writing, zines. They might have lived thousands of miles from the nearest Riot Grrrl chapter, but zines allowed them to make connections with other Riot Grrrls across North America, and to join the print economy referred to in the previous section. As zine production grew throughout the mid- and late-1990s, this print economy continued to expand, and became Riot Grrrl's most important political contribution. It was an economy in which girls wrested control of their agency, and their stories, away from the patriarchal forces that had governed and abused them; an economy built on making and exchanging goods not for money, but for the pleasure of creation and of forming embodied ties with other young women. It was based on care and affection, on radicalization and radical self-love, rather than on profit—and, as such, it showed that an economy outside of patriarchal strictures and capitalist motives could exist.

In 1993, when Riot Grrrl's organization first began to shift, the easiest way for new Riot Grrrls to get involved in this economy was either to contact Riot Grrrl Press or to obtain a copy of a publication like *Action Girl Newsletter* or *Queer Zine Explosion* (fig. XXII).[267] *Action Girl Newsletter,* which has already been mentioned, "listed girl zines" of interest, and often included short descriptions of what those zines covered; *Queer Zine Explosion* "did the same for work by

queer zinesters of all genders." As such, in a year when one "Canadian newspaper article estimated that there were forty thousand zines actively publishing in North America"—far too many for any new adherent "to sift through," and to guess at which they would feel an affinity with—*Action Girl Newsletter* and *Queer Zine Explosion* simplified the process. All an aspiring Riot Grrrl had to do to get a foothold in the movement was to obtain a copy of one of these newsletters, and, when they read an entry on a zine that sounded interesting, they could write its creator (whose contact information would be included) and ask for a copy. Riot Grrrl Press was based on a slightly different model: it encouraged zinesters to submit copies of their work to the press itself, then printed a catalogue listing all the zines that it had on hand (fig. XXIII). Girls who read the catalogue could send Riot Grrrl Press a list of zines they wanted, and the press would deliver those zines by mail. Importantly, Riot Grrrl Press would not only send out new titles, but also classics of the genre; as such, it was someone like "an Oklahoma high school sophomore's only shot at reading *Bikini Kill* #2 or *Jigsaw* #5—highly influential zines that had long been out of print." While girls like this hadn't been connected to Riot Grrrl at the beginning, ordering and reading these zines allowed them to familiarize themselves with early Riot Grrrl writings, and to learn about—and learn to live—the principles that had first animated the movement.

There was another reason, too, why newsletters and zine distributors were so important: because, as Rebekah Buchanan points out, they were a key part of the infrastructure of the independent "production and distribution systems" Riot Grrrl zinesters were attempting to build. Zine distributors in particular were a way for creators to "grow their circulation" without having to reach out to capitalist institutions like big-name publishers or chain bookstores to get them to

print or stock their work. Distributors "resembled mass market publishing in their broad reach, but created opportunities for re-envisioning independent publishing and the independent"—and specifically, feminist "press." This was a press that was "not part of the capitalist marketplace": one that allowed young female creators "to promote themselves" and their publications "without having to participate in either large, market-driven spaces or those controlled by boys which limited the ways grrrls were represented." What Riot Grrrls were constructing, in other words, was a zine economy that divested from, and remained outside of, capitalist and patriarchal systems.

They had reason to think that they could pull off such an effort, given the earlier success of the Women in Print movement: an organized network of feminist booksellers, printers, and newsletter writers that flourished from the mid-1970s until the early '90s. Women in Print developed out of second-wave feminism, and "was an attempt…to create an alternative communications circuit—a woman-centered network of readers and writers, editors, printers, publishers, distributors, and retailers through which [feminist] ideas, objects, and practices" could circulate. Like Riot Grrrl zinesters, who worked hard to create material objects in which they could share their thoughts and their traumas, Women in Print members "aimed to capture women's experiences and insights in durable—even beautiful—printed forms," and to get them into the hands of other women "through a communications network free of patriarchal and capitalist control."[268] In their attempt to hold sway over all aspects of the production and distribution process, they set up and promoted their own institutions: women-owned publishing houses, printers, distributors, and bookstores, all of which were linked by the *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter,* or the *FBN*. The *FBN* not only listed names and addresses of women-owned

bookstores and suggestions for what to recommend to "readers looking for information on being in the world as a woman of color, coming out, surviving and enduring sexual assault, raising confident and thoughtful children, or otherwise participating in feminist movements," but was also a space where Women in Print members could plan how they would lobby feminist publishers and, eventually, try to influence mainstream presses.[269] Their efforts to do the latter came out of their conviction that setting up an independent print economy "would not only create a space of freedom for women," but could also impact the way other, non-Women in Print publishers were run, "and ultimately, change the…world at large."[270]

While I want to acknowledge the importance of Women in Print's broader aspirations, I would also argue that, by establishing their own networks of production and distribution—networks that, in both cases, would last over a decade—the Women in Print movement and Riot Grrrl accomplished something revolutionary. Both groups managed to create sustainable alternate economies based on women's creativity—and, in Riot Grrrl's case, acts of care—and did so in the face, and in the midst, of a capitalist and patriarchal society. Given Riot Grrrl zine networks' status as a gift economy (the Women in Print networks, revolutionary as they were, did charge for their products) I see their achievement as especially critical. They demonstrated that an economy based on intimacy rather than profit could survive—an economy that prioritized girls' agency and pleasure, too—and, in turn, could be inhabited while its participants still worked on improving society at large. That is, even as Riot Grrrls attempted to take down the patriarchy and capitalism, they were already living in a way that demonstrated there were viable alternatives to those systems—and, in so doing, were chipping away at those structures' hegemony. If other ways of living could be implemented and sustained, then it would become

clear that patriarchy and capitalism weren't the only systems that could work. As individuals imagined possibilities outside of such structures, capitalism and the patriarchy's hold would grow weaker. This, as Janice Radway writes, is "prefigurative politics": that is, it was Riot Grrrls' attempt "to constitute through their own cultural and aesthetic practices social relationships and cooperative forms of the kind that they believed ought to replace the commercial and commodity-based practices of the dominant social formation." In other words, by creating and sustaining their zine networks, Riot Grrrls modeled what a better world could look like and how it could be structured—and, because these networks were something that had already been proven to work on the ground, they made a convincing case that they might actually be successful if implemented on a broader scale.

Indeed, zine networks were already having a concrete, and positive, impact on many Riot Grrrls' lives. As this chapter has already discussed, the zines themselves gave young women a space where they could write about their traumas without having their emotions policed, and where they could reclaim their agency; they also fostered intense connections between zinesters and readers. Just as important, however, was the fact that these networks of zine production and distribution, and the sense of community to which they gave rise, helped Riot Grrrls realize they were not alone. "The zine community provides a much-needed listener," Sinor writes: "a national audience of relative strangers who are as close as a lover or friend."[271] As Marcus tells, "Riot Grrrl always existed first and foremost as an incantation": it was "an idea that linked you up not only to any girls who lived near you or became your pen pals but to the until others out there, the thousands of girls whose names you'd never heard."[272] All of this evokes Benedict Anderson's idea of the imagined community: specifically, his example of the "newspaper reader" who

believes he is a part of something larger than himself because he knows "thousands (or millions) of others" are reading the same paper, and who feels a kinship with his fellow readers even though he'll likely never meet any of them.[273] For young women who lived in small towns, or were in abusive households—who had no one nearby to confide in, or who couldn't talk about their experiences because they feared repercussions—the idea that there was a community of like-minded girls out there was tremendously powerful. Even if there was no one around you who had your back, there were people out there who understood you—and this knowledge could feel like a lifeline.

It's not surprising, then, that the zines which circulated within this community put so much emphasis on connecting to, and standing in solidarity with, other girls. "I propose you talk to a friend," writes the young woman behind *Housewife Turned Assassin!*, "and she talks to another and another and then we'll start a beautiful, huge connection of support—a secret society of love and empowerment so people won't fuck with us and we won't be victims anymore. We don't need anyone's permission to take control of our lives and fight this. We will educate and support each other through ideas put into action."[274] She was not the only zinester who saw forming relationships with other girls as the key to overturning oppressive systems. "I want to build connections with other women," the author of *Rubyfruit Manifesto* tells her reader, and to "subvert the ever-present patriarchy (within and outside). smash imperialism. recognize and dismantle racism. smash capitalism + greed. in myself even/especially."[275] Interestingly, neither she nor the zinester who wrote *Housewife Turned Assassin!* self-identified as Riot Grrrls; nevertheless, their publications still circulated within Riot Grrrl zine networks, and bore the clear stamp of the movement. They were part of a wave of zines produced by girls of color, including

*¡Mamasita!*, *Calico,* and *i dreamed i was assertive,* and were a mark of how these zine networks were expanding to include wider and more diverse populations than had been present in the movement's earlier stages.[276] Just as early Riot Grrrls had discussed how misogyny intersected with, and was compounded by, structural inequities such as capitalism, racism, and fatphobia, so did these newer zines tackle both the patriarchy and other, overlapping systems of oppression. They also encouraged readers to share their personal stories, as they were an important part of figuring out how to dismantle these structures. Issue #1 of *Housewife Turned Assassin!*, for example, reprints a passage from a pamphlet on reproductive freedom, which includes the line, "In whatever sphere of activism we choose—education, agitation, inspiration, legislation—whether we are building organizations or creating alternative structures and communities of resistance, we must trust in our ability to find answers from our own lives."[277]

What all of this demonstrates is that Tobi Vail's fears were, in fact, unfounded: that, while she had believed young women would start calling themselves Riot Grrrls without committing to the movement's principles, it turned out that many zinesters were more interested in Riot Grrrl's ideas than in the "Riot Grrrl" label. The young women behind *Housewife Turned Assassin!* and *Rubyfruit Manifesto* may not have identified as Riot Grrrls, but they were dedicated to standing in solidarity with other women and taking down the patriarchy—and, in so doing, building a better world for themselves and their fellow girls. They were clearly influenced by, and practicing, girl love: not the girl love that Ramdasha Bikceem had called out, but the version of it that she proposed and modeled in her writings, with its more inclusive vision. It was a girl love that would prove strong enough to keep these zine production networks going strong well into the late '90s and early '00s. Indeed, many of the zines mentioned above were being produced

years after the movement had been written off as dead. *Housewife Turned Assassin!* was published into 1996, and *Rubyfruit Manifesto* into 1998.[278] *i dreamed i was assertive* ran until 2014, and *The East Village Inky*—which was cited in section IV., and debuted in 1998—is, incredibly, still in print.[279]

Nevertheless, the rise of the Internet—which gave young women access to a community of like-minded others in much of the same way as Riot Grrrl zines—put a serious dent in zines' popularity. That you could log onto a site like LiveJournal or Blogspot (and later, MySpace or Tumblr or Twitter) and not only find a space where you could write about your life, but reach so many more girls than you ever could have connected with through zine networks, threatened to make zines obsolete. However, while this very well could have been where the story of Riot Grrrl zines ended, this was not the case. Once again, I want to call attention to a shift in the role Riot Grrrl zines played in the movement, and in how they functioned as a source of support and a site of possibility for young women. This shift started in the late '90s, "when a number of former girl punks riot grrrls, and zine producers began to donate their [zine] collections to libraries and archives."[280] As Kate Eichhorn writes, "despite the seemingly ephemeral nature of Riot Grrrl—a movement defined by an explosive repertoire of gestures, styles, performances, rallying cries, and anonymous confessions reproduced on copy machines—it was also a movement that had been collecting, preparing, and preparing itself for the archive all along."[281] It was clear that the Riot Grrrls had not only been reading and writing zines, but *saving* them. They had collected boxes and boxes of some of the movement's most famous publications, along with titles that were only published once or that had gone relatively unnoticed when they were printed. Many of Riot Grrrl's founders and central figures—including Kathleen Hanna, Jen Wolfe, Mimi Nguyen,

Tammy Rae Carland, and Sarah Dyer—made donations that formed the basis of the zine collections at Barnard, Duke, and NYU.[282] These collections tend to be very large—the Sarah Dyer Zine Collection at Duke has "[a]pproximately 2000 individual zines and nearly 800 titles"—and to generate more attention than many other archives.[283] The Riot Grrrl Zine Collection at NYU, for example, has been name-checked in *The New York Times, The Awl, Pitchfork,* and *The Verge.*[284]

Many scholars who focus on Riot Grrrl have written extensively about these collections. They tend to see Riot Grrrls' decision to donate their zines to university archives as an indication of their desire to legitimize the movement, as well as to secure its place in feminist genealogies. As Eichhorn writes, the archive is "the primary apparatus through which we have continued to authorize new forms of feminist knowledge and cultural production."[285] That Riot Grrrl zines are often "locat[e]d…within" these institutions' "larger collection[s] of first and second wave feminist publications and manuscripts" is thus a way to "historically contextualize the writings of [this] new generation of feminists." "In this context," Eichhorn tells us, "the zines are reconfigured as valuable manuscripts offering insights into women's lives as well as documentation integral to understanding the feminist movement across the decades."[286]

However, I think there was also another reason that so many Riot Grrrls saved and donated their zines. In preserving them, they seem to have recognized that there was something essential about what these zines contained: about the disclosures, the anger and joy, the personal touches, and the pledges of girl love and solidarity. It was important to make sure that these things endured—but it was even more crucial that other people could have access to them. To me, it seems that Riot Grrrls chose to move these zines out of boxes in their basements and to

give them to libraries and collections so that those who had never been part of the movement—and especially young women who might not even have been born when Riot Grrrl was founded—would have a chance to join the Riot Grrrl zine community. In this way, zine collections took the place of, and began to function like, the networks of Riot Grrrl zine distribution that had held the movement together for so long. Young women no longer had to reach out to a press or distributor to get their hands on the zines they wanted: now, they could either visit these archives in person, have them sent to their local libraries, or request scans from one of these archives' librarians. Jenna Freedman of the Barnard Zine Library has led the effort to make sure that girls can access these zines: not only has she catalogued the zines in her collection, making them available through Interlibrary Loan, but she is also very willing to email scans of these zines to those who write to her (myself included).[287]

The question remains, of course, of *why* these Riot Grrrls, and librarians like Freedman, feel it is so important for younger women to be able to get their hands on these materials. Is it just a matter of historical interest—so they can better understand the movement, and how it was situated within the broader context of 20th century feminism—or because they think it's necessary for today's girls to read firsthand accounts of what earlier generations went through? Or is there something else driving their impulse to make these zines—not just a few, but thousands of them—accessible? I would argue that there is another reason behind their actions: because they realize that, just like in the '90s, young women need the alternate world that Riot Grrrl zines, and zine networks, built. This is not to say that things haven't improved for American teenage girls since the early '90s; indeed, The Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN) reports that "[s]exual violence has fallen by half in the last 20 years."[288]

There has also been substantial pushback against sexism in popular culture—especially in movies, television, and advertising—and a concerted effort to make traditionally male-dominated fields like STEM more inclusive and open to girls.[289] The way American women think about the feminist movement has also done a complete 180°. While the 1989 *Time* article cited in this chapter's introduction reported that "76 percent of American women paid 'not very much' or 'no' attention to the women's movement, and…only 33 percent of women considered themselves feminists," those numbers have shifted to a remarkable extent, to the point that a 2020 Pew poll found that "61% of U.S. women say 'feminist' describes them well."[290] Still, women continue to face significant challenges, with young women particularly affected. The RAINN numbers, while encouraging, are probably not an accurate reflection of how many women have actually experienced sexual violence, as crimes of this nature are notoriously underreported.[291] Indeed, the #MeToo movement has shown that violence against women is still extraordinarily common in American life: just like the Riot Grrrls observed two decades ago, women are regularly raped, abused, and then pressured into silence.[292] In turn, despite all the efforts to boost girls' confidence—to put more body-positive and empowering images on their TVs, to break down barriers for them in education—they still experience a self-esteem drop very similar to the one observed in 1992.[293] One 2018 study found that, "[b]etween ages 8 and 14, girls' confidence levels *drop by 30%.*" "More than half of teen girls feel *pressure to be perfect,*" and "[n]early *8 in 10* girls want to feel more confident in themselves."[294]

What all of this means, in short, is that young women still need spaces like the ones Riot Grrrls created: where they won't be assaulted or harassed or expected to look and behave in certain ways. If they read Riot Grrrl zines, they can inhabit these sites, and exist—finally, for

once—outside of the patriarchy's grasp. They will encounter young women who found the strength to speak out about their abusers, and learn that the fight to destigmatize being a survivor has been a long one. They will also find that there are ways to recover from this abuse: that inhabiting a supportive community like this one will teach them not to feel ashamed, and that zine-making and other means of creating art can help them reconnect with their bodies. They can read about young women standing in solidarity with one another, and experience the bonds of girl love in much of the same way as Riot Grrrl zinesters and readers did. Indeed, in being able to access these archives—which bring together, and make available, thousands of zines—today's girls essentially enter into Riot Grrrl zine networks. They can plug into an enormous and ready-made community filled with girls who, though they were writing years earlier, talk about the same things today's reader is going through, offer them support and encouragement, and give them the confidence to work through how they feel.

This, more than anything, is why I continue to see Riot Grrrl zines as the movement's most significant achievement. In creating these zines and zine networks, Riot Grrrls built something that was not only a lifeline for so many young women, but that was adaptable, and that *endured.* It could become the center of the movement when other parts of Riot Grrrl faltered, operate outside of patriarchal and capitalist control, and, just when the rise of the Internet looked like it might bring it to an end, could continue to operate—and indeed, take on a new life—in the archive. The Riot Grrrls managed to build something permanent: an alternate world, and a lasting community, that a girl can enter any time she reads a scan or goes into the archive. This is why I would like to see these zines not only made available through Interlibrary Loan, but uploaded, free of charge (and institutional barriers) to the Internet:  so that hundreds of thousands, and

perhaps millions, more young women can inhabit this space. If this happens, countless girls will be able to experience what zinester GirlSam meant when she wrote about Riot Grrrl was so important to her. “[I]n a world that wants me to be dead inside, in a world that tries to shut me up, a place that makes me feel nothing,” she told her reader, Riot Grrrl “makes me feel real.”[295]

# VIOLENT IRONIES: HOW THE ALT-RIGHT USED VIRAL IRONY TO TRY TO TAKE OVER THE MAINSTREAM

## I. Introduction

This chapter will examine how the alt-right—an Internet-savvy white supremacist movement active between 2010 and 2018—used a mode of online discourse that I will call "viral irony" to move from white supremacist-only websites and onto mainstream social media platforms in an attempt to gain political and cultural influence and to normalize their beliefs. While the term "alt-right" can have different meanings depending on who is discussing the movement, I am using it here to refer to the loose coalition of former Stormfront posters, Internet trolls, militia members, self-proclaimed white nationalist intellectuals, and angry young white men that first came together on the imageboard site 4chan.[296] Viral irony did not originate on 4chan, but it was the site's dominant language, and it was where the majority of these posters became fluent in this type of speech. In turn, while most of the people familiar with viral irony simply call it "irony," it has several features that set it apart from the dramatic, situational, and comic types. Viral irony is a form of humor that relies on absurdist jokes and over-the-top scenarios; it also has its own syntax, which uses misspellings and grammatical errors to sound stunted and deliberately 'off.' Those who use viral irony thrive on taking certain situations and responding to them in ways one would never expect (for example, turning the cultural veneration of 9/11 on its head by making a joke about "Cop Guts from 9/11" smoothies being sold at Ground Zero).[297]

It is in this insistence on subverting expectations that it most resembles more traditional forms of irony. "[B]asic to all irony," D.C. Muecke writes, "is a contrast of 'appearance' and 'reality.'"[298] Still, he notes that "the concept of irony is vague, unstable, and multiform":

> The word 'irony' does not now mean only what it meant in earlier centuries, nor does it mean in one country all it may mean in another, nor in the street what it may mean in the study, nor to one scholar what it may mean to another. The different phenomena the word is applied to may seem very tenuously related. The semantic evolution of the word has been haphazard; historically, our concept of irony is the cumulative result of our having, from time to time over the centuries, applied the term sometimes intuitively, sometimes heedlessly, sometimes deliberately, to such phenomena as seemed, perhaps mistakenly, to bear a sufficient resemblance to certain other phenomena to which we had already been applying the term.[299]

Despite this rather complicated history, Muecke is able to map out a basic trajectory of the concept. He begins by arguing that "[t]he phenomenon was responded to before it was named and consequently before there was a concept of it," though the Greeks were some of the first to put a name to it, as well as to depict what we would now identify as verbal and situational irony.[300] The term "[e]ironeia is first recorded in Plato's *Republic*," and Cicero and Quintilian would see it "as a mode of behaviour": "as a way of treating one's opponent in an argument and as the verbal strategy of a whole argument."[301] "The word 'irony' does not appear in English until 1502 and did not come into general literary use until the early eighteenth century," which Muecke attributes partly to the fact that English "was rich in colloquial terms for verbal usages which we might regard as embryonic irony: fleer, flout, gibe, jeer, mock, scoff, scorn, taunt."[302] However, "[i]n England, as in the rest of modern Europe, the concept of irony developed very slowly"; when it was mentioned, "[t]he more interesting meanings of Cicero and Quintilian… were ignored," and "for two hundred years and more irony was regarded principally as a figure of speech. The word was defined as 'saying the contrary of what one means,' as 'saying one thing but meaning another,' as 'praising in order to blame and blaming in order to praise,' and as

'mocking and scoffing."[303] But "at the very end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century…the word 'irony' took on a number of new meanings."[304] "Where before irony had been thought of as essentially intentional and instrumental," Muecke writes, "it now became possible to think of irony as something that could instead be unintentional, something observable and hence representable in art, something that happened or that one became or could be made aware of." This made it possible "to think of irony in terms not of someone being ironical, but of someone being the victim of irony, attention thus shifting from the active to the passive."[305]

In turn, while "in the post-Romantic nineteenth century the dominant concept was that of nihilistic irony, the dominant twentieth-century concept seems to be that of an irony that is relativistic and even non-committal." This, I think, is especially important: it is an interpretation of irony that sees it as "'a view of life which recognized that experience is open to multiple interpretations, of which no *one* is simply right, and that the co-existence of incongruities is part of the structure of existence.'" As Muecke notes, "[i]rony in this latest sense is a way of writing designed to leave open the question of what the literal meaning might signify: there is a perpetual deferment of significance. The old definition of irony - saying one thing and giving to understand the contrary - is superseded; irony is saying something in a way that activates not one but an endless series of subversive interpretations."[306] As we will see all throughout this chapter, this is one of the reasons that viral irony was so valuable to the alt-right. Indeed, unpacking how viral irony works is more than a matter of intellectual interest: it is also key to understanding how the alt-right was more successful at getting its ideas into mainstream discourse than any other white supremacist movement over the last fifty years. Viral irony took the 20th-century understanding

of irony as a way to evade definite meanings and defer significance (and responsibility) and combined it with a specific grammar, syntax, and set of highly-stylized online conventions. The result was a discourse that allowed the alt-right to present their white supremacist talking points, and then to argue, if they were called out, that they didn't really mean what they said. Ambiguity was an important part of this: as Andrew Anglin, founder of the alt-right website *The Daily Stormer* wrote in its style guide, "People should not be able to tell if we are joking or not."[307]

The alt-right was able to produce this sort of ambiguity because of viral irony's insistence on surreal, absurdist humor. Using viral irony meant making up situations that were so ridiculous, and saying things that were so over-the-top, that they seemed like they had to be a joke. Would a real white supremacist think the best way to promote racial purity was to post about how much milk they drank using the hashtag #milktwitter?[308] Would a Holocaust denier really flood the comments section of an article on the Shoah with stories of their six grandmothers playing electric piano solos for Nazi guards?[309] Both of these examples are so ridiculous that most people who encountered them assumed they had been written by someone making fun of racists and anti-Semites, rather than by actual bigots. However, as this chapter will show, these are actual examples of content posted by the alt-right. They demonstrate how the alt-right used viral irony to get the public to dismiss this kind of content as harmless, which was a large part of the reason why the alt-right was able to establish such a significant presence on social media. As it was difficult to tell whether posts like this were a joke, most moderators allowed them to stay up. What's crucial to understand, in turn, is that the alt-right itself saw no tension between humor and sincere belief. In their minds, they could joke as much as they wanted about white supremacy, and still be deeply committed to its ideals. In fact, they believed

that humor was what attracted people to their movement, and that this was the first step in converting them to alt-right ideas. "The goal," Anglin claimed, "is to continually repeat the same points, over and over and over again. The reader is at first drawn in by curiosity or the naughty humor, and is slowly awakened to reality by repeatedly reading the same points."[310] Indeed, Anglin recognized that "[m]ost people are not comfortable with material that comes across as vitriolic, raging, non-ironic hatred." But if the alt-right could find a way of presenting their ideas that didn't make them sound so hateful or self-serious, then the public might be more receptive to what they were saying. "Packaging our message inside of existing cultural memes and humor can be viewed as a delivery method," Anglin wrote. "Something like adding cherry flavor to children's medicine."[311]

These quotes explain why so many members of the alt-right were intent on establishing a presence on mainstream social media sites. These alt-right adherents believed that, if they flooded major platforms with their talking points—couched, of course, in viral irony—then what Anglin had predicted would come true. The social media users who saw these posts would not immediately be turned off by them, as they most likely would have if they'd encountered unadulterated white supremacist rhetoric. Instead, they might not recognize them as a racist or anti-Semitic; even if they saw the white supremacist ideas below the surface, they might find the use of viral irony so funny that they could overlook the actual content. Then, as these users encountered these sorts of posts over and over, they might start finding themselves agreeing with —or at least more sympathetic to—the white supremacist ideals that were presented in such an amusing way. Of course, the alt-right knew that not everyone who read these posts would be radicalized; still, they hoped that the majority of social media users would get so used to seeing

them that, even if they weren't converted, they would come to accept white supremacist content as a normal part of mainstream discourse. This was the reason, in fact, that the alt-right allied itself with Donald Trump's presidential campaign: because they believed that he was also bringing previously-unacceptable, and borderline white supremacist, ideas into the mainstream. As the media attention on Trump's campaign thrust the alt-right into the public spotlight, several of its members became celebrities, while the movement found itself at the center of a national firestorm. Most of the alt-right was thrilled that their ideas, which had for so long been relegated the fringes, were now being discussed openly on talk shows and at presidential debates. In turn, when Donald Trump won the 2016 election, his former campaign manager, Steve Bannon, became his chief strategist; this meant that the alt-right officially entered the White House. It seemed like the movement would only continue gaining power, and that it would most likely become a major force in American political life for years to come.

Everything changed, of course, after the Unite the Right rally on August 11 and 12, 2017. It now seems ironic that the event, which was meant as a celebration of the alt-right's ascendance into the mainstream and proof that it was a force to be reckoned with, was the moment when the public turned decisively against the movement. The images from the rally—of militiamen beating Black protesters, of tiki torch-wielding marchers shouting "Jews will not replace us," and especially of James Alex Fields Jr. driving his car into a crowd and killing Heather Heyer—put an end to the question of whether the alt-right really was made up of white supremacists. If its members were willing to go to such violent extremes to defend their ideals, then it was clear that, whether they used viral irony or not, they were committed to white supremacy. With no one willing to give them the benefit of the doubt, the alt-right's online strategy was useless; within a

matter of days, they had lost all remaining goodwill. Politicians rushed to condemn them, Steve Bannon was ousted from the White House, and corporations kicked them off their servers and closed their accounts. At the same time, anti-fascists and liberal activists engaged in a massive push to expose their identities and get them fired for belonging to the movement. The only allies they had left were social media platforms, which refused to remove all but the most obvious alt-right content. This matters because, while the alt-right itself would be too weak to mount a comeback, these platforms' inaction would leave the door open for the rise of other right-wing extremist movements.

This chapter will cover all of this: the alt-right's rise and collapse, its social media strategies and why they eventually failed, and how other extremist groups borrowed from the alt-right's tactics to mainstream their ideas. It will start, however, at the very beginning: with the origins of viral irony, and how it spread from the forums on a website called Something Awful to become the dominant language on 4chan. The same section will also track the emergence of the alt-right: that is, it will unpack how white supremacist trolls and former Stormfront posters became steeped in viral irony on 4chan, and used it to make their ideology appealing to that site's population of disaffected young men. In the following section, I will show how the rapidly-growing alt-right used viral irony to establish a presence on social media platforms like Twitter. There were two factors that aided in their success: first, that a group of former Something Awful members known as "Weird Twitter" had already made viral irony popular on the site, and second, that moderators had trouble policing white supremacist content when it was couched in viral irony. The alt-right's social media presence gave them a level of visibility that earlier generations of white supremacists had not been able to achieve, which went a long way towards

normalizing their ideas and making the public more receptive to their movement. In section IV., I will explore how the alt-right's alliance with the Trump campaign accelerated this trend, putting the alt-right at the center of the national conversation and offering them a chance to achieve real power. While the Unite the Right rally put an end to their ambitions, the alt-right's downfall did not prevent it from influencing other right-wing extremist groups. In fact, as I will argue in this chapter's final section, the alt-right provided a blueprint for how social media could be used to spread extremist ideas. This is a blueprint that QAnon and other right-wing groups have since borrowed, and that has enabled them to become so influential. The success of these movements, as well as how quickly a new group emerges whenever the public finally decides to take action against the last one, should alarm us. Nevertheless, the fact that almost all of them use the alt-right's playbook gives us a crucial advantage. If we can understand how the alt-right operated, and what vulnerabilities they were able to exploit to gain power—and, most importantly, what strategies worked to defeat them—then we will know how to stop these newer movements in their tracks, and, ideally, will be able to prevent another Unite the Right (or January 6th) before it happens.

## II. The Rise of Viral Irony: Something Awful, 4Chan, and the Alt-Right's Early Years

Something Awful was the brainchild of Richard 'Lowtax' Kyanka, a former systems administrator and PC games promoter.[312] He founded the site in 1999, as a space for people to talk about, and mock, "the entirety of Internet culture, or, as Lowtax put it, 'crappy internet things.'"[313] Something Awful was not the first site dedicated to the worst and weirdest on the Internet; in the '90s, "some of the most popular sites on the web were dark shock sites" like

rotten.com, "which showed images that would never have appeared in print." What set Something Awful apart, however, "was the odd growth of its forums," which proved immediately, and tremendously, popular.[314] "Rather than strip out all the bizarre aggression that inevitably accompanied forums," like "flame wars, obsessive users, and rude comments," Something Awful "let it grow, cultivated it even."[315] This approach attracted "hundreds of thousands" of users, until the site was filled with "bile, cynicism, cruelty, mockery, and vulgarity."[316] It also became a space for elaborate storytelling, with tales like "The Great Scam"—about one Something Awful user who becomes "disaffected with human behavior as he is robbed, scammed, and bullied out of doing honest work in the virtual [game] *EVE Online*"—populating the forums.[317] "Vowing to get revenge at all costs," the protagonist of "The Great Scam" "devises a scheme for scamming the [game's] richest guilds out of all their currency":

> a plan that rotates in and out of reality and the space world. To convince other players to invest in a spaceship he never intends on building, the [protagonist] "sockpuppets" various users on *EVE Online* message boards, conducting elaborate arguments with himself so that the threads are always bumped to the top of the page. When the marks finally bite, he is forced to sprint between his home phone line and a landline at his local library, pretending to be different investors in the game. The scheme works. He becomes one of the richest people in the game, and in doing so, betrays even those who were nothing but kind to him, going out of his way to wound the nicest people. The story ends when the [protagonist] dumps all of his currency (480,000,000 isk; approximately $40) on the first virtual stranger he meets in space, logs off, and never plays the game again.[318]

Something Awful historian Dale Beran argues that, whether stories like "The Great Scam" were "[f]ictional or real," they nevertheless "set the tone for" the site: that "life is a joke. Life could be played the normal way, or as a situational absurdist comedy that tears at the curtain of fantasy. The question was, how ridiculous could you act to make that apparent to everyone else?"[319] The posters on one particular Something Awful board—Fuck You And Die, or FYAD—set out to answer this question. FYAD, which one user described as "just layer upon layer of irony," "was so weird and caustic that most people were intimidated by it or baffled by it or

confused by it."[320] Posters there had developed a distinct way of communicating: a "style of humor" that involved "a lot of contrarianism," "a lot of trying to antagonize each other," and that was "a little bit of being crude, being shocking, things like that." This was the beginning of viral irony: it was "[a] combination of trying to be weird, unpredictable. Never too smart, but never too stupid.[321] Many users engaged in "fakeposting," or "pretending to be kind of an illiterate, really serious teenager, and just occupying that persona in your posts."[322] The idea of posting as if you were someone ignorant, so as to demonstrate the absurdity of their positions, would become one of viral irony's most important features. Some of the best examples of the form came from FYAD user Gigantic Drill, whose Twitter account @dril has garnered 1.6 million followers thanks to tweets like these:

> ah, So u persecute Jared Fogle just because he has different beliefs? Do Tell. (girls get mad at me) Sorry. Im sorry. Im trying to remove it[323]
>
> "This Whole Thing Smacks of Gender," i holler as i overturn my uncle's barbeque grill and turn the 4th of July into the 4th of Shit[324]
>
> THE COP GROWLS "TAKE OFF TH OSE JEANS, CITIZEN." I COMPLY, REVEALING THE FULL LENGTH DENIM TATTOOS ON BOTH LEGS. THE COP SCREAMS; DEFEATED[325]
>
> another day volunteering at the betsy ross museum. everyone keeps asking me if they can fuck the flag. buddy, they won't even let me fuck it[326]
>
> the doctor reveals my blood pressure is 420 over 69. i hoot & holler outta the building while a bunch of losers try to tell me that im dying[327]
>
> fuck "jokes". everything i tweet is real. raw insight without the horse shit. no, i will NOT follow trolls. twitter dot com. i live for this[328]

"On the most basic level," Tom Whyman writes at *The Outline,* "Dril's Twitter feed portrays a certain *character*…an entity alternately young and old; at once married and divorced….What is however consistent about Dril is a certain *affect:* pompous, gluttonous, self-righteous, perennially diapered, always ready to engage with brands, and constantly at war with the trolls."[329] In the last tweet cited above, for example, the character becomes "[t]he perfect

parody of [an] 'extremely serious online guy'—obsessed with his own brand of inconsequential social media posts, [with] a belief that he's the only one committed to what's actually important, and whining about trolls."[330] Crucially, these are not the author's actual beliefs; as Whyman points out, we are meant to understand that the person behind @dril is "ironic[ally] detach[ed] from his character's utterances."[331] This idea of ironic detachment gave those who engaged in viral irony a way to excuse anything offensive they'd posted. If they claimed they were playing a character, and they were posting this way to highlight how ridiculous that character's opinions were, then they could get away with writing whatever they wanted, as long as they argued they were being ironic. Indeed, it was "at times, impossible to tell if [Something Awful] users were really racists or sexists, or were simply inhabiting racist, sexist personae to make political points….[W]as that just another level of brain-melting irony? It was, and remains, tough to say."[332]

Of course, viral irony was neither the first nor the only discourse to rely on a form of disavowal. Insisting you didn't really mean what you'd said—that you were joking, or being provocative—is a crucial part of, and fallback strategy for, many types of comedy, as is the idea of an on-stage persona that is separate from the comedian. What distinguishes viral irony, however, is how it combines disavowal with a specific grammar and set of conventions. Most important are "brevity, surrealism, [and] lack of context," all of which Something Awful posters used to frame their "ironic humor."[333] This FYAD post about the Vin Diesel movie *The Chronicles of Riddick* is a classic example:

> EVERY MORNING I WAKE UP AND OPEN PALM SLAM A VHS INTO THE SLOT. ITS CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK AND RIGHT THEN AND THERE I START DOING THE MOVES ALONGSIDE WITH THE MAIN CHARACTER, RIDDICK. I DO EVERY MOVE AND I DO EVERY MOVE HARD. MAKIN WHOOSHING SOUNDS WHEN I SLAM DOWN SOME NECRO BASTARDS

> OR EVEN WHEN I MESS UP TECHNIQUE. NOT MANY CAN SAY THEY ESCAPED THE GALAXYS MOST DANGEROUS PRISON. I CAN. I SAY IT AND I SAY IT OUTLOUD EVERYDAY TO PEOPLE IN MY COLLEGE CLASS AND ALL THEY DO IS PROVE PEOPLE IN COLLEGE CAN STILL BE IMMATURE JERKS. AND IVE LEARNED ALL THE LINES AND IVE LEARNED HOW TO MAKE MYSELF AND MY APARTMENT LESS LONELY BY SHOUTING EM ALL. 2 HOURS INCLUDING WIND DOWN EVERY MORNIng[334]

All of viral irony's key components are on display here: the post is short (a brief window into someone's daily routine), with zero context (who is this person? Where are they in college? What even happens in *The Chronicles of Riddick?*). Most importantly, it is completely absurd. The idea of someone watching *The Chronicles of Riddick* every morning, and "DOING THE MOVES ALONGSIDE THE MAIN CHARACTER," is strange and unbelievable enough to make the reader want to laugh out loud. The grammar and syntax only heighten the sense of absurdity: the post is in all caps, then shifts into lowercase in the middle of the last word, as if the speaker has been screaming the entire time he's been telling his story, and then has suddenly broken off, exhausted. Indeed, the run-on sentences suggest the speaker is frantic; he's worked up about his story, and he's trying to relay it as fast, and forcefully, as possible. This is the syntax, and the grammar, of viral irony: incorrect punctuation, strange capitalizations, plus phrasing that's just a little bit *off*.

It's no surprise that, as such a perfect example of the form, the Riddick post was copied and pasted and circulated far beyond its original thread.[335] It became so popular, in fact, that it turned into a meme, or "an image, a video, a piece of text, etc. that is passed very quickly from one internet user to another, often with slight changes that make it humorous."[336] While Something Awful is often considered the birthplace of modern Internet memes, it was on another site, known as 4chan, where they truly proliferated.[337] 4chan was an offshoot of Something Awful—its founder, fifteen-year-old Christopher Poole, had been a member there—and, like

Something Awful, its posters often seemed like they were in "a race to see who could be the most crazy, fucked-up piece of shit possible."[338] However, there were also notable differences between the two sites. 4chan was even more loosely moderated, and, with no option to pick a username, everyone on its forums posted as "Anonymous."[339] As a result, 4chan hosted much more obscene content than Something Awful: not just anime porn and shock images, but also child pornography.[340] It also meant posters used far more slurs, particularly the n-word. Indeed, as Internet scholar Whitney Phillips notes, "this most toxic of epithets [appeared] on the /b/ board [4chan's most popular forum] with such frequency that its use [took] on an absurd, almost Dadaist feel." Posters "use[d] it as a pronoun. They use[d] it as a verb. They use[d] it as an adjective, as a conjunction, and as a standard one-word response to yes/no questions. In many ways, [they] treat[ed] the word like a floating, meaningless signifier."[341]

Interestingly, when Phillips interviewed some of these posters, they insisted they weren't racist. Instead, they argued, they were "trolling," or trying to get a rise out of other users by saying offensive things they didn't actually mean.[342] This definition of trolling shows how similar it is to viral irony; in fact, the terms "trolling" and "being ironic" are often used interchangeably.[343] What sets the two apart, however, is that while trolling can be done in any form and using any language, viral irony has a specific grammar, syntax, and set of conventions. Though one can use viral irony to troll, not all trolling involves viral irony, and not every instance of viral irony is trolling.[344] Much of what appeared on 4chan, I want to argue, should be understood as viral irony. When 4chan's earliest users came over from Something Awful, they brought viral irony with them, and it became one of the forums' *de facto* languages. Nowhere was it more popular than on /b/, where it manifested in the use of the n-word that Phillips

observed. When /b/ users posted the n-word to the point of absurdity, they were not only trying to provoke a reaction, but also were engaging in a surreal sort of language play. These posters knew the n-word could never truly be stripped of its meaning; in fact, they needed it to retain it, as if it "weren't particularly contentious," it would lose its power to shock.[345] At the same time, reading the n-word so often, used in so many unfamiliar ways—as a pronoun and a conjunction, the answer to any question—is disorienting and, indeed, "almost Dadaist."

In turn, while Phillips' interviewees may have been telling the truth when they claimed they weren't racist, their posting style was adopted by other 4chan users who self-identified as bigots. Even 4chan's founder, Christopher Poole, had to acknowledge that the forums had a significant reactionary population; in 2011, he claimed he'd deleted a board that'd been set up to discuss news because it had "become Stormfront."[346] Poole wasn't exaggerating: in fact, many of the board's posters had come over from that white supremacist site. They had found out about 4chan a few years earlier, when some channers had decided to target Stormfront in a trolling raid, or an organized campaign in which 4chan posters would take over another website and troll its inhabitants. Ironically, these raids functioned as a recruiting tool: they were often the first time those sites' users had heard of 4chan, and those who were more curious about what it was than annoyed by the raid would click over and check it out. Many became permanent 4chan posters; indeed, after the raid, "Stormfront users were not only clued into 4chan's existence, but soon became absorbed in [the] image-board culture themselves."[347]

It's not hard to see why they found 4chan appealing. For one, its content moderation rules were actually *less* restrictive than Stormfront's, which had banned "profanity" and "racial epithets" in 2008.[348] 4chan also had an already-existing population of racist and anti-Semitic

posters, most of whom had been radicalized offline. Perhaps the most famous is Andrew Auernheimer, who is better known by his Internet handle 'weev'. While many believe weev developed white supremacist beliefs while incarcerated (he went to prison in 2013 for publishing AT&T user data), he insisted that he had been "a dedicated white nationalist" since age 14 or 15, "far before [he] went to prison."[349] The best evidence to support his claim is the blogs he wrote in the late 2000s, in which he argued that black men raping white women was "the reality of multiculturalism" and that "Jews have long made a sham of the nobel prize," and celebrated a man named Drasius Kedys, whose daughter had been "raped by some powerful Jews" and who had murdered the perpetrators.[350]

It was the proximity to channers like weev, as well as the migrants from Stormfront, that pushed many other 4chan users over the edge into white supremacy.[351] While 4chan's user base had always been mostly white and male, there had at one point been a number of liberal and leftist posters. However, by the early 2010s, most "had either left for activist sites or grown out of 4chan."[352] The users who remained were ripe for conversion; not only were they largely conservative, but many identified as "incels," or misogynists who blamed women, Black men, and Jewish people for their lack of romantic success.[353] When they read posts from former Stormfront users, or from channers like weev, they found an ideology that validated their grievances.[354] Much of this conversion process happened on /pol/, which was a "containment board" Poole had created in November 2011. Poole had found that deleting the news board hadn't solved 4chan's white supremacist problem, as these reactionaries had merely taken "up residence in the international (/int/) and weapons (/k/) boards." Hoping to again cordon them off to one section of the site, Poole set up /pol/, which stood for "politically incorrect." While "in

some sense this worked—Nazis flooded into /pol"—"the board didn't get crowded out in the marketplace of ideas. Rather, 4chan's new neo-Nazi section thrived," becoming one of the most popular forums on the site.[355] It was such a hotbed of radicalization that, as one Stormfront poster wrote, there was now "an army of basement dwelling neckbeards [a pejorative term for channers] ready to fill the internet with our message 24/7." Another claimed that 4chan "has helped many young people become racially aware, especially those who may not have come around to the movement by normal means."[356]

These young people who had been radicalized on /pol/, along with the former Stormfront users and other white supremacists like weev, would soon start referring to themselves by an official name: the alt-right. One of the most common misconceptions about the movement was that it contained only these "basement dwelling neckbeards," and that there was no overlap between the alt-right and neo-Nazis or the KKK. The alt-right encouraged this perception, as it made the movement seem far more appealing to potential members and the general public. As George Hawley points out, most Americans tended to associate "older white nationalist movement[s]" with "rage and hate," and to see those who participated in them as "angry, bitter skinhead[s]."[357] In an attempt to avoid this stigma, the alt-right went to great lengths to differentiate themselves from these other movements. Andrew Anglin suggested "mocking stereotypes of hateful racists," and wrote, in *The Daily Stormer*'s style guide, that he thought "of this as self-deprecating humor. I am a racist making fun of stereotypes of racists, because I don't take myself super-seriously."[358]

Indeed, the alt-right's emphasis on humor was a large part of the reason so many Americans believed them when they insisted they were nothing like the KKK or neo-Nazis. After

all, humor was not something the public tended to associate with either of these other movements. In reality, however, both of these groups have a long history of combining terror with humor. "[T]he costumes and titles and rituals" of the KKK were "meant to look and sound ridiculous," journalist Jamelle Bouie notes, and, as Sartre famously argued, anti-Semites "know that their remarks are frivolous," but believe that they "have the *right* to" joke and to engage in language "play."[359] Nevertheless, by drawing on the stereotype that other white supremacist movements were ultra-serious—and, at the same time, emphasizing their own humor—the alt-right was able to set themselves apart from neo-Nazis and the KKK. In so doing, they could imply that, while most Americans were right to be afraid of these other groups, they had nothing to fear from the alt-right. As Hawley notes, this strategy worked: "[s]omeone who would never associate with a group like the Klan or the National Socialist Movement" might very well have considered joining the alt-right. After all, it offered something "far more attractive," and less threatening, "to potential supporters: edginess and fun."[360]

The reason the alt-right was able to come off this way was simple: they used viral irony. Though they had the same beliefs as many other white supremacist movements—and, despite their attempts to deny it, they had many neo-Nazis and KKK members in their ranks—they could not have expressed their ideas more differently. Take one example of alt-right activity that Hawley cites:

> When an article about a university contest for Holocaust art was published online, Alt-Right trolls immediately began posting in the article's comment section, relaying absurd stories about their families' experiences in concentration camps. One of these comments stated, "All six of my grandmothers were survivors. They avoided being gassed by playing alto saxophone and electric piano solos for the guards while hiding in the rubble." Whereas earlier white-nationalist movements often claimed the Holocaust never happened, the Alt-Right typically treats it as a joke.[361]

Hawley's last point is crucial: that, rather than stating their white supremacist ideas outright, the alt-right posters in the above example used humor to introduce them. Rather than claiming the Holocaust didn't happen, they used viral irony to make it sound ridiculous. Nevertheless, it's important to recognize that the fact that the alt-right could laugh about their beliefs didn't mean they weren't also deeply invested in them. Indeed, just after Andrew Anglin noted that he was "a racist making fun of stereotypes of racists, because I don't take myself super-seriously," he added, "[t]his is obviously a ploy and I actually do want to gas kikes. But that's neither here nor there."[362] In other words, the alt-right had no problem joking about their white supremacist ideology; instead, they saw it as a way to make the non-converted feel more comfortable with their beliefs than if they had stated them outright. Almost no one but a white supremacist was going to be susceptible to the idea that the Holocaust didn't happen. However, imagining someone's six grandmothers playing electric piano for Nazi guards was so absurd that one might laugh, even if they felt guilty about it.

This was exactly what many members of the alt-right wanted: for the public to let its guard down. If the alt-right could chip away at people's defenses, and get them thinking that a bit of light Holocaust denial could be amusing, or that jokes about racial slurs and religious violence could be enjoyed—because, after all, it wasn't like the person making them *really* meant it—then they were one step closer to normalizing their beliefs. This was also a way to get those who were teetering on the edge of joining the alt-right to feel more comfortable with the ideas its members espoused. This is easier to understand if we look at one particular post from 4chan, which uses the alt-right "Deus Vult" meme. "Deus Vult" is a Latin phrase tied to the First Crusade; within an alt-right context, it is shorthand for the idea that whites should expel Muslim 'invaders' from the

west. Below an image of a sword-carrying knight with crosses on his armor (one of the standard Deus Vult motifs), the poster describes a hypothetical home break-in, writing:

> >Buy Claymore [a broadsword] for home defence
> >One night i finally hear a crash
> >my home surround sound is primed to play Gregorian Chants
> >Put on my surcoat with a black cross
> >hit play
> >Die you godless heathens!
> >Plunge my sword into one of the heathens
> >The other one tries to flee
> >cut off his leg at the knee
> >He begs for mercy
> >"The only one who will show mercy is God"
> >behead him
> >call police
> >Have mead and mutton ready for them
> Why don't you use religious zeal and a sword to defend your keep?[363]

If one isn't familiar with how the alt-right uses viral irony, then this post is almost impossible to understand. To those who have spent time on 4chan, however, it is immediately recognizable as a call to arms: an invitation for the alt-right to see themselves as heroes who would violently defend both their own homes and their 'home' of the west. At the same time, it's also important to recognize how deeply—and deliberately—goofy it is. The idea of having one's surround sound cued to play Gregorian chants, and of offering the police mead and mutton, is surreal and more than a little bit absurd. Having a soundtrack prepared in case of a break-in, and fighting off intruders dressed as a knight, is also laughable: the poster sounds like a cosplaying nerd.[364] The author is aware of all of this, and it's exactly why he's written it; it is, indeed, self-conscious humor. He recognizes that he and his fellow white supremacists' obsession with the Crusaders makes them seem like superhero or anime fanboys; in fact, they resemble no one more than the speaker in the *Chronicles of Riddick* meme.

Still, as the post goes on, something else becomes apparent: that, as much as the reader is meant to laugh at its protagonist, that reader is also meant to admire him and celebrate his

actions. After all, he has managed to take down two implicitly-racialized home intruders, and in so doing, to secure his home for Christianity and the west. What this post shows, then, is how viral irony can operate on two levels: both as a joke and something the reader is meant to take seriously. One doesn't have to disregard the humor to believe in the underlying message; in fact, the humor is a key part of how the message functions. Not only are the things that make the reader laugh what allow the protagonist to defeat the robbers, but the fact that all of this is very funny makes its message more palatable. These posts, which reframed white supremacy within a context and language with which 4chan users were already familiar, made white supremacist ideology seem amusing rather than scary and self-serious. This wasn't the language of the KKK or neo-Nazi skinheads; it was lighthearted, even silly, and clearly, the people who used it felt comfortable making fun of themselves. This made it easy to assume that, if one were to join this movement, it wouldn't be like signing up for a *real* white supremacist group—and, even if one didn't go that far, there was no reason not to see a post like this and laugh.

This, of course, was what much of the alt-right was hoping for, and why their use of viral irony was so important. Their absurdist jokes and references that appealed to Internet veterans made their movement seem harmless; they looked like nerds playing around with subversive humor, not a gang of committed white supremacists. As we will see in the next section, this was also what allowed the alt-right to establish a presence on mainstream social media sites. This presence was what the alt-right needed to increase their recruiting, and to continue their efforts to normalize their ideas. However, the alt-right would not have been nearly as successful if viral irony had not already been popular on social media. Thanks to a movement called Weird Twitter, which had its beginnings on Something Awful, viral irony had become so mainstream that even

the accounts of corporations and brands were using it. It was so normal to see viral irony on Twitter—and, if you followed particularly edgy Weird Twitter comedians, to come across posts that looked like alt-right material—that the alt-right was able to fit in there with ease. This gave the alt-right a far larger platform than any white supremacist movement in recent memory, and a chance to convince millions to accept their ideas.

## III. The Alt-Right on Social Media: Weird Twitter, Content Moderation, and White Supremacist Rhetoric in the Public Consciousness

In January 2020, Richard Kyanka announced that he was shutting down the FYAD board on Something Awful. While "back in the day," FYAD had been "full of funny people producing funny content," with "their own unique sense of humor that couldn't be found anywhere else," Kyanka claimed that it had since become "a racist shithole" of "iron crosses and swastikas and Hitler threads," "with no redeeming qualities whatsoever." Not only had Nazis infiltrated the board, but many of the original posters had long since left the site. "Everyone who was funny on FYAD moved to Twitter," Kyanka explained. "The people who were left were…right wing Nazi people."[365]

While FYAD had indeed turned into a haven for white supremacists, what Kyanka didn't mention was that the Something Awful posters who identified with the alt-right were also moving over to Twitter. They'd had the way paved for them by the original migration of FYAD users, or the "funny people producing funny content" who had once dominated Something Awful.[366] These users had started posting on Twitter in the late 2000s and early 2010s, and had various reasons for doing so: some were looking for a more mobile-friendly platform, while

others appreciated that Twitter was more of an "open forum," or were tired of Kyanka's heavy-handed moderation.[367] The community they established on this new site became known as "Weird Twitter." Weird Twitter was "[a] loose group of Twitter users who write in a less accessible form, using sloppy punctuation/spelling/capitalization, poetic experimentation with sentence format, first-person throwaway characters, and other techniques little known to the vast majority of 'serious' Twitter users."[368] Its original participants took the viral irony they had honed on Something Awful, and used it to tweet "[r]andom, ludicrous, and oftentimes nonsensical" 140 character snippets.[369] As *Complex*'s Brendan Gallagher puts it, "Weird Twitter is not traditional comedy. Weird Twitter isn't about 'What's the deal with…' observational humor; Weird Twitter isn't one-liners about politicians and celebrities; Weird Twitter isn't in-joke references of current trends." Rather, "Weird Twitter is absurd, subversive, and often keenly-self aware," and its "jokes are as much about form—niche, brief, Internet-speak—as they are about content."[370] Its members "share surreal bursts of unusual ideas," writes Dylan Love at *Business Insider:* "jokes that are funny not because of a conventional punchline, but because they fly in the face of what we think a joke is."[371]

While @dril has always been the undisputed king of Weird Twitter—not just because of his follower count, but also the unparalleled influence he's had on Weird Twitter's style and conventions—there were also hundreds of other accounts that shaped the community in its early years. Like @dril, most were long-time Something Awful users who had migrated to Twitter, and whose tweets used viral irony to mix surrealism with irreverence. Some of their best-known posts include:

> [@dogboner:] haha this is so fuckin sweet.. apparently you can use your imagination to travel to diff. times/places. grounded my ass.[372]

> [@BronzeHammer:] Hey kid…catch
> *Lebron tosses kid his headband*
> *Kid tosses it back*
> Keep it. You ol barbershop ass corn cob pipe lookin ass motherfucker[373]
>
> [@Bro_Pair:] Bad credit? NO credit? Credit? Bad? Are you bad? No life? Model trains? Do you spend Friday nights playing with model trains?[374]
>
> [@BikiniBabeLover:] Hey "Vegan's": If you love animals so much, why do you keep eating all there food? Also, why dont you marry it? Bitch[375]
>
> [@SexCarl:] internet ad: "are u tired of jerking off?" no[376]
>
> [@olhnso:] Wow to the street vendor serving raspberry smoothies named "Cop Guts from 9/11" at ground zero site, $8.99 is over priced as hell[377]

Viral irony wasn't the only thing these users brought over from Something Awful, however. In fact, the entire FYAD community was essentially carried over onto, and re-formed on, Twitter. Its users had spent years getting to know one another on Something Awful, and were used to riffing on and promoting each other's posts; when they came to Twitter, they continued those behaviors. They replied to and favorited and retweeted their friends' content, which exposed those accounts to a wider variety of users. Soon, Twitter posters with a great deal of influence, including comedians like Rob Delaney and celebrities like Chrissy Teigen, were taking notice. They started replying to and retweeting those former FYAD users, which put them on *their* followers' timelines.[378] The result was that tweeters who had never heard of Something Awful, but who saw these posts because they were promoted by their favorite stand-up acts and Hollywood stars, were exposed to viral irony. If they found it funny, they could get in on the action by following those Weird Twitter accounts and making tweets that sounded like theirs. In this way, Weird Twitter went from a niche community populated almost entirely by former Something Awful users to a veritable online sensation. By 2013, there were thousands and thousands of accounts using viral irony to tweet in the instantly-recognizable Weird Twitter style,

and the movement had been written up in *Buzzfeed, The Daily Dot,* and *Paste,* and earned mentions in *The Awl* and *The Washington Post.*[379]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, as more and more people found out about Weird Twitter—and thus, it became increasingly mainstream—the jokes that garnered the most retweets and faves became less dark than in the "raspberry smoothies named 'Cop Guts from 9/11'" era. Still, Weird Twitter never backed off from its embrace of surrealism and absurdity, and sex and profanity remained on the table. For every tweet like this one that went viral—"I'm sorry Ms. Jackson (Oooooo)/ I am four eels/ Never meant to make your daughter cry/ I am several fish and not a guy"—there was one like @nurseycrimes' "*nudges boyfriend at 3 AM* pretty fucked up that we assume that wall-e is a boy. it's a robot. chad? wake up chad. listen. it's sexless," or @dril's "the wise man bowed his head solemnly and spoke: 'there's actually zero difference between good & bad things. you imbecile. you fucking moron.'"[380] When, in 2013 and 2014, brands began to try to capitalize on Weird Twitter's popularity, they mostly stuck to tweets that were on the tamer side of the spectrum—though, in order to meet the genre's demands, they had to get at least a little bit strange and nihilistic.

Denny's was one of the first corporations to try to appeal to Weird Twitter, and, in so doing, "[i]t arguably kick-started the trend toward 'weird corporate' personification by organically drawing in a digitally literate audience that chose to follow a brand for its consistently entertaining, relatable content." Recognizing that "[n]othing draws positive engagement like humor," Denny's saw an opportunity to use viral irony to get young consumers to interact, and have a positive association, with their brand.[381] If millennials liked Weird Twitter, then Denny's would tweet like it was a part of that community, posting content like, "balloons.

drained pools. the emptiness inside. fill them all with syrup." and "do you ever yearn for the soft touch of a pancake."[382] When this strategy got Denny's attention from millennials and the media outlets they visited—*Buzzfeed, Thought Catalogue,* and *Ranker* all ran articles praising Dennys' tweets—other brands took notice. Companies like Moon Pie "started hiring people who were Extremely Online" to run their Twitter accounts, and, as such, their tweets "became more self-aware and ironic."[383]

Though I'm sure none of these brand managers could have foreseen it at the time, that these corporations had started using viral irony gave the alt-right an opportunity to enter the mainstream. As the last section detailed, the alt-right had spent years using viral irony on sites like 4chan and Something Awful. Now that viral irony had taken over Twitter, and was popular not only with Weird Twitter comedians, but with mainstream brands and the millennials who followed them, the alt-right could use viral irony to blend in with the rest of the users on the platform. In fact, because tweets that used viral irony were so popular, there was even the chance that the alt-right's posts could go viral, and be seen by millions of Twitter users. Still, even if only a few of the alt-right's tweets received that much engagement, the movement would still be reaching a much broader audience than it would have if it had remained primarily on 4chan. By moving over to Twitter, the alt-right would have the chance to spread their message and increase recruitment, and to try and normalize their beliefs. As we will see, the alt-right would succeed at these first two objectives, and would come very close to achieving the third. In so doing, they would manage something that earlier generations of online white supremacists had not been able to pull off: making their ideas a part of mainstream discourse, and eventually, at the center of a contest over the nation's values.

For the alt-right, the possibility that no one would be able to ignore their beliefs was especially salient. This was because, prior to the rise of 4chan and social media platforms, whites supremacists had been restricted to a few websites. These were spaces like Stormfront, which advertised themselves as for white supremacists and white supremacists alone. While a non-racist might visit Stormfront out of curiosity, the explicit white-power branding was enough to drive anyone but the most committed white supremacists from the site. Indeed, even those with some racist or anti-Semitic tendencies—in other words, the same demographic that would be radicalized on 4chan—would most likely have been scared away from white supremacy had they spent time on Stormfront. After all, while the Stormfront users who joined 4chan would become fluent in viral irony, the discourse on Stormfront and its sister sites was nothing like what one would find on 4chan. It wasn't as if these sites didn't have jokes; in fact, sociologist Michael Billig found that Whitepower.com and Whitesonly.net had offshoots dedicated entirely to humor.[384] However, they bore almost no resemblance to the absurd, self-aware posts on /b/ and /pol/. A typical joke (found on "Nigger Jokes KKK," a subsidiary of Whitesonly.net, and on another site, "Nigger Jokes") is this parody dictionary entry:

> Nig-ger (nig'er)n. An African jungle anthropoid ape of the primate family pongidae (superfamily cercopithecoidea). Imported to the United States as slave labor in the late 1700's-1800's, these wild creatures now roam freely while destroying the economic and social infrastructures of American and various other nations. These flamboyant sub-human[s] love to consume large quantities of greasy fried chicken.[385]

There's nothing subtle about this post: there are no cryptic references or in-jokes, and there is certainly no chance of convincing anyone that it is merely a parody of white supremacists. Indeed, if a person were posting on a forum called "Nigger Jokes KKK," and trading in some of the most well-known, insidious stereotypes about Black people, then it would

be clear that they believed what they said. This was also the kind of rhetoric that, until the early 2010s, would have earned one a ban on most mainstream sites. Until that point, content moderation on even the most popular websites meant putting a filter on slurs and hiring someone to delete any bigoted posts in the comments section; while this might have been difficult, it was certainly doable. What this meant, in turn, was that white supremacists who posted openly about their beliefs would be banned from these sites; as a result, not many people saw their comments, and their ideas didn't spread very widely online.

Everything changed, however, when 4chan became popular, and then again with the rise of social media. It was the lack of content moderation policies that made 4chan a safe space for white supremacists; on social media platforms, however, the problem was one of volume. In 2013, Twitter had 218 million active users, who sent about 500 million tweets per day, while Facebook had 1.23 billion "monthly active users worldwide."[386] When a site had so many users and posts, it was impossible to find and remove every piece of offensive content. The best case scenario was that a site could police most of it, which required hiring an enormous content moderation team (in 2019, Facebook's had 40,000 members, including 15,000 independent contractors).[387] Nevertheless, since it was unrealistic to expect that team to scroll through each user's Facebook page or Twitter profile, these platforms had no choice but to get their users involved. If a user saw an offensive post on their Facebook or Twitter feed, they were meant to report it, which meant clicking a button that flagged it as offensive content and selecting the reason it should be removed (the options, as of 2021, include "violence," "terrorism," or "hate speech"); this sent the post to a moderator for review.

However, moderators often had trouble determining whether or not a post warranted deletion. In large part, this was because they were exhausted from the amount of content they had to review, much of which was extremely disturbing. ("My first day on the job, I witnessed someone being beaten to death with a plank of wood with nails in it and repeatedly stabbed," claimed one former Facebook moderator. "Day two was the first time for me seeing bestiality on video—and it all escalated from there."[388]) In many cases, though, it was also difficult to decide whether a post actually violated a site's terms of service. Facebook describes hate speech as "a direct attack on people based on…protected characteristics," and "an attack 'as violent or dehumanizing speech, statements of inferiority, or calls for exclusion or segregation.'" (In 2017, "Facebook reported…that it was deleting nearly 288,000 hate speech posts per month." By late 2018, that number was 1 million per month, and by 2020, it was 3.2 million.)[389] Twitter's guidelines, on the other hand, are much less strict: "Except for hateful images or symbols in a profile image or header that express hate towards a person, group, or protected category, Twitter's rules allow hate speech as long as it does not incite violence or attack someone on the basis of their membership in a group."[390]

Figuring out if all of that meant a post should be deleted often required a significant amount of context that moderators didn't have. For example, if a moderator were looking at a tweet in which one anonymous user called another the n-word, then how was that moderator able to tell whether it was an in-group usage between two Black people, an interaction between two non-Black people in which neither user was offended (but others who saw it might be), or an instance where one user really was trying to be racist? Further, what was the line between expressing one's political views—which might involve violence against other groups, were they

to be enacted—and calling for violence against those groups to be carried out? Of course, this didn't mean that no offensive content was ever removed; in fact, the post from "Nigger Jokes KKK" was the sort of thing that, had it been put on Facebook or Twitter and then reported, would more than likely have been deleted. This was because one needed little context to figure out that it was meant to "attack someone on the basis of their membership in a group." But if white supremacists could find a subtler way to express their ideas—one that, like the "Nigger Jokes KKK" post, claimed to be a joke, but could actually pass for one—then they might be able to evade moderators' bans.

As we know, the alt-right had already become fluent in a discourse that would allow them to do exactly that. Viral irony, with its insistence on absurdity, obscure references, and lack of context, was almost impossible for someone not already steeped in it to parse. If normal discourse presented a challenge for moderators, then dealing with viral irony would be a Herculean task. What made things even harder was that, by 2015—when 4chan's white supremacists really began flooding the site—the idea of tweeting something ironically racist was already an established practice. Indeed, it was often difficult to tell if a tweet came from a white supremacist or one of Weird Twitter's most noted comedians, especially since some of them were friends with, and fans of, one another. In 2012, Nick Mullen, who would later become a host of one of Weird Twitter's most popular podcasts, CumTown, tweeted, "everyone should follow @rabite (weev). most important internet person. troll messiah."[391] Several years later, Mullen would face an Internet firestorm after he tweeted a link to an article with the headline, "In Rare Killing, Chimpanzees Cannibalize Former Leader" and wrote "rip obama."[392] While his defenders insisted he was being ironic, this was far from the first or last time Weird Twitter

would be rocked by this kind of scandal. Two members of Chapo Trap House—a tremendously influential leftist podcast that's been covered in *The New Yorker, Politico,* and *The New York Times,* and that's hosted by Weird Twitter celebrities—were criticized when they and a friend took a photo of themselves smiling and giving thumbs-ups next to Bill Cosby's star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, which their friend then tweeted with the caption, "hey libs try taking THIS statue down."[393] Once again, viral irony was cited as an excuse: Chapo Trap House's fans argued that critics didn't realize the hosts were mocking conservatives who wanted statues of historical figures, however abhorrent, to stay up. The question remained, however, of whether intent mattered when your post showed you giving a rapist a thumbs-up.

There was also the fact that tweets like this were often indistinguishable from the content white supremacists tweeted. In fact, many alt-right tweets were a bit more subtle, like the "Free Helicopter Rides" meme that was popular in late 2017. Members of the alt-right tweeted at liberal and left-wing accounts to offer them free helicopter rides; to someone unfamiliar with the conventions of white supremacist viral irony this would have been confusing, but not obviously violent. However, the meme was actually "a reference to the practice of killing people by dropping them from helicopters, made most famous by Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet in the 1970s."[394] Like everything the alt-right did, these threats were compounded, not neutralized, by the fact that they were presented as a joke. One account even posted a poll asking its followers, "what's the official #HelicopterTwitter anthem?" in which the options were "It's Raining Men," "Let the Bodies Hit the Floor" (the winner), "Learning to Fly," and "Start Up the Rotors."[395]

"Free Helicopter Rides" wasn't the only alt-right Twitter meme, either. There was also "Remove Kebab" (pro-Muslim genocide), "We Wuz Kangs" (mocking Black people and their

ties to African history), the three parentheses (meant to signal someone was Jewish), and "Pepe the Frog" (a cartoon frog that debuted in Matt Furie's *Boys Club* and became a popular meme before being co-opted by the alt-right).[396] One of the most absurd was "#MilkTwitter," which used "dairy milk" as a symbol of "strength of body and society," and saw drinking it as "reinforc[ing] notions of white superiority and idealised versions of masculinity." Soy milk, on the other hand—which the alt-right often accused their opponents, especially antifascists, of drinking—"represent[ed] weakness, emasculation, and all things politically correct."[397] One #MilkTwitter tweet included a photo of a Moon Man mask (another white supremacist meme) sitting next to a gallon and a glass of milk, plus a frog statue (an allusion to Pepe the Frog), with the caption, "We must secure an existence for our people and whole milk for white children. #milktwitter."[398] While the idea of modifying the 14 Words—"We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children," which the ADL calls "the most popular white supremacist slogan in the world"—to include a line about whole milk might seem ridiculous, we now know enough about the alt-right's use of viral irony to realize that absurdity didn't mean they weren't sincere about these goals. Indeed, the danger was that posts like this would become normalized: that eventually, social media users would expect to see viral irony combined with white supremacist ideas, and would brush it off as just another thing one had to get comfortable with if they were on the Internet.

This, more than anything, was what members of the alt-right like Andrew Anglin wanted. As this chapter has already shown, they were hoping that, by establishing a presence on social media, they would be able to recruit more people to their cause, and to get others who might not have felt comfortable joining the alt-right to feel like they could laugh at their jokes. But what

was most important was *normalizing* their beliefs, and making them feel like a part of the everyday discourse. The alt-right knew they couldn't convince everyone to buy into, or even feel sympathetic towards, their ideas. What they wanted was for people to see alt-right beliefs as something they disagreed with, rather than as something so far outside the range of acceptable public opinion that it had to be censored. It was about shifting the "Overton window," explained one member of the alt-right, or broadening "the range of ideas tolerated in public discourse" to include white supremacist tenets.[399] If a movement's ideas were outside the Overton window, that movement was destined for "political exile or pariahdom." However, if that movement could make their beliefs part of the mainstream, then it would have a chance at political and cultural influence.[400] This would not only be a symbolic victory for the alt-right movement, but would also have significant real-world consequences. As Ryan Milner explains:

> Every time you see a viral video of somebody shouting down a person of Muslim descent in a supermarket line, what you're seeing are the effects of an environment where it's increasingly normal, increasingly accepted and expected to speak in this register, whether or not that started out as a joke.[401]

However, while the alt-right was doing all that it could to shift the Overton window on its own, its ideas only really began to break into the mainstream after it joined forces with another movement: Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. Trump's candidacy would normalize opinions long thought to have been outside the realm of acceptable public discourse, many of which were close to, or toned-down versions of, the alt-right's beliefs. The alt-right would catch Trump's attention through a series of social media posts, and would become his fiercest online supporters, using viral irony to troll his opponents and to convince more people to support his campaign. Their influence would be magnified by that of Steve Bannon: the former head of *Breitbart* who became Trump's campaign manager and then advisor. All of this would put the alt-

right at the center of the national conversation, and would leave them poised to become a lasting force in American politics. Their days of being shut up on *Stormfront* were past: the alt-right, and white supremacy, had hit the mainstream.

## III. The Alt-Right Goes Mainstream: The 2016 Election, Donald Trump's Presidency, and White Supremacists in the Media

It might be difficult to believe now, but when Donald Trump first announced he was running for president, many white supremacists were skeptical of his candidacy. "[T]here was a general recognition among white nationalists that Trump did not ultimately share their worldview," George Hawley writes. "For that reason, some…suggested that their movement be cautious about being too enthusiastic about Trump." Hawley cites white supremacist Matt Parrott's remarks "early in the [Trump] campaign," in which Parrott told his fellows:

> While there's an understandable impulse to rally behind a powerful man who shares our vision, Donald Trump is only standing behind one sliver of our total vision, and he's only been doing it for a few weeks. Until a powerful man emerges who truly and completely shares our vision, we should resist the urge to endorse or support any man.[402]

However, as the campaign went on, Trump managed to win over a number of white supremacists, especially those who identified with the alt-right. While some of these white supremacists became convinced he was committed to their cause, others decided Trump's actual beliefs were less important than what he said to the public, and what a candidate like him represented. Though by the time of Parrott's warning, Trump had only spent "a few weeks" painting Mexicans as rapists and criminals—which, as Parrott correctly pointed out, was merely "one sliver of [white supremacists'] total vision"—his comments over the next few months not only doubled down on this particular point, but began to articulate a broader view of America

that was in line with the alt-right's goals. He had started his campaign by declaring "that the country had become 'a dumping ground for everybody else's problems," and his subsequent pledges to build a wall between the United States and Mexico and ban Muslims from entering the US—along with his derogatory remarks about women, the disabled, and veterans—were sentiments that would have been unheard of in the political arena even a few years before.[403] The conventional wisdom was that even conservatives wanted leaders who spoke about America as a land of equality and opportunity for all, and kept up that same rhetoric as they gutted the social safety net and waged the War on Terror. Indeed, Trump arrived on the scene at a time when "the Republican Party's leadership wanted to move away from the party's traditional restrictionist immigration stance," as "the party hoped to expand its support among Latinos and other demographic groups that were turned off by anti-immigrant rhetoric," and "to focus" instead on "issues such as tax cuts, health care, and deregulation."[404]

However, "Trump's popularity dashed all hope that the GOP could shed its reputation for nativism. He showed that rank-and-file Republican voters wanted border walls, not a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants," and that they were hungry for the sort of 'politically-incorrect' rhetoric that became his trademark.[405] They cheered not only for the Wall, but for his attacks on Megyn Kelly, Serge Kovaleski, and John McCain—and the white supremacists who'd watched his campaign with interest and/or skepticism began cheering too. They had gotten on social media because they'd wanted to bring their ideas into the mainstream, and they saw Trump as doing their job for them. In their eyes, he was "moving the direction of the national conversation in a more right-wing direction, creating space for their ideas." According to white supremacist Greg Johnson, Trump was "[l]ike an icebreaker," having "plowed through the frozen

crust of the artificial political consensus, smashing it to bits and releasing the turbulent populist currents beneath."[406] He "helped normalize nativist rhetoric" and "dealt the organized conservative movement"—the one that wanted to focus less on race and immigration and more on deregulation and tax cuts, and promoted a hawkish foreign policy and claimed to revere veterans—"a devastating blow, creating an opening for right-wing alternatives." The longer Trump lasted in the primaries, the more attention he received in the press (and, because of his celebrity and outrageous statements, he was constantly being discussed on the major news networks). The more coverage he got, the more the average American would be exposed to his nativist, white supremacist-adjacent ideas—and the more they learned about them, and heard them repeated, the likelier it was that they would start to find some of these ideas appealing.

But while the fact that Trump was bringing white supremacist talking points to the forefront of the national conversation was a large part of what made him popular with the alt-right, there was also another reason they became devoted him. To put it simply, Trump often seemed to be engaging, intentionally or not, in viral irony. It's become common to refer to the ex-president as a "troll," in reference to the way he antagonizes his opponents and, when they react, attacks them for being weak and easily-provoked. However, I want to argue that so much about the way Trump behaves, and the discourse he engages in—down to the way he speaks and punctuates his tweets—should be read as examples of viral irony. Indeed, *Rolling Stone, New York Magazine,* and *The Daily Dot* have all pointed out how similar Trump's (now-suspended) Twitter account is to dril's[407]:

> [@realDonaldTrump:] Sorry losers and haters, but my I.Q. is one of the highest - and you all know it! Please don't feel so stupid or insecure,it's not your fault[408]
>
> [@dril:] THERAPIST: your problem is, that youre perfect, and everyone is jealous of your good posts,

> and that makes you rightfully upset.
> ME: i agree[409]
>
> [@realDonaldTrump:] The Coca Cola company is not happy with me—that's okay, I'll still keep drinking that garbage.[410]
>
> [@dril:] @McDonalds i have an a 1 million dollar idea that will pull your failing company directly out of the toilet. hear me out[411]
>
> [@realDonaldTrump:] Why would Kim Jong-un insult me by calling me "old," when I would NEVER call him "short and fat?" Oh well, I try so hard to be his friend - and maybe someday that will happen![412]
>
> [@dril:] "im not owned!  im not owned!!", i continue to insist as i slowly shrink and transform into a corn cob[413]
>
> [@realDonaldTrump:] ISIS uses the internet better than almost anyone…[but] There is nothing to admire about them, they will always try to show a glimmer of vicious hope, but they are losers and barely breathing. Think about that before you destroy your lives and the lives of your family![414]
>
> [@dril:] issuing correction on a previous post of mine, regarding the terror group ISIL. you do not, under any circumstances, "gotta hand it to them"[415]
>
> [@realDonaldTrump:] Airplanes are becoming far too complex to fly. Pilots are no longer needed, but rather computer scientists from MIT. I see it all the time in many products. Always seeking to go one unnecessary step further, when often older and simpler is far better.[416]
>
> [@dril:] let's talk about planes now. the pilots are flying them up too damn high. it's dangerous. I don't like it. got to make them lower[417]

I don't think it would be difficult to convince someone who was unfamiliar with @dril and @realDonaldTrump that all of these tweets were written by the same person. The syntax is very similar, and they have the same overblown sense of self-importance and fixation on minor insults. It's no wonder that, in 2017, one Reddit user would write, "Trump's and Dril's tweets are pretty much indistinguishable by this point."[418] Of course, the major difference was that @dril was *trying* to sound ridiculous—though when Trump was called out for a tweet or offline remark that others considered offensive, he would often claim that he, too, was only joking. In August 2016, *Time* journalist Zeke J. Miller noted a pattern: Trump "makes wild accusations, sticks by them for a few days to rile up his most fervent supporters, and then tries to laugh them off as jokes to the general public days later."[419] For example, several days after claiming Obama was the "founder" of ISIS, Trump tweeted, "Ratings challenged @CNN reports so seriously that I

call President Obama (and Clinton) 'the founder' of ISIS, & MVP. THEY DON'T GET SARCASM?" He also told Robert Mueller's team that his request for Russia to "find [and publish] emails Hillary Clinton had deleted from her private server" was made "in jest and sarcastically, as was apparent to any objective observer." Trump's team got in the habit of making similar justifications: Sarah Huckabee Sanders argued that when Trump praised Wikileaks, he was "making a joke," and gave the same excuse after Trump told Long Island police officers that they "shouldn't be 'too nice' with suspects." Top Republicans followed their lead: when Trump "praised Republican Montana Rep. Greg Gianforte for body slamming a reporter," claiming, "Any guy who can do a body slam — he's my guy," Rep. Steve Scalise wrote that "President Trump was clearly ribbing Congressman Gianforte for last year's incident, which he apologized for last year. It's obvious he was not encouraging his supporters to engage in attacks." In turn, "[d]uring the House impeachment investigation in October 2019," when Trump "called on China to look into" Joe Biden, Sen. Marco Rubio argued that "Trump was just 'needling' the press when he made the comment and wasn't actually serious."[420]

This was the same excuse that proponents of viral irony had been making since its beginnings on Something Awful: that what they'd said was so outlandish that there was no way it should, or could, be taken seriously. Indeed, the fact that so many of Trump's claims were things other politicians never would have said out loud only made this argument more convincing. *Of course* Trump wouldn't be foolish enough to make these comments and actually mean them—which was a justification his staff and Republicans clung to even when it became increasingly apparent that he did. What had made viral irony so dangerous in the hands of the alt-right, then—that its users could always fall back on the insistence that they were joking—became Trump's

last, and most important, line of defense. When you were dealing with someone who resembled dril more than any politician, believing he was making outrageous comments for effect wasn't too much of a stretch, especially when he and his supporters would ridicule you for taking him seriously. "You don't understand sarcasm," Trump lectured one reporter, while Sarah Huckabee Sanders told the press, "Maybe you guys should get a sense of humor."[421]

All of this meant that, while Trump may or may not have believed in everything the alt-right stood for, the movement recognized that, in tone and tactics, he was one of them. What excited them even more was that, since the early stages of his campaign, Trump seemed to recognize this kinship, and to approve of his growing base of alt-right support. "Soon after Trump announced his candidacy in the summer of 2015, /pol/ and /r9k/ [another board] produced a few" memes of Trump as Pepe the Frog, including one of Trump-Pepe "locking immigrants out of the United States." By mid-October, these images had made their way over to Twitter, and when one of them appeared on Trump's timeline, he decided to promote it. Specifically, he "retweeted /pol/'s depiction of him as Pepe along with /pol'/s tag line, 'You can't stump the Trump,'" and "linked the image to a raucous meme-ified YouTube video that remixed his performance at the recent Republican debate with dance music, Illuminati jokes, and audio clips from a documentary about a centipede with killer pincers."[422]

Much of the alt-right was thrilled when they realized what Trump had done, and they were even more delighted when mainstream media figures began associating their memes and Twitter accounts with the candidate. On January 7, 2016, "cable news pundit and 'Never Trump' conservative Cheri Jacobus noted…that Pepe appeared frequently in the nasty comments that appended her tweets. 'The green frog symbol is what white supremacists use in their propaganda.

U don't want to go there,' she tweeted at a colleague."[423] While at that point, "Pepe had not yet been [totally] co-opted by /pol/," white supremacists on Twitter and 4chan saw the opportunity "to make the connection real." "[T]hey began flooding Jacobus with the most offensive, racist, and pro-Trump Pepe memes" they could find, including "Trump-loving Pepes gripping assault rifles; Pepes with swastikas on their foreheads….smug Pepes in yarmulkes watching the twin towers fall." "When the dust settled, the channers had succeeded in associating Pepe with white supremacy and Donald Trump. This was a connection that would soon be championed and promoted not only by Trump, but by his longtime confidante and political adviser," Steve Bannon.[424] Bannon ran the right-wing website *Breitbart,* which had close ties with the alt-right; in fact, it would later be revealed that one of their correspondents, Milo Yiannopoulos, had let weev "review and comment on multiple drafts" of the site's explainer on the alt-right and its factions.[425] When Yiannopoulos and *Breitbart*'s other columnists were pressed on their ties to the movement, they explained them away with a familiar argument: that members of the alt-right were being transgressive and didn't really mean what they said. According to Yiannopoulos, members of the alt-right weren't "actually bigots," in the same way that "death metal devotees in the 1980s were actually satanists. For them, it's simply a means to fluster their grandparents."[426]

Among those who were skeptical of Yiannopoulos' claims were Hillary Clinton and her staff. The Clinton campaign believed that if they could publicly tie Trump to the alt-right, then they could "drive a wedge between traditional conservatives and the GOP's new standard bearer." Thus, in August 2016, Clinton delivered a speech on the alt-right, focusing on how Trump was "taking hate groups mainstream and helping a radical fringe take over one of America's two major political parties." She explained how Trump had continually engaged with

white supremacists online: he had retweeted "a user who [went] by the name 'white-genocide-™" three times, and his campaign had "posted an anti-Semitic image - a Star of David imposed over a sea of dollar bills - that [had] first appeared on a white supremacist website." She also cited Trump's hiring of Steve Bannon, calling the decision to bring him on as campaign manager "a de facto merger between Breitbart and the Trump [c]ampaign," and "a landmark achievement for the alt-right."[427]

Clinton received a good deal of praise in the aftermath of the speech. As one conservative commentator, Matt Lewis, put it, "Hillary [was] doing EXACTLY what she should." However, as a *New York Times* article covering her remarks noted, the alt-right was also "[t]hrilled" by her comments."[428] By giving a major campaign speech about their movement, she had put the alt-right at the center of the national conversation. "We in the Alt-Right are thrilled to be receiving so much press," wrote a blogger at white supremacist site *The Right Stuff,* "negative or inaccurate as it may be, because it is driving curious people to our cause in droves." *The Daily Stormer* pointed out that "Google searches for 'alt-right' have completely exploded," and "seemingly every major media venue" rushed to publish "a story on [the] movement."[429] Even more importantly, Clinton's speech tied the alt-right and Trump's campaign together in many Americans' minds. "Once this connection had been made," George Hawley argues, "the Alt-Right could justifiably view the subsequent election as being, at least in part, a referendum on the movement. If Trump won, the movement could claim his victory as their own."[430]

As we now know, Trump *did* win—and the alt-right rejoiced. They had become "perhaps Trump's most enthusiastic base of support," and they "viewed Trump's election as a fundamental paradigm shift in American politics." According to one white supremacist, Lawrence Murray,

> President Trump has given rise to nationalism, to America First, to formal recognition of the Alt-Right… to (((anti-globalist))) [that is, anti-Semitic] memes entering the public consciousness, to levels of shvitzing that shouldn't even be possible, and more than anything else to hope for the future of our people…We will make the world safe for ethnocracy.[431]

As dramatic as Murray's prediction was, there were also no signs that President Trump intended to back away from his embrace of the alt-right. Though he had replaced Steve Bannon as campaign manager after Clinton's speech, Bannon had continued to meet frequently with Trump. After his election, Trump appointed Bannon to his administration, naming him Chief Strategist.[432] Many media outlets—which, like the public and the alt-right, had seen the election as a mandate on the movement—now ramped up their coverage of its leading figures. What was notable about these pieces was how sympathetic, even flattering, they were to their subjects. For example, *Mother Jones*' article on Richard Spencer was originally published with the headline "Meet the dapper white nationalist who wins even if Trump loses." Spencer's wealthy background and graduate education were highlighted, as if to illustrate how different he was from the stereotype of a white supremacist. His views, which he went to great lengths to frame as reasonable and rational, were also quoted at length without much authorial pushback.[433] Later profiles of Spencer and other alt-right figures would hit many of the same notes, though most would also include extended speculation on just how serious the subject was about their beliefs. For example, a *Bloomberg* piece on Yiannopoulos—which was accompanied by a glossy photoset—would portray him as a troll much more invested in stirring up controversy than in white supremacist ideas. It even quoted a Southern Poverty Law Center expert who claimed she wasn't "even sure if Yiannopoulos believes in the alt-right's tenets or [had] just found a juvenile way to mix internet culture and extreme ideology to get attention."[434]

This was the same way many media outlets wrote about the alt-right as a movement. They might make comments that seemed racist and anti-Semitic, journalists argued, but one couldn't be sure how serious they were about their claims. In large part, this assumption was made because of the alt-right's use of viral irony. Not only did reporters assume that 'real' white supremacists wouldn't joke about their beliefs, but many of these writers were already familiar with viral irony. However, rather than recognizing how the alt-right used it to manipulate people into not seeing them as a threat, they decided it was a sign that its members were harmless trolls. As Internet scholar Whitney Phillips explains,

> many of the young reporters who initially helped amplify the white nationalist 'alt right' by pointing and laughing at them, had all come up in and around internet culture-type circles…They knew what this was. This was just trolls being trolls. This was just 4chan being 4chan. This was just the internet. Those Swastikas didn't mean anything. They recognized the clothes the wolf was wearing…and so they didn't recognize the wolf.[435]

Phillips, for her part, realized that "[t]his was how the wolf operated…by laundering hate into the mainstream through 'ironically' racist memes, then using all that laughter as a radicalization and recruitment tool."[436] She wasn't the only one who recognized this, either; there were several other journalists, including the entire staff of the Southern Poverty Law Center's publication *Hatewatch* (and David Neiwert in particular), *Buzzfeed*'s Joseph Bernstein, and *Vox*'s Aja Romano, who took the alt-right seriously. However, many other scholars and journalists fell into the trap Phillips described. Most notable among them was Angela Nagle, an Irish-American academic and author of *Kill All Normies: The online culture wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the alt-right and Trump.* Nagle's book was featured on NPR and received positive coverage in *The New York Times, The New Republic,* and *New York.*[437] It also blamed "hysterical liberal call-out culture" for creating "a breeding ground for an online backlash of irreverent mockery and anti-

[political correctness] typified by charismatic figures like" Yiannopoulos. "[A]fter crying wolf" about racism and sexism for so many years, Nagle argued, "the real wolf eventually arrived, in the form of the openly white nationalist alt-right who hid among an online army of ironic in-jokey trolls."[438] Nevertheless, while she acknowledged that these "open white segregationists and genuinely hate-filled, occasionally murderous, misogynists and racists" existed within the movement, she also claimed that the alt-right was largely made up of "Pepe meme-posting trolls and online transgressives."[439] Rather than recognizing that their use of humor to disguise and enact racial terror followed in the footsteps of early 20th-century anti-Semites and the KKK, she wrote that the alt-right was part of an "anti-moral," anti-establishment "tradition that can be traced from the eighteenth-century writings of the Marquis de Sade, surviving through to the nineteenth century Parisian avant-garde, the Surrealists, [and] the rebel rejection of the feminized conformity of post-war America."[440] Her book gave the impression that the alt-right was more interested in pushing back against politically-correct culture than in acting on any white supremacist beliefs.

This was, as we now know, completely untrue. However, it was also an assumption that would shape much of the media coverage of the alt-right into late summer 2017. The idea that its adherents were making racist and anti-Semitic jokes because they'd calculated this was what would shock people the most, and that they didn't actually subscribe to these ideals, was what behind the articles that described the movement as "media-driven provocateurs," and that argued they valued trolling more than any white supremacist commitments.[441] In fact, the idea that humor and sincere belief were mutually exclusive was what Richard Spencer would rely on as an excuse after he was caught on tape giving a speech in which he declared, "Hail Trump. Hail our

people. Hail victory," and "[a] minority of the audience responded…by raising their right arm in the Nazi salute."[442] In his defense, and theirs, Spencer claimed that "the Alt Right is boisterous and even outlandish," and that the gestures were "clearly done in a spirit of irony and exuberance."[443] It was the same argument those who used viral irony had been making since the days of FYAD, and for Spencer, it was proof that he and his ilk shouldn't be regarded as white supremacists.

The debate over whether or not the alt-right was trolling would continue to dominate political conversation for the next year and a half. Take, for example, the controversy around the 'OK' sign, which evolved out of an image of Pepe the frog "making an OK hand gesture, reminiscent of [the one] Trump" often made during speeches. "This specific Pepe started circulating in online communities of alt-right and Trump supporters in early 2015," with "Donald Trump himself" tweeting "one of them" in October of that year. The Twitter account of *Breitbart* contributor "Pizza Party Ben" "used the gesture as a calling card," and "Richard Spencer posted a photo of himself making the sign the night of the election."[444] In 2017, one 4chan poster suggested "flood[ing] Twitter and other social media sites…claiming that the OK hand sign is a symbol of white supremacy." The implication was that the gesture didn't actually have any connection to white supremacists, and, by writing about it as if it did, reporters and liberals made themselves look unhinged.[445] The tension between the argument that the OK sign's association with white supremacy was all part of an elaborate trolling attempt, and the fact that some white supremacists really were using the sign, gave rise to a debate about the gesture.[446] Should the OK sign be read as a signal of white supremacist affiliations, or was regarding it as such misreading

an instance of irony?[447] Either way, Twitter was dominated by a discussion of white supremacists and their agenda.

Indeed, by the summer of 2017, the movement seemed like it would be a part of American political life for the foreseeable future. "We are not outsiders anymore," one essayist for the white supremacist publication *Counter-Currents* had written in the days after the 2016 election. "Trump's victory has cracked open the window through which we can become insiders again. We need to slam that window open and make our presence felt."[448] By all appearances, the alt-right had done exactly that. They had political and cultural influence, and they were in the White House, in newspapers, and on social media. They had shifted the Overton Window to the extent that their ideas were circulating out in the open, and were being debated on every major platform. "People have adopted our rhetoric, sometimes without realizing it," claimed alt-right member @JaredTSwift. "We're setting up for a major cultural shift."[449]

While "a major cultural shift" would soon occur, however, it wouldn't be in the alt-right's favor. The Unite the Right rally would be a watershed moment: one that would end the debate over whether the alt-right meant what they said, and convince the American public that they really were white supremacists. The violence that the nation saw in Charlottesville would put an end to the alt-right's ability to claim they were just being ironic, as there would be no plausible deniability after Heather Heyer's death. Instead, public opinion would turn against the alt-right, and there would be a rush to condemn the white supremacist ideas its members had spent so long trying to mainstream. At the height of their influence, the alt-right would shatter the illusion they had worked so hard to maintain—that they were nothing like other white supremacist groups,

that they should be given the benefit of the doubt—and would seal the downfall of their movement.

V. The Unite the Right Rally and its Aftermath: The End of Viral Irony, The Rise of Anti-Racist Activism, and The Collapse of the Alt-Right

The Unite the Right rally was organized in response to an attempt by several Charlottesville, Virginia residents (including a remarkable young activist named Zyahna Bryant), to have the city's Confederate statues removed. Jason Kessler, a local who opposed the demands to take down the statues, made the issue a rallying cry for the alt-right by publishing articles on it on right-wing sites like *The Daily Caller,* and in white supremacist publications like *VDare.* After organizing a protest with Richard Spencer in front of the city's Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson statues in May of 2017, Kessler, along with several other alt-right figures, planned a second, larger event for August of that same year. It was Kessler who applied for a permit with the city to hold that event, which he was now calling "Unite the Right." Spencer was scheduled to speak, as were many other big names in the white supremacist community, including:

> Mike Peinovich aka Mike Enoch of [the white supremacist site] The Right Stuff, Matthew Heimbach of the white nationalist Traditionalist Worker Party, Augustus Invictus, a pagan neo-fascist who had pledged to bring about a second Civil War, ex-Klansman David Duke, white supremacist shock jock Chris Cantwell, [white supremacist-adjacent] Tim Gionet AKA Baked Alaska…and Michael Hill of the [neo-Confederate] League of the South.[450]

Several of the speakers in this lineup—including David Duke and Michael Hill, who had KKK and neo-Confederate affiliations—fit far more easily into the public's idea of what a 'real' white supremacist looked like. This made it easier for observers like Angela Nagle to claim, in

the immediate aftermath of the Unite the Right rally, that the makeup of the alt-right had shifted. In *Kill All Normies,* Nagle had argued that "open white segregationists and genuinely hate-filled, occasionally murderous, misogynists and racists" were a minority of the alt-right, and most of its members were "Pepe meme-posting trolls and online transgressives."[451] However, in an article published just after the rally, she insisted that what she'd seen in Charlottesville proved the "heavily armed militiamen" she had once dismissed as a small faction of the alt-right were now "the most vocal and committed leaders of the movement." "This was no shambolic gathering of weedy LARPers or neckbeards with silly grins and Pepe signs," Nagle wrote, "but a uniformed procession of politically serious white nationalists prepared for violence and employing deadly serious chants of 'blood and soil' and 'you will not replace us.'"[452]

However, while Nagle was correct about how serious the attendees were about their convictions, her assumption that "weedy LARPers" and "neckbeards with silly grins and Pepe signs" weren't at the rally, and that they weren't just as dedicated to white supremacists beliefs as the militiamen, was incorrect. Indeed, one of the reasons Unite the Right was so important was that it showed that those people the public assumed weren't 'real' white supremacists were willing to commit violence in the name of white supremacist ideals. In turn, the rally made it clear that the alt-right also had a contingent of skinheads, neo-Confederates, and KKK members, and that they, not just the "weedy LARPers," had been some of the people posting online using viral irony. As we know from section II., many channers were Stormfront posters; though Nagle had failed to notice it, several of the armed marchers were also carrying shields and emblems emblazoned with some of the alt-right's favorite memes, from the Kekistan flag to the Deus Vult cross.[453] In other words, there wasn't a division between the "neckbeards" who used viral irony

and didn't mean what they said, and the militia members who employed serious rhetoric and were sincere in their beliefs. Rather, the alt-right was made up of both "basement-dwelling geeks" and militiamen; almost all of them, in turn, were posting on 4chan or Twitter, using memes and viral irony, and committed to white supremacy.

Indeed, the man who would come to define Unite the Right, James Alex Fields, Jr., was an introverted loner who had spent much of his adult life living with his mother, *and* a Hitler admirer who marched at the rally with the neo-Nazi group Vanguard America.[454] Fields posted explicitly pro-Nazi content on his Facebook page, "including a cover photo of soldiers with a US flag and swastikas," "a baby portrait of Adolf Hitler," "a Norse symbol that was co-opted by the Nazis to promote their ideas of racial 'purity,'" and "a character from the animated series *Archer* who is raised by a Nazi scientist and suggested to be a clone of Hitler." He also shared many of the memes the alt-right circulated on social media, from an image of Pepe the Frog to "a portrait of a crowned Trump sitting on a throne."[455] For Fields, then, there seemed to be no separation between 'serious' neo-Nazi ideas and the kind of content that defenders of the alt-right argued was merely provocative. He posted it all on his Facebook, sometimes side-by-side, and when the moment came for him to prove that he was dedicated to his beliefs, he showed no hesitation. A *NPR* reporter writing about Fields' attack describes it thusly:

> A car suddenly speeds down Fourth Street Southeast, ramming into pedestrians with an audible thud, striking another vehicle from behind and sending people flying through the air and over another car near the intersection with Water Street East. The struck vehicle then hits a minivan ahead, sending that vehicle into more pedestrians. Seconds later, the car allegedly driven by Fields, reverses on Fourth Street, its front bumper dragging as people who avoided the initial attack chase after it.[456]

The crowd of pedestrians into which Fields drove his gray Dodge Challenger was made up of counter-protesters, and he managed to kill one of them—32 year-old Charlottesville resident Heather Heyer—and to seriously injure "many others."[457] Fields was tried for Heyer's

murder, and one of the memes that he had posted on Instagram three months before the rally—which showed "a car ramming into a crowd of protesters, strikingly reminiscent of the Pulitzer Prize-winning photo taken a split-second after" his own attack, and which was captioned, "YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO PROTEST BUT IM LATE FOR WORK"—was ruled admissible in court. "Prosecutors argued that the Instagram post was a 'blueprint' for the fatal crash, and was indicative of Fields' 'intent, motive, and state of mind.'"[458] With the similarities between the meme and Fields' actual attack so obvious, there was little room to argue that Fields had only been joking when he'd posted the image. The meme may have been intended as humorous, but it also clearly reflected his actual beliefs; indeed, its conceit was that there was something amusing about running over protesters. There were few better ways to demonstrate that, in the alt-right, humor and violence were coextensive: that posting memes didn't make you less of a dedicated white supremacist, and, in fact, encouraged radicalization.

It makes sense, then, that Fields' attack, along with the other acts of violence that occurred at the rally, was what forced the media and much of the American public to finally recognize the reality of the threat the alt-right posed. James Alex Fields Jr.'s social media presence was no different than that of anyone who had been brushed off as 'just kidding' or 'only trying to stir up a reaction,'; like them, he posted Pepe memes and images of Trump as a God-king. His admiration of Hitler wouldn't have set him apart from many channers on /pol/, nor from the irony Nazis that Twitter was refusing to ban, nor from Richard Spencer. And yet he had murdered a woman, not to mention injured many others; this begged the question of whether the thousands of alt-right posters like him would be willing to do the same. That many Unite the Right attendees had proven willing to brutalize counter-protesters suggests the answer was yes.

In addition to the 35 people injured in Fields' attack, at least "14 [others] were hurt in street brawls," a trans woman was assaulted, and a KKK imperial wizard fired a gun at a Black counter-protester.[459] Another Black counter-protester, Deandre Harris, was set upon by four white supremacists in a parking garage; they beat him with poles and left him with "a broken wrist, a chipped tooth, a laceration across his eyebrow, abrasions on his knees and elbows, and a head injury that resulted in a concussion and required eight staples.[460] A reporter captured Harris' beating on camera and the photos went viral on social media, as did many of the other images of violence from the rally.[461]

While one might argue that it was because these events took place 'in real life' (that is, off the Internet) that forced the public to recognize the danger of this white supremacist movement, I think it had more to do with the content of those images. After all, there had been plenty of instances where these white supremacists expressed their beliefs offline, and yet many people had still not taken them seriously. Milo Yiannopoulos was especially fond of talking about his ideas in person, even launching a cross-country tour across college campuses. When students protested, Angela Nagle insisted they were overreacting and Yiannopoulos posed no real threat.[462] In turn, when *Esquire* writer Sanjiv Bhattacharya interviewed weev in 2014, he listened as weev told jokes about Black men raping white women, and "rail[ed] angrily against the Jews for looting the economy and controlling the media."[463] However, Bhattacharya dismissed weev's bigotry as "practically a schtick," and it was only after weev got a swastika tattoo that Bhattacharya admitted he now had "no doubt" weev had meant what he'd said.[464]

I think the fact that it took a swastika tattoo to convince Bhattacharya that weev wasn't merely being ironic is key to understanding why the photo and video footage from the rally was

what made the public take the alt-right seriously. There are some kinds of physical proof that leave no room for ambiguity, like getting a swastika tattoo or driving one's car into a crowd of protesters; there is no way to do either of these things ironically. That we are discussing images and not words here seems important; as we have seem throughout this chapter, language can be used to obscure one's intentions and to avoid taking responsibility for one's comments. While some images can have ambiguous meanings (particularly memes like Pepe the Frog), others function as what I want to call "hard lines": that is, what they signify is so clear that it is undeniable. Footage of young men wielding tiki torches and chanting "Jews will not replace us" is a hard line, as are photos of militia members carrying neo-Nazi flags and assaulting Black protesters. While the alt-right had played coy about whether they believed their comments, there was nothing ironic about murdering a young woman or beating protesters senseless. In this case, the alt-right couldn't argue that they were parodying racist beliefs, or had acted "in a spirit of irony and exuberance"; indeed, there was not even a compelling case that they were less dangerous than any other white supremacist movements.

All of this made the public—along with media outlets and corporations—sit up and pay attention to the threat the alt-right posed. Major companies were some of the first institutions to break with the alt-right; in the immediate aftermath of the rally, many announced that they would no longer do business with any of its members. Uber permanently banned a Unite the Right attendee and invited the driver who had kicked him out of her car to give a speech to the company, while Apple "cut off ApplePay support for certain websites that [sold] clothing or other products with Nazi and white supremacist symbols and slogans."[465] PayPal announced it would no longer allow "more than three dozen hate groups" to use its services, including Jason

Kessler's organization, Unity and Security for America, and Richard Spencer's site Altright.com. Discover Financial Services claimed it was "terminating merchant agreements with hate groups, citing the 'violence incited by their extremist views.'"[466] Keegan Hankes of the Southern Poverty Law Center told the *Washington Post* that he hadn't "seen [tech companies] take this much action on all these platforms, ever." He believed that "the shocking images people saw [had] created enough attention" that companies felt forced to take action, as "[i]t looks bad if they don't." Some of the harshest measures were taken against *The Daily Stormer,* which had not only encouraged its readers to attend the rally, but had published a piece in its immediate aftermath calling Heather Heyer "a fat, childless slut." GoDaddy, which hosted the *Stormer*'s domain and "had long withstood calls" to ban the site, recognized that associating with it had finally become too toxic. It took *The Daily Stormer* offline; when "[t]he Stormer quickly moved its servers to Google," Google "promptly evicted it too."[467] As a result, the *Stormer* was forced to move over to the Dark Web, which made it much harder to access. This did not stop weev from trying to continue the site's vendetta against Heyer, however; he took to a chat app to encourage his contacts to target "that fat skank's funeral."[468] Fortunately, no one signed on to his plan, and Heyer's service was held without incident.

This suggests that at least some of the members of the alt-right recognized that the last thing the movement needed was more bad press. Indeed, the media that had once given the alt-right soft-focus coverage was now blasting footage of Fields' attack and the tiki torch march across every channel. Many articles that explained how the alt-right used viral irony were now being shared on social media; while some had just been written, others were from months before the rally. The alt-right has "stormed mainstream consciousness by weaponizing irony," the

*Guardian* had warned its readers three months prior to Unite the Right, "and by using humour and ambiguity as tactics to wrong-foot their opponents."[469] Aja Romano at *Vox* had written about how, if you dismiss the alt-right's irony "as trolling, or simply ignor[e] it altogether, you risk glossing over [the] actual dangerous messages: [the] racist, misogynistic, bigoted, and violent symbolism and language."[470] Perhaps the most important articles, however, were the ones written in December 2017, after *The Daily Stormer*'s style guide leaked. The document was a step-by-step breakdown of how the alt-right used viral irony, and media outlets rushed to explain this strategy to their readers. As Ashley Feinberg at *The Huffington Post* wrote,

> Remember this style guide the next time an alt-righter says something so hammily outrageous that you begin to doubt its sincerity. This is by design. The Daily Stormer and other groups like it want you to be unsure if you should take them seriously. Andrew Anglin wants you to think he's just a troll, that he's spouting incendiary crap for no other reason than to get a rise out of you. Remember that the irony and the coy misdirection are all in service of tricking people into following him on his path toward a white supremacist state. This is what he believes.[471]

In my mind, the public understanding this strategy was the worst thing that could have happened to the alt-right. After all, the movement relied on ambiguity and confusion: on the people who encountered their posts being unsure as to whether they were serious, and assuming the alt-right wouldn't make these sort of jokes if they really were white supremacists. However, when the public realized that it didn't matter if the alt-right was kidding, and that these could be jokes *and* expressions of sincere belief, then it no longer had any reason to give the alt-right the benefit of the doubt. Of course, most Americans had stopped doing so the minute they saw the footage from Charlottesville; nevertheless, it was useful to know how the alt-right's strategy worked. If the public could recognize what it looked like when the alt-right used viral irony, then they could not only report these posts, but also be on guard against letting themselves perceive this content as just another part of the discourse. This, indeed, would be why the alt-right's

strategy of using social media to mainstream their rhetoric would ultimately fail: because social media users stopped letting alt-right posts pass by unnoticed, or "adopted [their] rhetoric, sometimes without realizing it."[472] That this happened at the same time that most of the public was united, and speaking out, against the alt-right meant that the movement and its beliefs—which had been so close to gaining a foothold in the mainstream—were now once again on the other side of the Overton window, in the realm of "political exile" and "pariahdom."[473]

Still, there was one person who refused to join in on the criticism of the alt-right: President Trump. While Trump was given multiple opportunities to denounce the movement, he declined to do so at every turn. Just after the Unite the Right rally, he had told the press, "We condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry, and violence," but had added that the violence had come from "many sides": a remark that was read as blaming the anti-racist protesters.[474] Andrew Anglin of *The Daily Stormer* was thrilled by Trump's comments. "Nothing specific against us," Anglin wrote. "No condemnation [of us] at all…God bless him."[475] Three days later, Trump clarified that "Racism is evil, and those who cause violence in its name are criminals and thugs, including the KKK, neo-Nazis, white supremacists and other hate groups that are repugnant to everything we hold dear as Americans." However, in the same interview, he would revert to blaming the counter-protesters and defending the alt-right:

> TRUMP: I am not putting anybody on a moral plane, what I'm saying is this: you had a group on one side and a group on the other, and they came at each other with clubs and it was vicious and horrible and it was a horrible thing to watch, but there is another side. There was a group on this side, you can call them the left. You've just called them the left, that came violently attacking the other group. So you can say what you want, but that's the way it is.
> REPORTER: You said there was hatred and violence on both sides?
> TRUMP: I do think there is blame — yes, I think there is blame on both sides. You look at, you look at both sides. I think there's blame on both sides, and I have no doubt about it, and you don't have any doubt about it either. And, and, and, and if you reported it accurately, you would say.
> REPORTER: The neo-Nazis started this thing. They showed up in Charlottesville.
> TRUMP: Excuse me, they didn't put themselves down as neo-Nazis, and you had some very bad people in that group. But you also had people that were very fine people on both sides. You had people in that group — excuse me, excuse me. I saw the same pictures as you did. You had people in that group that

> were there to protest the taking down, of to them, a very, very important statue and the renaming of a park from Robert E. Lee to another name.[476]

Trump's remarks sent the alt-right, and the rest of his voters, a signal: that if you backed him, he would defend you, regardless of what you'd done. His supporters would take this to heart; eventually, it would drive them to organize the "Stop the Steal" rally. Its attendees felt empowered to storm the Capitol, and to try and stop the election from being certified, because they believed they were preventing the election from being stolen from Trump. They were acting in his name, and they trusted he would defend them—and, as we now know, they were right. Trump refused to condemn the rally he'd encouraged, just as he never really denounced what the alt-right had done in Charlottesville. As recently as 2019, Trump was claiming that there really had been "very fine people on both sides" at Unite the Right. "I was talking about people that went because they felt very strongly about the monument to Robert E. Lee," he argued, in an attempt to justify his earlier comments. "People there were protesting the taking down of the monument to Robert E. Lee. Everybody knows that."[477]

Still, even as Trump stood firm in his defense of the marchers, the Unite the Right rally effectively put an end to the alt-right's influence in the Trump White House. On August 18, Steve Bannon resigned as Trump's Chief Strategist. Though rumors blamed his feud with Jared Kushner, that the person in the administration with the most visible ties to the alt-right was ousted within days of the rally suggests he was forced out as a PR move.[478] Bannon retreated to *Breitbart,* which would soon lose many of its readers. Indeed, even as other right-wing sites continued to grow their audiences, *Breitbart*'s monthly traffic "plummeted nearly 72% from 17.3 million in January 2017, when Trump took office, to 4.9 million in June 2019."[479] As *Breitbart*

hemorrhaged visitors, it was no longer able to drive the discourse, which meant that the alt-right lost its biggest champion in the right-wing media landscape. In turn, while other anti-immigrant and anti-diversity voices like Stephen Miller remained in the White House, and Trump and the rest of his administration would continue to stoke racial animus, the agenda Bannon had pushed —which directly reflected alt-right priorities, like the Muslim ban—was now dead in the water. There was little coherent vision, whether white supremacist or otherwise; instead, it was whatever benefitted Trump most in the moment. Thus, unlike the white supremacists who had initially latched onto Trump because they hoped he could help them get their beliefs into the mainstream, Trump's base increasingly came to identify with the man rather than with whatever ideas he championed; in so doing, they set the stage for the QAnon movement.

It's important to note that, at the same time that the alt-right was losing its institutional power, its members were also being threatened on an individual level. A loose collection of anti-fascist Internet researchers had decided that the best way to permanently take down the movement was to employ a tactic called 'doxing' against its members. Doxing involves finding and publishing the personal information of someone who is anonymous or semi-anonymous online. Though anti-fascists usually don't "post addresses, phone numbers, or names of loved ones," they do include full names and workplaces.[480] When a white supremacists' employer finds out about their Internet activities, they are usually fired, and the revelation often has devastating consequences for their personal relationships. For example, Peter Cvjetanovic, a student at the University of Nevada at Reno, was doxed shortly after a photo appeared of him holding a tiki torch at Unite the Right. Though his school didn't expel him, he was kicked out of his fraternity and, under pressure from the rest of the student body, he quit his job. When he tried to join the

National Guard four years later, he was ousted "after a background check revealed his extremist past."[481] Peter Tefft, another Unite the Right participant, was "publicly denounced" by his father after he was identified on Twitter. "Peter Tefft, my son, is not welcome at our family gatherings any longer," wrote his father. "I, along with all of his siblings and his entire family, wish to loudly repudiate my son's vile, hateful, and racist rhetoric and actions…We do not know where he learned these beliefs. He did not learn them at home."[482]

Anti-fascist researcher Molly Conger, herself a Charlottesville resident, argues that this is precisely why it's so important to dox members of the alt-right. "The goal is humiliation and the accountability that comes with it," she explains. If people know that associating with the alt-right can get them fired and ruin their relationships, then they'll be much less likely to join the movement. "I'm interested in disincentivizing this behavior," Conger continues. "I'm interested in raising the cost of being a white nationalist, raising the cost of being a Nazi, raising the cost of making these threats anonymously online, and making it clear that these people are not as hard to find as they think they are."[483] Indeed, while doxing raises concerns about the right to privacy, there is also no denying how effective it's been in disincentivizing the alt-right. "The thought of getting outed as 'white supremacists' to our employers and possibly losing our jobs is a horrifying prospect," wrote *Daily Stormer* user Ignatz, on a thread explaining why he had decided not to attend the Unite the Right rally in the first place. "It's hard to get a job, hard to make a living, hard to have a normal social life when all your friends and family know you believe in ethnic cleansing," explains the SPLC's Keegan Hanks. To him, even members of the alt-right who claim they aren't afraid of doxing are bluffing. "When you see those articles that say, 'We can come out of the shadows now and we don't have to hide our identities,' that's pure

bluster," he argues. "That's them trying to embolden their supporters or bring more people into the fold who would otherwise be casual observers or just stay away, because they're afraid of the consequences of being involved…The truth is, they're terrified."[484]

While doxing might have been the best way to strike fear in the hearts of the alt-right, there were also several other ways to fight back against the movement. These tactics were a large part of the reason the alt-right wasn't able to wait until the bad publicity from Charlottesville had died down and then make a return to the political arena. They included boycotting, protesting, and publicly pressuring companies that were still willing to cater to, or had resumed doing business, with the alt-right. In so doing, participants ensured that the alt-right's 'brand name' remained toxic, and that corporations stopped working with white supremacists. One of the most successful examples of this strategy is the activist group Sleeping Giants, which encouraged its followers to contact, and publicly shame, companies that advertised on sites or worked with individuals connected to the alt-right. Sleeping Giant is best known for its campaign against *Breitbart,* which convinced "4,000 companies"—including Lyft, TMobile, Kellogg's, Allstate, Warby Parker, BMW, and Visa—"to take their ads off the site."[485] It was this massive loss in advertising dollars, combined with the bad press after Charlottesville, that sent *Breitbart* into a nosedive from which it has yet to recover.

However, while Sleeping Giants also targeted social media companies, they had much less success with these platforms than with other businesses. Though tech companies like Uber and Airbnb and hosting services like GoDaddy had rushed to ban the alt-right after August 11th and 12th, Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter proved far more reluctant to crack down on the movement. After months of public pressure post-Unite the Right, Twitter finally purged some of

the most visible white supremacist accounts in December 2017. They deleted Vanguard America's account, as well as that of "Generation Identity, an extremist youth group," and the American Nazi Party. Jeff Schoep, "leader of the National Socialist Movement," was banned, as was the League of the South's Michael Hill.[486] Still, Richard Spencer's account remained active, as did Jason Kessler's.[487] Facebook had "something of an internal reckoning" post-Charlottesville, deleting several pages associated with the alt-right, including Vanguard America, Awakened Masses, Genuine Donald Trump, and Right Wing Death Squad. They also instructed moderators to remove Pepe the Frog memes "when he is shown in the context of hate," such as one image that had him "dressed in an SS uniform standing outside a concentration camp."[488]

However, in 2018, leaked internal documents revealed that company policy made a distinction "between white supremacy, separatism, and nationalism." It mandated that only content related to white supremacy be banned, and allowed "users to call for the creation of white enthno-states or [to] claim that the US 'should be a white-only nation.'"[489] It took a year after that information was released for Facebook to announce that they would "no longer allow content supporting white nationalism and white separatism"; this was only in the aftermath of the "white supremacist terror attack on mosques in [Christchurch,] New Zealand that left 50 people dead."[490] Reddit's trajectory was similar: immediately after Unite the Right, the platform announced it would be banning content that incited violence, including "content that encourages, glorifies, incites, or calls for violence or physical harm against an individual or group of people." They also shut down over 70 subreddits that either violated this policy or were identified as "far-right-leaning and Nazi-sympathizing forums."[491] However, it took Reddit until June 2020 to ban r/The_Donald, the pro-Trump subreddit where the alt-right had workshopped its memes during

the 2016 election, which had become "a magnet for conspiracy theories" and was filled with "harassment, bullying, and threats of violence."[492]

The question of why these social media platforms were so reluctant to take decisive action against the alt-right isn't easy to answer. Of course, as this chapter has discussed at length, the alt-right's use of viral irony makes it hard to identify much of what they post as hate speech. Still, with all the work that has been done post-Unite the Right to expose how white supremacists employ viral irony, the idea that moderators wouldn't be familiar with it—especially when they're asked to do things like distinguish hateful Pepe memes from harmless ones—is difficult to believe. However, even if one assumes that individual moderators don't know much about viral irony, that still doesn't explain Twitter's refusal to ban figures obviously associated with the alt-right, like Richard Spencer and Jason Kessler. Indeed, recent reports suggest that Twitter has come up with a way to remove virtually all alt-right content from its platform, but is choosing not to do so. An anonymous Twitter employee who spoke to *Vice* explained that, when Twitter was trying to drive ISIS off the site, its programmers wrote an algorithm that identified and removed content it determined was affiliated with the extremist group, and this approach "largely eradicated Islamic State propaganda."[493] Presumably, Twitter would be able to write a similar algorithm to target white supremacist content. The anonymous Twitter employee claims that this is the case, but that Twitter refuses to implement such an algorithm because some in the company fear a program written to screen out white supremacist talking points would also end up deleting content posted by Republican politicians.[494] Though Twitter has denied the whistleblower's claims, the idea that it has avoided using algorithms because it is scared of backlash from Republicans isn't hard to imagine.[495] As extremism researcher J.M. Berger argues,

> a very large number of white nationalists identify themselves as avid Trump supporters. Cracking down on white nationalists will therefore involve removing a lot of people who identify to a greater or lesser extent as Trump supporters, and some people in Trump circles and pro-Trump media will certainly seize on this to complain they are being persecuted.[496]

I think the fear of backlash is also part of the reason Facebook and Reddit have been hesitant to ban alt-right content. Reddit, in particular, has long since had a reputation as a "bastion of free speech." Though the site has content moderation guidelines, its users have repeatedly fought back against any attempts by Reddit executives to further limit what they could post.[497] While the backlash against the alt-right immediately after Charlottesville made Reddit's decision to ban some alt-right-affiliated subreddits uncontroversial, shutting down The_Donald, which was one of Reddit's largest political communities, would have likely angered even users who weren't affiliated with the subreddit. Facebook also seems afraid of conservative backlash; however, as the recent testimony of former Facebook employee Frances Haugen shows, the company's decisions are also motivated by a fear of losing money. Haugen claims that Facebook is picking and choosing what posts its users see, and that it is "optimizing for content that gets engagement, or reaction":

> HAUGEN: [Facebook's] own research is showing that content that is hateful, that is divisive, that is polarizing, it's easier to inspire people to anger than it is to other emotions.
> INTERVIEWER: Misinformation, angry content— is enticing to people and…keeps them on the platform.
> HAUGEN: Yes. Facebook has realized that if they change the algorithm to be safer, people will spend less time on the site, they'll click on less ads, they'll make less money.

Though one of the internal documents Haugen leaked states that Facebook has evidence "from a variety of sources that hate speech, divisive political speech and misinformation on Facebook and the family of apps are affecting societies around the world," Facebook's reluctance to have users spend less time on the site and to lose out on advertising revenue means that they continue to recommend extremist content to their users.[498] These policies, Haugen insists, are

still in place at Facebook, which explains how movements like QAnon have been able to thrive on the platform. Indeed, if the alt-right had not been so seriously wounded by all of the efforts this section has already described, then they might have continued taking over social media, simply because these platforms were not going to do much to stop them.

Fortunately, however, the alt-right was unable to recover from the Unite the Right rally and its aftermath. We paid a price for what happened in Charlottesville," Richard Spencer admitted. "Things have become a lot harder."[499] As it turned out, he was understating the case. With so much of the nation united against them, the alt-right had lost any chance of normalizing their ideas or exerting political and cultural influence. Their prospects for recruiting also looked dismal; after all, no one wanted to join a movement that was now every bit as toxic as the KKK. Meanwhile, the alt-right's rank-and-file members were fleeing, as they were terrified of being doxed. One of them was Connor Perrin, who had once been so dedicated to the alt-right that he had driven "all night from Austin to Charlottesville" to attend the Unite the Right rally. By April 2018, however, he had left the alt-right—"You're going to get yourself in trouble," he recalled his mother warning him—and was "focusing on working and being normal." He conceded that the movement was practically over, admitting, "We lost."[500]

Indeed, by the end of the year, the alt-right was dead in the water. While Perrin got the chance to "go back to [his] normal life," many of the movement's former leaders weren't so lucky. Christopher Cantwell, nicknamed the 'Crying Nazi,' was charged and pled "guilty to two counts of assault and battery stemming from his dispersal of pepper spray" at Unite the Right. He was released on time served and banned from Virginia for five years, but it didn't take much time before he was in trouble with the law again. In 2021, he was sentenced to over three years

in prison "for trying to extort and threaten a fellow member of the white nationalist community" on a messaging app.[501] *The Daily Stormer*'s Andrew Anglin faced a harassment lawsuit in civil court, and went into hiding to avoid having to appear; at one point, he claimed he was seeking refuge in Cambodia.[502] Richard Spencer has also had legal troubles: his wife filed for divorce and said he'd been physically and verbally abusing her for years.[503] The Traditionalist Worker Party's Matthew Heimbach physically attacked his TWP co-founder Matthew Parrott after Parrott accused Heimbach of having an affair with his wife.[504] Heimbach was charged for the assault and spent 38 days in prison; after he was released, the "TWP disbanded and Heimbach, once an ever-present fixture at public alt-right events, went into hiding."[505] Heimbach and Parrott weren't the only alt-right figures to have a falling out, either: Brad Griffin, creator of the white nationalist blog *Occidental Dissent,* tore into weev for praising "the neo-Nazi group Atomwaffen Division," which Griffin thought made "him and [other white supremacists] look dangerous, and attract[ed] the interest of federal agents."[506] In one particularly strange dispute, alt-right personality "Kyle 'Based Stickman' Chapman had it out with fellow California far-right activists Johnny Benitez…and Irma Hinjosa," as well as his "former ally," "long shot Florida GOP senate candidate Augustus Invictus." Invictus argued Chapman "gets coked up, takes pills, and uses rallies to pick up women," and Benitez "tagged the FBI in a reply to a since-deleted tweet Chapman posted that referenced drugs." "In his response, Chapman mocked 'the fake colonial accent [Invictus] tries to put on,' and called him a has-been and a Satan-worshipper."[507] All of this was evidence the alt-right was "[i]mploding," the SPLC's Heidi Beirich claimed. "The self-inflicted damage, the defections, the infighting is so rampant, it's to the point of almost being pathetic."[508]

It's hard to argue with anything Beirich was saying. The alt-right, which had once seemed so formidable—and for a second, looked like it was going to become a major force in American political and cultural life—had collapsed. As I will argue in this chapter's conclusion, however, the alt-right's impact would still be felt long after the movement itself had died off. There was one way in which it would prove particularly influential: in the social media strategies it had pioneered. The alt-right had shown that these platforms could not only be infiltrated, but used to bring fringe ideas into the mainstream. As a result, other right-wing extremist groups would use the alt-right's blueprint to spread their ideas on Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and Instagram. In my conclusion, I will focus on perhaps the most important example of this phenomenon: the QAnon movement. Specifically, I will look at how QAnon was able to take its beliefs from the 4chan-spinoff 8chan to the highest echelons of the Republican Party. However, I will also note that, while being able to draw on the alt-right's playbook makes movements like this dangerous, the fact that they borrow so heavily from the alt-right's tactics means that we already know how to defeat them. To do so, we must learn from the mistakes we made with the alt-right, and not wait for moments of real-life violence and spectacular images. Instead, we have to treat these movements as serious threats from the beginning, and use every tool in our arsenal to get them off social media.

## VI. Conclusion

I started thinking about this chapter, which I originally envisioned as a self-contained research project, in the spring of 2017. I was a second-year Ph.D. student at the University of Virginia, and I'd been following the alt-right with interest since the 2016 election. As a longtime

fan of, and occasional participant in, Weird Twitter, I was disturbed by how the alt-right used the same ironic tweeting style to spread white supremacist messages. I also doubted many commentators' assurances that the alt-right wasn't all that dangerous. I had seen how they harassed journalists, Jewish people, and women of color, and it was clear that they felt emboldened by Trump's nomination and eventual election. When the sympathetic articles about the alt-right started coming out, I found myself screenshotting the pieces (I still have my original photo of the *Mother Jones* article calling Richard Spencer a "dapper white nationalist"), as well as the replies from others who couldn't believe what they were reading. After I mentioned all of this to one of my professors, she recommended I meet with another faculty member who had similar interests. He encouraged me to do a project on the alt-right under his supervision, and I began my research in spring 2017.

That was about four months before the Unite the Right rally: before Charlottesville, where all of us lived, became synonymous with white supremacy and tiki torch-wielding Nazis. I saw the moment when James Alex Fields Jr. drive his car into protestors live on TV, and I watched in real time as the narrative around the alt-right changed. Suddenly, all the commentators who had insisted we shouldn't take the alt-right seriously realized that the movement really was made up of committed white supremacists. I was fascinated by how so many people had underestimated the alt-right, and I was sure I knew the reason why: because the movement used a form of Internet discourse that I'd started calling viral irony. While I wasn't the only person who'd identified irony as the key to the alt-right's success—as I mentioned in section IV., journalists like David Neiwert and Aja Romano had been writing how the alt-right used ironic humor to make the movement seem more appealing, though 'viral irony' itself is a

term of my own invention—there were still plenty of voices who'd spent the months before the Unite the Right rally arguing that we shouldn't treat the alt-right as a very real threat. Of course, after Charlottesville, everything changed: no one could justify giving the alt-right the benefit of the doubt, and viral irony was no longer a viable strategy. Indeed, at the same time that I was refining my theories on viral irony, the alt-right itself was dying off.

This is one of the risks of writing about contemporary culture. When you start your project, you're usually dealing with a movement that's just getting started, but by the time your research is ready to present and publish, that movement is either fading out or already finished. To be fair, I wasn't all that upset about the alt-right's decline. Not only did I think that the eradication of a white supremacist movement was more important than whether or not my research was relevant, but I was also convinced that my work was still useful, especially since QAnon was rapidly gaining strength. At the same time, I was a bit shocked that, while we had just lived through the rise and fall of the alt-right, it looked like we were making the exact same mistakes again with QAnon. While there were many more journalists urging their readers to treat QAnon as a serious threat than there had been with the alt-right pre-Charlottesville, most of the public still seemed to view QAnon as a joke. This was almost exactly what happened with the alt-right, albeit for different reasons. As I have already explained, the alt-right had *wanted* the public to underestimate them; they had been very conscious in using viral irony to make people think that they were joking, so those people would let their guards down and not automatically dismiss alt-right ideas. Conversely, I think QAnon adherents would have been delighted if the non-converted took them seriously; the reason they didn't was that so many of the movement's ideas seemed ridiculous. The thought that most of the world's politicians and celebrities were

involved in a child-eating pedophile cabal, and that President Trump was on a one-man mission to stop them, was laughable, as was believing that a high level government official was leaking clues about this mission on an even less moderated version of 4chan. However, even though most QAnon followers didn't see anything funny about what they'd bought into, their ideas had the same effect on the general public as the alt-right's deliberate attempts at absurdity. Most people saw them as a joke, and couldn't believe they could possibly be committed to their beliefs.

The problem was that they were—just as the alt-right had been. They were also very good at social media—which, as I mentioned in section V., was because their strategy on these platforms owed much to the tactics that the alt-right had pioneered. QAnon followers wanted to bring the movement's ideas from relatively isolated spaces like 8chan to major platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Reddit. In so doing, they hoped to expose more people to QAnon, and to make it part of mainstream discourse. While most users who saw what they posted on social media sites laughed it off, those who were already susceptible to right-wing extremist thinking, and/or who had bought into the hero worship of Trump that the then-President encouraged, latched on to QAnon's ideas. As more and more people like this became exposed to QAnon via social media, the movement grew. As it gained strength, some of its savvier adherents started to present its ideas in a more watered-down, palatable form. Just like the alt-right, QAnon followers had come to recognize that winning over the general public meant getting them to let their guard down; this meant tweeting about the movement's ideas without ever explicitly associating them with QAnon, which was a label many people were already primed to dismiss. Sometimes, users following QAnon accounts didn't even realize they were

tied to the movement; still, they internalized the movement's talking points all the same.[509] Soon, almost all of the discourse on the right was in some way QAnon-inflected, though the source of these ideas was almost never mentioned.[510] By the 2020, a large swath of the American public believed that most government officials were unimaginably evil, and that Donald Trump was the only one who could stop them. Indeed, according to QAnon's ideology, he was planning to do so by holding military tribunals and sentencing them to death. This is why, when it looked like Trump might have the election 'stolen' from him, and his chance to punish all of these people might be lost, his supporters stormed the Capitol in an attempt not only to restore him, but also to execute elected officials in his name.

Much of what went on in D.C. on January 6, 2021 was planned on the same social media platforms that had hesitated to ban extremist content even after the Unite the Right rally. As the Tech Transparency Project reported, "[c]alls to 'occupy Congress' were rampant on Facebook in the days leading up to the deadly Capitol riot." "Private Facebook groups spent months advising one another about how to 'take down' the U.S. government," and "[m]any of [these] groups specifically talked about traveling to the Capitol on Jan. 6."[511] Facebook wasn't the only site where this sort of discourse took place, either; indeed, there was a "slew" of Twitter hashtags which "implied that violence could occur at the rally." Many Twitter posters hashtagged #Jan6 so as to "encourag[e] excitement about the date," while others used hashtags that "implied even further disruption, including #wildprotest…#fightback, and in #midnightride."[512] It was only when these militias breached the Capitol, and the images of violence and destruction went viral, that these platforms decided to take some action. In many ways, this was reminiscent of what had happened after the Unite the Right rally, except for one significant difference: Facebook and

Twitter banned President Trump's accounts. They justified this move by claiming his posts had incited the riots at the Capitol—and to Facebook and Twitter's credit, their decision dealt both Trump and QAnon an enormous blow. Trump was cut off from his primary means of connecting with supporters and driving the news cycle, while QAnon believers no longer felt like their president was giving them direct orders.

As you can imagine, I was ecstatic (and somewhat surprised) when I found out that Facebook and Twitter had banned Trump. At the same time, I wasn't all that optimistic about the broader response, as the rest of the fallout from the January 6th riots looked so much like what I'd seen after Charlottesville. The footage of insurrectionists storming the Capitol forced Americans to acknowledge that QAnon-fueled extremism was a real threat, and companies and web hosting services cut ties with QAnon- and rioter-affiliated individuals and sites. Both antifascists and regular citizens lined up to identify the rioters from photos that had been taken at the rally, and then either doxed them or turned that information over to the FBI.[513] As a result of their efforts (plus those of law enforcement), over 674 people were arrested and then charged for participating in the insurrection. All of this—plus a great deal of infighting and informing on one another—tore the QAnon movement apart.[514] I knew, however, that unless major social media companies were willing to take comprehensive and lasting action against right-wing extremism, the same cycle we'd seen play out with the alt-right and then QAnon would keep repeating itself. Indeed, by the time I started working on this project again in the summer of 2021—now with the goal of turning it into my third dissertation chapter—another movement was already taking over social media. This time, it was the COVID-19 misinformation and anti-vaccine crusade, which had spread across Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok like wildfire. While Instagram and Facebook

have taken some measures to stop misinformation, including labeling anti-vaccine posts that contain false information, this kind of content is still everywhere on both platforms.[515] Indeed, Instagram seems to have actually promoted anti-vaccine and COVID truther posts to its users. One report from a UK nonprofit found that "Instagram recommended false claims about COVID-19 [and] vaccines to people who appeared interested in related topics," suggesting about one post containing misinformation per week.[516]

All of this, of course, is incredibly depressing. It's not easy to think about the fact that, in the three-and-a-half years since I started this project, we've seen the rise and fall of two right-wing extremist movements, and are currently living through a third. However—and while this may seem improbable—I still think there's a bit of a silver lining here. The most important thing about all the research I've done on the alt-right might end up being the fact that it gives us a blueprint for understanding how all the other online movements that came after it operate, and thus, for how we can take them down. The biggest advantage the alt-right had at the start of its crusade was that no other American right-wing extremists had ever used social media in quite the same way. This meant that those of us who opposed the alt-right had to figure out what they were doing as they did it, and come up with tactics to oppose them on the fly. Now, though, we not only have an understanding of how the alt-right operated, but are also aware that subsequent movements have followed in their footsteps. We know that they've been able to build such large followings because few people take them seriously at first, and don't bother opposing their efforts; it's only when these movements explode into violence that the public realizes the dangers they pose. Now that we're aware of all of this, however, we don't have to wait until things get to this point to start opposing these groups. We can head them off just as they're starting to gain

steam on social media, and can do so by using the tactics that activists and antifascists employed post-Charlottesville and after January 6th. That means doxing their members and encouraging companies to ban them from their services, as well as targeting advertisers who do business with movement-affiliated sites. If we can disincentivize people from joining these movements before they ever really have a chance to pick up followers and become influential, then we can prevent future Unite the Right rallies and January 6th riots (and the countless lives lost to the anti-vaccine movement) from happening.

Needless to say, this requires quite a bit of action from ordinary citizens. Not only do they have to resist the impulse to dismiss any extremist movement as not posing a threat, however unserious that movement and its supporters' beliefs seem, but they also have to be willing to call companies and boycott advertisers, and collaborate with other social media users on coordinated action. While this might seem like a lot to ask, there are promising signs that more Americans than one might expect are already engaged in this sort of work. Ironically, they're using the same platforms on which extremists have been able to spread their views—Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit, to name a few—to come together and combat these movements. Groups like r/AgainstHateSubreddits, a Reddit community where users come together to monitor, and then post content from, particularly hateful subreddits, so as to try to get Reddit to take action against them, are particularly encouraging examples.[517]

The social media platforms themselves pose a much greater challenge—and, admittedly, this is where I lose a bit of hope. Much of the reason why the alt-right was able to spread its content so far and wide on these sites was that their use of viral irony made it difficult for these platforms to identify whether or not what was being posted was hate speech. With these newer

movements, however, companies don't seem to have any trouble determining what is or isn't extremist content; the problem is that they're unwilling to purge it from their sites. In some ways, this makes things much easier: these companies already have the tools that would stop online extremism, and all we have to do is convince them to use them. Of course, from another angle, this looks impossible; after all, if the Unite the Right rally and the events of January 6th didn't make Facebook and Twitter and the like take real action on combatting this issue, then what could possibly change their minds? Indeed, the recent Congressional testimony from the Facebook whistleblower makes me think that platform, at least, has little incentive to change the way it operates: her account suggests that Facebook is not only aware that their platform is a hotbed for extremism, but actually needs to stay that way in order to keep their users on the site. In fact, since so many young people have abandoned Facebook, and it has increasingly become a platform for older users, I would hazard a guess that the people who spend more time on the site because they get riled up by its extremist content are a larger part of its user base than Facebook would like to admit. As a result, I think it's unlikely that Facebook will ever be significantly reformed, and that the best hope for combatting extremism on the platform is that the site eventually dies out. Twitter, on the other hand, has a young, active, and liberal-leaning user base, and one that has been very vocal about the kinds of changes it wants to see made; while Twitter has been slow to act, it has implemented some of these reforms, and seems more susceptible to public pressure. If users keep tweeting at Twitter support and asking them to take action against hate speech—and if these tweets continue going viral and getting a significant amount of attention, as they tend to do—then Twitter will most likely continue taking steps to combat

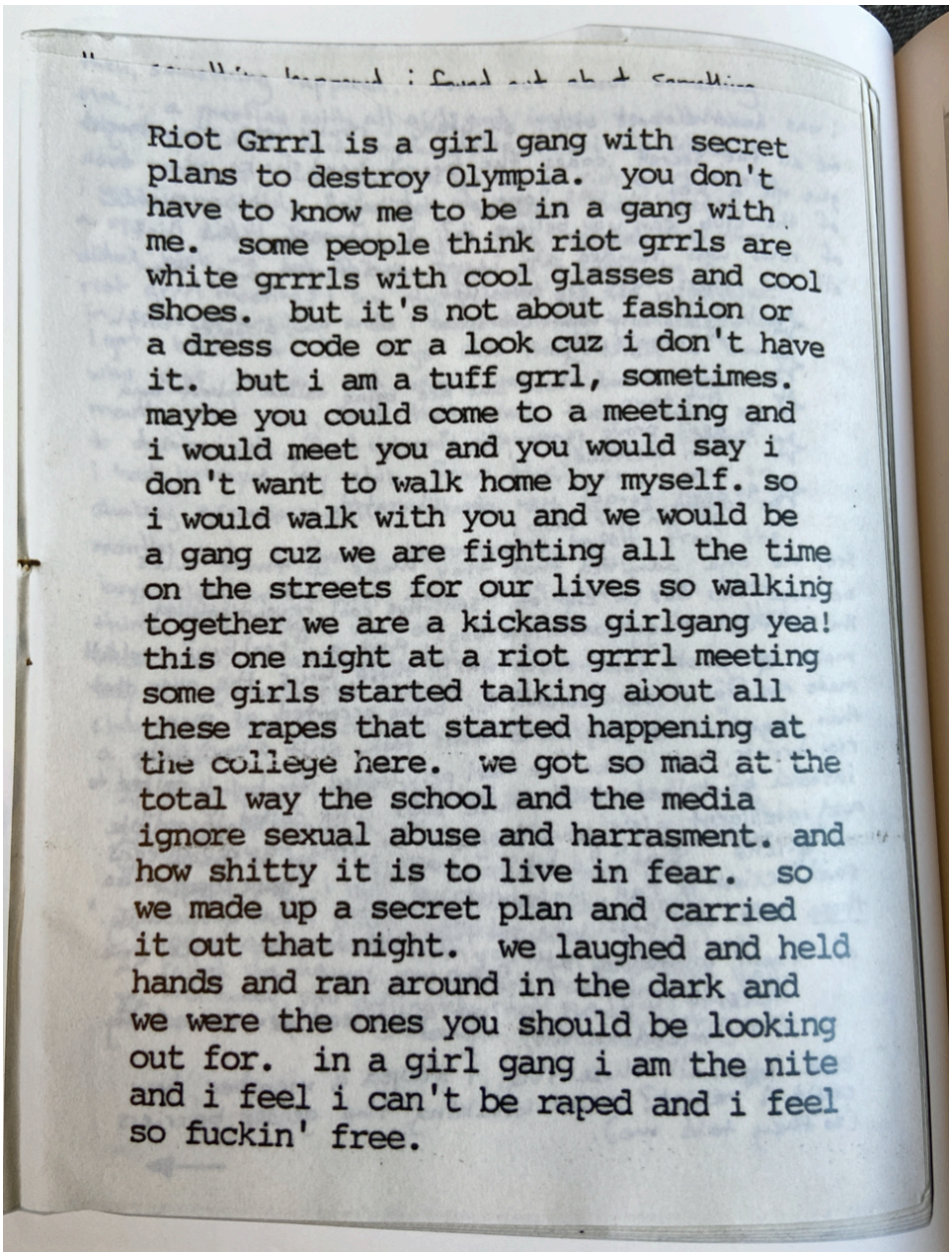
extremism on the platform: not as quickly or effectively as would be ideal, but doing so all the same.

At the same time, I'm not sure that, by the time I defend this dissertation, there won't be another, even larger and more dangerous, online extremist movement. I do this work because I think the fight against extremism can be won, even, and especially, after I saw it come to my doorstep in Charlottesville. However, I know that, unless we keep up the pressure on social media platforms, and start taking these movements seriously and working against them as soon as they appear, we'll see the same cycle play out over and over again. If that's the case, our body politic will become further radicalized, and irreparably damaged. I don't think we're at that point yet, but we're getting close. In order to stop it from happening, we need to learn everything we can from the rise and fall of the alt-right. It is perhaps the ultimate irony that, in being so adept at using social media to spread their ideas, the alt-right may have given us precisely the tools we needed to put an end to the rise of online extremism.

APPENDIX (RIOT GRRRL ZINES)


fig. I (*Riot Grrrl* #1)


fig. II (*Jigsaw* #4)



Riot Grrrl is a girl gang with secret plans to destroy Olympia. you don't have to know me to be in a gang with me. some people think riot grrls are white grrrls with cool glasses and cool shoes. but it's not about fashion or a dress code or a look cuz i don't have it. but i am a tuff grrl, sometimes. maybe you could come to a meeting and i would meet you and you would say i don't want to walk home by myself. so i would walk with you and we would be a gang cuz we are fighting all the time on the streets for our lives so walking together we are a kickass girlgang yea! this one night at a riot grrrl meeting some girls started talking about all these rapes that started happening at the college here. we got so mad at the total way the school and the media ignore sexual abuse and harrasment. and how shitty it is to live in fear. so we made up a secret plan and carried it out that night. we laughed and held hands and ran around in the dark and we were the ones you should be looking out for. in a girl gang i am the nite and i feel i can't be raped and i feel so fuckin' free.

fig. III (*What Is Riot Grrrl Anyway????*)

## ZINES

*NOTE: On zine size and format, unless another size is mentioned, all zines are the usual xeroxed 8½" x 11", folded down to half-size (5½" x 8½").*

### *Abuse*
Rachel Abuse
PO Box 1242
Allston, MA 02134
(#1 — $3 ppd, #2 — $5 ppd)
*#1-2 — full-size xerox. Really thick (70 and 84 pages respectively) compendiums of thematic mail artwritings; compiled, edited (but not altered or censored) and published by Rachel. Really daunting undertaking, if you ask me. #1 is the "carnal desires" issue, #2 is the "nightmares" issue. Both have a really wide variety of contributors (male and female) who have all sorts of takes on the subject, including letters, essays, comics art and anything else they could imagine. #1 is definitely "adult" and some people's contributions could be considered offensive. But you have to know how people really think, don't you. In no way grrrl but very interesting.*

### *Aim Your Dick*
Mimi
PO Box 4655
Berkeley, CA 94704-0655
($1 ppd)
*#1 — it's big and swell. Big folded xeroxes, and 64 pages? Extremely cool feminist zine, with cut-up graphics and tons of reading. Some of the stuff included here: Emma Goldman quotes, writings on anarchy, children's rights, a male perspective on why women's spaces are not sexist or separatist (reprinted from* Profane Existence *and required reading for any guy that's trying to understand all this), shoplifting tips, foot care, reprints of scary articles, herbs for health, vegetarianism, and so much more I can't begin to list it all. More than worth it — essential reading for a punk of any gender, or even those who don't consider themselves to be punks. I consider this required reading, especially for those guys who are trying to learn about "this whole girl power thing." Support this zine! #2 — fullsize and totally packed full of great stuff. A really cool politically oriented zine with tons of articles on stuff like: rape & rapists; fraternity pigginess (examples, even!); bad meat; de-romanticising anarchy (i.e. get off your butt and face the real world); abortion rights; hippies; a dissection of Ice-T's lyrics (very offensive, yes they are); an expedition to a Dead show; the evils of drugs, cigarettes, cars & smoking; plus lots more. Way cooler and more informative than certain well-established "politically-oriented" zines I won't name here . . .*

### *AngelFish*
Karen + Michelle
RPO 2037
PO Box 5063
New Brunswick, NJ 08903-5063
($1.25 ppd)
*#2 — more or less a 24-page collage, cut-up stuff with their own writing and drawing, all of it really cool and friendly. The cut-up stuff is different from most (crazy comic-type things) and is used really cleverly. A great combination of the funny and the serious — definitely worth a try. And what a swell name, hmm?*

### *Babydoll*
ericka
10924 Camarillo Pl #4
North Hollywood, CA 91602
(2 stamps or trade)
*#1 — full-size xerox. Enthused LA grrrl zine, it's got writings, poetry, and the occasional clipping/quote. Not an incredibly substantial issue, but it's all original stuff, and she's getting #2 out ASAP. Scribbly, messy, joyful, spirited and full of energy. #2 — fullsize xeroxer, much more substantial than last time. Lots of reprints, (some handwritten) a letter from Kathleen Hanna (I felt really voyeuristic reading it!); some stuff on Hole & 7 Year Bitch and a really personal piece by Ericka. She seems very disillusioned and may give up on all this zine/grrrl stuff so drop her a line and some support.*

### *Ball-Buster*
Amanda
PO Box 3277
Columbus, OH 43210
($2 ppd)
*#1 — a gorgeously put together fullsize mag with a fabbo cover! Mostly poetry and short fiction, BB also includes: confessions of a boy-crazy feminist & top 10 cute boys; 70s music revival/retread; and a summer reading list. Really great job.*

### *Barbie Bazaar*
5617 6th Ave
Kenosha, WI 53140
($4.95 sample issue)
*Vol 5 #5 — fullsize & glossy with color popping up all over! Okay, so this is hardly a grrrl zine. But it is put out by women for adult Barbie fans. And you know we all have that love/hate thing with her. This wacky & pretty cool mag concentrates on older Barbie stuff and is all about the craftsmanship and beauty of the old merchandise. Lots of crazy fashion layouts of Barbie and friends, too! It sounds completely dorky, I know, but everyone that's seen it digs it! Look for it at mags/comic shops with a lot of stuff on toys and collecting, or write for a sample copy.*

### *Bedtime Stories for Trivial Teens*
Andrea
5255 Bothe Ave
San Diego, CA 92122
(50¢ plus 2 stamps)
*#1 — a mini-zine of fiction and art. Probably the only fiction-oriented zine I've ever read all the way through, and it wasn't because it was short. Three somewhat fanciful stories plus several pages of graphics that are all really keen. My personal favorite was the longest story, "Grace in Transit." I really was surprised by how much I liked this zine. It's like the best prize you ever got out of a gum machine — unexpected, tiny and so neat. For fiction-lovers this is definitely recommended.*
*#2 — a mini-zine, with less fiction than last time, more poetry, a play of sorts, some random thoughts and still lots of clip art. It's a real swell little pocketful of creative writing. The Post Office ripped the cover off my copy, but I'm sure it was groovy, too.*

### *Betty Stained*
Beth
7540 N Pennsylvania St
Indianapolis, IN 46240-2802
($1ppd)
*#3 — continuing where Ycide left off (and by the same four girls), this issue contains essays on: the lack of rights for minors; the 1919 communist rules of revolution and how they compare to American society; bookstore perverts; greed; plus more. Really interesting and full of info! Lots of work here — get one of your very own.*

### *Bi Girl World*
Karen
99 Newtonville Ave
Newton, MA 02158
($2 ppd)
*Summer — A extra cool full-size xeroxed zine for girls who are bi, gay or neither. Really fun, with all kinds of tidbits packed into its 24 pages. Fiction, art, essays and more, including "why I love dykes, but not Lesbians," a Roberta Gregory strip, an expose of* Details *magazine's bisexual agenda (well, really it was just a titillating fashion layout based on* Thelma & Louise*); bi-women of the underground, some hot erotica, mini-profiles of historically important bi-women (Greta Garbo, Tallulah Bankhead and more), the almost de rigueur body modification article and much, much more! There's nothing I like to see more than a good sense of humor . . .*
*Winter 93 — full-size xeroxed zine for girls who are bi, gay or neither. Just as great as the last one! Fiction, art, essays and more, including: Bi Love Advisor; film etc. recommendations; an essay on anti-bi bias among gays; more mini-profiles of historically important bi-women (Margaret Mead, Virginia Woolf and more); and much more. Très, très swell!*

### *Bleu Cheese on Fire*
Amy Champ
Pitzet
1050 N Mills Ave
Claremont, CA 91711
($2.50 + stamps)
*A "book" of sorts, consisting of writing (mostly poetry) and some art (mostly clipped) which add up to a whole piece on socio-political issues. I don't feel qualified to judge poetry-type stuff, but this looks pretty good to me.*

### *Blowin Chunx*
Alyssa
75 Stanton Rd
Brookline, MA 02146
($1 ppd)
*#5 — a really cool half-size zine with lots of contributors. Mostly put together while Alyssa was in Michigan, several pages are dedicated to the 404 Willis project in Detroit —*



fig. IV (*Action Girl Guide* #1)

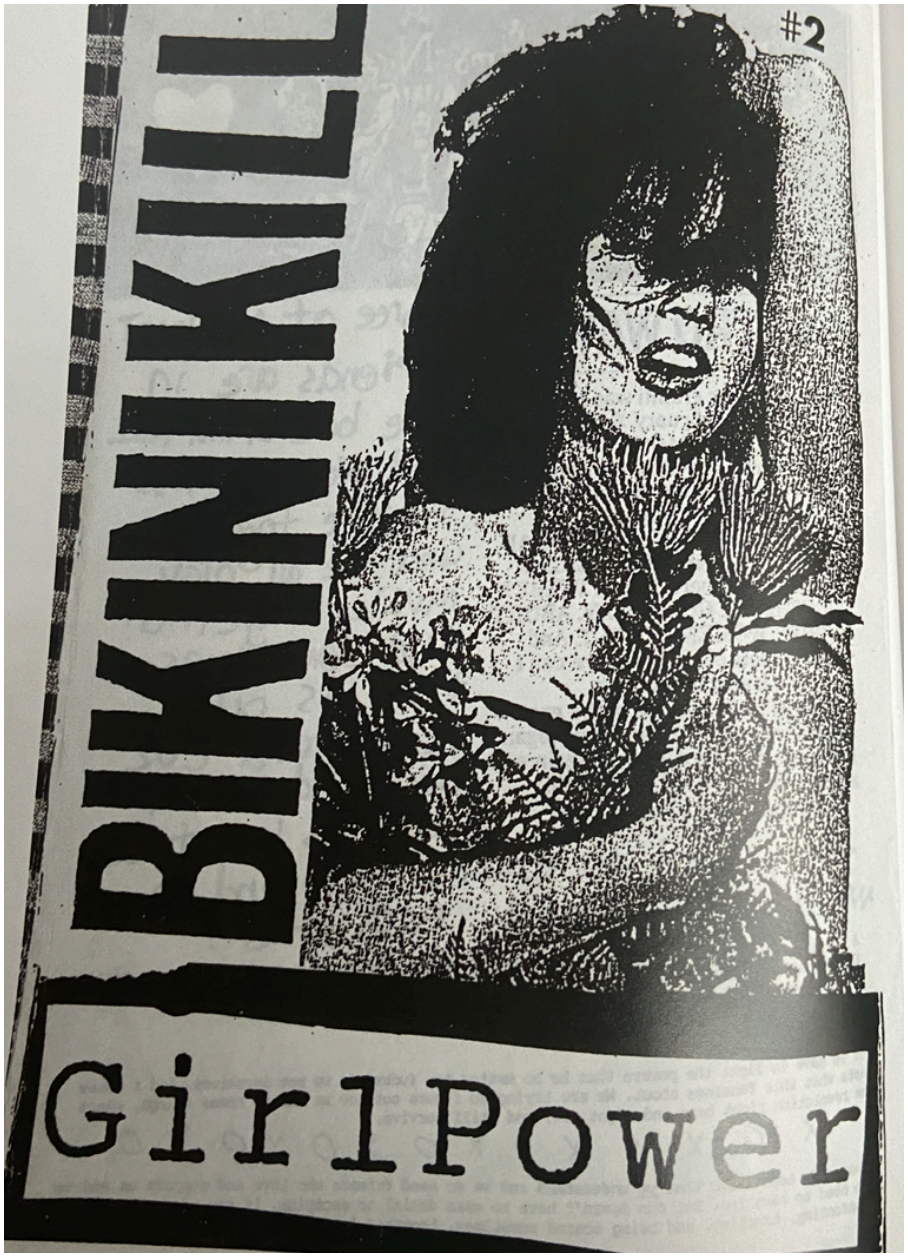
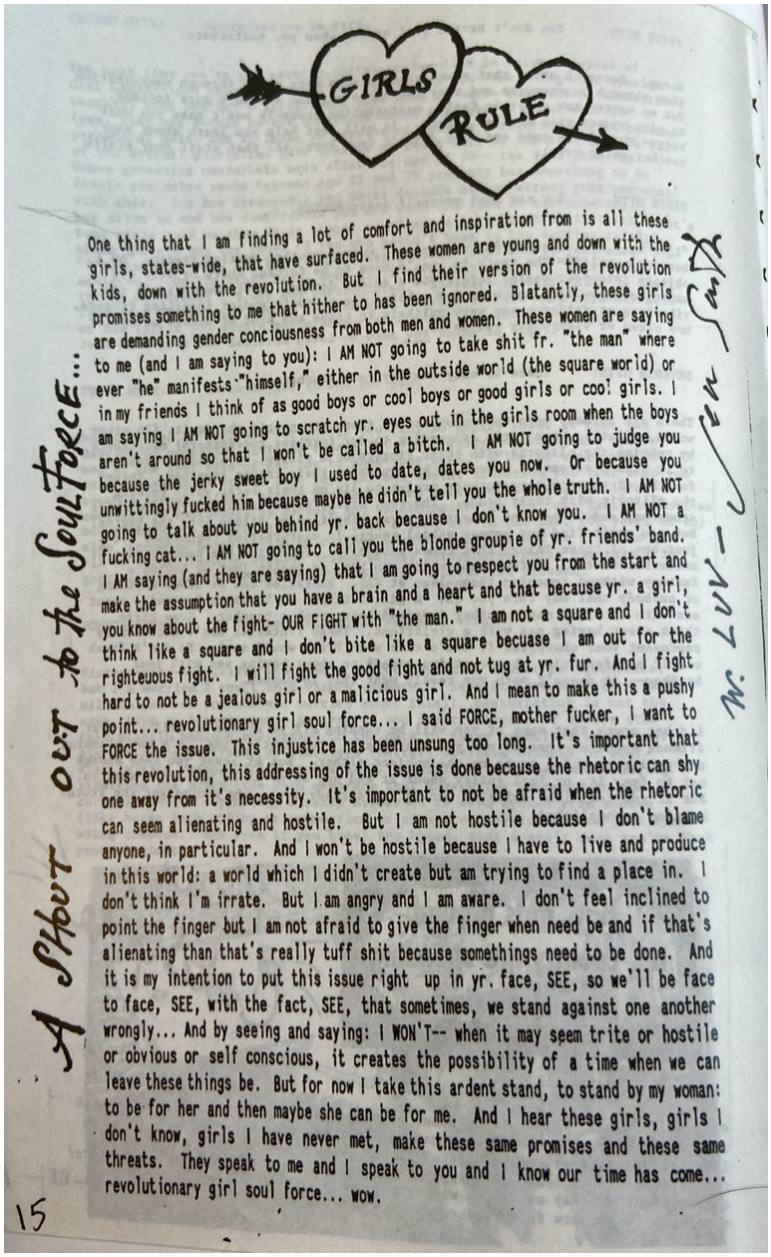



fig. V (*Bikini Kill* #2)



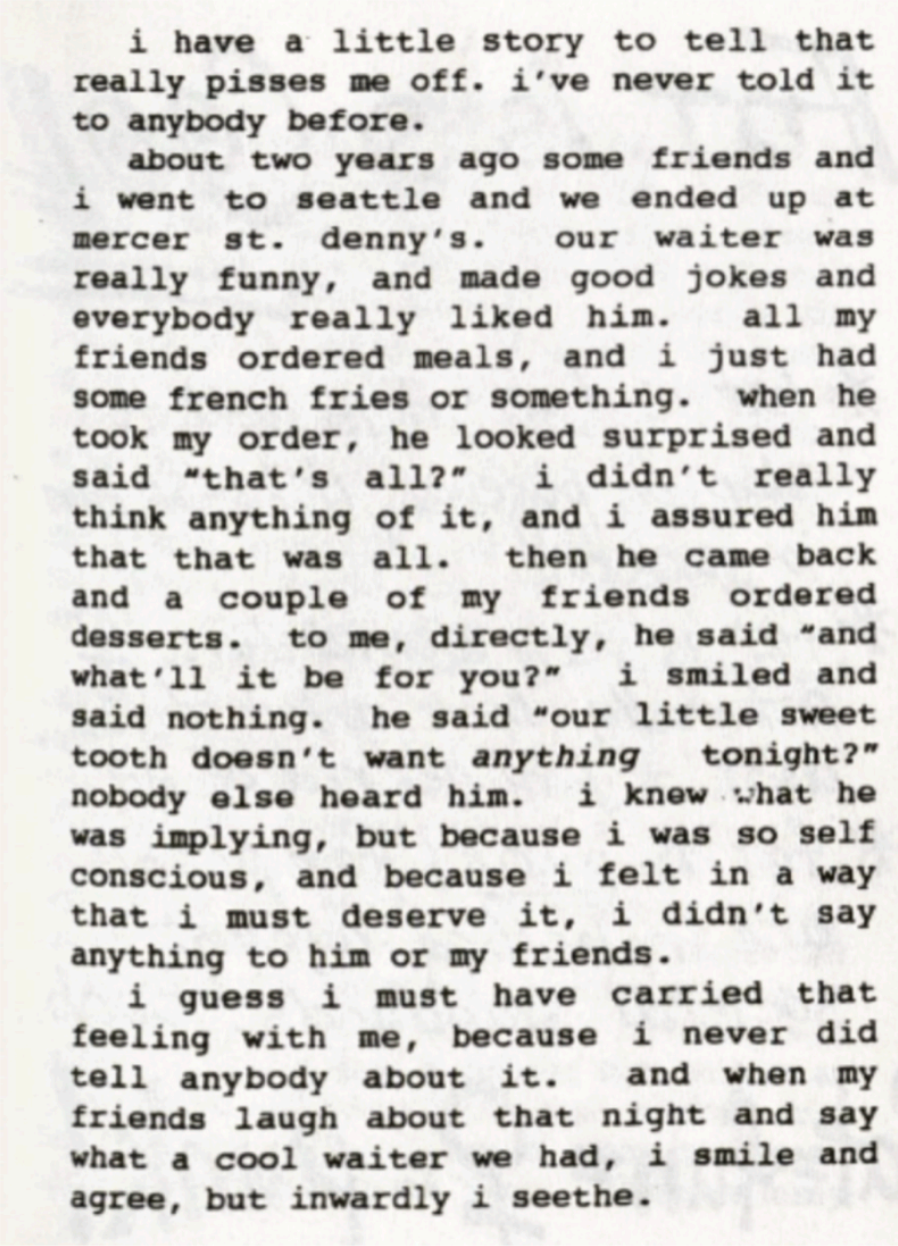
GIRLS RULE

A Short out to the Soulforce...

One thing that I am finding a lot of comfort and inspiration from is all these girls, states-wide, that have surfaced. These women are young and down with the kids, down with the revolution. But I find their version of the revolution promises something to me that hither to has been ignored. Blatantly, these girls are demanding gender conciousness from both men and women. These women are saying to me (and I am saying to you): I AM NOT going to take shit fr. "the man" where ever "he" manifests "himself," either in the outside world (the square world) or in my friends I think of as good boys or cool boys or good girls or cool girls. I am saying I AM NOT going to scratch yr. eyes out in the girls room when the boys aren't around so that I won't be called a bitch. I AM NOT going to judge you because the jerky sweet boy I used to date, dates you now. Or because you unwittingly fucked him because maybe he didn't tell you the whole truth. I AM NOT going to talk about you behind yr. back because I don't know you. I AM NOT a fucking cat... I AM NOT going to call you the blonde groupie of yr. friends' band. I AM saying (and they are saying) that I am going to respect you from the start and make the assumption that you have a brain and a heart and that because yr. a girl, you know about the fight- OUR FIGHT with "the man." I am not a square and I don't think like a square and I don't bite like a square becuase I am out for the righteuous fight. I will fight the good fight and not tug at yr. fur. And I fight hard to not be a jealous girl or a malicious girl. And I mean to make this a pushy point... revolutionary girl soul force... I said FORCE, mother fucker, I want to FORCE the issue. This injustice has been unsung too long. It's important that this revolution, this addressing of the issue is done because the rhetoric can shy one away from it's necessity. It's important to not be afraid when the rhetoric can seem alienating and hostile. But I am not hostile because I don't blame anyone, in particular. And I won't be hostile because I have to live and produce in this world: a world which I didn't create but am trying to find a place in. I don't think I'm irrate. But I am angry and I am aware. I don't feel inclined to point the finger but I am not afraid to give the finger when need be and if that's alienating than that's really tuff shit because somethings need to be done. And it is my intention to put this issue right up in yr. face, SEE, so we'll be face to face, SEE, with the fact, SEE, that sometimes, we stand against one another wrongly... And by seeing and saying: I WON'T-- when it may seem trite or hostile or obvious or self conscious, it creates the possibility of a time when we can leave these things be. But for now I take this ardent stand, to stand by my woman: to be for her and then maybe she can be for me. And I hear these girls, girls I don't know, girls I have never met, make these same promises and these same threats. They speak to me and I speak to you and I know our time has come... revolutionary girl soul force... wow.

15

fig. VI (*Girl Germs* #3)

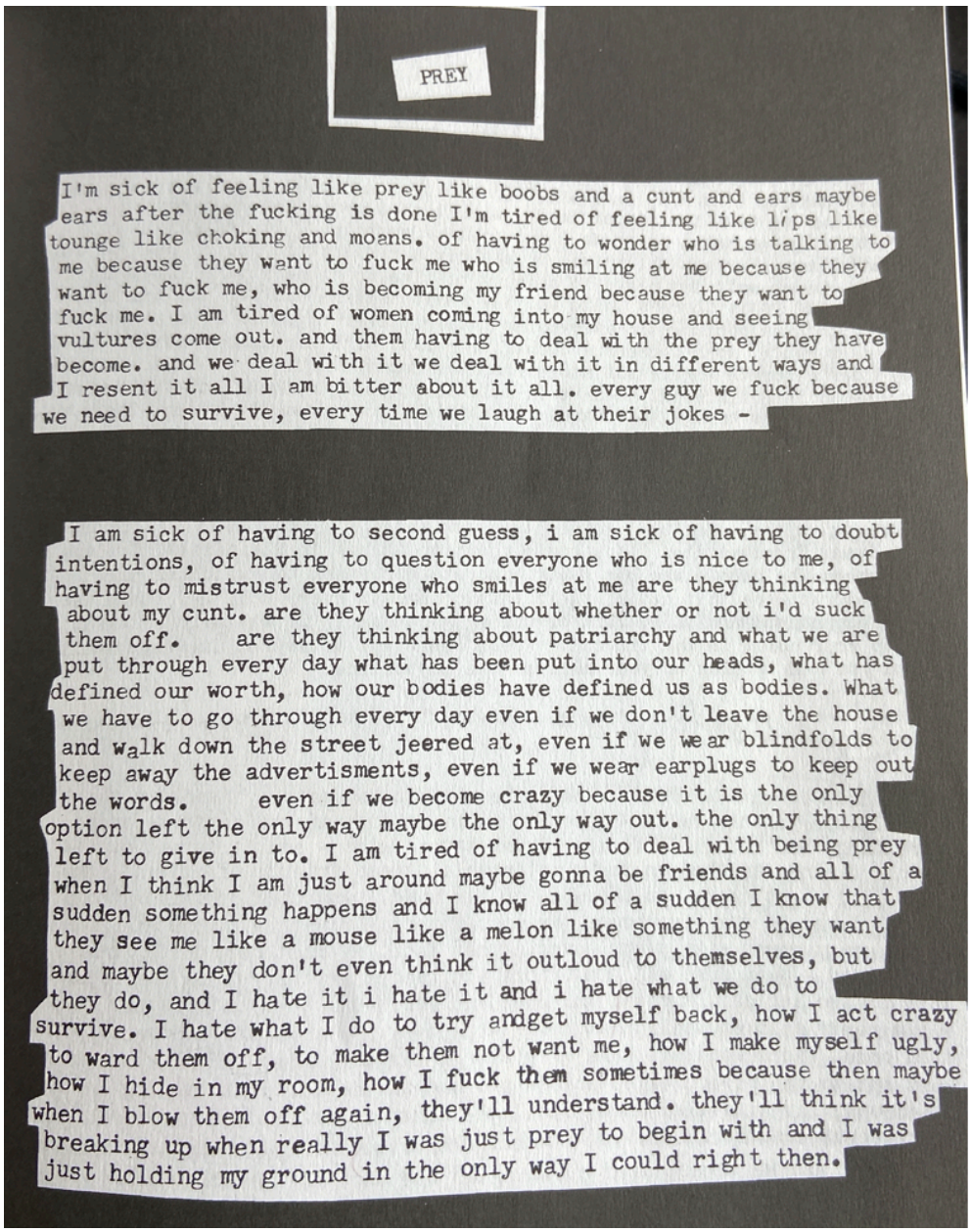


i have a little story to tell that really pisses me off. i've never told it to anybody before.

about two years ago some friends and i went to seattle and we ended up at mercer st. denny's. our waiter was really funny, and made good jokes and everybody really liked him. all my friends ordered meals, and i just had some french fries or something. when he took my order, he looked surprised and said "that's all?" i didn't really think anything of it, and i assured him that that was all. then he came back and a couple of my friends ordered desserts. to me, directly, he said "and what'll it be for you?" i smiled and said nothing. he said "our little sweet tooth doesn't want *anything* tonight?" nobody else heard him. i knew what he was implying, but because i was so self conscious, and because i felt in a way that i must deserve it, i didn't say anything to him or my friends.

i guess i must have carried that feeling with me, because i never did tell anybody about it. and when my friends laugh about that night and say what a cool waiter we had, i smile and agree, but inwardly i seethe.

fig. VII (*I'm So Fucking Beautiful* #1)



PREY

I'm sick of feeling like prey like boobs and a cunt and ears maybe ears after the fucking is done I'm tired of feeling like lips like tounge like choking and moans. of having to wonder who is talking to me because they want to fuck me who is smiling at me because they want to fuck me, who is becoming my friend because they want to fuck me. I am tired of women coming into my house and seeing vultures come out. and them having to deal with the prey they have become. and we deal with it we deal with it in different ways and I resent it all I am bitter about it all. every guy we fuck because we need to survive, every time we laugh at their jokes -

I am sick of having to second guess, i am sick of having to doubt intentions, of having to question everyone who is nice to me, of having to mistrust everyone who smiles at me are they thinking about my cunt. are they thinking about whether or not i'd suck them off. are they thinking about patriarchy and what we are put through every day what has been put into our heads, what has defined our worth, how our bodies have defined us as bodies. What we have to go through every day even if we don't leave the house and walk down the street jeered at, even if we wear blindfolds to keep away the advertisments, even if we wear earplugs to keep out the words. even if we become crazy because it is the only option left the only way maybe the only way out. the only thing left to give in to. I am tired of having to deal with being prey when I think I am just around maybe gonna be friends and all of a sudden something happens and I know all of a sudden I know that they see me like a mouse like a melon like something they want and maybe they don't even think it outloud to themselves, but they do, and I hate it i hate it and i hate what we do to survive. I hate what I do to try andget myself back, how I act crazy to ward them off, to make them not want me, how I make myself ugly, how I hide in my room, how I fuck them sometimes because then maybe when I blow them off again, they'll understand. they'll think it's breaking up when really I was just prey to begin with and I was just holding my ground in the only way I could right then.

fig. VIII (*Doris* #2)

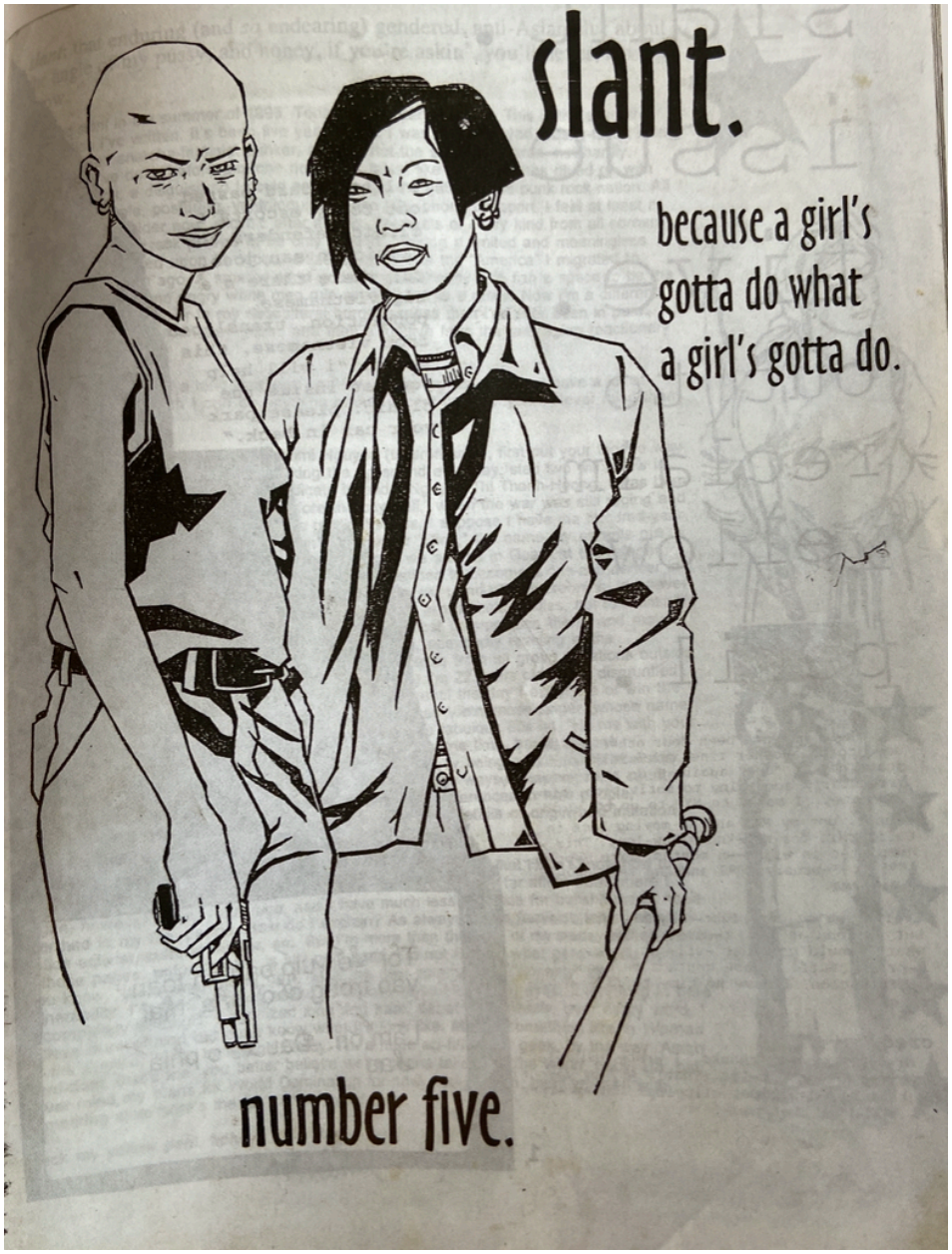



fig. IX (*Slant* #5)

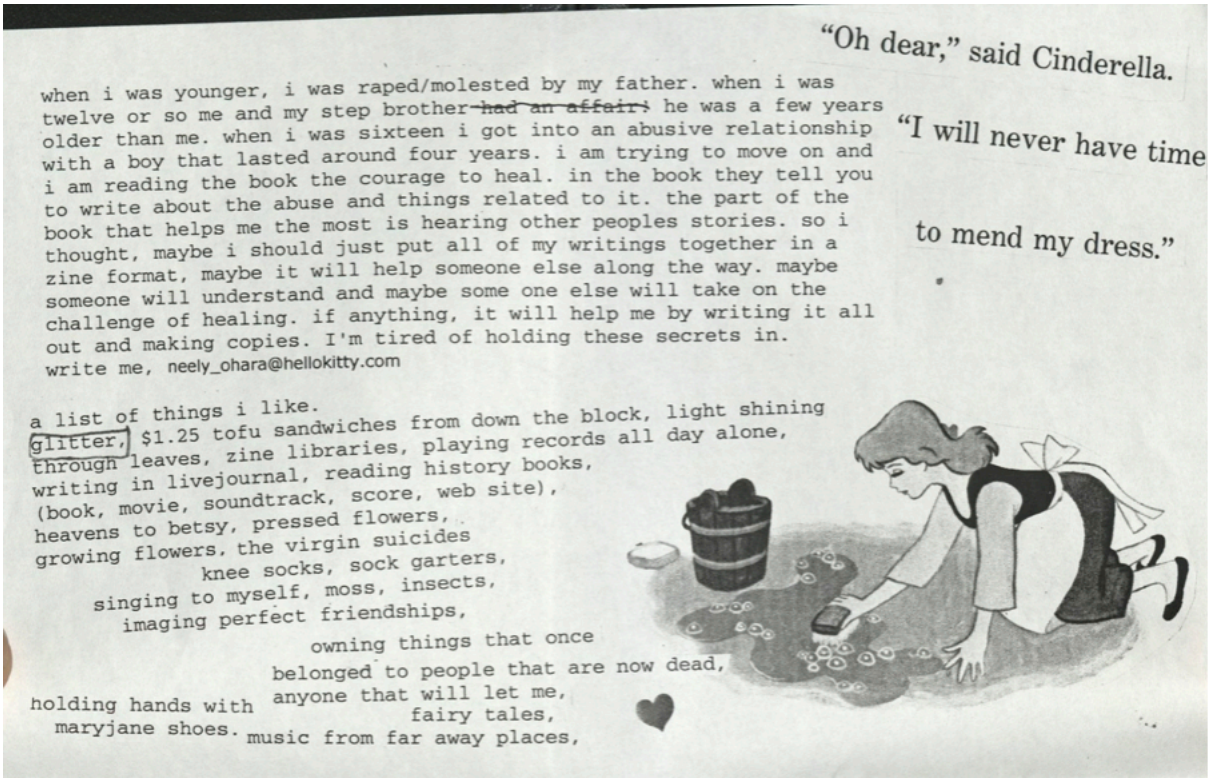



fig. X (*Mend My Dress* #1)

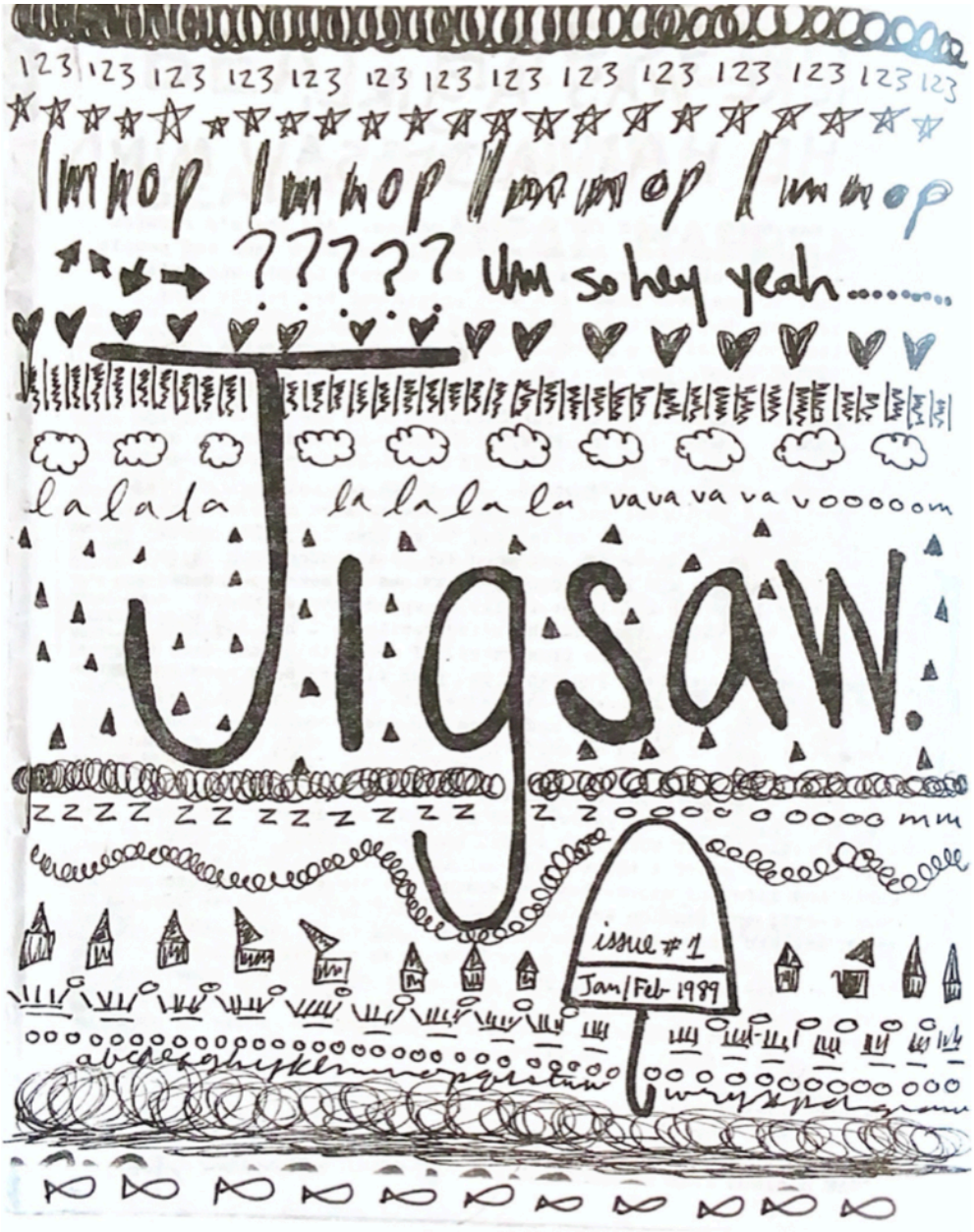



fig. XI (*Jigsaw* #1)

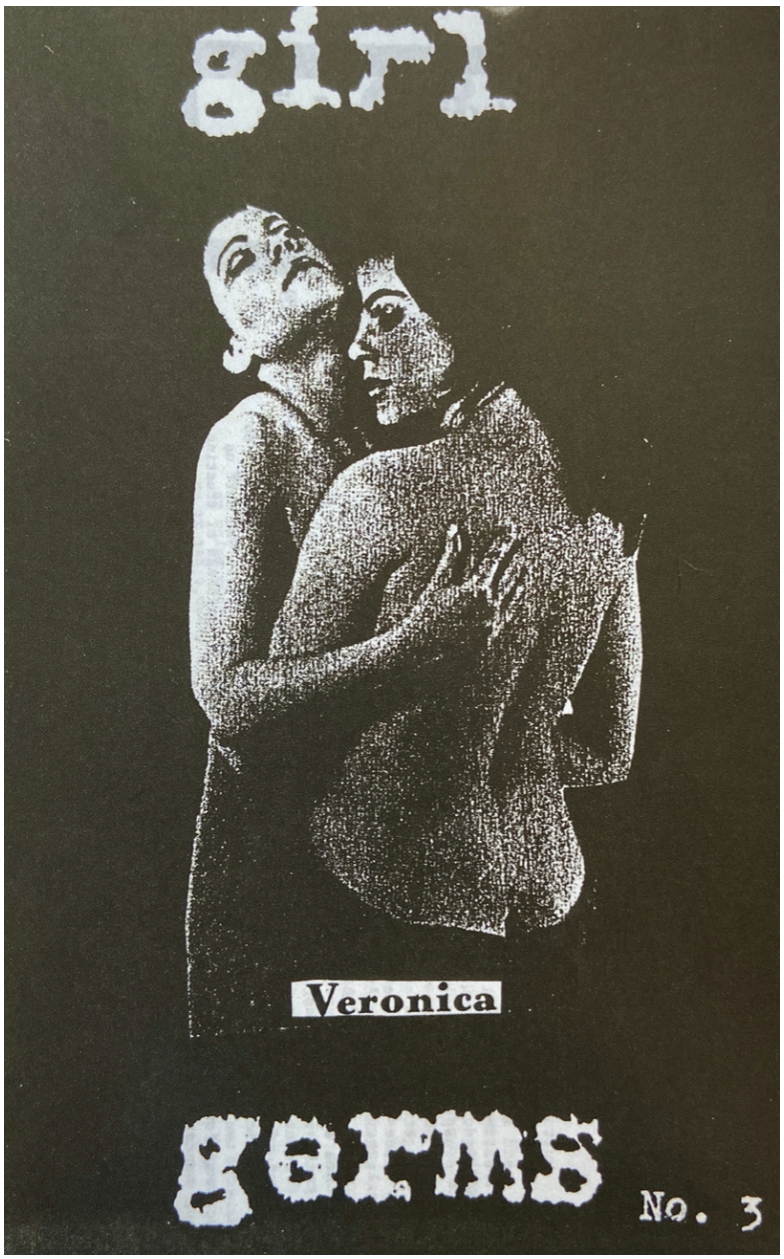
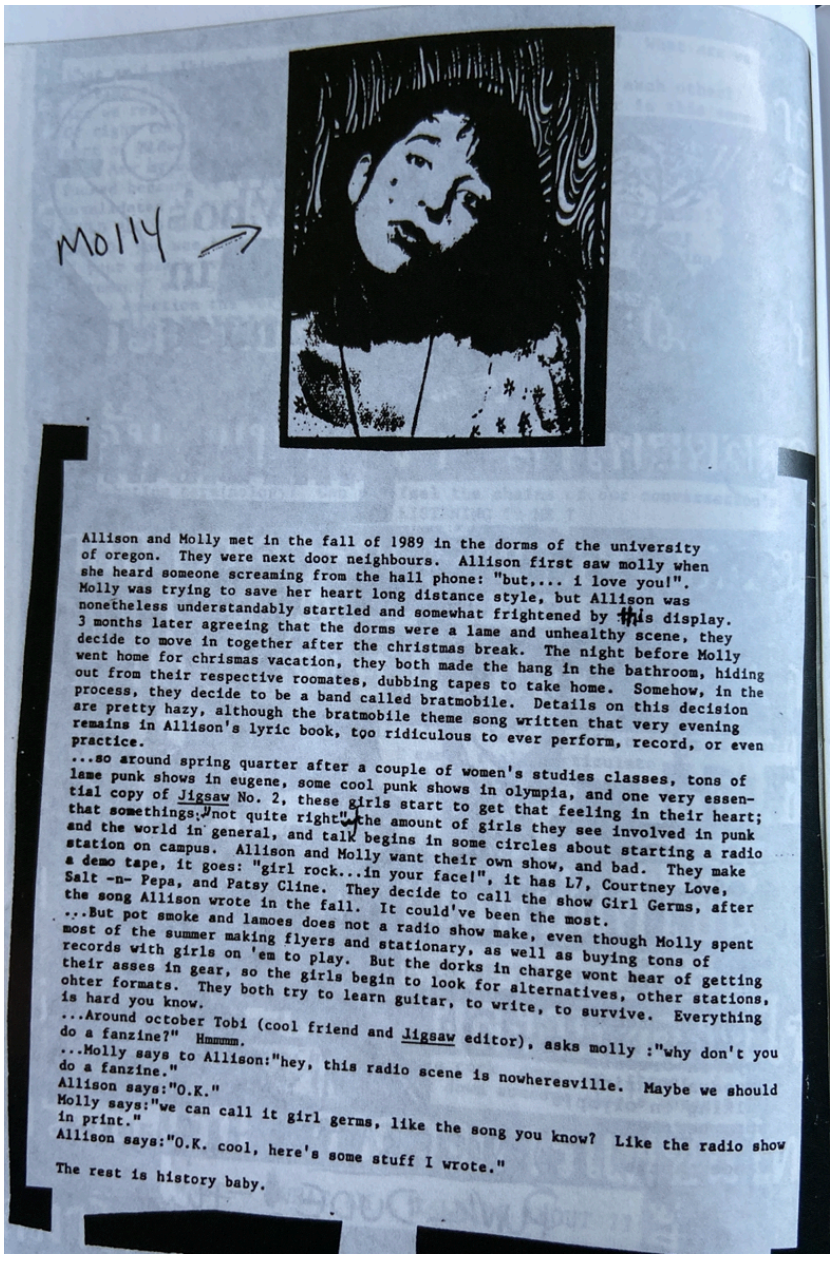



fig. XII (*Girl Germs* #3)




Allison and Molly met in the fall of 1989 in the dorms of the university of oregon. They were next door neighbours. Allison first saw molly when she heard someone screaming from the hall phone: "but,... i love you!". Molly was trying to save her heart long distance style, but Allison was nonetheless understandably startled and somewhat frightened by this display. 3 months later agreeing that the dorms were a lame and unhealthy scene, they decide to move in together after the christmas break. The night before Molly went home for chrismas vacation, they both made the hang in the bathroom, hiding out from their respective roomates, dubbing tapes to take home. Somehow, in the process, they decide to be a band called bratmobile. Details on this decision are pretty hazy, although the bratmobile theme song written that very evening remains in Allison's lyric book, too ridiculous to ever perform, record, or even practice.

...so around spring quarter after a couple of women's studies classes, tons of lame punk shows in eugene, some cool punk shows in olympia, and one very essential copy of Jigsaw No. 2, these girls start to get that feeling in their heart; that somethings not quite right with the amount of girls they see involved in punk and the world in general, and talk begins in some circles about starting a radio station on campus. Allison and Molly want their own show, and bad. They make a demo tape, it goes: "girl rock...in your face!", it has L7, Courtney Love, Salt -n- Pepa, and Patsy Cline. They decide to call the show Girl Germs, after the song Allison wrote in the fall. It could've been the most.

...But pot smoke and lamoes does not a radio show make, even though Molly spent most of the summer making flyers and stationary, as well as buying tons of records with girls on 'em to play. But the dorks in charge wont hear of getting their asses in gear, so the girls begin to look for alternatives, other stations, ohter formats. They both try to learn guitar, to write, to survive. Everything is hard you know.

...Around october Tobi (cool friend and Jigsaw editor), asks molly :"why don't you do a fanzine?" Hmmmm.

...Molly says to Allison:"hey, this radio scene is nowheresville. Maybe we should do a fanzine."

Allison says:"O.K."

Molly says:"we can call it girl germs, like the song you know? Like the radio show in print."

Allison says:"O.K. cool, here's some stuff I wrote."

The rest is history baby.

fig. XIII (*Girl Germs* #3)

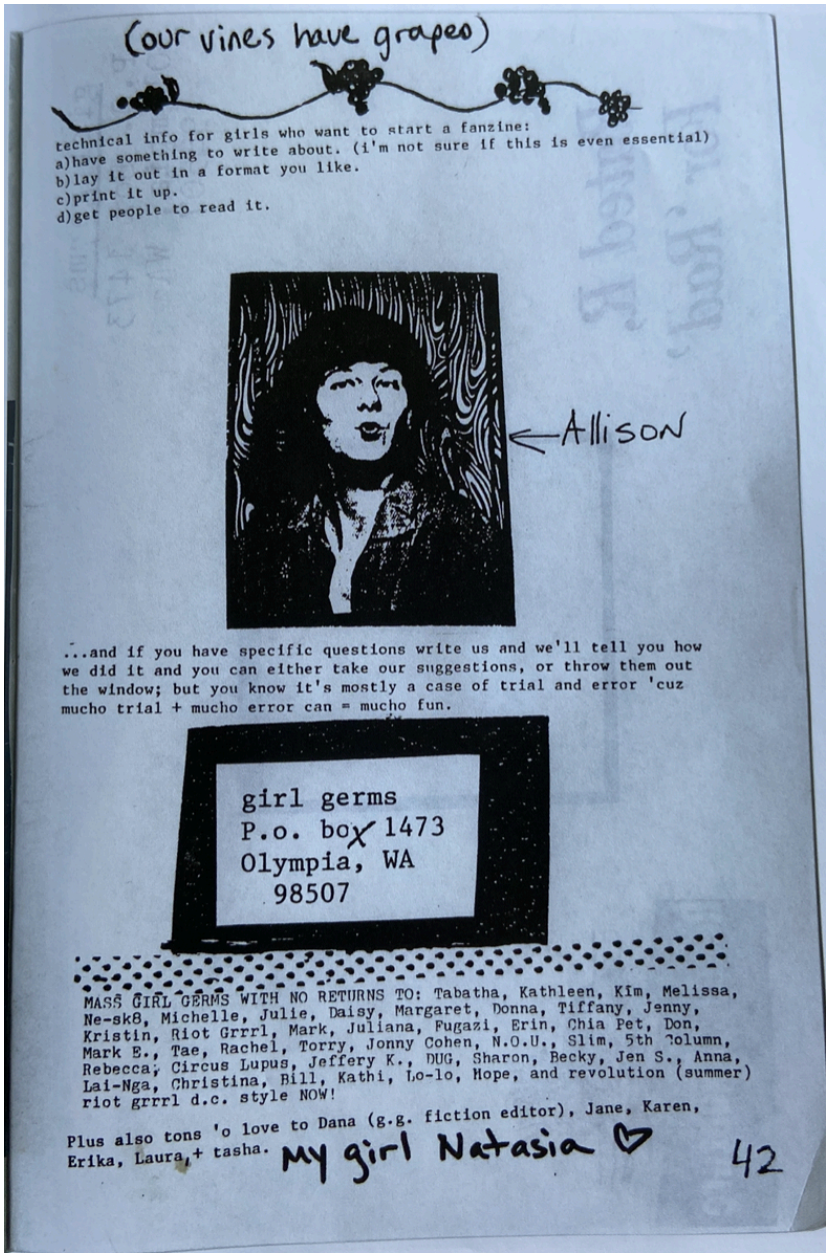
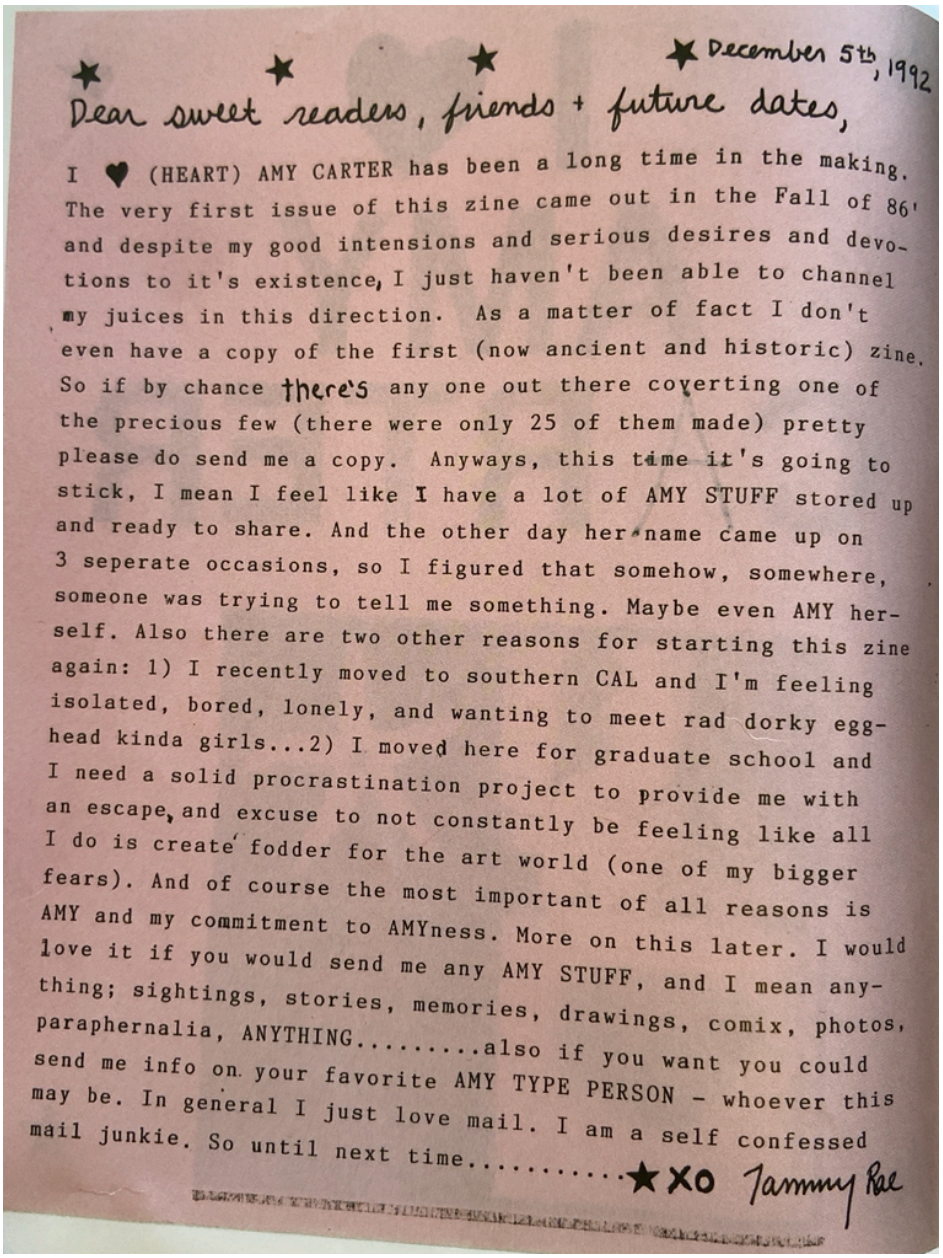



fig. XIV (*Girl Germs* #3)

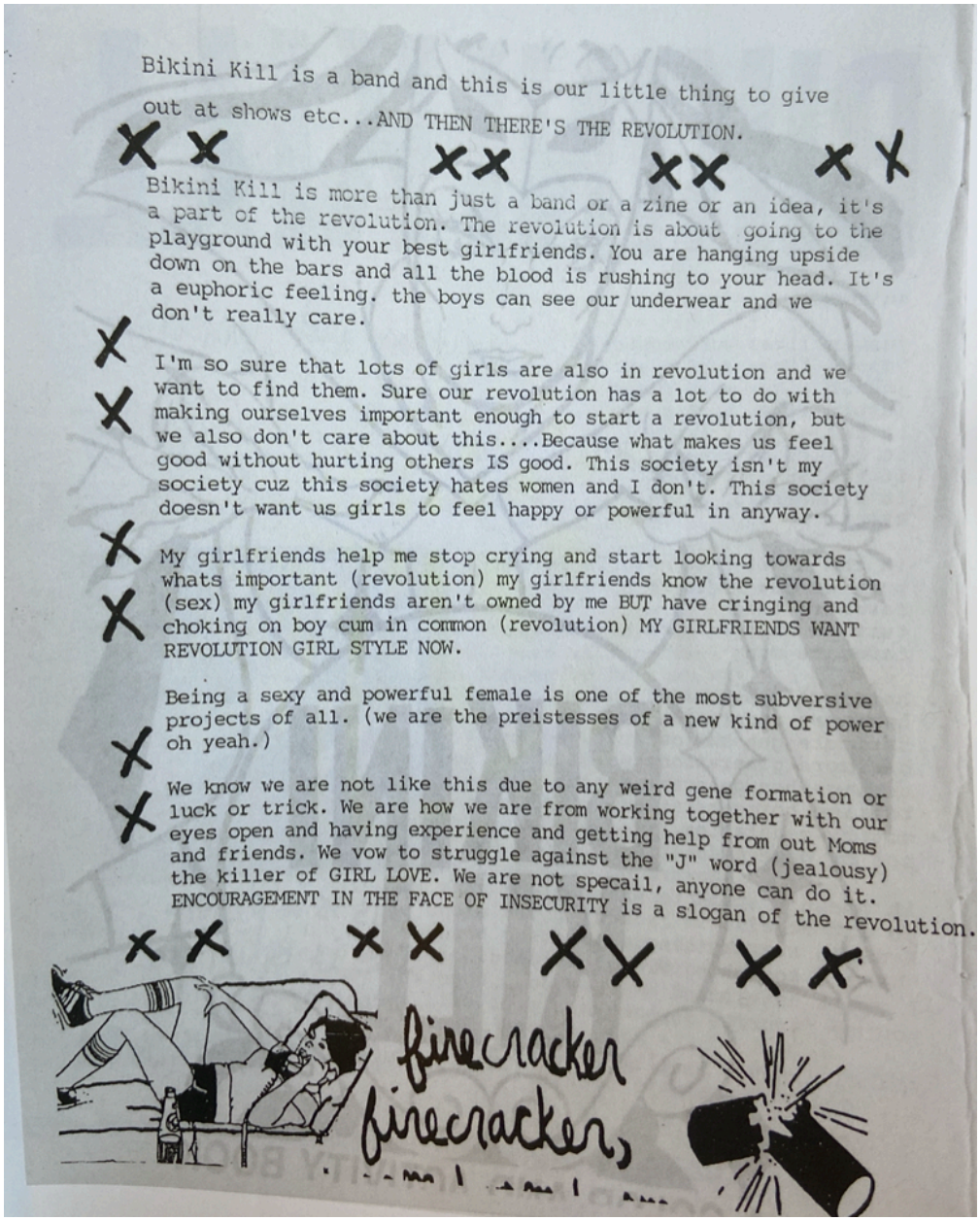


December 5th, 1992

Dear sweet readers, friends + future dates,

I ♥ (HEART) AMY CARTER has been a long time in the making. The very first issue of this zine came out in the Fall of 86' and despite my good intensions and serious desires and devotions to it's existence, I just haven't been able to channel my juices in this direction. As a matter of fact I don't even have a copy of the first (now ancient and historic) zine. So if by chance there's any one out there coverting one of the precious few (there were only 25 of them made) pretty please do send me a copy. Anyways, this time it's going to stick, I mean I feel like I have a lot of AMY STUFF stored up and ready to share. And the other day her name came up on 3 seperate occasions, so I figured that somehow, somewhere, someone was trying to tell me something. Maybe even AMY herself. Also there are two other reasons for starting this zine again: 1) I recently moved to southern CAL and I'm feeling isolated, bored, lonely, and wanting to meet rad dorky egghead kinda girls...2) I moved here for graduate school and I need a solid procrastination project to provide me with an escape, and excuse to not constantly be feeling like all I do is create fodder for the art world (one of my bigger fears). And of course the most important of all reasons is AMY and my commitment to AMYness. More on this later. I would love it if you would send me any AMY STUFF, and I mean anything; sightings, stories, memories, drawings, comix, photos, paraphernalia, ANYTHING.....also if you want you could send me info on your favorite AMY TYPE PERSON - whoever this may be. In general I just love mail. I am a self confessed mail junkie. So until next time.....★XO Tammy Rae

fig. XV (*I ❤ Amy Carter* #1)



Bikini Kill is a band and this is our little thing to give out at shows etc...AND THEN THERE'S THE REVOLUTION.

Bikini Kill is more than just a band or a zine or an idea, it's a part of the revolution. The revolution is about going to the playground with your best girlfriends. You are hanging upside down on the bars and all the blood is rushing to your head. It's a euphoric feeling. the boys can see our underwear and we don't really care.

I'm so sure that lots of girls are also in revolution and we want to find them. Sure our revolution has a lot to do with making ourselves important enough to start a revolution, but we also don't care about this....Because what makes us feel good without hurting others IS good. This society isn't my society cuz this society hates women and I don't. This society doesn't want us girls to feel happy or powerful in anyway.

My girlfriends help me stop crying and start looking towards whats important (revolution) my girlfriends know the revolution (sex) my girlfriends aren't owned by me BUT have cringing and choking on boy cum in common (revolution) MY GIRLFRIENDS WANT REVOLUTION GIRL STYLE NOW.

Being a sexy and powerful female is one of the most subversive projects of all. (we are the preistesses of a new kind of power oh yeah.)

We know we are not like this due to any weird gene formation or luck or trick. We are how we are from working together with our eyes open and having experience and getting help from out Moms and friends. We vow to struggle against the "J" word (jealousy) the killer of GIRL LOVE. We are not specail, anyone can do it. ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE FACE OF INSECURITY is a slogan of the revolution.



fig. XVI (*Bikini Kill* #1)

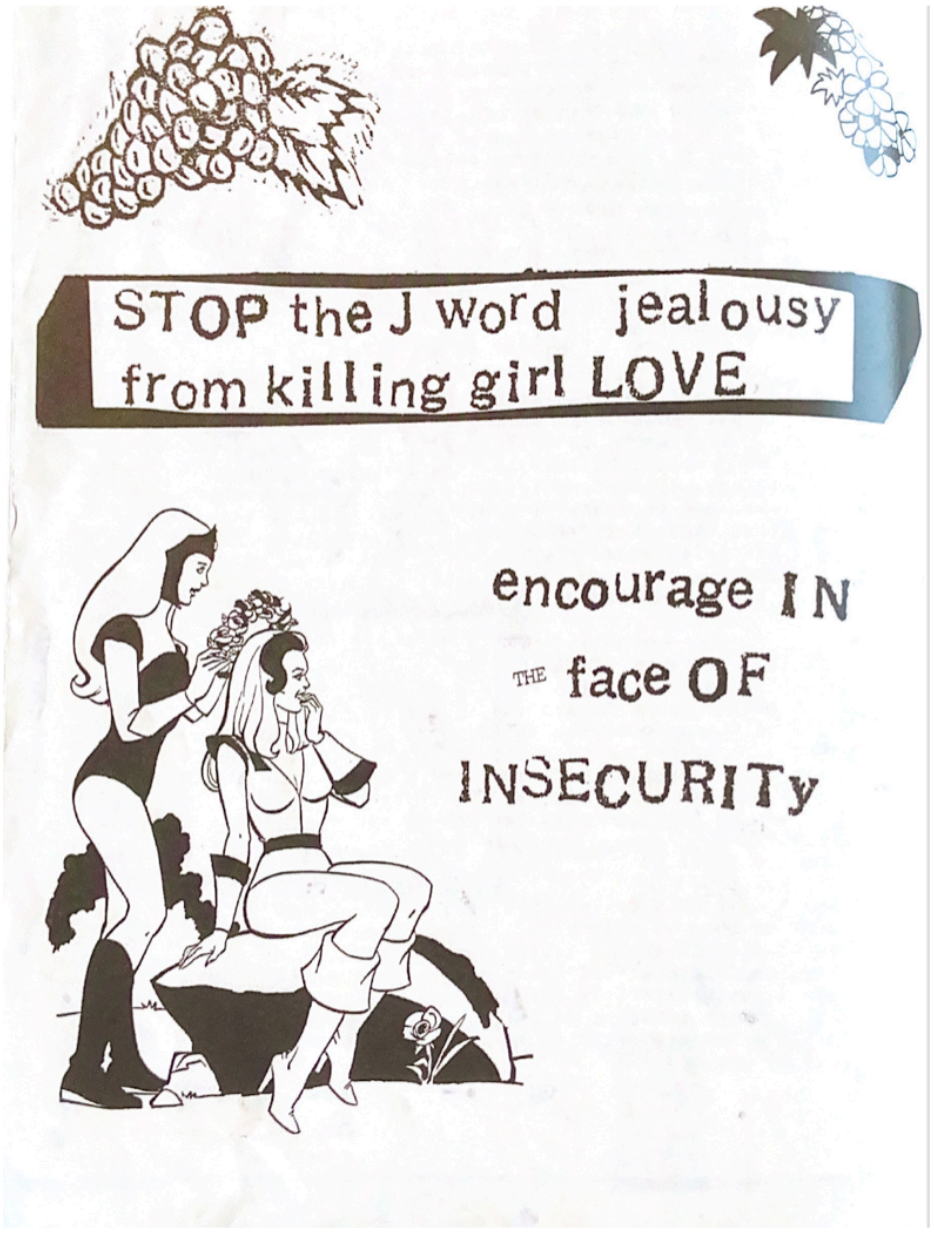



fig. XVII (*Bikini Kill* #1)

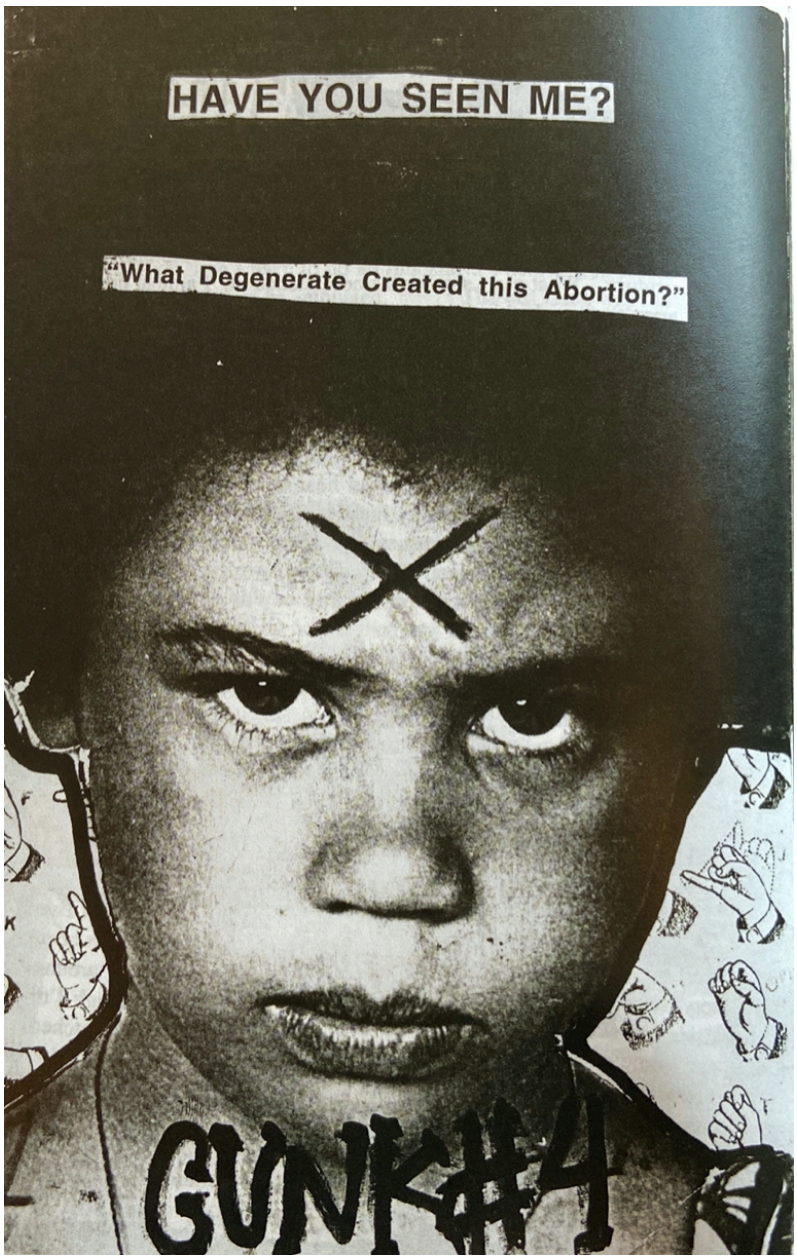



fig. XVIII (*Gunk* #4)

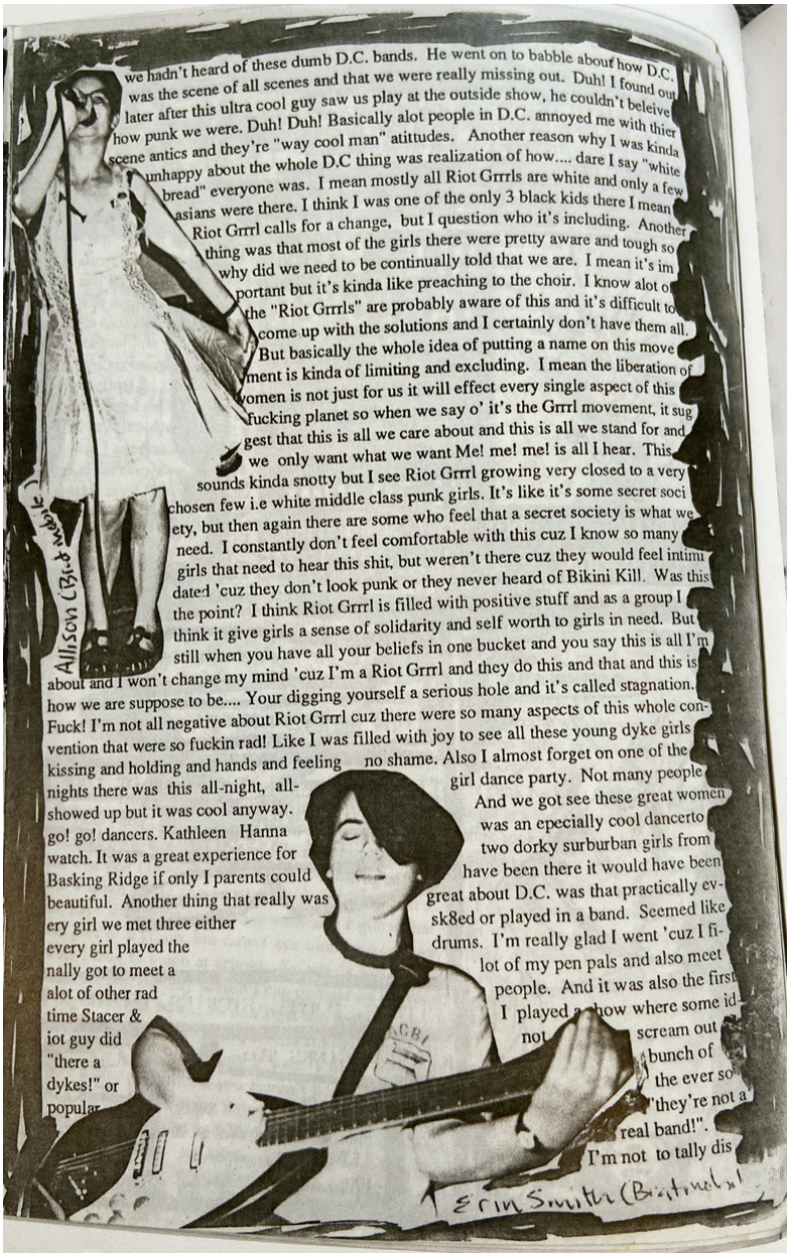



fig. XIX (*Gunk* #4)

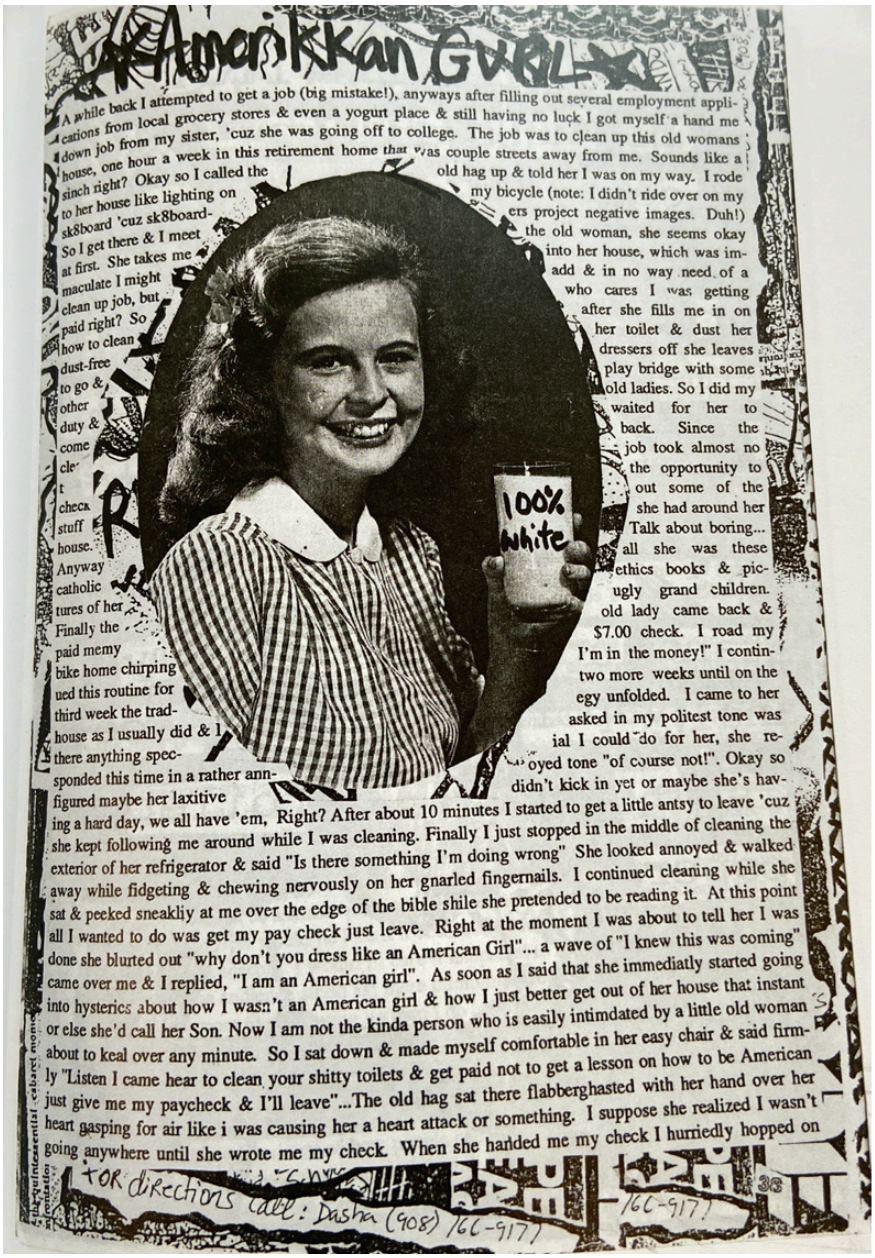

AmeriKKan GURL
100% white
A while back I attempted to get a job (big mistake!), anyways after filling out several employment applications from local grocery stores & even a yogurt place & still having no luck I got myself a hand me down job from my sister, 'cuz she was going off to college. The job was to clean up this old womans house, one hour a week in this retirement home that was couple streets away from me. Sounds like a sinch right? Okay so I called the old hag up & told her I was on my way. I rode to her house like lighting on my bicycle (note: I didn't ride over on my sk8board 'cuz sk8boarders project negative images. Duh!) So I get there & I meet the old woman, she seems okay at first. She takes me into her house, which was immaculate I might add & in no way need of a clean up job, but who cares I was getting paid right? So after she fills me in on how to clean her toilet & dust her dust-free dressers off she leaves to go & play bridge with some other old ladies. So I did my duty & waited for her to come back. Since the job took almost no cle- the opportunity to check out some of the stuff she had around her house. Talk about boring... Anyway all she was these catholic ethics books & pictures of her ugly grand children. Finally the old lady came back & paid memy $7.00 check. I road my bike home chirping I'm in the money!" I continued this routine for two more weeks until on the third week the tragedy unfolded. I came to her house as I usually did & asked in my politest tone was there anything special I could do for her, she responded this time in a rather annoyed tone "of course not!". Okay so figured maybe her laxitive didn't kick in yet or maybe she's having a hard day, we all have 'em, Right? After about 10 minutes I started to get a little antsy to leave 'cuz she kept following me around while I was cleaning. Finally I just stopped in the middle of cleaning the exterior of her refrigerator & said "Is there something I'm doing wrong" She looked annoyed & walked away while fidgeting & chewing nervously on her gnarled fingernails. I continued cleaning while she sat & peeked sneakliy at me over the edge of the bible shile she pretended to be reading it. At this point all I wanted to do was get my pay check just leave. Right at the moment I was about to tell her I was done she blurted out "why don't you dress like an American Girl"... a wave of "I knew this was coming" came over me & I replied, "I am an American girl". As soon as I said that she immediatly started going into hysterics about how I wasn't an American girl & how I just better get out of her house that instant or else she'd call her Son. Now I am not the kinda person who is easily intimdated by a little old woman about to keal over any minute. So I sat down & made myself comfortable in her easy chair & said firmly "Listen I came hear to clean your shitty toilets & get paid not to get a lesson on how to be American just give me my paycheck & I'll leave"...The old hag sat there flabberghasted with her hand over her heart gasping for air like i was causing her a heart attack or something. I suppose she realized I wasn't going anywhere until she wrote me my check. When she handed me my check I hurriedly hopped on
for directions call: Dasha (908) 166-9177
166-9177

fig. XX (*Gunk* #4)

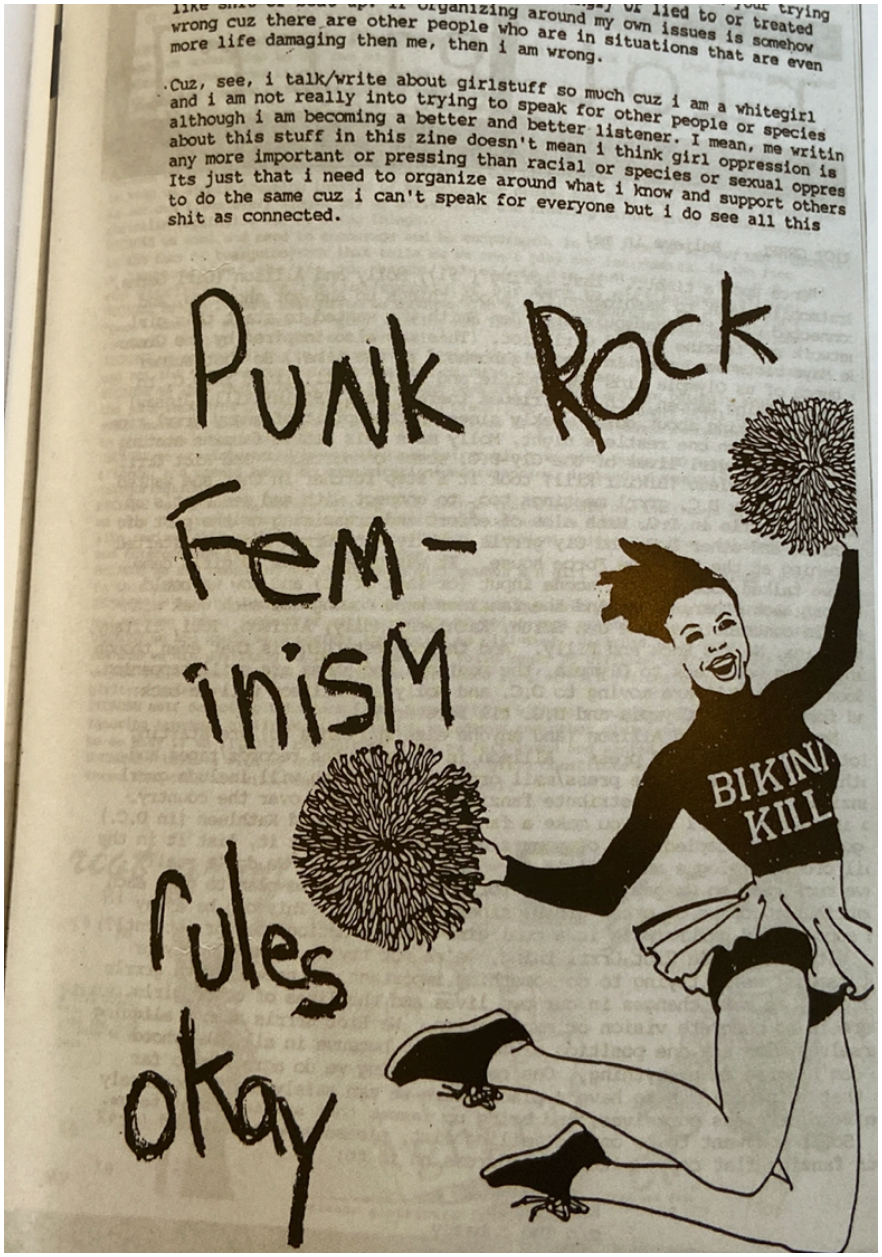



fig. XXI (*Bikini Kill* #2)

# ACTION GIRL

NEWSLETTER ● NUMBER FOUR



## ACTION GIRL HQ

Sarah
543 Van Duzer St
Staten Island, NY 10304

*Write to me at this address for more info; future issues of AG; or a copy of number two, which contained four pages of reviews not reprinted here (and which you can still get for just 1 stamp); a copy of number three (four page, one stamp); to order Kikiniine (stamp or SASE) or Mad Planet ($1/issue); or just to say hi and tell me what you think.*

## Z I N E S

*NOTE: On zine size and format, unless another size is mentioned, all zines are the usual xeroxed 8½ x 11, folded down to half-size (5½ x 8½).*

### *Abuse*
Rachel Abuse
PO Box 1242
Allston, MA 02134
(#1 — $3 ppd, #2 — $5 ppd)
*#1-2 — full-size-xerox. Really thick (70 and 84 pages respectively) compendiums of thematic mail artwritings; compiled, edited (but not altered or censored) and published by Rachel. Really daunting undertaking, if you ask me. #1 is the "carnal desires" issue, #2 is the "nightmares" issue. Both have a really wide variety of contributors (male and female) who have all sorts of takes on the subject, including letters, essays, comics art and anything else they could imagine. #1 is definitely "adult" and some people's contributions could be considered offensive. But you have to know how people really think, don't you. In no way grrrl but very interesting.*

### *Baby Doll*
ericka
10924 Camarillo Pl #4
North Hollywood, CA 91602
($1 + 2 stamps)
*#1 — full-size xerox. Embossed LA grrrl zine, it's got writings, poetry, and the occasional clipping/quote. Not an incredibly substantial issue, but it's all original stuff, and she's getting #2 out ASAP. Scribbly, messy, joyfull, spirited and full of energy.*

### *Bulldozer*
Rebecca
PO Box 342
Oberlin, OH 44074
($1 + 2 stamps)
*#1 — half-legal. A really fantastic zine, full of thought-provoking essays and well-chosen clip art. Stuff includes: insights on real (evil) corporate climate; the marketing of beef; training to be a ballerina (all the horrible things you've heard are true); a guerrilla zine to slip into Sassy/YM/ etc at the store; a really enlightening Jane Pratt (Sassy editor) interview — she basically concedes that they're hypocrites; books; lists; comics and more. Inspiring, informative and an essential read.*

### *Cheese Log*
c/o Brooke
PO Box 802
Fairport, NY 14450
(50¢ + 2 stamps)
*#3 — put out by a four-grrrl coalition who are so organized they have a contents page! Those contents include: zine & music & a show & bra reviews; essay from the frontlines of pro-choice action; mini-essays and musings; a how-to (make yourself a swirly-color star necklace); eyeliner tips; and stuff on legalization, divorce, allegiance, discrimination against people because of weight, and feminism. (Whew!) A really fun read and a price you sure can't argue with? Swell.*

### *chickfactor*
Gail + Pam
245 E 19 St #12T
New York, NY 10003
($2 ppd)
*#3 — full size, and still sideways, but like I said, it's good exercise that way! No lollipop on the cover this time, but still a lot of fun. Interviews this time: Stereolab, Liz Phair, Graeme Downes (Verlaines), two Eggs members, and Roberta Gregory (cool comic artist); plus there's reviews; cool stuff (like groovy comics); and travelogues for a bunch more cities. A major zine in the new world order. It's ultra!*

### *Coagulated Comics*
Carrie Hall
PO Box 3162
Salt Lake City, UT 84110
($1 or trade)
*#5 & 6 — really zines with a lot of comics in them. #5 is full of poetry, drawings, comics and essays, plus a few reviews. It's alright, but #6 is better. Girl comix by Carrie (like peeing in a men's room, seeing the gynecologist); stories like Holiday at Home and My Sister; some cool artitect one-pagers; plus more.*

### *Dead Molly*
Lisa
2300 South E St
Richmond, IL 47374
($1 or trade)
*#1 — a short, relatively political zine with lots to read. Art, clippings and pieces on: the word "Bitch"; Kitty Genovese; men (and some women) who don't believe charges of sexual harassment; date rape (with useful info); fighting the boys off with a stick; plus more. (I never really thought about the appropriateness of that phrase "you'll have to fight the boys off with a stick" until I read this — why on earth do they say that?)*

### *Fantastic Fanzine*
Erika
($1.50 from Riot Grrrl Press)
*#3 — where does she get all this amazing clip art! Long, and motivating, and brutally personal and honest and incredibly cool. "The List" (a thing about personal growth) is interest and inspiring ("stop trying to prove I'm not a manhater" really struck home with me); bus trip diary highlights are cool; and the examination of media co-option of Riot Grrrl (and everything else) is a must-read. There's tons of other stuff in here, inlcuding the green (jealousy) pages, riotious stuff by other grrrls, drawing and poetry. SuperSwell!*

### *Flatter!*
Jaina
PO Box 421
Occidental, CA 95465
($2.50 ppd)
*#2 — nicely printed full-size. A big favorite of mine right now, clean but not slick, funny but not stupid, and really interesting. Unusual contents include: groovy reader questionnaire; poetry art and assorted crazy stuff; sneaky record reviews; Christine Shields interviews; Dear California letter column; and lots more swell stuff. She loves office supplies and you can tell. A really adorable zine, definitely out of the ordinary. (Plus, Jaina sent me Hello Kitty tattoos so she rocks!)*

### *Function*
Dawn Williams
20946 Bryant St. #31
Canoga Park, CA 91304-2806
($1, $2 overseas)
*#6 — fabulous Grrrl zine from California. (get/see AG2 for more info on Function, especially #2-5.) Collected writing, musings, poetry and more, #6 includes: jealousy; 1992 @narchist gathering report; to sucks; dying to be thin; plus a lot of writing on personal stuff. (A big fave: the "time's real" pages.) I still consider this one of the tops in reading material.*

### *Garbles*
Ros
5, New House Close
Canterbury, Kent CT4 7BQ
England, UK
(To order in the US send $1 to Action Girl HQ, in the UK write to Ros)
*#6 — the usual fabbo mix of comics, reviews and anecdotal writing and the famous scribbly "garbles" art style. #6 includes: getting lost in Edinburgh; childhood (pain-ting Josh-ua!); the job (telephone solicitation); "my hot date" (in 1990); the COBRA art group; thursday March 4th 6:16 am; fave things and reviews.*

### *Get Off My Property*
c/o Ann
131 N 33rd #5
Omaha, NE 68131
($1 ppd)
*#1 — a really adorable zine born at an all-girl slumber party, made up of "funny stories from when we were little." Remember yelling, "you're not the boss of me" and "oooh, I'm telling"? There's a bunch of lists (top kid-threats, pet's names, clothing items etc), and a bunch of stories. It's way cool — if boys did this it'd probably be infantile. (Not to boy-slag but . . .) Send them your little-kid memories for future issues!*

### *Hag*
PO Box 411711
Los Angeles, CA 90041
($1 or 3 stamps ppd)
*#2 — mostly selected reprints (i.e. cut-and-paste) of bits about, well, I can pretty much classify it as women's shit place in the world, like: some stuff on Aileen Wuornos; the spread of AIDS in women; safer sex; and ancient birth control methods (amusing yet sad at the same time). Some great clip art, and funny and good book reviews. I'd really like to see more of her own stuff in here.*



by JF/MadWoman

fig. XXII (*Action Girl Newsletter* #4)

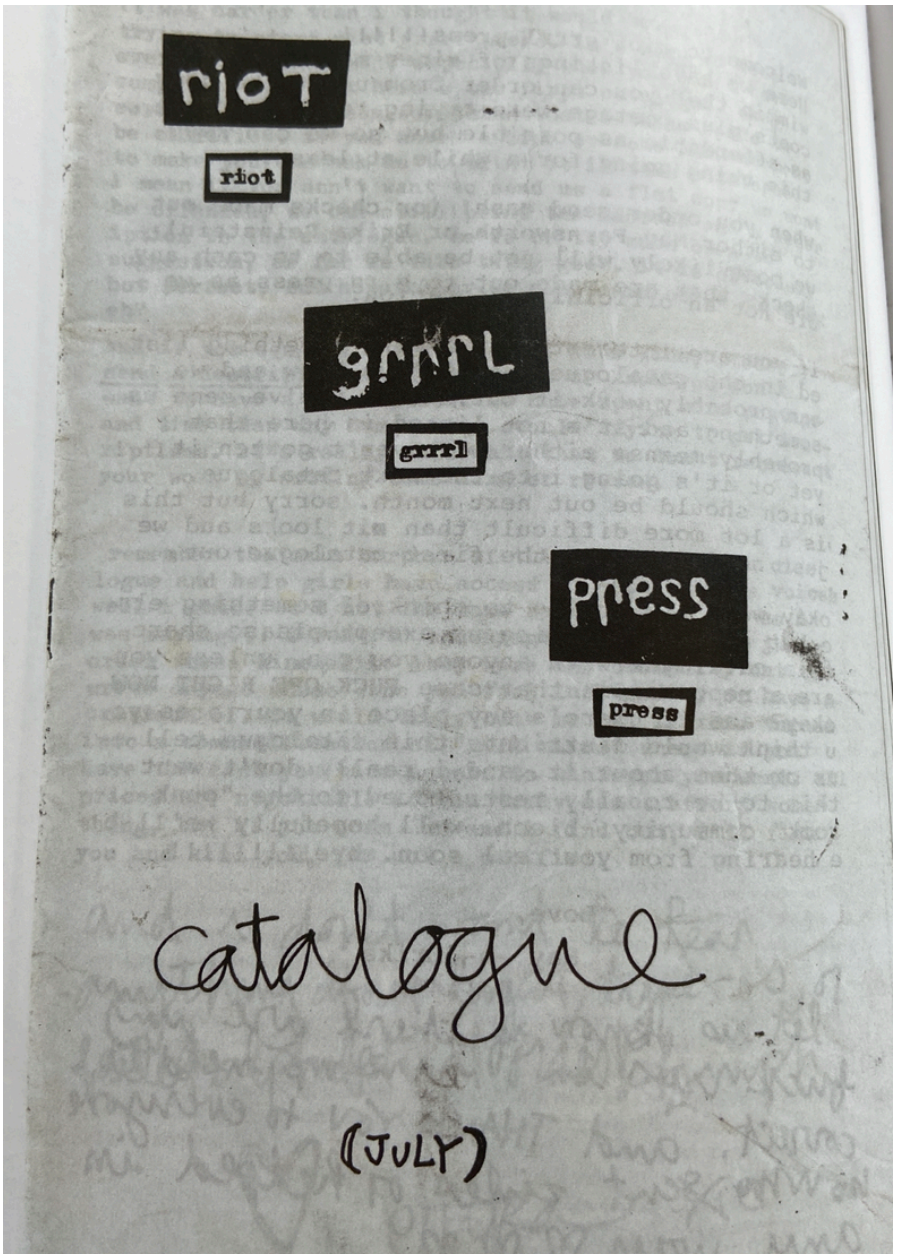



fig. XXIII (Riot Grrrl Press Catalogue)

# ENDNOTES

[1] Waldron, Beth. Letter to Molly Neuman and Allison Wolfe. *Girl Germs* #3. Self-published, 1992, p. 3. Reprinted in *The Riot Grrrl Collection,* edited by Lisa Darms. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013. page 54

[2] Weingarten, Marc. *The Gang That Wouldn't Write Straight: Wolfe, Thompson, Didion, Capote, and the New Journalism Revolution*. New York City: Three Rivers Press, 2005. pages 13-5

[3] Farber, David. *Chicago '68.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994 [1988]. page 219

[4] Wolfe, Tom. "The New Journalism." *The New Journalism*, ed. Tom Wolfe and E.W. Johnson. New York: Harper & Row, 1973. page 23

[5] See Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. trans. Howard, Richard and Annette Lavers. New York City: Hill and Wang, 2013 [1957]. pages 223-40; and Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London and New York City: Routledge, 2008 [1979]. pages 102-6.
Cultural studies uses both "pastiche" and "bricolage" to describe this phenomenon, but I have coined "juxtapastiche" because I feel it better captures the way movements like the ones studied here tried to highlight the *contrasts* between the media technologies they brought together, and how, indeed, doing so was inherent to their practice.

[6] Wolfe, Tom. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. Picador: New York, 2008 [1969]. page 39

[7] Wolfe, Tom. "The New Journalism." *The New Journalism*, ed. Tom Wolfe and E.W. Johnson. New York: Harper & Row, 1973. page 15.

[8] Of course, the question of exactly when New Journalism began, and which authors and texts can be classified as New Journalists/works of New Journalism is always contentious. This chapter follows the chronology set out by Weingarten, Pauly, and Wolfe himself, which locates New Journalism's official beginnings some time after Norman Mailer's 1960 article "Superman Comes to the Supermarket," and around the early to the middle part of the 1960s, with the genre reaching its heyday in the late '60s and the early '70s. Sims (Sims, Norman. *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), however, cites *Esquire* editor Harold Hayes' comment that saying New Journalism began with Mailer, Capote, and the like "required ignoring similar reporting that happened earlier," including pieces by "Lillian Ross, Joe Mitchell, and Alva Johnston at *The New Yorker*," "the work of Edmund Wilson, James Agee, George Orwell, and articles in the *American Mercury*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Harper's* under editor Jack Fischer" (Sims 224). While I want to acknowledge these earlier works, they seem to me more predecessors to the movement that became New Journalism, rather than concretely part of that movement.

[9] Pauly, John J. "The New Journalism and the Struggle for Interpretation." *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism* 15.5 (2014): 589-604. page 8

[10] 9

[11] 4

[12] Pauly 4 quot. Smith 61; Pauly 4

[13] Eason, David L. "New Journalism, Metaphor, and Culture." *Journal of Popular Culture* 15.4 (1982): 142-149. page 145

[14] 5

[15] Wolfe, "The New Journalism" 29

[16] 41

[17] 31

[18] 30

[19] 15

[20] 31

[21] Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 39
Jerry Rubin, who was three years younger than Kesey, would express a similar sentiment in the early 1970s: that "[t]hose who grew up before the 1950s live today in a mental world of Nazism, concentration camps, economic depression and communist dreams Stalinized. A pre-1950s child who can still dream is very rare. Kids who grew up in the post-1950s live in a world of supermarkets, color TV commercials, guerrilla war, international media, psychedelics, rock 'n roll and moon walks. For us *nothing is impossible*. We can do *anything*" (Farber 220).

[22] Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 155-156

[23] 77

[24] 137

[25] 139-40

[26] 250

[27] 231-2

[28] 234

[29] 103

[30] 153

[31] 153

[32] Wolfe wasn't working with some abstract idea of how the Pranksters used multimedia; rather, in writing his original magazine articles, he had access "to a tremendous amount of audio and visual documentation, particularly films of various Acid Tests, which Kesey screened for him" (Weingarten 143-4).

[33] Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 241

[34] 287

[35] 322-3

[36] 238

[37] 81, 82, 90

[38] Eason 146

[39] Weingarten 12

[40] 143. Eason refers to these ways of thinking/frameworks as "cultural forms," but I prefer the "schema" formulation.

[41] "Introduction." *Counterculture and Revolution*. ed. David Horowitz, Michael Lerner, and Craig Pyes. New York City: Random House, 1972. page x.

[42] x

[43] Wolfe "The New Journalism" 29

[44] Weingarten 12

[45] Eason 147

[46] Ibid.

[47] Mailer, Norman. *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History*. New York City: The New American Library, 1968. page 92

[48] Sinclair, John. "We are A People." *Counterculture and Revolution*. ed. David Horowitz, Michael Lerner, and Craig Pyes. New York City: Random House, 1972 [1971]. page 75.

[49] Wainwright, Loudon. "The View From Here." *Life*, 31 Mar. 1967. page 15.

[50] 15

[51] 15, 15, 16, 16

[52] 16

[53] Thompson, Hunter S. "The 'Hashbury' Is the Capital Of the Hippies." *The New York Times*, 14 May 1967. page 1.

[54] Didion, Joan. "Slouching Towards Bethlehem." *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1967. pages 26-31, 88-94. page 94. "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" also appears in Didion's 1968 short story collection of the same name; however, the version cited here is the original, which ran in *The Saturday Evening Post.*

[55] Feigelson 9

[56] Cottrell, Robert C. *Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll: The Rise of America's 1960s Counterculture.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. page 221.

[57] Farber 56

[58] Feigelson 9

[59] Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 12, 220

[60] 69
For more about how this process would work, it's necessary to turn to Barthes' work on myth. The way myth works, Barthes tells us, is that it takes an ordinary object—like a piece of clothing—and "impoverishes" its original meaning before inserting it into a chain of other objects whose meanings are similarly held "at a distance." The relationships between the objects in this chain are reconstituted as a cause-and-effect sequence, so that the chain takes on a message which reinforces the dominant culture's hegemony. A hair curler, for example, is no longer just a hair curler: put in a chain with objects like "*palazzo* pajamas," lipstick, a girdle, and high heels, it sends the message about a specific white middle-class version of femininity, and suggests that it is the epitome of womanhood—and, moreover, that this is the only way womanhood should look. Indeed, myth's primary function is that it "transforms history into nature": it takes a phenomenon (like this version of white middle-class womanhood) that evolved out of specific historical circumstances, and writes over the history behind it, making the phenomenon look like if it has always existed, as if it is natural. The result is that the standards which are set down by, and which uphold, dominant systems of race, patriarchy, and class—standards like the ones governing, and naturalizing, white middle-class existence—seem like the only possible ways of being; this, in turn, justifies violence against anyone who cannot conform to, or consciously steps outside of, these standards, as they are stigmatized as unnatural, abnormal, and unacceptable.

Hebdige tells us, however, that there is a way of fighting back against these standards, of countering these myths. If myth's strength comes from its ability to naturalize itself, then the best strategy to combat it is to *de-naturalize* it: to point out that it is actually artificial, a standard which has been constructed. It is sub- and counter-cultural groups that are able to do so, Hebdige claims, because they dress in a way that "directs attention to itself," that "stands apart [as] a visible construction, a loaded choice." Their style is "*obviously* fabricated," and as such it suggests that mainstream style, though it looks natural, must be fabricated as well.

This, I want to argue, is precisely the kind of practice the counterculture engaged in. Their juxtapastiche styles were so clearly calibrated to come off as strange and artificial—so self-consciously outside the standards of middle class dress—that a 'straight' who encountered them on the street could not help but do a double-take, and then wonder, were *they* the crazy one? What if it was not the hippie's style that was so outrageous, but their own? Even more importantly, countercultural groups re-appropriated the ordinary objects myth had captured and put into sequences which transmitted the dominant culture's messages: they seized those objects and inserted them into their own chains of meaning. In disrupting these chains and forming their own, these oppositional groups both challenged and provide an alternative to the dominant messages; this "contradict[ed] the myth of consensus" and interrupted "the process of normalization" (Feigelson, Naomi. *The Underground Revolution: Hippies, Yippies, and Others*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970. page 10).

[61] 70

[62] Mailer, Norman. *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History*. New York City: The New American Library, 1968. page 91

[63] Weingarten 257-8

[64] Mailer, *The Armies of the Night* 91-2

[65] 225

[66] 120. Unsurprisingly, the exorcism did not have twelve hundred participants, but hyperbole was a key part of Rubin's (and Hoffman's) ethos.

[67] Manseau, Peter. "Fifty Years Ago, a Rag-Tag Group of Acid-Dropping Activists Tried to 'Levitate' the Pentagon." *Smithsonian.com.* The Smithsonian, 20 Oct. 2017.

[68] Mailer, *The Armies of the Night* 120

[69] 119

[70] 121

[71] 125

[72] 124

[73] 121-2

[74] Raskin 124
"Pentagon Papers." *Encyclopedia Britannica.* https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pentagon-Papers
Daly, Christopher B. "Fifty years ago the Pentagon Papers shocked America — and they still matter today." *The Washington Post.* 13 Jun. 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/06/13/fifty-years-ago-pentagon-papers-shocked-america-they-still-matter-today/
Gross, Terry (interviewing Daniel Ellsberg). "How The Pentagon Papers Changed Public Perception Of The War In Vietnam." *Fresh Air. NPR.* 18 Jun. 2021. https://www.npr.org/2021/06/18/1007573283/how-the-pentagon-papers-changed-public-perception-of-the-war-in-vietnam

[75] Mailer, *The Armies of the Night* 271

[76] Kasmir, Jan Rose. "That's me in the picture: Jan Rose Kasmir at an anti-Vietnam war rally at the Pentagon, in 1967." *The Guardian.* 7 Nov. 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/nov/07/jan-rose-kasmir-anti-vietnam-rally-pentagon

[77] Stewart, Jocelyn Y. "Bernie Boston; captured iconic 60s' moment." *boston.com. The Boston Globe.* 25 Jan. 2008. http://archive.boston.com/bostonglobe/obituaries/articles/2008/01/25/bernie_boston_captured_iconic_60s_moment/
Montgomery, David. "Flowers, Guns and an Iconic Snapshot." *The Washington Post.* 18 Mar. 2007. https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/17/AR2007031701300.html

[78] Mailer, *The Armies of the Night* 286

[79] Mailer, *The Armies of the Night* 286

[80] Raskin 124

[81] Ibid.

[82] Farber 56

[83] Raskin 124, Farber 56

[84] Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It* 45, 46; Farber 15

[85] 60

[86] 87, 94

[87] 38-9

[88] 45-6; Raskin 143

[89] Farber 201

[90] Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It* 44

[91] Raskin 215

[92] 200

[93] 214, 209

[94] 215

[95] 216; Hoffman, Abbie. *Revolution for the Hell of It.* New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005.

[96] Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It* 111

[97] Farber xvi

[98] Raskin 143

[99] Amore 39-40

[100] Ibid.

[101] Mailer, *The Armies of the Night* 199

[102] 198-9

[103] 153

[104] 153-4

[105] 154

[106] 149

[107] 153

[108] 156

[109] Ironically, Mailer had actually co-founded *The Village Voice*; the fact remains, though, that he is not the *Voice* reporter who was on the ground at the event.
Bruinius, Harry. "Norman Mailer, 1923-2007." *The Village Voice.* 6 Nov. 2007. https://www.villagevoice.com/2007/11/06/norman-mailer-1923-2007/

[110] 195

[111] 206, 208

[112] 210-11

[113] 177, 181

[114] Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969. page 19

[115] Farber 290

[116] 206. The numbers among Black Americans were very different: "82% of college-educated blacks felt that the police had used too much force, as did 63% of all blacks polled." I don't think it's all that difficult to infer why: Black Americans had much more first-hand experience with the injustice of police brutality.

[117] Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* 140-2

[118] Farber 223

[119] 216

[120] Hoffman, Abbie. *Woodstock Nation: A Talk-Rock Album*. New York: Random House, 1969. page 91.

[121] *CBS News 1968 Democratic National Convention Coverage.* Columbia Broadcasting System. Anchored by Walter Cronkite. 28 Aug. 1968. Archived on C-SPAN. https://www.c-span.org/video/?444739-1/cbs-news-1968-democratic-national-convention-coverage#
See the 1969 film *Medium Cool,* which has a similar take on TV news coverage of the 1968 DNC. *Medium Cool* is not as optimistic as I am about photography, however.
*Medium Cool.* Directed by Haskell Wexler, performances by Robert Forster and Verna Bloom. Distributed by Paramount Pictures, 1969.

[122] Indeed, Marshall McLuhan, from whom Hoffman got many of his ideas, warned that TV was a medium which did "not excite, agitate, or arouse," but induced a kind of "rigor mortis" in the viewer. I have not included this quote in the text of my chapter itself, however, because McLuhan's argument was actually the opposite of what seemed to have happened at the DNC (or at least, as Mailer observed it). McLuhan believed that the audience experienced rigor mortis when watching television, and did not feel compelled to get up and join the protests, because they felt *too deeply involved, too deeply absorbed,* in what they saw onscreen. This seems to be the opposite of what Mailer observed (and what I, too, think was happening) at the DNC, which was that viewers were becoming too *detached* from the protesters they watched on TV.
McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, by Marshall McLuhan. MIT Press: Cambridge and London, 1994 [1964]. page 309.

[123] 77

[124] 74

[125] 79

[126] 77

[127] 75; Glass, Andrew. "U.S. military draft ends, Jan. 27, 1973." *Politico.* 27 Jan. 2012. https://www.politico.com/story/2012/01/us-military-draft-ends-jan-27-1973-072085

[128] 79

[129] Farber 205

[130] Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* 237

[131] Craig, Pat. "Out Of Sight, Man! 300,000 At Bash." *Lodi News-Sentinel.* 8 Dec. 1969. page 1. Archived online at https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=LAJYAAAAIBAJ&pg=3201%2C983078

[132] Mailer, *The Armies of the Night* 91-2

[133] Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 250

[134] Raskin 191

[135] Hebdige 96

[136] Raskin 226-7

[137] Glass, Andrew. "Nixon reelected in landslide, Nov. 7, 1972." *Politico.* 7 Nov. 2018. https://www.politico.com/story/2018/11/07/this-day-in-politics-november-7-963516

[138] Mound, Joshua. "What Democrats Still Don't Get About George McGovern." *The New Republic.* 29 Feb. 2016. https://newrepublic.com/article/130737/democrats-still-dont-get-george-mcgovern

[139] "Fifty Years Ago: President Nixon Announces Cambodia Incursion." *Richard Nixon Foundation.* 28 Apr. 2020. https://www.nixonfoundation.org/2020/04/fifty-years-ago-president-nixon-announces-cambodia-incursion/
Pfaff, William and Los Angeles Times Syndicate. "Cambodia Invasion Reminder of U.S. Political Use of Military." *The Chicago Tribune.* 25 Apr. 2000. https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2000-04-25-0004250036-story.html
Glass

[140] Raskin 220

[141] It is interesting that Hoffman ended up being undone by his own mythmaking, because he had actually believed that the only way to undermine the myths of the establishment was for the counterculture to create their own myths. This was a strategy which reflected Barthes' own thinking on the best way to combat the myths of the dominant culture. For Barthes, a myth could not be vanquished by disproving it, as "myth can always, as a last resort," incorporate "the resistance which is brought to bear against it" into existing myth (Barthes 246). Rather, "the best weapon against myth" was "to produce an *artificial myth*"—in other words, to create one's own myth which stands in opposition to the myths of the powers-that-be" (246-7).

This was what Hoffman had been trying to do at the Democratic National Convention: to infuse both their advertising for the Festival and the Festival itself with "a high element of risk, drama, excitement, and bullshit," in the hopes that this would make the idea of the Festival powerful enough for scores of people to buy into it—and for it to be able to combat the dominant culture's myths (Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It* 103). They would create a myth of what would happen in Chicago, a myth of the Yippies, to support their aims, in the same way that the powers-that-be in U.S. politics created the myth of the DNC to bolster their own ambitions: to make it seem like the nation's democracy was healthy, and that Americans had a meaningful role to play in choosing their Commander-in-Chief. They would fight myth with myth, bullshit with bullshit, in the hopes that their myth—their vision of a world where people freely fought and frolicked, made love and made art—would eventually become the new hegemony. "The mission," Jerry Rubin claimed, was to "freak out the Democrats so much that they disrupt their own convention. And meanwhile demonstrate to the world the alternative: our own revolutionary youth culture" (Rubin, Jerry. "Selections from 'Yippie' and 'Chicago.'" *Counterculture and Revolution*, ed. David Horowitz, Michael Lerner, and Craig Pyes. New York City: Random House, 1972. page 20).

Of course, as we know, Hoffman and Rubin's strategy for the Festival of Life, and the Democratic National Convention as a whole, failed—and I would suggest that this was because the myth the Yippies tried to create was not as clear and compelling, as it would need to be to succeed in contesting the myths of the dominant culture. As I argued in section IV., the lack of a foil in President Johnson, and the decision to advertise that there would likely be clashes between protesters and police (which muddled the Festival of Life's messaging), made it so that the myth-making, and the symbolism, of their demonstration was not strong enough to win over the public.

[142] Raskin 254, 257

[143] Ross, Nancy L. "On Wall Street, Former Yippie Stages First Financial Hurrah." *The Washington Post.* 12 Apr. 1981. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/business/1981/04/12/on-wall-street-former-yippie-stages-first-financial-hurrah/de498a66-9400-47ef-b7c2-6c83b6dd382a/

[144] Cain, Eric. "Ken Kesey: An Oregon Life." *Oregon Public Broadcasting.* 3 Jan. 2014. https://www.opb.org/television/programs/oregon-experience/article/or-exp-ken-kesey/

[145] Mailer, *The Armies of the Night* 6

[146] Weingarten 15-16

[147] Heitman, Danny. "Tru Life: How Truman Capote Became a Cautionary Tale of Celebrity Culture." *Humanities* 38.3 (2017). Published online. https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2017/summer/feature/tru-life

[148] 41; Weales, Gerald. "Mailer's Maidstone." *The North American Review* 257.2 (1972): 62-4; Baker, Alan. "Norman Mailer Atones For His TV Sins." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 5.3 (1979): 27-35 (another good source on Mailer and his reputation in the media is the following: Lennon, Michael J. "Mailer's Sarcophagus: The Artist, The Media, and the 'Wad.'" *Modern Fiction Studies* 23.2 (1977): 179-87.
Ironically, the incident which should have drawn the most ire—Mailer's near-fatal stabbing of his wife, Adele Morales—drew far less attention, at least outside of feminist circles.

[149] "Vietnam War." *The National Archives.* https://www.archives.gov/research/vietnam-war
Glass
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[150] Goitein, Elizabeth. "Rolling Back the Post-9/11 Surveillance State." *Brennan Center for Justice.* 25 Aug. 2021. https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/rolling-back-post-911-surveillance-state
Fasman, John. "Pushback against the surveillance state." *The Economist.* 2020. https://worldin.economist.com/article/17339/edition2020pushback-against-surveillance-state
Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. "The Emerging Movement for Police and Prison Abolition." *The New Yorker.* 7 May 2021. https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-emerging-movement-for-police-and-prison-abolition
Reyes, Yacob. "White House pushes back at Rashida Tlaib prison stand." *Axios.* 23 Nov. 2021. https://www.axios.com/white-house-rashida-tlaib-prison-abolition-9a75f2d2-65cb-4c2d-bf86-e2a4ab81ceab.html
Epstein, Reid J. "These Top Democrats Go Further Than Biden on Diverting Police Funds." *The New York Times.* 26 Jun. 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/us/politics/defund-police-protests-democrats.html
To see how mainstream the awareness of, and pushback against, imperialism has become, check out the "imperialism" tag on teenvogue.com: https://www.teenvogue.com/tag/imperialism

[151] Boynton, Robert S. "Whatever Happened to the New Journalism?" *The Los Angeles Times.* 23 Jan. 2005. Reprinted on Boynton's website: https://www.robertboynton.com/articleDisplay.php?article_id=83

[152] Mailer, Norman. *The Executioner's Song.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1979. Wolfe, Tom. *The Right Stuff.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979.

[153] Didion, Joan. *The White Album.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979.

[154] "A city divided, a mother's anguish." *The Straits Times.* 6 Oct. 2019. https://graphics.straitstimes.com/STI/STIMEDIA/Interactives/2019/10/hkfamily/index.html?shell
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Peçana, Sergio, Almukhtar, Sarah, and Lai, K.K. Rebecca. "Untangling the Overlapping Conflicts in the Syrian Civil War." *The New York Times.* 18 Oct. 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/10/16/world/middleeast/untangling-the-overlapping-conflicts-in-the-syrian-war.html
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[155] Wolfe, *The New Journalism* 28

[156] Hanna, Kathleen. "The Revolution Starts Here and Now…" (Flyer). The Kathleen Hanna Papers. Reprinted in *The Riot Grrrl Collection* 19

[157] Marcus, Sarah. *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution.* HarperCollins e-books, 2010. pages 23, 22

[158] 24

[159] 108

[160] 107

[161] 89

[162] 22, 25, 111

[163] 108

[164] 27-8

[165] 88-9

[166] 18

[167] 76-7

[168] Duncombe, Stephen. *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture.* Bloomington: Verso, 2008. Online. page 10
Piepmeier, Alison. *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism.* New York and London: New York University Press, 2009. Online. page 2

[169] 29. For more about the history of women's informal print publications, see Piepmeier 30-9

[170] Duncombe 10

[171] Marcus 42

[172] 26

[173] "Introduction." Crabb, Cindy. *Doris: an anthology of Doris zines from 1991-2001.* Portland: Microcosm Publishing, 2005. n.p.

[174] Marcus 56

[175] Nguyen, Mimi Thi. "Riot Grrrl, Race, and Revival." *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory.* 22.2-3 (2012): 173-196. page 173

[176] Marcus 70

[177] 77

[178] An alternate version of the story behind the "Grrrl" part of "Riot Grrrl" comes from Molly Neuman, who explains, "we had thought about *Girl Riot* and then we changed it to *Riot Grrrl* with the three 'r's' as in growling. It was a cool play on words, and also kind of an expression about how there should be some kind of vehicle where your anger is validated" (Buchanan, Rebekah J. *Writing a Riot: Riot Grrrl Zines and Feminist Rhetorics.* New York: Peter Lang, 2017. Online. page 28); emphasis in original. Though this origin story differs from the one that comes from Sara Marcus' research, the idea of taking "girl"—with its sugary-sweet connotations—and then spelling it "Grrrl" so as to express the assembled young women's anger is still demonstrates the same juxtaposition—playfulness/light contrasted with rage—that we get in the origin story from Marcus.

[179] Marcus 69

[180] 199-200

[181] See Adela C. Licona's *Zines in Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetoric* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012). I'm citing the online version.

[182] Piepmeier 1, citing Vail, Tobi. *Jigsaw #4.* Olympia: Self-published, 1991. n.p.

[183] Marcus 287; Buchanan 56, citing Riot Grrrl Olympia. *What Is Riot Grrrl Anyway???* Olympia: Self-published, n.d., n.p.

[184] Buchanan 56, citing *What Is Riot Grrrl Anyway????* n.p.

[185] Buchanan, Rebekah J. *Writing a Riot: Riot Grrrl Zines and Feminist Rhetorics.* New York: Peter Lang, 2017. pages 124-7. Marcus 267

[186] 267. Emphasis in original.

[187] Bikini Kill. "Suck My Left One." *Revolution Girl Style Now!* Self-released, 1991.

[188] That "Suck my left one" is the tell-off used here—and the one that forms the refrain for the song—has interesting gendered connotations, as its literal meaning is "suck my left testicle."

[189] Not only at Bikini Kill's shows, but at the performances of her earlier band, Viva Knievel: see Marcus 38, as well as my later in-text discussion of Viva Knievel's and Bikini Kill's formations.

[190] Piepmeier points out the continuity between the over-the-top anger expressed in both punk and Riot Grrrl on pages 53, but, as we will see later, she doesn't sense that Riot Grrrls are also pushing back against those who have claimed they are exaggerating, and are insisting that the fact that they are extraordinarily angry is a reason they should be taken seriously. See also: Buchanan 43-4.

[191] Marcus 120, 133, 146, 227

[192] 297

[193] Ibid.

[194] Piepmeier 53, citing Amazon, Lizzard. *Slut Utopia #1*. San Jose: Self-published, 1993. n.p.. Piepmeier's own analysis of this passage will be discussed in the pages below.

[195] This is what I see as motivating Riot Grrrls' decision to call themselves "grrrls" instead of women. As one of my committee members, Dr. Caroline Rody, noted, "[s]econd wavers pioneered the act of calling young women young women," and "[w]e would never have called ourselves girls! Demeaning!" I think Riot Grrrls were very aware of just how demeaning it could be to be called a girl—and all the cutesy, stay-in-your-place-and-behave connotations the word had—and were reclaiming it as an act of appropriation. With the "rrr" growl replacing the "ir," "girl" became something different: it was no longer infantilizing or belittling, but threatening. Riot Grrrls were reclaiming the word: in shooting it through with their anger, they were taking it back. Suddenly, a "grrrl" was something you had to be afraid of: something that had teeth, that was furious, and that was ready to speak up.

[196] 50, citing Dyer, Sarah. *Action Girl Newsletter.* Staten Island: Self-published, 1993. n.p.

[197] Licona 73, citing Ortiz, Bianca. *¡Mamasita!, Issue One.* San Pablo: Self-published, n.d. n.p. Emphasis in original.

[198] 70; see also Licona, Adela. "(B)orderlands' Rhetorics and Representations: The Transformative Potential of Feminist Third-Space Scholarship and Zines." *NWSA Journal* 17.2 (2005): 104-129. p. 118-9.

[199] Licona *Zines in Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetoric* 71

[200] Piepmeier 53

[201] Ibid.

[202] 54

[203] Licona 92, citing Barber, Sarah. *Tater Taught, Issue One.* Seattle: Self-published, n.d., n.p. This is another passage I've sourced from Licona, who writes of it: "Barber's critical investigation into anger as a tool of inquiry and understanding exemplifies how e-motion informs meaning making. Her reflections demonstrate an integrated knowledge and embodied understanding of third-space lived experience. Finally, Barber demonstrates an understanding of the role of anger and e-motion as motivators to action" (92). When discussing *Tater Taught*'s introduction, which I have not excerpted here, Licona claims that Barber's "introductory reflections imply both an awareness of the micropractices of resistance as well as a belief that it is through coalition that the ill effects of an oppressive and corporatized mass culture can be challenged"; in another passage, discussing the zine *Gift Idea, 1 & 1/2,* she makes the claim that "Anger is identified as a motivator in confronting the unacceptable and beginning to build a community based on shared experiences and desires" (89, 88-9). Thus, while I think our analyses of *Tater Taught* are similar—as well as how we see the relationship between anger and coalition-building more broadly—I see myself as building on and adding to Licona's work through my unpacking of just *how* anger can foster this coalition between women, and in my claim that Barber sees herself as already having taken the first steps in revolution.

[204] Marcus 37

[205] 37, 38

[206] 38

[207] 40-6, 48

[208] 42, 48

[209] 86, 68

[210] 87-8

[211] Stephen Duncombe is skeptical of this view; he writes that "the limitation of Riot Grrrl as a political force" is that "[i]t is very hard to translate the individual expression and personal subjectivity that is the trademark of Riot Grrrl communication into a lasting political movement." Specifically, he worries that "Riot Grrrl politics, like all zine politics, are based in the existential act of creative rebellion, "creat[ing] revolution in our lives every single day by envisioning and creating alternatives to the christian capitalist way of doing things," *Bikini Kill,* 2, reads. But with so much emphasis on individual expression and creativity, zines are less a means to an end than the ends in themselves: the revolution itself." As I will argue in section V. of this dissertation, however, I don't think Riot Grrrl zines being a revolution in themselves is necessarily a bad thing; indeed, giving young women a space where they have total control over how they tell their stories, and the ability to participate in an economy that exists outside of capitalism and the patriarchy, not only helps them to divest from these systems, but also boosts their self-esteem and sense of agency and encourages them to fight back against the patriarchy in their own lives.

[212] Hanna, Vail, and Wilcox. *Bikini Kill* no.1. n.p. Reprinted in *The Riot Grrrl Collection* 39

[213] Anonymous Contributor. Neuman, Molly and Allison Wolfe. *Girl Germs* no. 3. Self-published, 1992, p. 16. The Molly Neuman Riot Grrrl Collection. Reprinted in *The Riot Grrrl Collection,* page 66

[214] Lamm, Nomy. *I'm So Fucking Beautiful #1.* Olympia: Self-published, 1991. page 4. Scans courtesy of Duke's Bingham Zine Center

[215] Marcus 85-7

[216] 82-3

[217] 86-7

[218] 87

[219] 106-7

[220] Piepmeier 121, Duncombe 75

[221] For a good primer on second-wave consciousness-raising, see Shreve, Anita. *Women Together, Women Alone: The Legacy of the Consciousness-Raising Movement.* New York: Viking, 1989.

[222] Marcus 106

[223] Lamm 4

[224] Piepmeier 90

[225] Radway, Janice. "Girls, Zines, and the Miscellaneous Production of Subjectivity in an Age of Unceasing Circulation." Keynote speech given at the University of Minnesota for the Annual Colloquium of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing. Delivered in 2000, reprinted for the university's Speaker Series in 2001. page 6-8. Piepmeier 8, 10-11

[226] This is evident just from going through zines—*so* many of them are written by young women who have experienced, and who want to discuss, this type of abuse. Jennifer Sinor also suggests that zines' popularity among abuse survivors has to do with another opportunity for control they afford: specifically, the opportunity to control one's audience (Sinor 255). This will be discussed later in this section.

[227] Crabb, Cindy. *Doris* #2. Self-published, 1994, n.p. From Crabb, Cindy. *Doris: an anthology of Doris zines from 1991-2001.* Portland: Microcosm Publishing, 2005. page 17

[228] 16

[229] Piepmeier 40, citing Nguyen, Mimi. *Slant* #5. Berkeley: Self-published, 1997. page 2

[230] Sinor 255. Citing Menghsin. *Sidetracked* #7. n.d., n.p.

[231] Sinor 255

[232] Sinor 255, citing Tapper, Cheryl. *Merge Disorder* #1. Somerset, n.d. n.p.

[233] Chestnut, Neely Bat. *Mend My Dress* #1. Seattle, 2005. page 1. Scans courtesy of the Barnard Zine Library

[234] Gordon, JoAnne. "Sexual Assault Support Zines as a Pedagogy of Hope: An exploration of zines as a method of integrating community voices into the research process." *UCLA: Center for the Study of Women,* 18 Mar. 2012. pages 5-6. Citing Crabb, Cindy. *Support* #1. Portland, 2002. page 1

[235] Nguyen "Riot Grrrl, Race, and Revival" 176

[236] Marcus 38

[237] 42-3

[238] 44

[239] 44-5

[240] 45

[241] Piepmeier 59

[242] Siegfried 34

[243] Nguyen "Riot Grrrl, Race, and Revival" 176

[244] Hanna, Vail, and Wilcox. *Bikini Kill* no.1. n.p. Reprinted in *The Riot Grrrl Collection* 39

[245] Hanna, Vail, and Wilcox. *Bikini Kill* no.1. n.p. Reprinted in *The Riot Grrrl Collection* 44

[246] Hanna, Vail, and Wilcox. *Bikini Kill* no.1. n.p. Reprinted in *The Riot Grrrl Collection* 39

[247] Hanna, Vail, and Wilcox. *Bikini Kill* no.1. n.p. Reprinted in *The Riot Grrrl Collection* 44

[248] Nguyen "Riot Grrrl, Race, and Revival" 174-5

[249] 185-6

[250] 181, 183-4

[251] There was also *Chop Suey Spex,* though it came out later (in 1997), and criticized racism (particularly, anti-East Asian racism) in the punk movement more broadly

[252] Bikceem, Ramdasha. *Gunk* #4. Self-published, 1993, n.p. Reprinted in *The Riot Grrrl Collection* 158

[253] Bikceem, Ramdasha. *Gunk* #4 159

[254] Hanna, Vail, and, Wilcox n.p. Reprinted in *The Riot Grrrl Collection* 141

[255] Douglas, Kate and Anna Poletti. *Life Narratives and Youth Culture: Representation, Agency, and Participation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. page 123

[256] Buchanan 94

[257] Buchanan 56, citing Allison and Riot Grrrl Olympia. *What Is Riot Grrrl Anyway???* Olympia: Self-published, n.d., n.p.

[258] Piepmeier 80

[259] Ibid.

[260] 69

[261] Buchanan 103

[262] Piepmeier 82

[263] Marcus 259-60

[264] 241

[265] Ibid.

[266] While Marcus views this as going back to the way Riot Grrrl was initially organized—loose networks of people across the country who kind of knew each other, except with zines as the organizing medium rather than bands' shows—I see it differently, since zine distribution networks gave individual Riot Grrrls who had never met, and had no prior connections to Riot Grrrl nor to the punk music scene, a way to meet and then connect not only with Riot Grrrl and its ideals, but also with a huge number of other Riot Grrrls (Marcus 297).

[267] Dyer, Sarah. *Action Girl Newsletter* #12. Staten Island, n.d. pages 1-4

[268] Travis, Trysh. "The Women in Print Movement: History and Implications." *Book History* 11 (2008): 275-300. page 276

[269] Hogan, Kristen. *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016. location 1259

[270] Travis 276

[271] Sinor 255

[272] Marcus 152

[273] Piepmeier 79

[274] Licona *Zines in Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetoric* 86, citing *Housewife Turned Assassin!, Numero One* #1. e.d. Dani and Sisi. n.d., n.p.

[275] Licona *Zines in Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetoric* 122-3. Citing *Rubyfruit Manifesto* #2. 1998, n.p.

[276] Licona *Zines in Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetoric* 31*,* 51, 55-6. Citing *Calico* #5. n.d., n.p. and Perez, Celia. *i dreamed i was assertive.* Tampa, n.d.
Licona notes that, while she considers some of the publications she writes about to be Riot Grrrl zines, she doesn't classify all of them as such (22). She prefers to call them "third-space zines," as they have "a more diverse authorship," are more explicit about advocating for coalition work, and "are not satisfied with reflections on the personal as an individual experience" (3, 22). I think that there's a strong argument to be made, however, that the zines I've chosen to highlight in this section draw on Riot Grrrl to the extent that they can still be considered a part of the movement. They represent an *evolution,* a *broadening out*, of Riot Grrrl, to include more diverse zinesters, but many of the principles they espouse were present in Riot Grrrl since the movement's early days. Riot Grrrl has always been focused on using the sharing of individual experiences as a way to build trust and solidarity between members, so that coalitions can be formed, and I see the same emphasis on using your individual experience to work with other girls and engage in revolutionary action in *Housewife Turned Assassin!* and *Rubyfruit Manifesto.*

[277] Licona *Zines in Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetoric* 46. Citing *Housewife Turned Assassin! Numero One* #1. n.p.

[278] "Housewife Turned Assassin! #2,4." "Guide to the Mimi Thi Nguyen Zine Collection, in Collaboration with the People of Color Zine Project. 1992-1998. MSS.365." *The Fales Library & Special Collections. NYU Libraries.* New York University. http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/fales/nguyen/dscaspace_ref55.html#aspace_ref20
"Rubyfruit Manifesto, no. 2, August 1998." "Sarah Wood Zine collection, 1990s." *Archives & Manuscripts. Duke University Libraries.* Duke University. https://archives.lib.duke.edu/catalog/woodsarah_aspace_b878f054c660a3d801f5295f80bf6701

[279] "OFRENDA: A ZINE ANTHOLOGY (1994-2014) BY CELIA PEREZ." *Portland Buttonworks.* https://portlandbuttonworks.com/sweet-candy-press/ofrenda-Celia-Perez-i-dreamed-i-was-assertive-zine-anthology?sort=pd.name&order=ASC&limit=12
"The East Village Inky." *Facebook.* https://www.facebook.com/EastVillageInky/
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[280] Radway 12

[281] Eichhorn, Kate. *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013. Online edition. Location 33

[282] "Guide to the Kathleen Hanna Papers, 1988-2015 MSS.271." *The Fales Library & Special Collections.* New York University. http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/fales/hanna/
"Guide to the Sarah and Jen Wolfe Zines." *The University of Iowa Libraries.* The University of Iowa. http://collguides.lib.uiowa.edu/?MSC0878
"Guide to the Mimi Thi Nguyen Zine Collection, in Collaboration with the People of Color Zine Project. 1992-1998. MSS.365"
"Tammy Rae Carland Riot Grrrl Zine Collection. 1988-2002. MSS.320." *The Fales Library & Special Collections.* New York University. http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/fales/carlandzines/
"Sarah Dyer Zine collection, 1985-2005." *Archives & Manuscripts Collection Guides. Duke University Libraries.* Duke University. https://archives.lib.duke.edu/catalog/sarahdyercollection

[283] "Sarah Dyer Zine collection, 1985-2005"

[284] Ryzik, Melena. "A Feminist Riot That Still Inspires." *The New York Times.* 3 Jun. 2011. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/05/arts/music/the-riot-grrrl-movement-still-inspires.html
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Zoladz, Lindsay. "Not Every Girl Is a Riot Grrrl." *Pitchfork.* 16 Nov. 2011. https://pitchfork.com/features/article/8710-not-every-girl-is-a-riot-grrrl/

[285] Eichhorn, Kate. "D.I.Y. Collectors, Archiving Scholars, and Activist Librarians: Legitimizing Feminist Knowledge and Cultural Production Since 1990." *Women's Studies* 39.6 (2010): 622-46. page 627

[286] Eichhorn "D.I.Y. Collectors, Archiving Scholars, and Activist Librarians: Legitimizing Feminist Knowledge and Cultural Production Since 1990" 631-2

[287] Eichhorn *The Archival Turn in Feminism* location 1468-73.

[288] "Statistics." *Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN).* https://www.rainn.org/statistics

[289] Martinez, Anthony and Christnacht, Cheridan. "Women Are Nearly Half of U.S. Workforce but Only 27% of STEM Workers." *United States Census Bureau.* 26 Jan. 2021. https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/01/women-making-gains-in-stem-occupations-but-still-underrepresented.html
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Asthana, Ananya. "About Us." *Women in Stem.* https://womeninstem.org/our-vision

[290] Marcus 23, 22
Barroso, Amanda. "61% of U.S. women say 'feminist' describes them well; many see feminism as empowering, polarizing." *Pew Research Center.* 7 Jul. 2020. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/07/61-of-u-s-women-say-feminist-describes-them-well-many-see-feminism-as-empowering-polarizing/

[291] Kimble, Cameron. "Sexual Assault Remains Dramatically Underreported." *The Brennan Center.* 4 Oct. 2018. https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/sexual-assault-remains-dramatically-underreported

[292] Interestingly, the #MeToo movement has a lot on common with, and in many ways seems to draw from, the tenets of Riot Grrrl. This chapter has already discussed at length the emphasis Riot Grrrls put on survivors coming together and supporting one another by sharing their stories. Compare that to these statements from #MeToo's founder, Tarana Burke: "On one side, it's a bold declarative statement that 'I'm not ashamed' and 'I'm not alone.' On the other side, it's a statement from survivor to survivor that says 'I see you, I hear you, I understand you and I'm here for you or I get it'" and "When you experience trauma and meet other people that have a similar experience, and you show empathy for each other, it creates a bond." I think we can say, then, that the #MeToo movement is another way that Riot Grrrl lives on, even as the fact that #MeToo needs to exist is evidence that Riot Grrrl wasn't able to eradicate abuse and harassment from the dominant culture.
Citing Santiago, Cassandra and Criss, Doug. "An activist, a little girl and the heartbreaking origin of 'Me too'." *CNN.* 17 Oct. 2017. https://www.cnn.com/2017/10/17/us/me-too-tarana-burke-origin-trnd/index.html

[293] Shipman, Claire, Kay, Katty, and Riley, JillEllyn. "How Puberty Kills Girls' Confidence." *The Atlantic.* 20 Sept. 2018. https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/09/puberty-girls-confidence/563804/

[294] The Confidence Code for Girls and Ypulse. "The Confidence Collapse and Why It Matters for the Next Generation." *The Confidence Code for Girls.* Survey fielded between 2/8/18 and 2/13/18. https://www.confidencecodegirls.com/poll. Emphasis in original.

[295] Buchanan 56, citing Riot Grrrl Olympia. *What Is Riot Grrrl Anyway???* Olympia: Self-published, n.d., n.p.

[296] Some people argue that, by calling this movement the alt-right, we're whitewashing its white supremacist beliefs, and that we should refuse the alt-right label and just refer to them as white supremacists (see Mohajer, cited at the bottom of this footnote). I actually agree—but the problem is that, when writing a dissertation chapter that focuses on the rise of a particular white supremacist movement, and that at the same time makes reference to earlier white supremacist groups, referring to the alt-right as "this new white supremacist movement" and "white supremacists who use viral irony" makes things get very wordy, and difficult to follow, very fast. Thus, for the sake of clarity, I've chosen to refer to them as the alt-right—and to mention their white supremacist beliefs as much as I can, not only because that's what they're committed to, but to make it so that no reader forgets that white supremacy is at the core of the movement. (See Hawley 3)
The history of how the term "alt-right" came to be associated with this movement in the first place is a bit complicated. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, "[t]he Alternative Right is a term coined in 2008 by Richard Bertrand Spencer, who heads the white nationalist think tank known as the National Policy Institute, to describe a loose set of far-right ideals centered on 'white identity' and the preservation of 'Western civilization.' In 2010, Spencer — who had stints as an editor of The American Conservative and Taki's Magazine — launched the Alternative Right blog, where he worked to refine the movement's ideological tenets ("Alt-Right"). However, "after two years, Spencer was tired of both the website and the entire Alt-Right concept. He stopped personally working with the website in 2012" (though, of course, he would eventually come back to, and become a central figure in, the movement) (63). As Hawley tells us, "the term Alt-Right seems to have fallen out of favor among the racial right on the Internet by 2014. However, no new term ever really arose to take its place. As a new iteration of the radical right began to grow, it needed something to call itself, and 'Alt-Right' was available. But…when the Alt-Right emerged a second time, it went in a very different direction" (66). While Spencer had originally envisioned the alt-right as hyper-intellectual and respectable—a sort of buttoned-up white nationalism—and that would indeed be one part of the new alt-right, most of the movement "was ostentatiously vulgar and offensive, violating every contemporary taboo related to race, ethnicity, religion, and gender" (68). As we will see in this chapter, most of its members were 4chan trolls, some of which were former Stormfront posters.
Mohajer, Shaya Tayefe. "It is time to stop using the term 'alt right'." *Columbia Journalism Review.* 14 Aug. 2017. https://www.cjr.org/criticism/alt-right-trump-charlottesville.php
"Alt-Right." *The Southern Poverty Law Center.* https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/alt-right
Hawley, George. *Making Sense of the Alt-Right.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2017. pages 63, 66, 68.

[297] real wise yuppie (@ohlnso). [Wow to the street vendor serving raspberry smoothies named "Cop Guts from 9/11" at ground zero site, $8.99 is over priced as hell]. *Twitter.* 17 Apr. 2011. Account is now locked (private); archived at https://boringasheck.com/2013/08/01/the-50-best-tweets-of-all-time/

[298] Muecke, D.C. *Irony and the Ironic.* London and New York: Methuen, 1970. Part of *The Critical Idiom* series. page 44
Muecke's book is one of the foundational works on irony; for another, see Wayne C. Booth's *A Rhetoric of Irony* (thanks, Professor Levenson!).

[299] 7

[300] 15

[301] 15, 17

[302] 16

[303] 17

[304] 18

[305] 19

[306] 31

[307] Anglin, Andrew. “Formatting.” [This document has no official title, but *The Daily Beast,* which it was originally leaked to, refers to it as *The Daily Stormer*’s style guide.] *DocumentCloud.* [Leaked from *The Daily Stormer*] https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/4325810/Writers.pdf. page 10.
*The Daily Beast*’s original article on the leak, in which they analyze the document itself, is here: Feinberg, Ashley. “This Is The Daily Stormer's Playbook.” *The Huffington Post.* 13 Dec. 2017. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/daily-stormer-nazi-style-guide_n_5a2ece19e4b0ce3b344492f2

[308] Dr. Mike (@RealMikeNapa). [We must secure an existence for our people and whole milk for white children. #milktwitter]. *Twitter.* 18 Feb. 2017. https://twitter.com/RealMikeNapa/status/833054025666924544

[309] Hawley 25

[310] Anglin 10

[311] Anglin, Andrew. “Formatting.” [This document has no official title, but *The Daily Beast,* which it was originally leaked to, refers to it as *The Daily Stormer*’s style guide.] *DocumentCloud.* [Leaked from *The Daily Stormer*] https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/4325810/Writers.pdf. page 10.
*The Daily Beast*’s original article on the leak, in which they analyze the document itself, is here: Feinberg, Ashley. “This Is The Daily Stormer's Playbook.” *The Huffington Post.* 13 Dec. 2017. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/daily-stormer-nazi-style-guide_n_5a2ece19e4b0ce3b344492f2

[312] Beran, Dale. *It Came From Something Awful: How a Toxic Troll Army Accidentally Memed Donald Trump into Office.* New York: All Points Books, 2019. Kindle eBook. pages 39-41.

[313] 41

[314] 42

[315] 43, 42, 43

[316] 43, 42, 43

[317] 44

[318] 45

[319] 45

[320] Herrman, John and Notopoulos, Katie. “Weird Twitter: The Oral History.” *Buzzfeed News. Buzzfeed.* 5 Apr. 2013. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/jwherrman/weird-twitter-the-oral-history. Twitter user @cheesegod69, who was a poster on FYAD, is the source of the quote I’m citing.
Wofford, Taylor. “Fuck You And Die: An Oral History of Something Awful.” *Motherboard. Vice.* 5 April 2017. https://www.vice.com/en/article/nzg4yw/fuck-you-and-die-an-oral-history-of-something-awful. Josh Boruff, a former Something Awful administrator, is the person I’m quoting here.

[321] Wofford. I’m still quoting Boruff here.

[322] Wofford. I’m now quoting David Thorpe, another former Something Awful administrator.

[323] wint (@dril). [ah, So u persecute Jared Fogle just because he has different beliefs? Do Tell. (girls get mad at me) Sorry. Im sorry. Im trying to remove it]. *Twitter*. 31 Oct. 2015. https://twitter.com/dril/status/660644922744262656?lang=en

[324] wint (@dril). [“This Whole Thing Smacks of Gender,” i holler as i overturn my uncle’s barbeque grill and turn the 4th of July into the 4th of Shit]. *Twitter*. 16 Jun. 2012. https://twitter.com/dril/status/213849618415484929?lang=en

[325] wint (@dril). [THE COP GROWLS "TAKE OFF TH OSE JEANS, CITIZEN." I COMPLY, REVEALING THE FULL LENGTH DENIM TATTOOS ON BOTH LEGS.  THE COP SCREAMS; DEFEATED]. *Twitter*. 13 Apr. 2012. https://twitter.com/dril/status/190943080730472448?lang=en

[326] wint (@dril). [another day volunteering at the betsy ross museum. everyone keeps asking me if they can fuck the flag. buddy, they wont even let me fuck it]. *Twitter*. 19 Feb. 2012. https://twitter.com/dril/status/171450835388203008?lang=en

[327] wint (@dril). [the doctor reveals my blood pressure is 420 over 69. i hoot & holler outta the building while a bunch of losers try to tell me that im dying]. *Twitter*. 13 Jun. 2012. https://twitter.com/dril/status/223751039709495298?lang=en

[328] wint (@dril). [fuck "jokes". everything i tweet is real. raw insight without the horse shit. no, i will NOT follow trolls. twitter dot com. i live for this]. *Twitter.* 13 Oct. 2011. https://twitter.com/dril/status/124634198387605504?lang=en

[329] Whyman, Tom. "Give the Nobel Prize in Literature to Dril." *The Outline.* 29 Mar. 2019. https://theoutline.com/post/7245/give-the-nobel-prize-to-dril?zd=1&zi=2rj5vmtu

[330] I quoted the article that says this in my 2019 presentation at UVA Humanities Week, and now, for some reason, that article is impossible to find on the Internet. Unsure of what's going on here, but I want to find some way to keep the quote in.

[331] Whyman

[332] Wofford. Here, I'm quoting Wofford herself.

[333] Rosenberg, Sam. "The Wonderfully Weird World of 'Weird Twitter.'" *The Michigan Daily.* 18 Jan. 2017. https://www.michigandaily.com/arts/wonderfully-weird-world-weird-twitter/

[334] graey alien. "EVERY MORNING I WAKE UP AND OPEN PALM SLAM A VHS…" *FYAD: Criterion Collection. Something Awful.* 30 Nov. 2006. https://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=2200257

[335] Siese, April. "That crazy, hyped-up 'Chronicles of Riddick' VHS meme turned 10 today." *The Daily Dot.* 30 Nov. 2016. https://www.dailydot.com/unclick/chronicles-of-reddick-vhs-meme/

[336] How weird is it that, with all the books I've read about Internet culture, and all the times I've seen "meme" defined, I still like the definition from the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (which is the one I've cited here) the best? "meme." *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.* Oxford University Press. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/meme
As you probably know, the term "meme" was "[c]oined by Richard Dawkins in 1976 to describe the process by which cultural artifacts (technological innovations, fashion trends, catchphrases, ideas) spread and evolve" (21). Another definition I like comes from "digital media scholar Limor Shifman, who describes memes as '(a) a *group of digital items sharing common characteristics* of content, form, and/or stance; (b) that were created *with awareness of each other*; and © were circulated, imitated, and transformed *via the Internet by many users*" (22). Both citations here are from Phillips, Whitney. *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture.* Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2016.

[337] Beran 61. Beran does a good job explaining the history of memes on Something Awful and 4chan, so I'm going to quote directly from his book: "Technically, Internet memes were invented on Something Awful (SA), where the first image macros (funny pictures captioned with white impact font) appeared, because there, too, people gathered not to exchange ideas but to compete to be funny. But around the same time 4chan was founded, Lowtax banned the practice, believing that simply copying someone else's joke and changing it slightly wasn't all that creative.
By contrast, 4chan defined itself as a pile of garbage posting with no rules (what later became known as "shitposting"), and so replicated the evolutionary games Dawkins and his peers ran on the first PCs, where strategies "lived" or "died" based on how many times they were repeated. Except instead of virtual animals, the competitors were jokes in the form of recaptioned cartoons and images or snippets of text, which "survived" and were replicated if they were sufficiently funny" (61).

[338] 52; quoting Kyanka

[339] 52, 50

[340] Phillips *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture* 55. The issue around child pornography on 4chan was actually a little bit more complicated: as Phillips notes, 4chan's official policy is that it has zero tolerance for kiddie porn…But mods can only work so fast, and can only oversee a certain percentage of threads. It is inevitable that even the most offensive content occasionally falls through the cracks" (55).

[341] 96

[342] 96-7

[343] See Romano , Aja. "How the alt-right uses internet trolling to confuse you into dismissing its ideology." *Vox.* 11 Jan. 2017. https://www.vox.com/2016/11/23/13659634/alt-right-trolling (which, for the record, is an excellent piece)

[344] Perhaps the most famous example of 4chan trolling in a way that didn't involve viral irony is "rickrolling," or "posting a link that seems important, but leads to the video for [Rick Astley's] 80s pop single "Never Gonna Give You Up" (Beran 61). Rickrolling went so mainstream that, in 2008--the same year 4chan started the practice—Rick Astley "popped out of a float in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade to rickroll the audience" (62).

[345] 96

[346] Beran 123

[347] Ibid. As Beran notes, at one point, 4chan had actually "spawned an international *far-left* hacking collective called Anonymous, which had played a role in Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring" (xii; Beran's coverage of Anonymous goes from p. 67-113). However, after "its principal members" were arrested by the FBI, "Anonymous was never the same." "[I]n the vacuum of hope and agency that remained," Beran writes, "the alt-right sprang up in [Anonymous'] place" (102).
I would also like to note that, while Anonymous tends to get a lot of credit, the seeds of the reactionary politics that would take over 4chan were present in it as well. In my mind, they were motivated much more by ideas of absolute freedom from censorship than any real left-wing ideology, and their trolling was often mean-spirited, racist, and sexist. For example, as Beran himself points out, "[f]or much of 2010, Anonymous became obsessed with harassing a fourteen-year old girl from Florida named Jessie Slaughter," who now goes by Damien Leonhardt, and who was a victim of a predatory groomer and sex offender (86). Anonymous' efforts caused Leonhardt and their family severe emotional distress.

[348] "Stormfront." *The Southern Poverty Law Center.* https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/stormfront.

[349] Sklar, Urizenus. "Interview with alt-right Pepemancer and Kek/Trump supporter, weev." *The Alphaville Herald.* 22 Sept. 2016. http://alphavilleherald.com/2016/09/interview-with-alt-right-pepemancer-and-kektrump-supporter-weev.html

[350] Auernheimer, Andrew (weev). "Perhaps the most shocking of all crime data dealing with…" LINK. *LiveJournal.* 12 May 2008. https://weev.livejournal.com/294940.html
Auernheimer, Andrew (weev). "jews have long made a sham of the nobel prize." LINK. *Livejournal.* LINK. 9 Oct. 2009. https://weev.livejournal.com/370039.html
Auernheimer, Andrew (weev). "Drasius Kedys, national hero." *LiveJournal.* 25 Apr. 2010. https://weev.livejournal.com/382860.html
Every time I discuss weev, I'm citing/paraphrasing myself, from an essay I wrote for my fall 2017 independent study, "Why Didn't Anyone Listen to Weev?"
Beran also has sections on weev in his book: pages 64-5, 102-5, 172-3

[351] Beran 124

[352] 109, 123

[353] Beran 121-2, 123-4

[354] xvi

[355] 123

[356] Russell, Josh (@josh_emerson). [After that there is a post from 2013 where /q/ realizes they have slowly worked themselves into /new/ and /pol/ [IMAGE]]. 18 Oct. 2018. https://twitter.com/josh_emerson/status/1056634720887496707/photo/2. I'm quoting from the image attached in the tweet, which is a screenshot of a 4chan post that quotes Stormfront comments.

[357] Hawley 78

[358] Anglin 11

[359] b-boy bouiebaisse (@jbouie). [this joking sensibility is present in homegrown white supremacy too. think about the ku klux klan, whose costumes and titles and rituals are meant to look and sound ridiculous]. *Twitter.* 15 Mar. 2019. https://twitter.com/jbouie/status/1106598937023139840?lang=en
Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet). [2. This is something Sartre noticed in 1944: Nazis rhetoric often includes absurd jokey flourishes, to better destabilize reality. From Sartre's "Anti-Semite and Jew": [IMAGE]]. *Twitter.* 15 Mar. 2019. https://twitter.com/HeerJeet/status/1106561615997136896. Quoting from Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate.*

[360] Hawley 25

[361] Ibid.

[362] Anglin 11

[363] Anonymous. [>Buy Claymore for home defence…]. *4chan.* 24 Jul. 2015. I can't actually link to the post, because, as Beran notes, 4chan "automatically" deletes all posts "in a matter of days, if not hours" (Beran 51), and it no longer exists. However, I have the whole post (both the image and the text) screencapped and saved in my personal archives.

[364] Cosplay is "the activity or practice of dressing up as a character from a work of fiction (such as a comic book, video game, or television show)." ["cosplay." *Merriam-Webster.* https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cosplay] It's heavily associated with nerd culture: people often dress up as their favorite superheroes and anime characters and attend fan conventions. Channers would consider it a dorky thing to do, even as many of them participated in it; thus, it's intentional self-deprecation.

[365] Gault, Matthew. "Something Awful's Notorious 'Fuck You and Die' Forum Shuts Down Because of Nazis." *Motherboard. Vice.* 7 Jan. 2020. https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjd8dv/something-awfuls-notorious-fuck-you-and-die-forum-shuts-down-because-of-nazis

[366] Herrman, John and Notopoulos, Katie. "Weird Twitter: The Oral History." *Buzzfeed News. Buzzfeed.* 5 Apr. 2013. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/jwherrman/weird-twitter-the-oral-history

[367] Herman and Notopoulos; Beran 52

[368] Herrman and Notopoulos The definition I'm quoting here is included in this article, but it originally came from a slacktory.com piece that no longer exists; the URL, which now gives you a 404 error, was http://www.slacktory.com/2012/10/weird-twitter-explained/

[369] Beard, Marcus. "Not So Weird Twitter: When Surreal Beats Sincere." *Brandwatch.* 8 Apr. 2014. https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/not-so-weird-twitter-when-surreal-beats-sincere/

[370] Gallagher, Brendan. "A Survey of the Best and Weirdest of Weird Twitter." *Complex.* 16 Jul. 2014. https://www.complex.com/pop-culture/2014/07/a-survey-of-the-best-and-weirdest-of-weird-twitter/

[371] Love, Dylan. "Inside The Odd And Hilarious Subculture Of 'Weird Twitter.'" *Business Insider.* 15 Dec. 2012. https://www.businessinsider.com/weird-twitter-2012-12

[372] db (@dogboner). [haha this is so fuckin sweet.. apparently you can use your imagination to travel to diff. times/ places. grounded my ass.] 8 Mar. 2011. *Twitter*. Tweet has been deleted; archived at https://boringasheck.com/2013/08/01/the-50-best-tweets-of-all-time/. This boringasheck article was where I found many of the tweets that I'm citing as the most famous examples of early Weird Twitter content.

[373] Kroger Marshmallows Just As Good (@bronzehammer). [Hey kid…catch *Lebron tosses kid his headband* *Kid tosses it back* Keep it. You ol barbershop ass corn cob pipe lookin ass motherfucker]. *Twitter*. 18 Jul. 2013. https://twitter.com/BronzeHammer/status/347195938525310977?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E347195938525310977%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fboringasheck.com%2F2013%2F08%2F01%2Fthe-50-best-tweets-of-all-time%2F

[374] Dan O'Sullivan (NOW *LIVE* ON GHOST) (@Bro_Pair). [Bad credit? NO credit? Credit? Bad? Are you bad? No life? Model trains? Do you spend Friday nights playing with model trains?]. *Twitter*. 11 Jan. 2013. Tweet has been deleted; archived at https://boringasheck.com/2013/08/01/the-50-best-tweets-of-all-time/

[375] Big-Tity Honker's (@BikiniBabeLover). [Hey "Vegan's": If you love animals so much, why do you keep eating all there food? Also, why dont you marry it? Bitch]. *Twitter.* 28 Oct. 2012. https://twitter.com/BikiniBabeLover/status/262430978394427392?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E262430978394427392%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fboringasheck.com%2F2013%2F08%2F01%2Fthe-50-best-tweets-of-all-time%2F

[376] Sex Carl (@SexCarl). [internet ad: "are u tired of jerking off?" no]. *Twitter.* 3 Jun. 2012. Account and tweet have been deleted; archived at https://boringasheck.com/2013/08/01/the-50-best-tweets-of-all-time/

[377] real wise yuppie (@ohlnso)

[378] Herman and Notopoulos
Evidence of Chrissy Teigen being a part of Weird Twitter, and being a big part of promoting it to more mainstream Twitter users:
Crazy Frog Updates (@pizzascholar). [no welcome needed, apparently she's been weird twitter adjacent at least since 2013]. *Twitter.* 29 Mar. 2017. https://twitter.com/pizzascholar/status/847140599580913664
eScare or whatever (@themanburglar). [chrissy teigen has been weird twitter for ages yall]. *Twitter.* 29 Mar. 2017. https://twitter.com/themanburglar/status/847140926430556164
fully vaxxed/still masked (@laynemarie). [In retrospect, it was only a matter of time before Chrissy Teigen entered weird twitter]. *Twitter.* 29 Mar. 2017. https://twitter.com/laynemarie/status/847195176460304384
Joseph Robinette Stalin (@TheSchweeb). [Christine Teigen is so fascinating. A famed, renowned supermodel who is also a fully functioning member of Weird Twitter.] *Twitter.* 12 Nov. 2017. https://twitter.com/TheShweeb/status/929859622705422336
Lord_Boo![Ghost emoji]Boo![Ghost Emoji][A whole host of other symbols] (@BobbyLibby). [there is no figure better at bringing Weird Twitter fixations into the mainstream than @chrissytiegen, bless her and her introducing the wider Internet world to Millennial Comedian Dan Nainan]. *Twitter.* 20 Feb. 2018. https://twitter.com/BobbyLibby/status/965981880800698374
The Gentle Freak (@mitchysutch). [Anyone want to place bets on when or if I will get followed by chrissy teigen like the other weird twitter guys. Winner can have 50 dollars or something of equal value. 'No' wins after 4 years by default.] *Twitter.* 11 Mar. 2018. https://twitter.com/mitchysuch/status/973007662911819782

[379] Herrman and Notopolos.
Douglas, Nick. "'Weird Twitter' Explained." *The Daily Dot.* 18 Oct. 2012. https://www.dailydot.com/upstream/weird-twitter-explained-map/
Schmidt, Alex. "10 Weird Twitter Beings Worth a Follow." *Paste.* 16 Nov. 2013. https://www.pastemagazine.com/comedy/twitter/10-weird-twitter-beings-worth-a-follow/
Layne, Ken. "The Real Weird Twitter Is Espionage Twitter." *The Awl.* 1 Mar. 2013. https://www.theawl.com/2013/03/the-real-weird-twitter-is-espionage-twitter/
Dewey, Caitlin. "Who is @Darth and why is this person always in my Twitter feed?" *The Washington Post. 5* Dec. 2013. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2013/12/05/who-is-darth-and-why-is-this-person-always-in-my-twitter-feed/

[380] cringe (@nurseycrimes). [*nudges boyfriend at 3 AM* pretty fucked up that we assume that wall-e is a boy. it's a robot. chad? wake up chad. listen. it's sexless]. *Twitter*. 28 Jan. 2015. Tweet and account have been deleted; archived in my personal collection and on various sites, including https://ifunny.co/picture/nudges-boyfriend-at-3-am-pretty-fucked-up-that-we-AQtTPuDI4
wint (@dril). [the wise man bowed his head solemnly and spoke: "theres actually zero difference between good & bad things. you imbecile. you fucking moron"]. *Twitter*. 1 Jun. 2014. https://twitter.com/dril/status/473265809079693312?lang=en

[381] Allebach, Nathan. "Brand Twitter Grows Up: How corporate social media (mostly) moved past its awkward phase and connected with audiences." *Vulture.* 24 Jun. 2019. https://www.vulture.com/2019/06/brand-twitter-jokes-history.html

[382] Denny's (@DennysDiner). [balloons. drained pools. the emptiness inside. fill them all with syrup.]. *Twitter*. 8 Jan. 2016. https://twitter.com/DennysDiner/status/685498015616925696?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E685498015616925696%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ranker.com%2Flist%2Ffunny-dennys-tweets%2Fjordan-love
Denny's (@DennysDiner). [do you ever yearn for the soft touch of a pancake]. *Twitter*. 12 May 2017. https://twitter.com/DennysDiner/status/863086370985721856?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E863086370985721856%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.buzzfeed.com%2Fjakekaplan%2F29-hilariously-ridiculous-dennys-tweets
I found the first tweet through this article: Love, Jordan. "The Funniest Tweets from the Denny's Twitter Account." *Ranker.* 18 Oct. 2018. https://www.ranker.com/list/funny-dennys-tweets/jordan-love
I found the second tweet through this article: Kaplan, Jake. "29 Hilariously Ridiculous Denny's Tweets." *Buzzfeed.* https://www.buzzfeed.com/jakekaplan/29-hilariously-ridiculous-dennys-tweets

[383] Geers, Jacob. "17 Tweets That Prove @DennysDiner Has The Best Twitter-Game On The Internet." *Thought Catalogue.* 27 Sept. 2015. https://thoughtcatalog.com/jacob-geers/2015/09/17-tweets-that-prove-dennys-has-the-best-twitter-game-on-the-internet/
Allebach

[384] Billig, Michael. "Humor and Hatred: The racist jokes of the Ku Klux Klan." *Discourse and Society* 12.3 (2001): 267-89. (I'm using the version posted online, which is numbered 1-42, and the pages I'm citing here are 14-15.) Interestingly, just like posters on 4chan, these sites' users tried to avoid culpability by claiming they didn't really mean what they'd said. For example, "Nigger Jokes KKK," a subsidiary of Whitesonly.net, featured a disclaimer with lines like, "The site is meant as a Joke," "And you agree by entering this site, that this type of joke is legal where you live, and you agree that you recognize this site is meant as a joke not to be taken seriously," "And you agree that this site is a comedy site, not a real racist site," and "we ARE NOT real life racists." (14-15)

[385] 19

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[388] Gilbert

[389] Wilson, Richard A. and Land, Molly. "Hate Speech on Social Media: Content Moderation in Context." *Connecticut Law Review* 52.3 (2021): 1029-242. Accessed online: https://opencommons.uconn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1535&context=law_papers. page 1048

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[391] extremely online guy (@nickmullen). [everyone should follow @rabite (weev). most important internet person, troll messiah]. *Twitter.* 7 Mar. 2021. Mullen's account has been suspended, and the tweet is archived here: Gwen Snyder is uncivil (@gwensynderphl). [As you may recall, both Cum Town and Mullen have strong ties to Nazis.Mullen has been friendly with the Nazi hacker Weev (best known for his work on the Nazi website Daily Stormer) to the point of having publicly praised him on Twitter. [IMAGE OF MULLEN TWEET]]. *Twitter.* 4 May 2020. https://twitter.com/gwensnyderPHL/status/1257364038784299010
In 2016, Mullen doubled down on this endorsement, writing, "i will always vouch for weev." extremely online guy (@nickmullen). [i will always vouch for weev] *Twitter.* 30 Jun. 2016. Mullen's account has been suspended; tweet is archived in my own personal records.

[392] extremely online guy (@nickmullen). [rip obama [LINK TO ARTICLE WITH THE TITLE "In Rare Killing, Chimpanzees Cannibalize Former Leader."] *Twitter.* 30 Jan. 2017. Mullen's account has been suspended; tweet is archived in my own personal records.

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[396] "Serbia Strong/Remove Kebab." *Know Your Meme.* Last updated Sept. 2021. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/serbia-strong-remove-kebab
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[398] Dr. Mike (@RealMikeNapa)

[399] Daniels, Jessie. "Twitter and White Supremacy, A Love Story." *DAME.* 19 Oct. 2017. https://www.damemagazine.com/2017/10/19/twitter-and-white-supremacy-love-story/

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[401] Wilson

[402] Hawley 118

[403] Of course, one might have gestured towards these ideas with dog-whistles, but actually stating them outright was taboo.

[404] 117, 118

[405] 117-118

[406] 119

[407] Bort, Ryan. “We’re Rapidly Approaching the Trump/@Dril Singularity.” *Rolling Stone.* 22 Mar. 2019. https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/trump-and-dril-811964/
Feldman, Brian. “Dril Should Be Trump’s Vice-President.” *New York Magazine.* 20 May 2016. https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2016/05/dril-should-be-trumps-vice-president.html
Covucci, David. “Does Donald Trump steal all of his tweets from this weird Twitter user?” *The Daily Dot.* 14 Mar. 2017. https://www.dailydot.com/unclick/donald-trump-dril-twitter/
Why did Trump’s Twitter account sound so much like @dril’s? In my mind, it’s because Trump is about as close as you can get to the real-life embodiment of @dril: he too is “pompous, gluttonous, self-righteous, perennially diapered, always ready to engage with brands, and constantly at war with the trolls” (Whyman).

[408] Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump). [Sorry losers and haters, but my I.Q. is one of the highest - and you all know it! Please don’t feel so stupid or insecure,it’s not your fault]. *Twitter.* 8 May 2013. Trump’s account has been deleted; I have the tweet saved in my own personal records. (You can also see it here, oddly enough: https://www.teetweets.com/products/donald-trump-sorry-haters-and-losers-but-my-iq-is-one-of-the-highest)

[409] wint (@dril). [THERAPIST: your problem is, that youre perfect, and everyone is jealous of your good posts, and that makes you rightfully upset. ME: i agree]. *Twitter.* 28 Sept. 2014. https://twitter.com/dril/status/516183352106577920?lang=en

[410] Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump). [The Coca Cola company is not happy with me—that’s okay, I’ll still keep drinking that garbage.] *Twitter.* 16 Oct. 2012. Trump’s account has been deleted; I have the tweet saved in my own personal records. (You can also see it here: https://www.deviantart.com/quietw8/journal/Trump-s-Coke-Addiction-and-His-Enablers-720358491)

[411] wint (@dril). [@McDonalds i have an a 1 million dollar idea that will pull your failing company directly out of the toilet. hear me out]. *Twitter.* 14 Apr. 2017. https://twitter.com/dril/status/852883715055398912?lang=en

[412] Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump). [Why would Kim Jong-un insult me by calling me “old,” when I would NEVER call him “short and fat?” Oh well, I try so hard to be his friend - and maybe someday that will happen]. *Twitter.* 11 Nov. 2017. Trump’s account has been deleted; I have the tweet saved in my own personal records. (You can also see it here: https://www.vox.com/2017/11/12/16639462/trump-kim-north-korea-russia-twitter)

[413] wint (@dril). [“im not owned!  im not owned!!”, i continue to insist as i slowly shrink and transform into a corn cob]. *Twitter*. 10 Nov. 2011. https://twitter.com/dril/status/134787490526658561?lang=en

[414] This one actually comes from two tweets, made in the same thread:
Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump). [ISIS uses the internet better than almost anyone, but for all those susceptible to ISIS propaganda, they are now being beaten badly at every level…]. *Twitter.* 22 Mar. 2019.
Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump). [There is nothing to admire about them, they will always try to show a glimmer of vicious hope, but they are losers and barely breathing. Think about that before you destroy your lives and the lives of your family!
Trump’s account has been deleted, but I have both tweets saved in my own personal records. (You can also read about them in Bort’s *Rolling Stone* article, cited above.)

[415] wint (@dril). [issuing correction on a previous post of mine, regarding the terror group ISIL. you do not, under any circumstances, “gotta hand it to them]. *Twitter.* 15 Feb. 2017. https://twitter.com/dril/status/831805955402776576?lang=en

[416] Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump). [Airplanes are becoming far too complex to fly. Pilots are no longer needed, but rather computer scientists from MIT. I see it all the time in many products. Always seeking to go one unnecessary step further, when often older and simpler is far better.] 12 Mar. 2019. Trump’s account has been deleted; I have the tweet saved in my own personal records. (You can also see it here: https://www.bloombergquint.com/business/faa-needs-to-ground-boeing-737-max-now)

[417] wint (@dril). [let’s talk about planes now. the pilots are flying them up too damn high. it’s dangerous. I don’t like it. got to make them lower]. *Twitter.* https://twitter.com/dril/status/501401995761426432?lang=en

[418] u/FancyAndImportantMan. “Trump's and Dril's tweets are pretty much indistinguishable at this point.” *Reddit.* 5 Mar. 2017. https://www.reddit.com/r/dril/comments/5xnvn9/trumps_and_drils_tweets_are_pretty_much/.
He also made an album that swaps Trump and dril’s tweets to prove that you really can’t tell the difference between what each account posts, which I think is pretty funny.

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[423] 155-6

[424] 156

[425] 173

[426] Wilson

[427] “Transcript: Hillary Clinton's full remarks in Reno, Nevada.” *Politico.* 25 Aug. 2016. https://www.politico.com/story/2016/08/transcript-hillary-clinton-alt-right-reno-227419

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Rappeport, Alan. “Hillary Clinton Denounces the ‘Alt-Right,’ and the Alt-Right is Thrilled.” *The New York Times.* 26 Aug. 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/27/us/politics/alt-right-reaction.html

[429] Hawley 125

[430] Ibid.

[431] 126

[432] 127

[433] Harkinson, Josh. “Meet the White Nationalist Trying to Ride the Trump Train to Lasting Power.” *Mother Jones.* 27 Oct. 2016. https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/10/richard-spencer-trump-alt-right-white-nationalist/
Evidence of the article’s original title here: Mother Jones (@MotherJones). [Meet the dapper white nationalist who wins even if Trump loses http://ow.ly/mBCm305F0PW.]. *Twitter.* 30 Oct. 2016. https://twitter.com/motherjones/status/792735410539655168?lang=en

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[435] Phillips, Whitney. “It Wasn’t Just the Trolls: Early Internet Culture, “Fun,” and the Fires of Exclusionary Laughter.” *Social Media + Society* 5.3 (2019): 1-4. page 2

[436] Phillips “It Wasn’t Just the Trolls: Early Internet Culture, “Fun,” and the Fires of Exclusionary Laughter” 3

[437] "Columnists' Book Club." *The New York Times.* 14 Dec. 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/12/14/opinion/15columnists.html?mtrref=www.google.com&gwh=0D344E1A726DF7571A08ABE538CC9D7D&gwt=regi&assetType=REGIWALL
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[438] Nagle, Angela. *Kill All Normies: The online culture wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the alt-right and Trump.* Winchester and Washington: Zero Books, 2017. page 8

[439] 9, 28

[440] 39, 28-9

[441] Schrekinger, Ben. "The Alt-Right Comes to Washington." *Politico Magazine. Politico.* Jan./Feb. 2017 Issue. https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/01/alt-right-trump-washington-dc-power-milo-214629/

[442] Hawley 134

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Barajas, Joshua. "Nazi salutes 'done in a spirit of irony and exuberance,' alt-right leader says." *PBS News Hour. PBS.* 22 Nov. 2016. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/white-nationalist

[444] Bishop, Rollin. "The OK sign is becoming an alt-right symbol." *The Outline.* 24 Apr. 2017. https://theoutline.com/post/1428/the-ok-sign-is-becoming-an-alt-right-symbol

[445] "How the "OK" Symbol Became a Popular Trolling Gesture." *Anti-Defamation League.* First posted 1 May 2017; updated 5 Sept. 2018. https://www.adl.org/blog/how-the-ok-symbol-became-a-popular-trolling-gesture

[446] Ibid.

[447] Though the ADL article cited above was skeptical that the OK sign was actually a hate symbol, and was anything more than white supremacists trolling, they eventually had to concede that, "By 2019, at least some white supremacists seem to have abandoned the ironic or satiric intent behind the original trolling campaign and used the symbol as a sincere expression of white supremacy." The ADL's change in attitude was most likely due to the fact that, since 2017, the OK sign had become associated with shocking real-life violence, stripping it of any pretense to irony. This was primarily because of the actions of the white supremacist Christchurch shooter; as the ADL article notes, "Brenton Tarrant flashed the symbol during a March 2019 courtroom appearance soon after his arrest for allegedly murdering 50 people in a shooting spree at mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand" ("Okay Hand Gesture." *Anti-Defamation League.* First posted in 2019. https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/okay-hand-gesture).

[448] Hawley 128

[449] Daniels

[450] "Jason Kessler." *The Southern Poverty Law Center.* https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/jason-kessler
Interestingly, as the SPLC's page on Kessler reports, "A rancorous debate emerged within the far right over Kessler's refusal to let Robert Ray aka 'Azzmador,' a Texas-based representative of the Daily Stormer speak [at Unite the Right], due to Kessler's fears that Ray's militant racism and Nazism would generate bad publicity." This shows that the organizers were still very conscious about not seeming like 'real,' 'scary,' and 'dangerous' white supremacists.

[451] Nagle, *Kill All Normies: The online culture wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the alt-right and Trump* 28

[452] Nagle, Angela. “Goodbye, Pepe.” *The Baffler.* 15 Aug. 2017. https://thebaffler.com/latest/goodbye-pepe

[453] Washington Post staff. "Deconstructing the symbols and slogans spotted in Charlottesville.” *The Washington Post.* 18 Aug. 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/local/charlottesville-videos/
The Kekistan flag bears the symbol of the alt-right “deity” Kek. The SPLC has a great example of Kek/Kekistan and its significance, which I’ll quote here:
“Kek, in the alt-right’s telling, is the “deity” of the semi-ironic “religion” the white nationalist movement has created for itself online – partly for amusement, as a way to troll liberals and self-righteous conservatives both, and to make a kind of political point. He is a god of chaos and darkness, with the head of a frog, the source of their memetic “magic,” to whom the alt-right and Donald Trump owe their success, according to their own explanations.
In many ways, Kek is the apotheosis of the bizarre alternative reality of the alt-right: at once absurdly juvenile, transgressive, and racist, as well as reflecting a deeper, pseudo-intellectual purpose that lends it an appeal to young ideologues who fancy themselves deep thinkers. It dwells in that murky area they often occupy, between satire, irony, mockery, and serious ideology; Kek can be both a big joke to pull on liberals and a reflection of the alt-right’s own self-image as serious agents of chaos in modern society.
Most of all, Kek has become a kind of tribal marker of the alt-right: Its meaning obscure and unavailable to ordinary people – “normies,” in their lingo – referencing Kek is most often just a way of signaling to fellow conversants online that the writer embraces the principles of chaos and destruction that are central to alt-right thinking…
At some point, someone at 4chan happened to seize on a coincidence: There was, in fact, an Egyptian god named Kek. An androgynous god who could take either male or female form, Kek originally was depicted in female form as possessing the head of a frog or a cat and a serpent when male; but during the Greco-Roman period, the male form was depicted as a frog-headed man.
More importantly, Kek was portrayed as a bringer of chaos and darkness, which happened to fit perfectly with the alt-right’s self-image as being primarily devoted to destroying the existing world order.
In the fertile imaginations at play on 4chan’s image boards and other alt-right gathering spaces, this coincidence took on a life of its own, leading to wide-ranging speculation that Pepe – who, by then, had not only become closely associated with the alt-right, but also with the candidacy of Donald Trump – was actually the living embodiment of Kek. And so the Cult of Kek was born….
Kek “adherents” created a whole cultural mythology around the idea, describing an ancient kingdom called “Kekistan” that was eventually overwhelmed by “Normistan” and “C---istan.” They created not only a logo representing Kek – four Ks surrounding an E – but promptly deployed it in a green-and-black banner, which they call the “national flag of Kekistan.”
The banner’s design, in fact, perfectly mimics a German Nazi war flag, with the Kek logo replacing the swastika and the green replacing the infamous German red. Alt-righters are particularly fond of the way the banner trolls liberals who recognize its origins” (Neiwert, David. “What the Kek: Explaining the Alt-Right 'Deity' Behind Their 'Meme Magic.’” *The Southern Poverty Law Center.* 9 May 2017. https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/05/08/what-kek-explaining-alt-right-deity-behind-their-meme-magic)

[454] Bromwich, Jonah Engel and Blinder, Alan. “What We Know About James Alex Fields, Driver Charged in Charlottesville Killing.” *The New York Times.* 13 Aug. 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/us/james-alex-fields-charlottesville-driver-.html

[455] Koerner, Claudia and Lewis, Cora. “Here’s What We Know About The Man Accused Of Killing A Woman At A White Supremacist Rally.” *BuzzFeed News. Buzzfeed.* Posted 12 Aug. 2017; last updated 14 Aug. 2017. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/claudiakoerner/what-we-know-about-james-alex-fields-charlottesville-crash#.nim6jm5D1

[456] Ruiz, Joe. “Ohio Man Charged With Murder In Fatal Car Attack On Anti-White Nationalist March.” *The Two-Way. NPR.* 13 Aug. 2017. https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/08/13/543176250/charlottesville-attack-james-alex-fields-jr

[457] United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia, Charlottesville Division. *United States of America v. James Alex Fields Jr.* Thomas T. Culley, U.S. Attorney, and John M. Gore, Acting Assistant Attorney General, Civil Rights Division. Filed 27 June 2018. https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1075091/download

[458] Augenstein, Neil. “Judge: Car crash meme admissible in Charlottesville murder trial.” *wtopnews.* 30 Nov. 2018. https://wtop.com/virginia/2018/11/judge-car-crash-meme-admissible-in-charlottesville-murder-trial/. Fields had actually posted the meme *twice,* which is even more damning.

[459] Rankin, Sarah. “Armed militia, clergy, more unite against white nationalists.” *AP News. AP.* 14 Aug. 2017. https://apnews.com/article/13683a34cd124ff28236cd7cbbc58b3a
Thompson, A.C., Winston, Ali, and Hanrahan, Jake. “Ranks of Notorious Hate Group Include Active-Duty Military.” *ProPublica.* 3 May 2018. https://www.propublica.org/article/atomwaffen-division-hate-group-active-duty-military
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[461] Commins

[462] Nagle, *Kill All Normies: The online culture wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the alt-right and Trump* 119-20

[463] Bhattacharya, Sanjiv. “The Battle For The Internet's Future.” *Esquire.* 25 Jan. 2014. https://www.esquire.com/uk/culture/news/a5597/hackers/.

[464] Bhattacharya wrote about all of this in an entry on his personal blog, which was still up as of 2019, when I mentioned it in the presentation I gave at UVa’s Humanities Week. Imagine my surprise at the fact that now, in 2021, I can’t find the post! Bhattacharya must have taken it down—I’m guessing because admitting he ever believed weev was bad publicity?

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[469] Wilson

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[471] Feinberg

[472] Daniels

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