

The 'Race Riot' Within and Without 'The Grrrl One';
Ethnoracial Grrrl Zines' Tactical Construction of Space

by

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Abstract

The Riot Grrrl movement of the 1990s arose in punk and aspired to seize a powerful feminine space. In my use of “space,” I draw from Henri Lefebvre, theorist of social space, and Mircea Eliade, theorist of sacred space, to imply a space of and for representation, community and potent existence. For Riot Grrrls, cultural existence and power requires such space. That space often materialized as the page of a zine (short, self-published, counter- and sub-cultural magazines). Riot Grrrls’ interests in zines, “space,” and language merged as they wrote their alternative, feminine selves in what I call “zine space.” However, early Riot Grrrls, who were primarily white, claimed space as feminine in opposition to the masculine, which established a binary that omitted race or intersectional identities. Even so, ethnoracial girls joined Riot Grrrl and used zines to critique the whiteness and often-unconscious racism of the movement. Ethnoracial zinesters alternatively theorized space as multiple rather than binaristic and described subjectivities as mobile and complex rather than static and simple. Ethnoracial zinesters thus problematized and pushed aside the binary on which white Riot Grrrl zines rested while claiming the zine as a subversive space for their intersectional identities. Accordingly, in this thesis I argue that subjects can tactically claim potent representational space and language to destabilize and displace other spaces and canons.

My first chapter explores early white Riot Grrrls’ preoccupations with space, which they construct as feminine in contrast to masculine. The zines “riot grrrl, HUH?,” “riot grrrl, olympia” and *Bikini Kill #1* provide useful sites of exploration into white Riot Grrrls’ gendered binary of space and language, which Hélène Cixous greatly influenced. I will then use bell hooks’ theory to complicate the zines’ omission and appropriation of racialized elements before pointing to hooks’ own binaristic language of the center and margin.

My second chapter examines ethnoracial zinesters’ vision of space and subjectivity as multiple and mobile as they aim to explode binaries including boy/girl and white/non-white. I follow the emergence of race and intersectionality in Lauren Martin’s zines using Katherine Ferguson and Geraldine Pratt’s theories of subjectivity in space. Martin works with and against a core-self fantasy to ambivalently assert her plurality and mobility. Her zine, then, reflects her multiple identity, as it is the space that contains her being. I turn to Mimi Nguyen’s zines in conversation with Michel de Certeau’s concept of linguistic tactics as tools of the disempowered to theorize how zinesters can claim space through re-telling and re-presenting experience. Nguyen re-presents her experience as multiple and mobile, thus claiming a space for it in the zine.

What motivates this thesis in part is a sense that scholarship on Riot Grrrl so far ignores or downplays the participation of ethnoracial Grrrl zinesters, who greatly contributed to and criticized the Riot Grrrl movement. Most Riot Grrrl scholars thus problematically maintain white Riot Grrrls’ binary of girl/boy that excludes racial difference. And yet the lack and creation of space has been a prominent question for Riot Grrrl scholars, feminist scholars and race scholars alike. I look to the contrasts of white and ethnoracial Riot Grrrl zines as key sites to examine the possibilities of space creation and disruption.

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Short Titles

BK #1: Hanna, Kathleen and Tobi Vail et al. *Bikini Kill A Color and Activity Book*. [Zine] Issue 1. Olympia, Washington. 1990. Print.

BK #2: Hanna, Kathleen and Tobi Vail et al. *Bikini Kill*. [Zine] Issue 2. Olympia, Washington. 1991. Print.

“EoRR”: Nguyen, Mimi. “Evolution of a Race Riot.” [Zine] Berkeley, California. 1997. Print.

GG #3: Wolfe, Allison and Molly Neuman. *Girl Germs*. [Zine] Issue 3. Olympia, Washington. 1992. Print.

forbidden planet: Martin, Lauren. *forbidden planet (you might as well live #3.5)*. [Zine] Issue 3.5. Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. 1996. Print.

“rgo”: Riot Grrrl Olympia. “riot grrrl, olympia.” [Zine] Olympia, Washington. Undated. Print.

Riot Grrrl #1: Vail, Tobi and Molly Neuman et al. *Riot Grrrl*. [Zine] Issue 1. Washington, D.C. 1991. Print.

Riot Grrrl #4: Vail, Tobi and Molly Neuman et al. *Riot Grrrl*. [Zine] Issue 4. Washington, D.C. 1992. Print.

Slant #5: Nguyen, Mimi. *Slant*. [Zine] Issue 5. Berkeley, California. 1995. Print.

Slant #6: Nguyen, Mimi. *Slant*. [Zine] Issue 6. Berkeley, California. 1997. Print.

YMAWL #1: Martin, Lauren. *you might as well live*. [Zine] Issue 1. Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. 1995. Print.

YMAWL #6: Martin, Lauren. *you might as well live*. [Zine] Issue 6. Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. 1997. Print.

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Introduction

One concrete thing we do agree on so far is that it's cool/fun to have a place where we can safely and supportively confront, express ourselves, and bring up issues that are important to us. (*Riot Grrrl #4*, 1)

this issue is about travel. ...
it's a travel zine in the sense
that i'm always being asked:

*why are you here? and when are you going
home?*

(Nguyen, *Slant #6*, 2)

A race riot broke out in inner-city Washington D.C. in 1991 on the night of Cinco de Mayo after an African-American policewoman shot and injured a Latino man while arresting him — and after rumors quickly spread that she shot him while he was handcuffed. Hundreds of Latino and African-American community members, many young people, took to the streets for three days battling riot police and damaging buildings. Yet the riot did not inspire a nationwide race revolt. Instead, the riot sparked a girl revolution.

The D.C. riots became the unlikely founding inspiration for Riot Grrrl (RG), a feminist-punk movement of girl music, meetings, slogans and zines that directed itself against the oppression of women in both punk subculture and mainstream culture. As RG critic Julia Downes puts it, the Riot Grrrl revolution “coalesced and crystallised [sic] following the 1991 Mount Pleasant riots,” which may seem surprising given that Riot Grrrl tends to be identified as a movement originating on the West Coast (Downes, 64). As it turns out, members of the U.S. Northwest punk rock bands Bikini Kill and Bratmobile — soon to be the first Riot Grrrls — witnessed the race riots while they were in D.C. for a summer of band gigs. But it was Jen Smith, a University of Maryland student living in the neighborhood of the riots, who coined the term “girl riot” and became one of the founding members of Riot Grrrl D.C. Smith wrote friend

Allison Wolfe of the band Bratmobile to say, ““We need a girl riot,”” referencing in her letter the D.C. race riots that she found so inspiring (Marcus, 73). The Cinco de Mayo race riots thus lent the small group of punk-feminist musicians from D.C. and the Northwest the language of revolt. The idea for a “girl riot” collaboratively materialized into the *Riot Grrrl* zine first printed in October 1991, which featured one of the earliest recorded uses of the term. Early Riot Grrrl Tobi Vail of Bratmobile worked with Smith and fellow band members Wolfe and Molly Neuman to produce the zine and gave the term for young women, ‘girl,’ a “ferocious growl” (Meltzer, 13). They did not anticipate how rapidly Riot Grrrl and RG zines would spread across the nation in the early 1990s.¹ And they did not foresee that the source of the “girl riot” would re-arise in an internal, textual “race riot.”

Riot Grrrl was a social movement that both invoked the punk movement’s agenda of resistance against mainstream norms and Do-It-Yourself (DIY) aesthetic and also revolted against sexism in punk and in mainstream society. Teen girls and college students created the nucleus of the movement with feminist punk rock bands like Bikini Kill, Bratmobile and Heavens to Betsy. They drew on punk fashions such as self-chopped hair and combat boots, but they incorporated ultra-girly fashion elements and scrawled sexist epithets like “slut” on their skin to draw attention to gender oppression and stereotypes. They re-imagined femininity as antagonistically powerful and wanted to express their new identity in a space of their own. RG critic Red Chidgey notes, “Riot Grrrl was about creating the culture you wanted to live in:

¹ There are no official estimates of how many participants Riot Grrrl had across the country in the 1990s (though it was probably at least in the hundreds to thousands from the count of Grrrl zines of that time period). However, Riot Grrrl became a cultural phenomenon as mainstream media, including *Newsweek*, *LA Weekly*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *Seventeen* and *Rolling Stone* rapidly documented the movement in 1992 and 1993 (Marcus, 211-212). The media tended to patronize and belittle Riot Grrrl as a simplistic and stylistic fad, which caused the movement to issue a media blackout in 1992 (Marcus, 200).

making pro-girl spaces where it felt like there were gaps in the mainstream, and showing your refusal to be defined by the dominant society, even if that refusal was just a ‘fuck you’ written on a bill-board at a bus-stop on the way home” (Chidgey, 101). However, Riot Grrrls did much more than deface sexist advertisements. Importantly, all of the members of the early RG bands started zines. Zines have a history of use in the punk subculture, but Riot Grrrls’ multitudinous zines were the foundational fuel of Riot Grrrl, and they encapsulated the goals and tactics of the movement.

The countercultural form of the zine became fundamental to the Riot Grrrl movement. In his book *Notes From Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, Stephen Duncombe describes zines as “noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish and distribute by themselves” (Duncombe, 10-11). Because zines are noncommercial and nonprofessional, they exist as underground forms beneath mainstream media. Jenna Freedman, former Riot Grrrl and current zine librarian at the Barnard Zine Library, also emphasizes that zines are “motivated by a desire for self-expression, not for profit” (Freedman, 2). Zines certainly vary widely in content and style; RG zines could fall under a few of Freedman’s 15 wide genres of zines and Duncombe’s 21 specific categories. However, zines’ alternative nature, combined with zinesters’ desires for self-representation over profit, means that zines generally include and encourage countercultural and subcultural thoughts, rants, articles, poetry and manifestos. In other words, zine content critiques mainstream culture and functions under the alternative norms of subculture. In *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism*, Alison Piepmeier notes, “The stereotypic images of the dominant culture are omnipresent in these zines, in subtle and overt ways, and the zinesters expose them, resist them, and leverage their own self-representation against them” (Piepmeier,

141). Thus, the zine form contains and enables opinions, experiences and identities that mainstream culture does not represent or represses. Indeed, zine critic Julie Chu asks in 1997, “Why ... has there been a proliferation of personal, confessional zines by teenage girls in the past two decades? Or, to ask it another way, why *not* a boom in sports zines by middle-aged businessmen?” (Chu, 74). Although the Riot Grrrl movement also formed around music, meetings and conventions, historian Marisa Meltzer emphasizes that zines were ubiquitous and crucial: “It was ultimately a scene connected through not just ideals but songs and so many zines, in fact, that in an early story on riot grrrl in a 1992 edition of *LA Weekly*, Emily White referred to it as ‘an underground with no Mecca, built of paper’” (Meltzer, 22).

Much as a riot claims a street, Riot Grrrl members wanted to claim space through revolt, and they did so in zines. The zine is an altogether unique and deliberate form, and, as Janice Radway points out, the emergence of “zines studies” indicates that scholars can look to zines to find cultural and theoretical material not seen elsewhere (Radway, 142).² RG bands’ foundational zines inspired readers and fans to create hundreds of zines, which often reproduced the initial zines’ textual patterns. Zine production was so central to the movement that many zine readers produced at least one zine, so that readers became authors and consumers became producers. Those numerous zinesters employed linguistic and material tactics to embrace and reconfigure traditions of youth femininity and demand a space for the powerful punk feminine. In Riot Grrrl, that space often materializes through writing as the page of the zine. I assert that

² Perhaps best known for her work on reader community, particularly the 1984 book *Reading the Romance*, Radway published these comments in a *PMLA* article meant to preview her book project on Riot Grrrl zines. She offers the directions she hopes her work will take: “My afterlives project is designed to explore what kinds of subjects were brought into being through zine-ing, how those subjects were constituted socially, and how the social forms they created enabled particular kinds of activities and activism on behalf of an altered relation to the twenty-first-century world” (Radway, 148)

we can look to the tactical writing and imagery of zines to evaluate how Riot Grrrls created what I will call “zine space.”

Though Riot Grrrl became an empowering movement that allowed girls to claim space, its early manifestation had certain ideological limits. Following second-wave feminism of the 1970s, early RG zinesters could only imagine a gender revolution by globalizing gender without concern for race. Ethnoracial zinesters in the mid-1990s, which was also a moment when third-world and third-wave feminisms became increasingly popular, thus critiqued the whiteness of RG space.³ They identified as Riot Grrrls but felt that the implicitly white “girl riot” constructed by early RG zines reinforced the detached binary systems of race and gender. They thought white Riot Grrrls failed to recognize the intense junction of race and gender/sexuality in society. They felt that punk and Riot Grrrl did not grant them positions as women of color, and instead suppressed or appropriated the expression of their particular experience. To counter this lack of representation in foundational RG zines, ethnoracial Grrrls wrote zines that addressed the intersectionality of race and gender and confronted the problematic stereotypes imposed on racialized women in punk and mainstream society alike. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a critical race and legal scholar who first theorized intersectional identity in 1989, argues, “when the practices that expound identity as ‘woman’ *or* ‘person of color,’ as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling” (Crenshaw, 357). Ethnoracial Grrrl

³ I use the term “ethnoracial” to describe those zinesters who are racialized girls that identify with ‘othered’ ethnic or cultural backgrounds. They consider their particular backgrounds as central to their complex identities. Indeed, Mimi Nguyen writes in the compilation zine “Evolution of a Race Riot,” “we’re not just ‘yellow,’ ‘brown,’ ‘black,’ or ‘red’ but peruvian chinese, persian, south asian, dine, ‘flips,’ chicanos/as, hmong, creole & more. it’s more than blood or skin color but history and power and identity and day-to-day survival” (Nguyen, “EoRR,” 82).

zinesters wanted to recover their displaced identities by writing them in their own powerful zine space.

Repeating the faults of many white Riot Grrrls, RG scholars generally ignore the existence and importance of ethnoracial zinesters in the movement. RG scholars (which variously includes scholars in history, girl studies, zine studies and music studies), including Meltzer, often mask the presence of ethnoracial zinesters entirely.⁴ They note instead that white, middle class girls mostly composed the movement because zine-ing required resources, time and access to printing facilities that they say many girls of color and working-class girls did not have. Other RG scholars, including Kearney, admit that Riot Grrrl was not an ideal or welcoming environment for ethnoracial zinesters and argue that the zinesters thus promptly moved on. RG scholars rarely acknowledge the rich and extensive critical contribution ethnoracial Riot Grrrls made and even more infrequently evaluate how those zinesters altered the dynamics of the broader movement. The archives I visited tell a very different Riot Grrrl story from the one given by most RG scholars. New York University's Riot Grrrl archive at the Fales Library focuses on the zines and historical material of the years 1989-1996, so it mostly contains the work of early white zinesters, but it also hosts zines by ethnoracial zinesters Lauren Martin, Sabrina Sandata and Johanna Novales, among others. The Barnard Zine Library contains only

⁴ "Girl studies" and "zine studies" are recent fields in academia that often respectively fall under women's studies and media or literary studies more broadly. Girl studies books relevant to this thesis include Angela McRobbie's *Feminism and Youth Culture*, Lauraine Leblanc's *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture* and Anoop Nayak and May June Kelily's *Gender, Youth and Culture: Young masculinities and femininities*. Duncombe's *Notes from Underground* is generally considered the foundational zine studies book.

zines by people who identify as women and focuses on zinesters of color. It hosts a wide variety of zines by ethnoracial Grrrls, including Mimi Nguyen.⁵ In analyzing how ethnoracial zinesters critique and contrast early white Grrrls, I hope to recover scholarly space for ethnoracial zinesters.

Riot Grrrls frequently reference the notion of and need for space, so it becomes essential to outline the composite and creative concept of ‘space’ I will employ in describing Riot Grrrls’ space and zine space. Riot Grrrls consistently suggest that they need a space in which to construct and enable an empowered subjectivity. Social theorists often use the concept of ‘space’ to describe how the sites people occupy unconsciously organize their experience and how they represent their experience. Henri Lefebvre, a French theorist who argues that space is a social creation, defines social space with recourse to three aspects of human experience of space. He explains that any given space has a “mental,” “social” and “physical” component (Lefebvre, 11). Mentally, we think about and record space; socially, we linguistically and artistically represent space and its use; and physically, we live in space “through its images and symbols” (Lefebvre, 38-39). The way subjects simultaneously conceive of, represent and inhabit space affects their experience. The three aspects form a seamless whole such that a person can “move from one to another without confusion” (Lefebvre, 40). Together, they create a unitary locus of space that manages subjects. In applying this rough sketch to zine space, I argue that

⁵ I was able to visit archives at the Fales Library and the Barnard Zine Library, both in New York City, in May 2011 because of a generous research grant from the English Honors Department, which Prof. Cathy Sanok approved. The Fales Library’s Riot Grrrl archive, composed of donations from former Riot Grrrls Becca Albee, Tammy Rae Carland, Johanna Fateman, Kathleen Hanna, Milly Itzhak and Molly Neuman, among others, launched in the fall of 2010. The Kathleen Hanna donations had just become available when I visited the archive in 2011, and librarian (and former Riot Grrrl) Lisa Darms is constantly adding to the collection. The Barnard Zine Library, led by former Riot Grrrl Jenna Freedman, launched in 2004 and began circulating in 2008. Lauren Martin donated 500 zines to the collection in 2005. It now has about 4,000 individual zines in the catalog or being processed.

zines also have mental, social and physical components. A zine influences how readers conceive of its textual space (for example, readers can visually imagine a particular, tangible zine issue and the pages within it); it influences how readers linguistically represent it (for instance, a zine's zine-review section linguistically describes other zines); and it influences how readers interact with and perceive it (zinesters collage and critique layers of cultural material and language on a page to create a particular readerly experience).

Zines further manifest Lefebvre's concept because his 'space' is inextricably tied up in language, as it is unthinkable outside a system of signs. In my reading of zines, space depends absolutely on language; zine space exists as a space because it is inherently linguistic. Lefebvre emphasizes that there is a clear connection between social representations of space (which occur in verbal systems) and society's production of space. Indeed, space cannot exist without its representation because it is *produced* in its representation. That representation can be as familiar as architecture, a visual depiction (which is also linguistic because of the building's description in language) that causes space to exist and last in time (Lefebvre, 42). However, representation of space can occur purely linguistically, for language organizes and represents reality in the same way space does: "Perhaps the 'logicalness' intrinsic to articulated language operated from the start as a spatiality capable of bringing order to the qualitative chaos (the practico-sensory realm) presented by the perception of things" (Lefebvre, 17). Indeed, since Lefebvre argues that existent spaces can be "decoded, can be *read*," we can conclude that the spaces were produced in the "process of signification," which is semiological and linguistic (Lefebvre, 17). If language organizes the chaos of the practico-sensory realm to create the boundaries and content of material space, it seems that to alter linguistic usages as zines do has powerful potential for creating new space. It is important to see how strongly this language in zines figures its power in

terms of *written* language rather than “voice,” which has been a popular trope of empowerment. Writing semiologically represents space and offers possibilities for the tactical creation of space. Zines contain but transcend linguistic representation, which might be compared to poetic language. Furthermore, their DIY production alters forms of material representation. For zinesters, alteration of language *and* material production merge to represent, and thus create, zine space.

Lefebvre emphasizes that society creates space and that space coercively organizes subjective experience, a point with which I agree but find zines challenge. For him, space is not just a room; it is a site of societal views that encompasses and orders its subjects. Lefebvre points out two illusions of space. Firstly, space appears not to manipulate experience; it “appears as luminous, as intelligible, as giving action free rein” (Lefebvre, 27). Subjects don’t realize space is a historical and societal product laden with knowledge, imagery and conceptions of use that sway their lives (Lefebvre, 28). Secondly, because language is inseparable from space, there is the illusion that language is naturally simple: “On this view language resembles a ‘bag of words’ from which the proper and adequate word for each thing or ‘object’ may be picked” (Lefebvre, 29). I agree with Lefebvre’s point that space and language are coercive, discursive, and created structures that influence — even control — how people act and express. Lefebvre emphasizes that revolutions of production must embrace differences in social existence to create new space, which could align with Riot Grrrl: “A revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential,” as it must “manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space” (Lefebvre, 54). However, he locates revolution on the socioeconomic level; he writes of the spaces of medieval society, capitalism and socialism (Lefebvre, 53). Lefebvre does not grant that individuals or small groups can subversively use

language to create new spaces — spaces that displace and destabilize dominant spaces or use of spaces.⁶

In departing from Lefebvre, I want to focus on zinesters' potential to create spaces of power, which affects how I use the term "space." Heavily influenced by Marx, Lefebvre locates production of space on the societal and revolutionary level; nothing short of a total change in modes of production — and not just media production — can produce new space. I want to see what happens if we locate the production of space in small-scale groups in order to re-envision what a revolution can be. Early Riot Grrrls coined the phrase "Revolution Girl Style Now!" which Lefebvre might call 'false consciousness' or a manifestation of the "illusion of transparency," that space gives "action free rein" (Lefebvre, 27). Indeed, he emphasizes that "all subjects are situated in space in which they must either recognize themselves or lose themselves; a space which they may both enjoy and modify" (Lefebvre, 35). Subjects can modify but cannot *create* spaces on and for their own. In contrast, the landmark 1990 article "Zines: Where the Action Is: The Very Small Press in America," by zinester and zine reviewer Mike Gunderloy, emphasizes the subversive and creative possibilities of zines: "these people, the few thousand publishers and the few million readers, are the ones at the cutting edge of social change.... A groundswell of publishers is appearing, people who realize that people can get things done, without the help of the major organizations which we tend to assume run society" (Gunderloy, n.p.).

⁶ Lefebvre does theorize that from the 1500s (which he associates with the Renaissance and the "Renaissance city") to the 1800s at the onset of the age of industrialization, a spatial code existed that allowed individuals to read *and* create spaces: "a code at once architectural, urbanistic and political, constituting a language common to country people and townspeople, to the authorities and also to the artists — a code which allowed space not only to be 'read' but also to be constructed" (Lefebvre, 7). Since the nineteenth century, subjects can only read spaces.

In Riot Grrrl there may be found a linguistic, tactical revolution that counters Lefebvre, making it possible to imagine how small revolutions can create powerful spaces. Theorist Mircea Eliade, although seemingly incompatible with Lefebvre because he uses “space” uncritically, is helpful in re-imagining how subjects can create accessible, rather than coercive, space that empowers their experience. In Eliade’s theory, profane space is formless chaos, while sacred space is set apart and formed around a center that organizes experience. In what could be taken as a clear departure from Lefebvre, individuals can use semiology to create sacred space that is “saturated with being” (Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane*, 12). Eliade primarily theorizes religious sacred space, but he allows for the possibility of *areligious* sacred space, which is also set apart and provides power of being (Eliade, *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, 82). In either case, Eliade emphasizes that to distinguish a sacred space is to “found the world, and to live in a real sense” (Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane*, 23). In application to Riot Grrrl, zinesters seem to set aside zines as a space that allows and contains powerful being. If that which is ordinary is also profane in Eliade’s view, zines are quite sacred because they purposefully exist outside the mainstream culture and media. By producing zines, zinesters found a center that organizes experience and enables them to “live in a real sense.”

My composite concept of zine space differs markedly from how Riot Grrrl scholars address zines. The scholarly field of Riot Grrrl zines is limited yet expanding, and it has focused on the productive quality of zine as sites of created community and third-wave feminist theory. Scholars have not tended to view space, even community space, in the way I propose: Space as a conceptual center that allows for representation, power, expression and *being* that displace other spaces of power. Feminist theorist Mary Daly similarly thinks of how women can use language, or rather “Muse words,” to create a space that allows for “participation in the power of being,”

but her space is always “on the boundary of all that has been considered central,” specifically patriarchy (Daly, 40). The space that Eliade proposes and I embrace is a newly created space as a center — which gives it powerful potential to displace other centers. I will evaluate how RG zines employ linguistic tactics to create such a space in language and society, thus displacing and destabilizing the patriarchal center and later the white-feminine center.

In this thesis I will focus on the contrast between early Riot Grrrl zines and ethnoracial RG zines to describe a theory of space as multiple and subjectivity as mobile and to outline the model zinesters present for subjects to create such spaces. Early Riot Grrrls rested on a binary of gender, woman/man and girl/boy, that claims feminine space in opposition to masculine space, the margin in contrast to the center. However, those Riot Grrrls did not realize that the margin they claimed became a space of power that excluded other oppressed groups, such as ethnoracial Riot Grrrls. Thus, the zines of ethnoracial Grrrls that serve as a space within a center *that is itself a margin* problematize a notion of space that depends on binary thinking. Ethnoracial Grrrl zinesters illustrate a theory of multiple spaces of power and mobility between those spaces. In other words, these later zines implicitly argue to transcend binaristic language of space in order to write spatial multiplicity and subjective mobility. Zinesters are able to claim such space with alternative language and the space of the page. This study will thus illustrate how multiply marginalized groups can employ linguistic and material tactics to create manifold alternative spaces in literature and larger society. Those spaces serve as sites that enable new forms of power to displace dominant cultures and canons.

I will begin this thesis with a historical antechamber, an entry space in which I detail the punk rock and sociocultural context that engendered Riot Grrrl before briefly describing the RG

movement and why the ethnoracial critique emerged.⁷ Similar to Riot Grrrl, punk ignored and exploited racialized elements, but punk also repressed women's participation. While Riot Grrrls departed from punk to claim a feminine space, they consciously and unconsciously took many punk influences with them — including exclusion and appropriation of ethnoracial participants, though perhaps for different reasons, such as a push for the primacy of feminine gender. I will thus describe Riot Grrrl as a movement and detail its problematic sociological, rather than literary, functions that resulted in ethnoracial Grrrls' critique. The ethnoracial uprising in Riot Grrrl much resembled the Riot Grrrl rebellion in punk, and I will outline that useful parallel.

In the first chapter I will evaluate the foundational zines “riot grrrl, olympia” and *Bikini Kill A Color and Activity Book* to establish Riot Grrrl's preoccupation with the idea of space from the movement's origin and to analyze how early zinesters organized space in a binary of boy/girl. Although early RG zinesters often use the term “voice” for expression, the space they create in zines is specifically tied to *written* language, in part a result of Hélène Cixous' explicitly acknowledged influence on early Riot Grrrls. Cixous speaks of male writing as the “locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated,” but “now women return from afar; from always: from ‘without,’ from the heath where witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond ‘culture’” (Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” 31, 29). Language maps and structures society and power so that taking language is taking space. By creating a feminine language and writing, Cixous argues, women are able to create a space for self. In Riot Grrrl, zines served as a space of representation outside of patriarchal language because, in keeping with much second-wave feminist practice, they used language subversively — spelling person as “persyn,” women

⁷ I use the term “antechamber” as a gesture to the importance of space to Riot Grrrl and this thesis and as a reference to the zine *Antechamber* by Molly Zuckerman, which explores the concept of an entry space historically gendered feminine.

as “womyn,” for instance. They foreground the materiality of linguistic conventions in order to break them and form an alternative language that carves space. However, Cixous’ influence also ensured that early Riot Grrrls functioned on the kind of binary of gender that theorist bell hooks critiques. hooks’ critique is vital to transcend a gender binary, but I will argue that hooks’ language of center and margin also depends on binary thinking. The ethnoracial zinesters, by contrast, point towards a view of space and subjectivity that is implicitly multiple and mobile.

Therefore, I will shift my argument in the second chapter to a small handful of zines by ethnoracial zinesters Mimi Nguyen of *Slant (Slander)* and Lauren Martin of *You Might As Well Live (YMAWL)* who identified as Riot Grrrls but also emphasized the need for another space from which to express the intersection of race and gender. In Martin we see the emergence of a writing meant to reflect intersectional identity, and in Nguyen we see an embrace of multiplicity and mobility and the use of textual tactics to claim space for that complex self. Using theorists of space and subjectivity Geraldine Pratt and Kathy Ferguson in conversation with the zines, I look at how the zines transcend — and argue for moving beyond — a binary notion of space. Ethnoracial zines point out the multiplicity of social spaces and the mobility of maneuvering between them. Many theorists, particularly 1970s feminist theorists, overemphasize the boundaries of center and margin to speak as if there is one center and one margin and little space or mobility inbetween. The multiplicity of space denotes the multiplicity of centers, pointing out two flaws of the margin/center metaphor. If feminist theorists argue for the creative possibility of the margin, that margin nevertheless remains a margin. Not only are there a multiplicity of centers and margins, margins within margins — those positions are also dynamic. And if patriarchal language constructs a masculine center, it seems that marginal groups can tactically use language to construct another space of power. Those new spaces of power displace

contemporary centers. I will thus further evaluate how Riot Grrrls have created space with subversive tactics by invoking theorist Michel de Certeau and Charles Bernstein and other L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets in my reading of Mimi Nguyen's zines. I will argue that mis-using language to claim and construct space displaces patriarchal and racist space in language and society.

By drawing together LANGUAGE writers and ethnoracial Riot Grrrls, I suggest that the linguistic tactics of written zines challenge the political trope of voice, which was so central to second-wave feminism, as the primary figure for empowerment. LANGUAGE writers, many third-wave feminists and, I argue, ethnoracial zinesters emphasize the importance and subversive possibilities of written language. Claiming language through textual alteration allows zinesters to claim and create a space of representation that also challenges dominant notions of the subject. Rather than a vision of static subjects and the spaces that control them, zinesters imagine and illustrate a dynamic relation between subjects and spaces. Zinesters write and empower their complex subjectivities as they create space; full subjectivity is constituted with space. The lack and creation of space has been a prominent question for race scholars, Riot Grrrl scholars, and feminist scholars of second and third waves alike. I look to the contrasts of white and ethnoracial Riot Grrrl zines as key sites to examine the possibilities of space creation and disruption.

Historical Antechamber: Spaces Within Spaces, Grrrls to the Front

The histories of punk rock, Riot Grrrl and ethnoracial Riot Grrrls share many qualities. Punk rock largely excluded ethnoracial participants and appropriated racialized elements, as did Riot Grrrl. Punk rock embraced and expanded the Do-it-Yourself (DIY) aesthetic, which included zine making, as did Riot Grrrl. Riot Grrrls arose in response to sexism in punk rock and mainstream society, while ethnoracial Grrrls critiqued the racism of Riot Grrrls and the mainstream. Indeed, Riot Grrrls departed from punk rock but largely considered themselves part of punk rock, and ethnoracial Grrrls likewise confronted white Riot Grrrls — and male punk rockers — while maintaining their identification as Grrrls and punk rockers. This section considers the similarities and divergences in the three movements to proffer a gendered and race-conscious reading of punk history and the broader sociopolitical contexts that provoked Riot Grrrl before briefly outlining the establishment of Riot Grrrl and how it began to ostracize its ethnoracial participants.

I call this section “antechamber” because it evokes a room within a house, a space within a space, which is how the spaces of punk rock, Riot Grrrl and ethnoracial Riot Grrrls can ultimately be viewed. In zinester Molly Zuckerman’s reading (in the zine *Antechamber*, which explores the concept of a gendered, provisional meeting space), “antechamber” is a gendered space, a woman’s space, for planning and preparing — a space for those, chiefly women, “who seek audience” (Zuckerman, 2). This textual “antechamber” briefly details the gendered and underground (though increasingly popular) history of Riot Grrrl to prepare my readers to engage with the zines that arose in this context, which I examine in chapters one and two.

I. Punk: A Brief (Gendered) History

Riot Grrrl arose from and responded to punk, a subculture and rock music genre that originated in 1970s Britain and re-emerged in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Punk generally had an anti-establishment, anti-normative, Do-it-Yourself (DIY) ethos that permeated everything from fashion to music. In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Dick Hebdige describes the initial punk aesthetic as an embrace of that which was strange to ‘proper’ British society in order to express the “neglected constituency” of the white, young working class (Hebdige, 63). They wore chains, dirty clothes, and spoke “rough and ready diction” in order to enact anarchy against “mainstream British culture” by hyperbolically yielding to the working-class position the culture imposed on them.

Hebdige also illustrates that punk appropriated racialized elements from the beginning; early British punk drew on reggae’s music and style as that which was strange, but members of punk and reggae cultures did not personally interact. Reggae visually and musically manifested how mainstream society had oppressed and rejected groups such as colonized Caribbean peoples, which drew attention to the mainstream’s tyranny — everything punk aimed for: “Reggae’s blackness was proscriptive. It was an alien essence, a foreign body which implicitly threatened mainstream British culture from within and as such it resonated with punk’s adopted values — ‘anarchy,’ ‘surrender’ and ‘decline’” (Hebdige, 64). Punk channeled reggae colors, rhetoric and slogans, but perhaps the most visible derivative of reggae was dreads (Hebdige, 67). Dreadlocks styled with “vaseline [sic], lacquer or soap” became characteristic of punk and augmented their perceived and actual cultural dejection (Hebdige, 66). Even though punk drew style elements from reggae, their music and interpersonal circles remained decisively — and problematically — separate: “the way in which the two forms were rigorously, almost willfully segregated would

seem to direct us towards a concealed identity, which in turn can be used to illuminate larger patterns of interaction between immigrant and host communities” (Hebdige, 68).⁸ Similar to white Riot Grrrls, early punks invoked racialized elements while detaching race from their movement. They appropriated racialized features to amplify their oppression without recognizing the intersections of oppression.

Punk quickly spread to the U.S. in the '70s, particularly to New York, Washington D.C. and the Northwest, morphing into punk rock as it became increasingly influenced by the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) aesthetic. DIY was (and continues to be used as) a “principle of counterhegemonic cultural production” that the Situationist International devised in 1950s France (Kearney, 55). The aesthetic emphasizes self-production of goods, style, media and culture rather than buying into (literally and figuratively) the consumerist mainstream. DIY also stressed individuality; every person can have a different type of production. We see this potential variety in the article “do it yourself fashions” in the zine “go teen go” about “teen sexuality and gender identity”; the plural emphasis of “fashions” recognizes that all of the zine’s readers are different and may not be accommodated by one norm, one stream, the mainstream or a subcultural stream (Molter, cover). According to Sarah Marcus in *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, DIY meant, “creating something from nothing, fashion from garbage, music and art from whatever was nearest at hand” (Marcus, 37).

DIY in punk allowed for new possibilities of female involvement in rock music and subculture. The aesthetic stressed production and invention rather than a prescribed standard, which unbolted the door of rock for women. Women had often played ‘proper’ instruments such

⁸ Hebdige recognized that his description of punk could only be provisional and incomplete, as punk was still evolving in 1979 at the time of publication (Hebdige, 186).

as violin or clarinet rather than guitar or bass — the primary instruments of rock (Marcus, 50).⁹ The lack of access to and the discouragement from playing rock instruments had foreclosed opportunities in a genre that privileged impromptu guitar and drum solos. But punk altered rock with DIY. Marisa Meltzer discusses the DIY aesthetic of seventies punk in her book *Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music*: “Because musical skill wasn’t the point, it leveled the playing field, encouraging young women to join bands, get onstage, and learn to play as they went — even in front of audiences” (Meltzer, 6). Kearney stresses that punk’s focus on amateur and DIY effort “opened doors for girls that had long been closed to them” (Kearney, 55). Riot Grrrls inherited the DIY aesthetic of punk: “(we) are patently aware that punk rock ‘you can do anything’ idea is crucial [sic] to the coming angry grrrl rock revolution which seeks to save the psychic and cultural lives of girls and women everywhere, according to their own terms, not ours” (*Riot Grrrl #4*, 2).

The initial years of punk thus included female musicians, like Patti Smith in the U.S. and the emphatically all-women band The Slits¹⁰ in Britain, but those women artists did not typically identify as feminists. Even though punk began at the height of the second-wave women’s liberation movement, women’s position in male-dominated punk was new and tenuous. Women in punk avoided the label “feminist” for that reason, among others. Meltzer emphasizes, “Punk may have been a source of liberation for some women, but it wasn’t explicitly feminist” (Meltzer, 8). The number of female musicians in punk, despite the DIY push, was small enough to be tokenized. To emphasize their gender and fight for further representation in punk would

⁹ Marcus refers to the Riot Grrrl example of Tobi Vail, who played violin, piano and clarinet “growing up,” and learned guitar and bass when she joined Riot Grrrl (Marcus, 50). She later played drums for the band Bikini Kill.

¹⁰ The Slits, an originally all-female band that brought their female-bodiedness to the forefront in their band’s name, were one of the punk rock bands most influenced by reggae sound and style.

have been artistic suicide, as Meltzer explains: “it was hard enough just being accepted as musicians” (Meltzer, 8).

The emergence and dominance of hardcore punk in the 1980s increasingly marginalized the feminine in punk. Sexual harassment and heckling was not uncommon when women played in bands (Meltzer, 9). For the audience, hardcore punk’s “moshing” dance aesthetic, during which participants violently crash into each other, especially drove out women. Moshing often relegated female audience members to the sidelines during hardcore punk shows — which exemplifies how male artists and a masculine aesthetic began to dominate the punk scene.

Punk marginalized women, yet scholarly practice and media coverage have exacerbated this marginalization in their writing on subcultures such as punk. In their 1970s essay “Girls and Subcultures,” Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber highlight the lack of attention the Birmingham Contemporary Cultural Studies generation of writers — including Hebdige on punk — gave to women in subcultures. In the ’70s and before, men predominantly studied and recorded subcultures that were thought to consist almost solely of males and their tenuous girlfriends. McRobbie and Garber ask whether that absence of women could be an invisibility rendered by a combination of repression of women within the movement, gender rapport between male researchers and subjects and masculine research methods (McRobbie, 210). The media also played a role in ignoring the role of women in subcultures. The media tends to focus on violence in subcultures, and women historically have not had a prominent role in subcultural violence: “the fact that it is always the violent aspects of a phenomenon which qualify as newsworthy is that these are precisely the areas of subcultural activity from which women have tended to be excluded” (McRobbie, 210). Because the space of the street was unsafe and hostile to women, McRobbie and Garber argue that women acted in an alternate sphere, often that of the

home and shop — insular spaces where they could still experiment with cultural styles as subcultural men did in streets and cafes. Thus, the authors argue that women's resistance was not blatant or violent, but it was still resistance through style, as Hebdige argues about men. However, McRobbie and Garber admit that they cannot claim definitively what kind of resistance women in previous subcultures enacted because biased records ignored women's contributions. Both academic scholarship and the media under-recorded and repressed the presence of women in '70s punk. As punk resurged in the '80s and early '90s, Riot Grrrls revolted against the lack of real or represented space allowed for the feminine in punk. They wanted women to have a powerful and prominent space of resistance from which to combat sexism in the mainstream and punk.

II. Sociopolitical Contexts of Gender Oppression

While punk and writing on punk increasingly sidelined women in the subculture, mainstream culture attacked women on sociopolitical fronts in the late '80s and early '90s, giving Riot Grrrls further impetus for revolt. Meltzer, outlining the difficulties facing feminism in the early nineties, draws attention to the December 1989 cover of *Time* magazine, "Women Face the '90s"; the cover reads, "In the '80s they tried to have it all. Now they've just plain had it. Is there a future for feminism?" (Meltzer, 12). The term "postfeminism" became widely used in the eighties and nineties, implying the completion of feminism's aims and thus the defunctness of the movement (Meltzer, 12). Indeed, Marcus points out that the broader context of Riot Grrrl was a culture in which "people felt either that feminism had completed its work or that its goals had been misguided in the first place, leading only to more unhappiness for women who had been duped into thinking they could 'have it all' or brainwashed into wanting to be like men" (Marcus, 23).

However, the sociopolitical controversies of the early nineties told a very different story. The Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings in October 1991 — just as Riot Grrrl gathered its force — amplified latent concerns of work-place sexual harassment and brought attention to the quick dismissal of a woman who had criticized a man in power: “Even women who didn’t believe Anita Hill — polls showed about half of them doubted her allegations of sexual harassment — still bristled at the sight of an African-American female law professor being grilled and dismissed by a panel of white male senators” (Marcus, 23). The hearing impassioned the women’s movement by stressing the gender oppression that still existed. Marcus refers to a column by Judy Mann of the *Washington Post* to emphasize the feeling after the hearings: “At a profound level, the Thomas hearings demonstrated that women are not equal, that men still have the power to take away women’s rights” (Marcus, 23). Most feminist coverage of the hearing, however, looked at the gender inequality rather than the aspect of race that influenced the hearings. They often didn’t acknowledge the powerful oppression that occurs at the intersection of ‘othered’ race and feminine gender.

Political events in the early ’90s gave new strength to the mainstream feminist movement — a movement that did not yet clearly acknowledge the place of race. April 1992 saw the “We Won’t Go Back March for Women’s Lives” to combat the expected loss in the Supreme Court hearing of *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. The hearing decided whether Pennsylvania’s regulations of abortion were constitutional, including the “parental consent rule” that required minors to get their parents to agree to an abortion (Marcus, 20). The verdict on that regulation would be particularly decisive for girls: in 1992, thirty-six states enforced parental notification laws (Marcus, 25). Half a million people, mostly women, marched on the National Mall — the largest protests there since the Vietnam War protests, and a sign of the recognition that

feminism’s achievements still needed to be defended and expanded (Marcus, 27). Riot Grrrls from D.C. were at the march, and it lent their cause clarity and force. They further realized the object of their rebellion was mainstream as well as punk culture. The socio-political phenomena in the early 1990s sparked and fueled various forms of feminist activism — including Riot Grrrl. But, as I’ve described, the 1991 inner-city race riots in Washington, D.C. directly inspired the call for a “girl riot,” which quickly morphed into Riot Grrrl.

III. Riot Grrrl(l) and the Revolt Within

The term “girl” was vital for the original Riot Grrrls, but they wanted to change its denotation to something powerful. Riot Grrrls were explicitly feminist and most had read foundational texts of feminism’s second-wave. They wanted to imagine what feminism could mean in their time and for their age group. Meltzer’s interview with Tobi Vail, who coined “Riot Grrrl” and played drums for the band Bikini Kill, emphasizes the conscious feminism at work in the first *Riot Grrrl* zine, an initiative drawn from their sociopolitical and punk context:

“‘We really did sit down and say, ‘How can we change what it means to be a girl?’ and ‘How can we reinvent feminism for our generation?’”

(Meltzer, 13) (see fig. 1).



Fig. 1. First *Riot Grrrl* zine and the origin of the term (*Riot Grrrl* #1, cover). Courtesy of the Fales Library’s Riot Grrrl archive at New York University.

Riot Grrrls chose the word ‘girl’ because, as young women in high school or college themselves, they wanted to resist patriarchal ideology, which held that young women did not have a voice or an opinion; girls were believed to simply be swept into whatever trend came their way. Kearney notes that young women are often denied the autonomy and upheaval granted to young men in adolescence. Women are historically either powerless girls or objectified women. Riot Grrrls wanted to merge the rebellious autonomy of masculine adolescence (taboo for girls) with the girliness imposed on them from youth to recreate the meaning of ‘girl’:

By recuperating the traits of independence, rebelliousness, and assertiveness normally associated with adolescence (and masculinity), while at the same time celebrating the innocence, playfulness, and homosociality typically associated with girlhood — in other words, by putting the “grrr” into “girl” — riot grrrls refuse the double bind that traditional ideologies of gender and generation have historically created for female youth. (Kearney, 65)

Riot Grrrls wanted to re-appropriate ‘girlhood’; they wanted to break the rules in order to change them. Indeed, Bikini Kill’s first zine, *Bikini Kill The Color and Activity Book (BK #1)*, begins with a scene at the playground to re-envision the freedom and power of ‘girlhood’ and invoke that new essence for their movement: “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” (*BK #1*, 1). Riot Grrrls elatedly claim the powerful freedom of boys for the girls, and they do so partially by taking away the boys’ (and associatively patriarchal society’s) ability to judge and control them, as “the boys” is the only sentence on the page that begins without capitalization. Riot

Grrrls wanted to euphorically flaunt the forbidden strength of girls alone and together to revolt against patriarchy's power to define both *girl* and girls.

Riot Grrrls also wanted to combat the second-wave feminist idea that the term “girl” was a patriarchal term used to demean and disempower women — an idea that, to them, reinforced patriarchy's desired weakness of girlhood. *Bikini Kill #1* lambasts the connotation of the term given to underage women: “BECAUSE we are angry at a society that tells us Girl=Dumb, Girl=Bad, Girl=Weak” (*BK #1*). They realized the derogative connotation of “girl” came from women's feminism as well as patriarchy. Chidgey notes that '70s feminists “wrote manifestos denouncing men who called grown-women ‘girls’” because “they recognized this as an act to infantilise [sic] them” (Chidgey, 109). But some groups went even further to juxtapose ‘grown up’ women as superior to young girls. Chidgey cites a 1969 manifesto from Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH):

‘HOW DOES A GIRL BECOME A WOMAN? When she defines her own life and stops being controlled by her family, her boyfriend, or her boss. When she learns to stand up and fight for herself and other women — because she has learned that her problems aren't just her own. *All over the world, girls are growing up.*’ (Chidgey, 109)

The manifesto assumes young girls are controllable, narcissistic and need to grow up. Riot Grrrls wanted to reclaim the term ‘girl’ to show that girls can be everything adult feminists can be — including activists fighting as and for a group — and more. These young women in their teens or early 20s, who did not yet think of themselves as women, went through struggles and were alive to oppression. And they could fight against it as *girls*, rather than waiting to become adult women to initiate protest. Indeed, Chidgey points out that Riot Grrrls challenged the “role of feminism as ‘Women's Liberation’ and the invisibility of girl activism” (Chidgey, 109). Riot

Grrrls identified as girls, and embraced and reconfigured ‘girly’ style elements to draw attention to the stereotypes and oppression imposed on girls in particular. They wanted to change the terms of girlhood, literally and figuratively. They wanted to declare the unique power in girlhood.

If the Mount Pleasant race riot inspired the call for a “girl riot” in the spring of 1991, the first “Girl Night” at an Olympia underground music festival fortified the movement. Girl Night, a night of all-women bands including Bratmobile, Heavens to Betsy and Suture, opened the International Pop Underground Festival (IPU) in August of ’91 (Meltzer, 22). For many Riot Grrrls and soon-to-be Riot Grrrls, it was the first time they had seen all-women bands on stage. Downes cites a quote from Rebecca in the 1991 zine *Girl Germs #4*:

Girl’s nite will always be precious to me because, believe it or not, it was the first time I saw women stand on a stage as though they truly belonged there. The first time I had ever heard the voice of a sister proudly singing the rage so shamefully locked in my own heart. Until girl’s nite, I never knew that punk rock was anything but a phallic extension of the white middle class male’s frustrations. (Downes, 29)

Girl Night catalyzed the women and girls who were on the cusp of joining Riot Grrrl; it made them realize that the movement could speak to their oppression and their anger.

Girl Night led all-women bands and Riot Grrrl to new levels of participation, and the event was a prime site for zine distribution. Girl Night continues to be thought of as infamously important to the early days of the movement: “The intensity of riot grrrl’s Revolution Summer was solidified back in Olympia with ... International Pop Underground (IPU) Convention” (Downes, 29). Indeed, most scholars speak of the race riot in Washington, D.C. and the IPU Girl Night in Olympia as the two primary elements that formed the Riot Grrrl combustion: “This

Olympia-style creative risk-taking, combined with the political consciousness raising that had just begun in DC, was what made the summer of 1991 so catalytic. Without either one of these components, there would have been no Riot Grrrl” (Marcus, 94). IPU Girl Night was sacredly significant to Riot Grrrls at the time. The first sentence of the 1991 zine *Bikini Kill #2* reads, “Tabatha says death to all fuckhead fanzine editors who dare to dis the Bratmobile/Bikini Kill/RGSN/Girl Day/International Pop Underground Revolution Summer 1991 Riot Grrrl Style Now even[t]!!!” (*BK #1*, 1). Band members and fans distributed RG zines at the event, which provided information and manifestos for the inspired event-goers. The manifold zines at the event were as important to facilitating Riot Grrrl’s growth as the many bands. In September 1991, San Francisco zine *Mudflap* featured a two-page spread on IPU, complete with ads for Olympia RG zines *Girl Germs* and *Jigsaw*, among others, seen at the show.

Even before IPU, Riot Grrrl meetings began in Washington, D.C. in 1991, and shortly after the festival, meetings and conventions swept across the country. Olympia Riot Grrrl meetings began in the summer of 1991, and RG spread to major cities, including New York, in 1992 (Monem, 169). Meetings could play out in various ways, although discussions of abuse, empowerment, music and zine-making often took place (Marcus, 112). At the D.C. meetings in particular, Marcus emphasizes that zine-making played an integral role, as “some days were zine days,” when members wrote and artistically produced zines as a group and Xeroxed them for distribution (Marcus, 112). As early as the summer of 1992, Riot Grrrls in Washington D.C. organized the first Riot Grrrl convention July 31-August 2 in D.C. Marcus says of the days before the convention, “That summer was pure delight. Plans for the convention were in full swing; Riot Grrrl had mushroomed in size” (Marcus, 184). RG conventions usually had more than 100 participants and also took various forms. Most conventions featured RG band

performances and myriad workshops on issues such as boy-girl relations, sexuality, abuse and rape, white privilege, zine-making and starting a band (Marcus, 166-68). By 1995, independent RG conventions had taken place in Omaha, Nebraska; Tacoma, Washington; and Los Angeles, California (Monem, 169). Incentive to organize Grrrl conventions gathered force in 1996-1999, as conventions launched in Portland, Oregon; Santa Barbara, California; Chicago, Illinois; Seattle, Washington; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (as the 'East Coast Riot Grrrl Convention'); Olympia, Washington; Boston, Massachusetts; San Francisco, California; Puget Sound, Washington; Cambridge, Massachusetts; and at New York University (Monem, 170). Riot Grrrl had spread through the States with music, zines, meetings and conventions.

RG meetings and conventions empowered many Grrrls, but they often made ethnoracial participants feel unwanted and ostracized, which contributed to the general unrest of ethnoracial Grrrls in Riot Grrrl. Lauren Martin, for instance, revealed in an interview with Piepmeier that a 1996 RG convention made her realize just how white, racist and classist Riot Grrrls could be (Piepmeier, 139). Meltzer argues that Riot Grrrls drew such behavior from the American context from which they arose: "What happens in a musical subculture will inevitably reflect American race and class relations" (Meltzer, 39). However, Meltzer believes that though the Riot Grrrl movement "resolutely, desperately wanted" to be "open to women of color," its message was not "of interest to them," an argument that other histories and ethnoracial Grrrls themselves counter (Meltzer, 39). Marcus points out that during RG conventions' white-privilege workshops, sometimes called "unlearning racism," many girls became defensive of their behaviors, which could be seen as oppressive, and angry with the people, white or ethnoracial, who confronted them (Marcus, 165-6). Most of the girls liked the group as it was and didn't want to change to accommodate or recruit ethnoracial participants (Marcus, 166). Throughout Riot Grrrl, Chidgey

observes, “Non-white girls were told race didn’t matter (that to bring it up was divisive)” (128). Although Chidgey does not evaluate ethnoracial Grrrl zines, she does note that ethnoracial participants often took on the role of “confronters and educators within their communities” (Chidgey, 128). As Riot Grrrls critiqued punk’s sexism while remaining punk rockers, ethnoracial Grrrls challenged Riot Grrrl’s racism while maintaining their identification as Riot Grrrls.

Ethnoracial Riot Grrrls eventually began to criticize the inadvertent racism of white Riot Grrrls at meetings, conventions — and in zines. Zinesters highlighted the racist phrases, imagery and attitude in Riot Grrrls and RG zines, calling for increased awareness and change. The change ethnoracial zinesters largely wanted was recognition of intersectional identities, the multiply oppressed junction of ‘othered’ race and feminine gender. Ethnoracial zinesters’ criticism gathered force, culminating most visibly in Mimi Nguyen compilation zine “Evolution of a Race Riot” (“EoRR”) in 1997. Nguyen writes in the zine’s introduction, “The race riot has lagged years behind the grrrl one for reasons that should be obvious by now: whiteboy mentality became a legitimate target but whitegirls’ racial privilege and discourse went unmarked ... except among those of use who were never white. Like me” (Nguyen, “EoRR,” 2). Ethnoracial zinesters problematized how white Riot Grrrls separated “grrrl” from race by representing the two together in ethnoracial Grrrl zines. Before I explicate the representation of intersectional identities in ethnoracial zines in chapter two, I will turn to foundational zines by white Riot Grrrls to evaluate and problematize their creation of space on a binary.

Chapter One: White Riot Grrrls' Zine Space in Binary Form

Early Riot Grrrl zinesters protested punk rock's exclusion of feminine gender, and they wanted their own feminine space; that space became the zine. A manifesto printed in *Riot Grrrl #4*, a foundational RG zine, lists the reasons for Riot Grrrl and RG zines, including, "BECAUSE we don't wanna assimilate to someone else's (Boy) standards of what is or isn't 'good' music or punk rock or 'good' writing AND THUS need to create forums where we can recreate, destroy and define our own visions" (*Riot Grrrl #4*, 2). Those forums are zines, existing as spaces for expression and resistance. Zines are spaces for zinesters and readers to tactically regroup; they are spaces from which to mount destruction against the masculine mainstream and punk rock; they are spaces in which to write and represent the self. Zines are framed as spaces for powerful Grrrl *being*. Ethnoracial Grrrls continue that pattern of zine use in the mid-1990s. Early Riot Grrrls' zine spaces exist in opposition to masculine punk, creating a binary of boy versus girl. These zinesters were preoccupied with space, and, for them, space existed in a binary form.

The creation of zine space is informed in part by alternative uses of language. Although the written word depends on the pages of the zine, writing also creates the zine as a space. Early Riot Grrrls' draw their conscious effort to write their space into existence from Hélène Cixous, among other theorists and ideas. Her concept of *l'Écriture féminine*, writing the body, explicitly influenced early Riot Grrrls. RG historians Julia Downes and Red Chidgey observe that founding Riot Grrrls, mostly college students, studied bell hooks and Audre Lorde and cited them in zines (Downes, 62; Chidgey, 129). However, Cixous overtly influenced early RG zines, as Chidgey highlights and Kathleen Hanna, singer for the RG band Bikini Kill, describes in an interview with *Punk Planet* (Chidgey, 129; Sinker, 64). Hanna, like Cixous, wants to "come up with an alternative" to the linear, grammatical nature of patriarchal, proper language, as Cixous

theorizes (Sinker, 64). Thus, zine writing often resists proper grammar, spelling and punctuation, and it frequently manipulates typography. Zinesters employ alternative writing that emphasizes its textuality in order to carve out the zine as a space.

This chapter will examine how early Riot Grrrl zines, influenced by Cixous, represent and re-inscribe binaries of space, a move bell hooks' theory problematizes. As a preface to my analysis of early Riot Grrrl zines' preoccupation with space, I will examine the production, content, and distribution of RG zines and provide a core context of zine history and the "zine scene."¹¹ Then, with close readings of the early zines "riot grrrl, olympia" and *Bikini Kill: A Color and Activity Book*, I will argue that Riot Grrrls were preoccupied with space and created the zine as a space by *writing* the expressions and opinions they embodied. Riot Grrrls foregrounded the constructed rules of language that might go unnoticed by breaking those rules to emphasize textuality. This subversive mis-use of language allowed Riot Grrrls to form a new language and thus a new space. However, that new space operated under a binary of feminine/masculine, and Riot Grrrls even tokenized and appropriated racialized imagery to bolster gender oppression. I will employ hooks' theory to illustrate the problems in a binary of masculine/feminine, which doesn't acknowledge race. However, I will argue that the gender binary's aversion of complexity is, paradoxically, similar in style to hooks' theory of margin and center.

I. Riot Grrrl Zines' Substance and Source

Riot Grrrl zines are personal-meets-political productions that embrace a hand-made aesthetic. Zinesters are opinionated, but they mostly locate that opinion in terms of their own

¹¹ A phrase also used in the first issue of *Riot Grrrl*, but the zine used the full phrase "the riot grrrl zine scene can be found at" to preface the return address of the zine, a Washington D.C. address. See Works Consulted for the full citation information.

selves and experience, often going “out of their way to stress that what follows is only their point of view” (Duncombe, 74). They print manifestos, poetry, feminist artwork, ‘rants,’ reprinted articles (often without attribution or permission), and stories of personal experiences, including sexual harassment, molestation, incest and rape. It was frequent at the start of the RG zine movement for a few girls to collectively compile a zine, though it became more common for zines to be individual productions. Later compilation zines were frequently led by one zinester who solicited the original and reprinted work of dozens of other zinesters. RG zines of all types borrow from each other, and, although zine content and design vary widely, certain patterns of style and entries emerge in early zines, which I will detail in this chapter.

There is also a wide range of production types and sizes in RG zines. Zinesters compiled content with a combination of typewriters, computers, handwriting, drawing and collage. Because they used Xeroxes to reproduce original templates, the quality of photos and drawings are second-rate, but that grittiness parallels the underground zine aesthetic. Kearney observes that most Riot Grrrls did not pay for such photocopies: “riot grrrls interested in producing (and reproducing) zines often ‘scam’ the use of print and reproductive technologies from their work establishments (an anti-industrialist practice of cultural bricolage the French refer to as *la perruque*), or from commercial photocopying establishments.” (Kearney, 71). The earliest RG zinesters almost exclusively printed their zines on white paper, arguably a sign that the Grrrls printed on a private business’s photocopier. However, later Grrrls usually printed zines on colored paper with black-and-white ink. The page range of RG zines, as most zines, was wide but usually between ten and forty pages (Duncombe, 14). However, compilation zines, increasingly seen in the mid- to late-1990s, often ranged up to one hundred pages.

Riot Grrrl zines, even if individually produced, had communities of distribution.

RG zinesters distributed for free or donation at punk and RG band shows, meetings and conventions, or they sent zines through the mail. The price of RG zines through the mail was often the cost of stamps, but could go up to three dollars for a large zine. Most were around one dollar. However, zine trading became an advertised and widespread practice, so zinesters would regularly mail other zinesters their own zines and a stamp to receive a zine back in return. Those trades created an interpersonal community, as most trades included hand-written and personal notes of recognition or response. As pen pals or participants in an online chatroom, Riot Grrrls often met each other and conducted friendships through zines. Furthermore, anthropologist Julie Chu notes that zine trading fostered a network of readership and production, as it encouraged “publishers to read each others’ zines” and encouraged “new readers to become publishers” (Chu, 79). Because of the varied forms of distribution, it is impossible to gauge the average readership of RG zines, but Duncombe estimates “two hundred and fifty as the average circulation,” with ranges up to the thousands (Duncombe, 15).

Riot Grrrls also launched numerous zine distributors, or “distros,” to increase access to and availability of zines. The distros would collect master copies of zine issues and print zines on demand. They commonly distributed zines to eager readers for the cost of printing and shipping. Some distros printed zine guides to let readers know of the latest zine offerings. The first RG zine distro was Riot Grrrl Press, which Erika Reinstein and May Summer started in 1993 in Washington, D.C. (they later relocated to Olympia and Chicago and took the distro with them) (Chidgey, 133). They started the RG Press to distribute zines beyond the “punk rock scene” and to network with “radical activist groups and feminists nationally and internationally” (Chidgey, 133). Furthermore, the distro enabled Grrrls who did not have access to printing resources to get their zines out. Finally, their database acted “as a central place of information

about different riot grrrl chapters” (Chidgey, 133). Myriad small distros began after the Riot Grrrl Press, including GERLL (Girls Empowered Resisting Labels and Limitations) (Chidgey, 133). Zines that specifically reviewed zines, such as Sarah Dyer’s *Action Girl Newsletter* and *Cherry Cherry Red*, also arose to act as directories to the burgeoning world of RG zines.

Because of the low cost of zines, zine trading and distros, RG zinesters often lost money on zines, but money was never the goal. Duncombe emphasizes, “the very idea of profiting from a zine is anathema to the underground, bringing with it charges of ‘selling out’” (Duncombe, 16). Personal representation and community, rather than profit, was the goal. Zinesters thus rarely paid for advertising but often traded advertisements with other zinesters and sent text to describe their zine for other zinesters’ ‘zine review’ sections, a ubiquitous section in RG zines. Ads and zine reviews did not draw in profit, but they increased readership and fostered a community of zinesters that focused on expression of content and presentational forms that were often unacceptable to profit-based mainstream publishing.

Riot Grrrl zines created their own genre with its own purpose and direction, but the Grrrl genre was one of many zine genres, most of which exhibit similar forms and functions. Tracing the rise of zines becomes important to explain the more recent incarnation, Riot Grrrl zines. From what textual history did Riot Grrrl zines draw and depart? Historians of Riot Grrrl zines often outline two foundations: a history of punk zines that directly preceded RG zines; and an alternate feminist history of independent media.

Riot Grrrl zines, originating in a movement that itself originated in punk, certainly belong in a history of punk zines. That history, in turn, begins with the American Revolutionary pamphlets, such as Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* (Piepmeier, 25). Paine, of course, was not punk, but zine historians view his writing as a precursory form. *Common Sense* anticipated zines

in its short page count and content featuring provocative statements, written in layman's language, against contemporary English rule. However, Paine's distribution count in the hundreds of thousands sharply contrasts the count of zines, which is often less than a hundred. Duncombe describes science-fiction fan publications of the 1930s as the precise genesis of both the term "zine" and its form (Duncombe, 11). Those publications, termed "fanzines," arose from individual fans or science-fiction fan clubs "as a way of sharing science fiction stories and critical commentary, and of communicating with one another" (Duncombe, 11). The next evolution of the zine came in the mid-1970s with the creation of punk zines, also called "fanzines": "fans of punk rock music, ignored by and critical of the mainstream music press, started printing fanzines about their music and culture scene" (Duncombe, 11). In these, we begin to see how zines express information and opinions that mainstream culture does not condone or even represses. And punk zines, articulators of the disavowed, were a prime precursor of Riot Grrrl zines.

Indeed, various misfit and nonconformist forms of expressions began to occupy zines after punk employed the genre, creating an underground culture of zines and zine-ing. Duncombe details the exponential expanse of zines in the '80s as "fans of other cultural genres, disgruntled self-publishers, and the remnants of printed political dissent from the sixties and seventies" were assembled in zine-review zines like *Factsheet Five*, which listed hundreds to thousands of zines from the United States (Duncombe, 11). "Fanzine" quickly became "zine," the general term among myriad terms specifying zine genres, including Grrrl zines. Duncombe emphasizes that a "culture of zines developed," so that in the early '90s when *Factsheet Five's* two editors determined a new title for a "commercially produced version of their zine," they "could honestly and accurately refer to *The World of Zines*" (Duncombe, 11). Riot Grrrl zines

significantly sprung up in about the same moment in the late '80s. Chidgey notes that fanzines had been a “male-dominated and straight (white) subculture,” so “the ‘angry grrrl’ and ‘homocore’ zines of the late 1980s and early 1990s therefore mark a crucial turning point in fanzine history” (Chidgey, 116). Alison Piepmeier stresses that in the punk history of zines, it is the confluence of punk’s DIY approach to production and “technological innovations such as desktop publishing and inexpensive, widely available photocopying” that was responsible for the explosion in the number and topics of zines (Piepmeier, 25). However, Piepmeier claims that this *history* (as opposed to a feminist “herstory”) is inadequate to explain the rise of Riot Grrrl zines.

Piepmeier explicates the generally ignored feminist history that implicitly and explicitly affected Riot Grrrl zines. Because zine scholars consider zines to be publications of resistance and women are “rarely identified with resistance,” scholars often identify zines as arising in “male-dominated space” (Piepmeier, 25). Therefore, it is vital to trace the feminist origin and influence on zines because that history will define how we read the recent history of grrrl zines — whether we see them as mimicry of punk zines, autonomous feminine resistance or both. Piepmeier thus outlines the history of women’s “participatory media,” publications that “were creative and resistant, and ... provided the platform for women speaking from disempowered positions” (Piepmeier, 29). She uses nineteenth-century scrapbooks, twentieth-century women’s health publications and second-wave feminist mimeographs of the '70s as points of access and illustration. Because Riot Grrrls widely read foundational feminist texts, I agree with Piepmeier that evaluating this feminist history of Grrrl zines illuminates the work that Riot Grrrls intended and accomplished.

In the 1800s, women commonly used scrapbooking to record their lives, their communities and their culture (Piepmeier, 30). But that commentary was not neutral; women scrapbooked to both critique society and to create community through the establishment of a circle of producers and readers. Women's organizations during the Progressive Era of the late 1800s and early twentieth century "often used scrapbooks to document their own work and challenge mainstream newspaper coverage," prompting Piepmeier to draw a parallel with Grrrl zines (Piepmeier, 30). Although scrapbooks were not copied and distributed like zines, they became a textual space for powerful and political expression and connection.

The early twentieth century saw the genesis of underground, self-produced women's health publications, which, like zines, distributed information suppressed or repressed in dominant cultural channels (such as sexual-health information). A primary underground publisher was Margaret Sanger, "a pioneering activist for contraception" (Piepmeier, 34). In 1914, Sanger illegally published the *Woman Rebel*, which contained information on contraception and women's sexuality, "after many of her columns for the socialist newspaper the *New York Call* were censored under the Comstock law," an 1873 federal law that banned individuals from mailing obscene material, providing contraception and educating about abortion (Piepmeier, 34). She fled to Europe to avoid prosecution, so "she had her supporters distribute 100,000 copies of a sixteen-page pamphlet called *Family Limitation*, a publication that explained and assessed the most common forms of contraception" (Piepmeier, 34). These publications have close similarities to zines in that they distributed unconventional information and opinions: "Like zines, these health pamphlets operated outside of the mainstream publishing marketplace and allowed women to convey experiences and information that otherwise couldn't be publicized" (Piepmeier, 34). Women's health publishers printed illegal material while RG

zinesters printed material that resisted sexist norms of the mainstream and punk, and women's health publications favored information while RG zines privileged opinion. However, both forms were politically and personally motivated.

Finally, Piepmeier invokes the history of '70s feminist mimeographed publications to explain the history of Grrrl zines. Mimeograph machines, though often messy since they involved making a stencil for each page and inking and rolling each copy, allowed second-wave feminist groups to distribute manifold cheap copies of fliers and pamphlets. These feminist groups dealt in similar information, whether blocked by law or culture, seen in earlier feminist fronts and later Grrrl zines: "Because there were not books or magazines that addressed the issues they were taking on, these activists had to create and distribute their own work" (Piepmeier, 36). Indeed, these mimeographed productions were "integral to the creation of feminist community" (Piepmeier, 36). Many feminist primary texts of the second wave of feminism, including the original *Our Bodies, Ourselves* of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, and hundreds of feminist newspapers and magazines, had originated as mimeographed fliers and pamphlets by the second half of the '70s (Piepmeier, 36). And RG zinesters often reprinted second-wave manifestos and material, even if they were not aware of the texts' original, underground-print form (Piepmeier, 39). Indeed, Chidgey notes that Grrrl zines are certainly "messier, more individualistic and personal" than second-wave publications, but "a shared heritage is clear" (Chidgey, 103). Women and girls of both time periods lived in a culture shot through with sexism, and both groups turned to self-produced media to resist mainstream culture and alternatively imagine "womanhood" — or, in Riot Grrrls' case, girlhood

(Piepmeier, 37).¹² For Riot Grrrls in particular, the concept of space became central to their re-imagination of feminine existence and power.

II. Grrrls' Preoccupation with Space Leads to Zine Space

“Girls to the front,” the prevalent RG zine slogan that sketched the direction of the movement, prompts an exploration of Riot Grrrl’s interest in and creation of their own feminine space.¹³ Indeed, they wanted girls — rather than an integration of girls and boys — “at the front.” The slogan originally referred to punk rock concerts. At concerts, men stood or violently moshed at the front near the stage, relegating women attendees to the sides and back of the room. The front of punk rock concerts served as a preferred place of power. Thus, the slogan’s focus on claiming space and power spoke to the broader aims of the movement. In the undated (but recognizably early) zine “riot grrrl HUH?,” a one-page feature titled in hand-scrawled letters, “Listen to Us When We Scream!,” explores the concept of “girls to the front.” The feature, written on a typewriter and signed “Love, a riot grrrl. T.S.,” considers the literal lack of space at punk rock shows: “I’m really sick of going to punk rock shows and having sweaty boys slamming into me for a good time” (“riot grrrl HUH?,” T.S.). The writer knows “people slam in order to get out aggression,” but she confronts how such masculine expression of aggression dominates space: “Well fuck that. I’ve got just as much anger in myself as you, possibly more, But I don’t have to slam into other people to prove it or get it out. I dance in my own space, In THE FRONT!” (“riot grrrl HUH?,” T.S.). The writer underlines “In THE FRONT” by hand, and

¹² Val Phoenix, in “From Womyn to Grrrls: Finding Sisterhood in Girl Style Revolution,” argues a similar point: “Like the feminist presses that sprang up in the 1970s, the girl zine network puts women in touch with each other on their own terms.... Zines create and document culture: girl rage, resistance and love” (Phoenix, 41)

¹³ Sara Marcus’s history of Riot Grrrl is titled *Girls to the Front*, which supports its strength as a slogan and signifier of the movement.

places a large hand-drawn exclamation mark at the end of the sentence, asserting a powerful and personal claim on the space.

Riot Grrrl's assertion that patriarchy holds 'the front' supports Cixous's argument that the oppression of women is spatially based; men possess spaces of power and push women to the background. Women are "carefully kept distant, pushed to the side of History and change, nullified, kept out of the way, on the edge of the stage, on the kitchen side, the bedside" (Cixous, "Sorties," 69). And the patriarchal system keeps women there through fear and coercion: "they told her there was a place she had better not go. And this place is guarded by men. And a law emanates from this place with *her* body for its locus" (Cixous, "Sorties," 103). Patriarchy violently relegates women to spaces without agency, like the back of a concert room. But women, "the trampled spaces," are "coming to culture" to claim authoritative space without shame (Cixous, *Sorties*, 69).

In *riot grrrl, HUH?*, T.S. comes to the front from 'trampled spaces' to set it apart as her "own space" — a feminine space. The literal center and front of punk rock — the front of punk shows — is violently masculine, and T.S. wants to claim it as hers. The writer further distinguishes that this claimed space is not just hers — it is a feminine space. The space exhibits feminine strength in contrast to the masculine: "I can even hold my friends hand and at the same time we can both get out our anger. I'd like to see some mosher try and do that some time. Let's see if your strong enough for that" ("riot grrrl HUH?," T.S.). She argues that feminine ability trumps the masculine, and thus Grrrls can claim the space of power. In Cixous's terms, she is able to lay hold on that significant space because when repressed women come to culture, "it is an explosive return" with "white-hot fire" (Cixous, "Sorties," 95). T.S. indicates that she is coming to space with the habitual present tense writing of "I dance in my own space." In

contrast, her sentence, “I can even hold my friends hand,” is temporally unclear because “I can even hold” (rather than “I hold,” which would parallel “I dance”) delineates both the writer’s ability to dance while holding her friend’s hand and also her imagination of that future state. The sentence thus reflects RG zines’ sense that so much needs to be done with and from such a space.

A vital text to situate Riot Grrrl’s concern with space is the innocuously titled “riot grrrl, olympia” (“rgo”), a zine that arose from the Olympia, Washington RG group to answer the

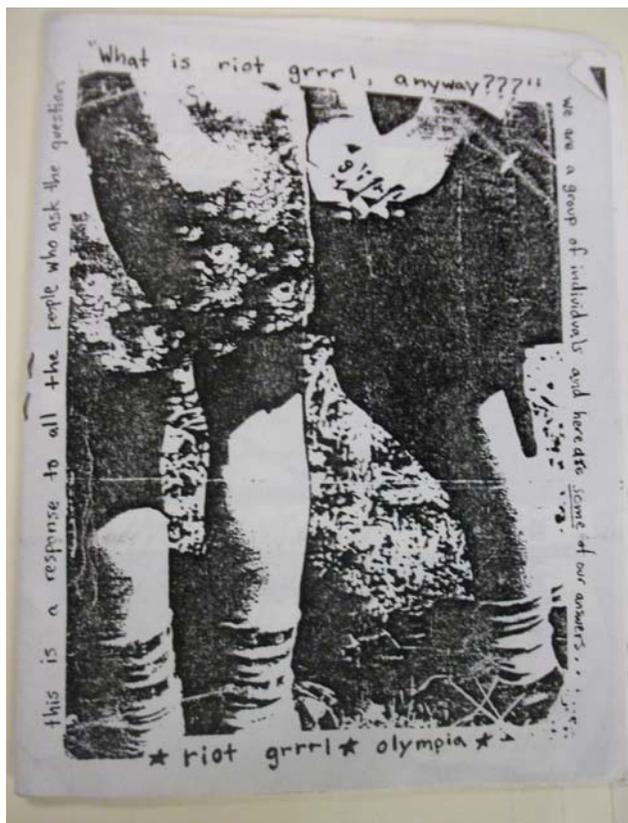


Fig. 2. Cover of “riot grrrl, olympia” (“rgo,” cover). Courtesy of the Fales Library’s Riot Grrrl archive at New York University.

question, ““What is riot grrrl, anyway???” (“rgo,” cover).¹⁴ The cover briefly answers the question: “we are a group of individuals and here are some of our answers” (“rgo”). The zine’s cover also features a black-and-white photograph of two young girls holding hands, a photo that captures the back and lower portion of the girls from their held hands and flowered skirts to their scrunched socks (see fig. 2). The picture and writing illustrate that they are individuals coming together in the space of a group zine. Each response of one to two pages (of which there

are twenty-three, signed with initials or first names or unsigned) is unique and emphasizes that

¹⁴ I use quotation marks around zine titles rather than italics when I know they were one-time publications rather than running titles. Because zine archives are incomplete, some running titles appear to be one-issue zines, but they usually have some signifier of being a running title, such as an issue title beside a zine title or, most commonly, issue numbers. However, this title is definitively a one-time title, arising from a large group to address a singular question.

the writer's response is her own, as most of the writers hand-write their entries, and all of them include self-drawn or collaged artwork.¹⁵ However, certain themes recur: the need for a literal and figurative space of safety, power and community; and the need for expression, an appeal that begins with figures of voice but necessarily becomes explicitly textual and intertwined with the appeal for space.

The most elemental manifestation of spatial preoccupations in “riot grrrl, olympia” is the use of the word “place,” a reference to RG meetings, to Riot Grrrl as a movement and to RG zines. I suggest that when Riot Grrrls say ‘place,’ they mean the definition of space that I use in this thesis. ‘Place’ refers not to a ‘place’ as concrete as a building; rather, ‘place’ indicates a space for representation and expression — for discursive power that engenders physical safety. Such a space empowers action. A “rgo” response signed “CC” with the common RG addition “xoxo” writes, “Knowing that i have a place to go and talk about my feelings is a way of making myself feel safe in a world that usually makes me feel scared and alone” (“rgo,” CC). Riot Grrrl space is an alternative space set aside from the “world,” the patriarchal space. She has a “place to go” to “feel safe,” a place that is gendered feminine, a space that is collective and powerful. That ‘place’ can be the representational space of the zine in which, as in this example, she can talk about her feelings and find a community of listening readers. Certainly physical space remains important, but as under Lefebvre’s theory, physical space (such as place) remains one component of ‘space,’ and Riot Grrrls are additionally interested in the mental and social aspects of space.

Many of the responses in “rgo” implicitly assert that Grrrls derive the power to act from a space in which to act. In “Riot Grrrl is...,” Misty integrates the needs for power and for

¹⁵ “rgo” pages are unnumbered, so I will specify the page to which I’m referring by specifying the writer or precise topic.

communal space because Grrrls draw power from space. She writes her response in cursive and borders it with hand-drawn lines punctuated by hearts; she dots the “i” in Riot Grrrl with a heart (“rgo,” Misty). She describes a series of connected answers and leads to a notion of place: “because we need a place to feel free + safe to talk, to do, and to plan the revolution which is taking place daily. P.S. its about solidarity!” (“rgo,” Misty). Misty indicates that Grrrls need a space to gather the power to plan and do. In Lefebvre’s sense, that RG revolution creates such a space; in Eliade’s sense, that space contains power to take effective revolutionary action. The revolution creates the space and the space reinforces the revolution. A hand-written response to the question of ‘why Riot Grrrl?’ by “Julie Straightedge Riot Grrrl”¹⁶ emphasizes the power of *being* embedded and generated in such a communal space: “RIOT GRRRL IS A PLACE FOR ME TO GO, NOT BE THE ONLY ONE, AND TO EXPERIENCE GIRLS POWER WORKING TOGETHER” (“rgo,” Julie). Julie leaves the possessive apostrophe out of “GIRLS,” which stresses the plurality of those girls and the commonality of the space. In this historical moment before the rise of the ‘girl power’ slogan, the lack of punctuation also defamiliarizes readers to point out the rarity of pairing girls with power. The Riot Grrrl zine becomes a space from which to express empowered being in collective action.

The “rgo” zine emphasizes that safety and power depend on space in the diction and imagery of the ‘girl gang.’ The space of the girl gang is more physical than most RG visions of space, but the feelings of being within the girl gang echo the sentiments Riot Grrrls express of zine space. Bordering CC’s response that speaks of a space that makes her “feel safe” are myriad yet identical decorative images that are at once encircling and menacing (see fig. 3). The image is circular, composed of two black sprigs that look like curved stems of a flower, so that it

¹⁶ Julie wrote her name in all caps. She wrote her response fully capitalized as well.

nearly and naturally encloses the space within. However, the black sprigs outline a white interior

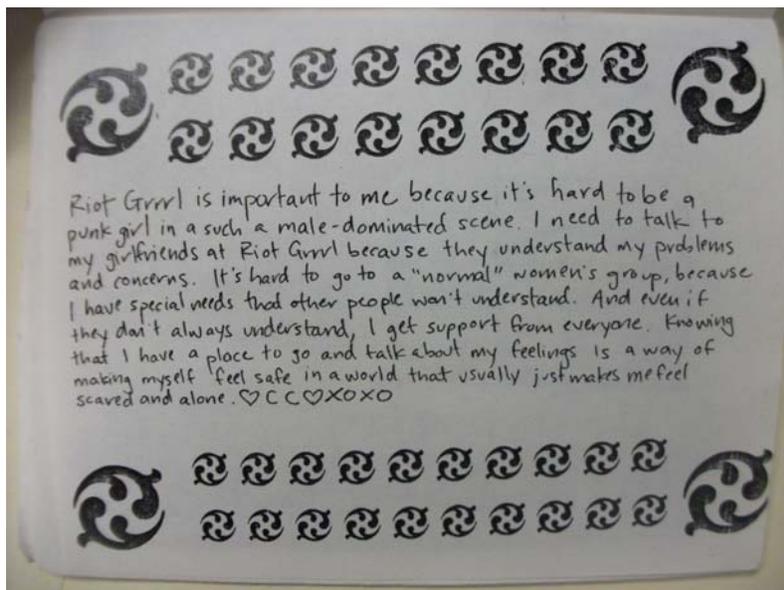


Fig. 3. Imagery of violent protection (“rgo,” CC). Courtesy of the Fales Library’s Riot Grrrl archive at New York University.

that appears to be a weapon — a curved blade with four points as in a throwing star. The image simultaneously evokes safety and violence. ‘Girl gang’ diction suggests the same union. In a response signed “C” and typed in all caps, the writer emphasizes that safety and power occur

within a space: “I THINK

WOMYN SUPPORT GROUPS

ARE COOL AND ESSENTIAL FOR US GIRLS JUST TRYING TO LIVE IN THIS PENIS CENTERED WORLD. IN A GIRLGANG I CAN BE SAFE AND HAVE POWER” (“rgo,” C).

The diction “in a girlgang” shows the situated and spatial quality of that community, as they are inside a “girlgang,” and the uniform capitalization underlines the power of that space. Girl gangs enclose and set apart a space — a space set in binary opposition to patriarchal space.

Individual bodies united in girl gangs disrupt the patriarchal hold on space. An unsigned response in “rgo” explains that girl gangs originate because of the fear of the street, from walking home alone with the possibility of sexual harassment and violence. The anonymous writer describes Riot Grrrl as a “girl gang,” and says, “you don’t have to know me to be in a gang with me” (“rgo,” girl gang). However, a girl gang unites to take space: “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!” (“rgo,” girl gang). Girl gang members use their physical bodies to create a space within the space of the streets — certainly a space of resistance that confronts and disturbs the patriarchal hold on the street. The zinester describes an instance in which a discussion at a Riot Grrrl meeting about the prevalence of rape and sexual harassment prompted a “secret plan” to take the streets: “we laughed and held hands and ran around in the dark and we were the ones you should be looking out for” (“rgo,” girl gang). The space that girl gangs create and inhabit is empowered, important and full of *being*: “in a girl gang i am the nite and i feel i can’t be raped and i feel so fuckin’ free” (“rgo,” girl gang). In a space they create with their bodies, they feel physically safe and sexually free. The power and agency of that space displaces and disrupts that patriarchal hold on the street.

Riot Grrrls employ embodied action to create a safe space, but a discursive space that protects expression remains important. They seem to privilege speaking as their form of expression. In a reprinted typed article from *Riot Grrrl D.C. #4*, Molly Neuman of Bratmobile (a popular RG band) stresses that there is no core view of Riot Grrrl, and every girl has her own opinion, but “One concrete thing we do agree on so far is that it’s cool/fun to have a place we’re we can express ourselves that won’t be censored, and we’re we can feel safe to bring up issues that are important to us” (“rgo,” Molly). Neuman uses the conjunction of “we are” in the place of “where,” pointing out that Grrrl being (we are) relies on their location (where). To do so suggests that being and expression depend on space. Neuman attributes to Riot Grrrl the belief that patriarchal society suppresses Grrrls’ expression, and RG space provides new opportunities and possibilities for voiced expression. The second page of “rgo” features a black-and-white photograph of a little girl with her mouth covered by an adult (see fig. 4). The same hushing hand pulls the girl firmly into the adult’s side; the hand silences the girl’s voice and seizes her

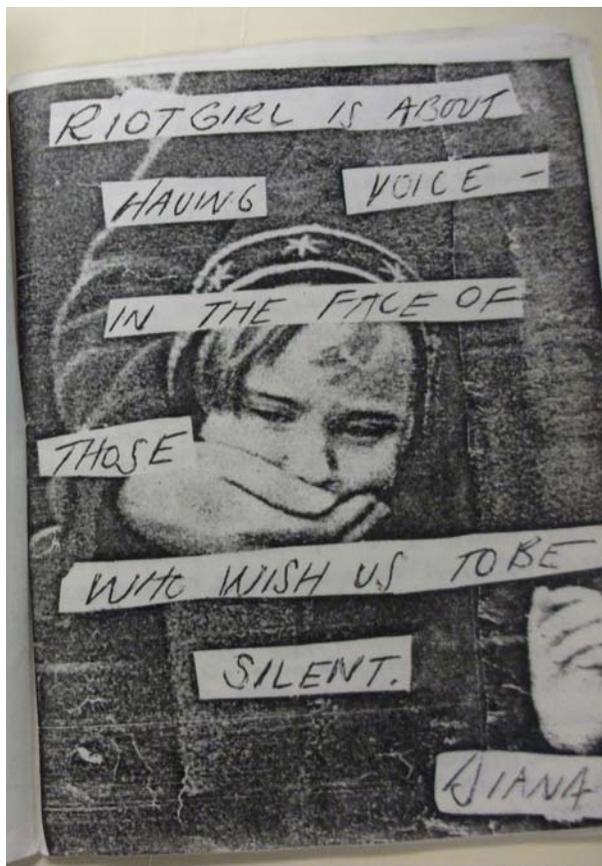


Fig. 4. Riot Grrrls' refusal to be silenced ("rgo," Diana). Courtesy of the Fales Library's Riot Grrrl archive at New York University.

personal space so she cannot move or act. It is a violent gesture that recalls Cixous' argument that patriarchy's violent censoring of the feminine body simultaneously censors "breath and speech" (Cixous, "Sorties," 97). "Diana" signs the page, and she glues multiple strips of white paper with hand-scrawled words over the photograph:

RiotGirl Is About
 Having Voice –
 In The Face Of
 Those
 Who Wish Us To Be
 Silent. ("rgo," Diana)

The ability to "have voice" is dependent on space and available language, which is emphasized in the space between "having" and "voice." And Riot Grrrls see their space and language as oppositional to patriarchal space.

Although "rgo" seems to privilege speech with the diction "voice" and "talk," the writing in RG zines foregrounds the materiality of the text, highlighting the importance of the space that writing creates. The zinesters must express their embodied action and opinions in writing to create the discursive space for which they aim. They do so typographically, often writing in their own handwriting, crossing out words on typed material, or adding expressive touches like hand-written underlines, exclamation points, hearts and stars. Riot Grrrls frequently push words

together into tight, spaceless lines for emphasis. Such forms of writing are difficult to convey as speech but powerful when read silently. Writing is indispensable for their self-expression.

They also foreground writing orthographically, as they often misspell words. Some, such as “womyn” and “persyn,” specifically highlight and queer the patriarchal nature of “proper” language; other misspelled words illustrate the materiality of language and the urgency of their expression. Indeed, Radway argues, “zinesters strove to resist commodification formally by practicing an aesthetic that was decidedly not reader-friendly. They produced collaged pamphlets with chaotic, cut-and-paste layouts that defy linear scanning, sometimes resist traditional narrative sequencing, and even refuse pagination altogether” (Radway, 141). I argue that Riot Grrrls’ misuse of language goes beyond avoiding commodification; they write to stress and subvert a patriarchal language structure that commands power, space and subjects.

Certainly, Cixous notes that written text, rather than voice, commands particular authority. Patriarchal powers have dominated speech as well, so speech is indispensable in ‘coming to culture.’ But the ideal of ‘free speech’ (for those who don’t have it) arguably placates the oppressed because it does little to found a counter-hegemonic space. Cixous argues, “You can speak — it evaporates, ears are made for not hearing, voices get lost. But writing! Establishing a contract with time. Noting! Making yourself noticed!! ‘Now *that* is forbidden”” (Cixous, “Coming to Writing,” 46). In order for women to come to space and culture, they must speak *and* write “from and toward women”; only then can women “confirm women in a place ... other than silence” (Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” 33). Riot Grrrls misuse language to highlight the textuality of their writing — to claim a language and thus a space.

Riot Grrrls’ purposeful and powerful ‘misuse’ of language furthermore accords with Cixous’ writing of the feminine body. Cixous emphasizes that writing the feminine body will

“always exceed the discourse governing the phallogentric system,” and “will not let itself think except through subjects that break automatic functions” (Cixous, “Sorties,” 92). The “phallogentric system” of language uses “automatic functions,” or naturalized rules of language like spelling and grammar, to uphold the system. RG zinesters break such linguistic rules, therefore exceeding patriarchal language to write their feminine experience. Poet and critic Rae Armantrout, who is affiliated with L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, can help explicate the use of misspellings in RG zines because she questions whether proper language can articulate women’s experience; since language has been a system structured to represent men’s experience, including sexism toward women, it is a system that enforces oppressive social structures. ‘Misuse’ of written language thus draws attention to its materiality and forges new types of expression that can more effectively convey women’s experience (Armantrout, 295). Proper language deters zinesters’ creation of space because language is structured to keep women in the background. Indeed, Cixous emphasizes that a new writing, writing the feminine body, is necessary for feminine space because “it is the invention of a *new, insurgent* writing that will allow her to put the breaks and indispensable changes into effect in her history” (Cixous, “Sorties,” 97). For women to come to culture, come to space, they must also come to writing — using a new feminine language.¹⁷

Zinesters’ use of “here” and “where” to index Riot Grrrl evokes its spatial quality — and the spatial quality of zines. Angelique’s hand-written response in “rgo” refers to Riot Grrrl as a “here” and as an environment: “Riot Grrrl is because i was scared walking *here* tonight, because

¹⁷ Although Cixous uses the terms “woman” and “man,” Cixous does not equate sex with gender: sexual difference or gender “is not distributed, of course, on the basis of the socially determined sexes” (Cixous, “Sorties,” 81). Some men exhibit femininity, and some women exhibit masculinity. But writing in the 1970s she says, “It seems to me that in the social-political scene today...men for the most part are occupied by predominantly masculine elements” (Cixous, “Coming to Writing,” 58).

a collective that is by, for & about girls & womyn is an absolute necessity, because of how beautiful and alive and free I can feel in a girl environment that is non-competitive and supportive and engaging” (“rgo,” Angelique, italics added). The “here” could refer to a Riot Grrrl meeting and it could refer to Riot Grrrl as a movement. ‘Here’ seems to indicate that she walked to a place to compile the zine with fellow RG zinesters, so the place is tied to the zine. Importantly, “here” in *practice* indexes the zine itself — “here” becomes the zine, and the zine becomes a space. The “girl environment” can be the zine, the textual space in which girls congregate and communicate. Chu argues that zinesters “reiterate this notion of zines as a ‘place’ by variously describing their need to ‘create a forum,’ ‘build a network,’ and ‘form a community,’” adding, “As one of the *few* places left,’ zines also provide a critical space for young people” (Chu, 77). Riot Grrrl community largely existed in zines, so zines act as crucial spaces for being to a degree that mainstream publications don’t approach. For example, Wendi A.’s “rgo” response is a poem about a father who controls and silences her and disavows her sexual abuse, and it ends with a claim to Riot Grrrl as a supportive and powerful space: “riot grrl is where I reclaim / myself. / riot grrl is a hand to hold / & a fist in his face” (“rgo,” Wendi A.). Riot Grrrl, which includes RG zines, is the “where,” the location, the site in which she is empowered and sustained, the space from which she displaces patriarchal and paternal hold. The textual line break that separates “reclaim” from “myself” mimics her separation from self and illustrates her grounds for reclaiming herself in zine space. A zine exhibits Lefebvre’s confluence of mental, social and physical aspects of space; there is knowledge behind it, social conceptions of its use, and images that overlay the page and direct how the zine is lived in as a space. It also becomes a space in Eliade’s sense — a space set apart, communal, powerful, efficacious and full of *being*.

Just as Lefebvre's triadic space would not exist without language, a zine is, paradoxically, a space *because* it exists in language. The zine "rgo" begins by commenting that it "started out as a flyer but we think its ended up more like a zine" ("rgo," 1). Why is "rgo" "more like a zine"? It is because "rgo" is a linguistic space of congregation, power, expression and efficacy set apart from patriarchal space. It gathers and empowers voices and makes their expression heard. And, unlike a flyer, zine writing commands authority. As communicated in the zine, patriarchal society does not give women space to express powerful qualities, so Riot Grrrls came together to create (textual) space in which and from which to enact their power and displace patriarchal space. Cixous states that by definition, a feminine text must be intensely subversive: "if it writes itself it is in volcanic heaving of the old 'real' property crust. In ceaseless displacement" (Cixous, "Sorties," 97). Writing creates space and thus disturbs patriarchal spatial hold. Patriarchal society treats women like "littlegirlsdumbslutsstupidwhoresuglybitchesoldmaidshelplessscruedPROPERTY," and Riot Grrrls zines are 'where' they can combat that image ("rgo," Angelique). The sexist image Angelique describes is, in Lefebvre's terms, a patriarchal representational space that maps onto actual space. Riot Grrrls employ language and imagery to create the space of the zine — a space that could not exist without language. A concentrated site to explore this theory of zine space is the textual piece "Boy" in *Bikini Kill A Color and Activity Book*¹⁸ (BK #1).

III. Applying the Theory of the Zine as a Space

"Boy" first establishes a conflict between the feminine voice and the patriarchal order, an opposition rooted in oppression. Members of Bikini Kill (Kathleen Hanna, Billy Karren, Tobi Vail and Kathi Wilcox) — arguably the first RG band — produced the zine in 1991. However,

¹⁸ Since this issue of *Bikini Kill* is the first issue, from here on I will refer to it as *BK #1*.



Fig. 5. The societal enormity of “Boy” displayed and critiqued (*BK #1*, 2). Courtesy of the Fales Library’s Riot Grrrl archive at New York University.

the zinesters did not sign the contributions, many of which seem to express personal experiences. Indeed, the piece “Boy” strikes a balance between personal and general, at once speaking for one girl and speaking for all. And the zinesters outline an antagonistic relationship between that feminine “all” and patriarchal society. They title “Boy” in large, stark printed letters that take up a third of the page and dwarf the text beneath, emphasizing

the societal enormity of “boy” (see fig. 5).

But they cut off most of the tail of the “y,”

critiquing the linguistic and structural importance of boys and men and highlighting the friction between ‘boys’ and Grrrls. ‘Boy’ becomes both one person of reference and the system he represents. The writer refers to herself as a girl and sets up an opposition between her gender and the patriarchal order: “I don’t want to be a girl eaten up by your world, how can i watch girls eatin up by your world” (*BK #1*, “Boy”). Patriarchy in this text threatens to devour women’s bodies, thoughts, agency and representation.¹⁹ She doesn’t want women to be swallowed and consumed — deprived of space and thus power. To devour is to make invisible and insignificant, to make marginal. The threat proceeds to violence: “How come i get hit and no

¹⁹ Patriarchy’s consumption of women’s bodies is a continual theme in early Riot Grrrl zines. A piece titled “Martyr Complex on the Eve of Becoming,” in *Riot Grrrl #4* reads, “Consume, I’ll be your sustenance. I’ll scrape my insides with shards of class, and serve them to you on my knees. Take, eat, this is my body. The unconditional condition of nothingness. My nothingness will become your guilt, your measure of conscience, what a commendable service” (*Riot Grrrl #4*, “Martyr Complex on the Eve of Becoming”).

ones sees it?” (*BK #1*, “Boy”). The stakes are high and necessitate an active response — a fight for body, for space, for representation: “I am in protest against the whole world” (*BK #1*, “Boy”).

The zinester expresses that protest through her body and voice. Directly after the declaration of revolt, she writes, “My body says it, slung into my clothes. I won’t stop talking, I’m a girl who you have no control over. There is not a gag big enough to handle this mouth. I’m gonna tell everyone what you did to me” (*BK #1*, “Boy”). Her body and its active relationship to her clothed appearance broadcast her revolt. Readers can envision her refusal to comply with norms of feminine ‘proper dress,’ which reflects her attitude about other manifestations of patriarchy. Patriarchy wants to devour her body, but her body and choice of clothing resist. She won’t present her body the way patriarchy demands. Voice is also vital to her struggle. She “won’t stop talking” and thus patriarchy has “no control over” her. Her decision to speak enacts her protest and initiates her freedom. The speech and body at first seem to be separate modes of protest, but her speech is intrinsically dependent on her body; because there is not a “gag big enough to handle this mouth” she is going to “tell everyone what you did to me.” The object of speech is at once the boy and patriarchy, as both violently oppress her. She protests for a space for body and speech while using her body and speech. In Lefebvre’s sense, her revolt actively creates her space.

The revolt that occurs through entwined body and voice depends on *writing* that body and voice with alternative language in the space of zines. She is writing to create the space of the page in which her body and her expression can exist:

I’m not writing to please you, i’m not giving you a clean little hole to stick your dick in, a nice smooth arrangement. Pick me up, open me, put me down. So sorry I’m no Hemmingway [sic], I’m writing for survival, my kind is being killed off, in fact i’m not

even sure that i exist. These words on this page mean something if only that i was here and my fingers made this mess. I don't know luxury, what it is to be carefree. That was your fantasy, remember? (*BK #1*, "Boy")

She is not writing "to please you," not writing 'properly' like Hemingway because she recognizes, in Armantrout's terms, that readability can implement social codes because proper language participates in and shores up patriarchy (Armantrout, 295-296). Writing in patriarchal language to please men and the system would only underpin the "nice smooth arrangement" of sex and sexism that allows men to systematically see women as an object, often sexual, to use: "Pick me up, open me, put me down" (*BK #1*, "Boy"). The phrase figures her as a book and body to consume, commenting on how sexism is tied to language. Canonical books like Hemingway's texts may be easy to consume, but she resists her consumption.²⁰ Her addressee wants her to use language as if she were "carefree," to not write her body, her pain, her experience of sexism in language that highlights language's own patriarchal nature. His "fantasy" of her being carefree is for her not to question her oppressed position and the actual and linguistic violence enacted on her body. She is not supposed to assert sexism's effects by saying "my kind is being killed off." To use language in a carefree way is his "luxury" because it is to use language without questioning how it oppresses its subjects. She is rather "writing for survival," writing to create a space in which to exist: "These words on this page mean something if only that i was here and my fingers made this mess" (*BK #1*, "Boy"). She writes her body onto the space, the "here," of the page. Because of the "words on this page" she can know her fingers exist, because they "made this mess." In reframing her existence from a 'clean little hole' to 'fingers that made this mess,' she transforms from a girl to be consumed (like a book) as an

²⁰ Perhaps she also writes to literally survive, as Hemingway did not.

absence to a girl who grabs the space and asserts presence through the authority of the page. There remains a textual trace of her body on the page. The page becomes her space of existence.

IV. Problematizing Riot Grrrls' Gendered Binary of Space

Early Riot Grrrls wanted to transcend the binary of boy/girl, but it is important we see that Cixous' influential focus on patriarchy versus women, and their own oppositional stance toward masculinity, precludes that effort. Riot Grrrls occasionally argue against the use of binaries:

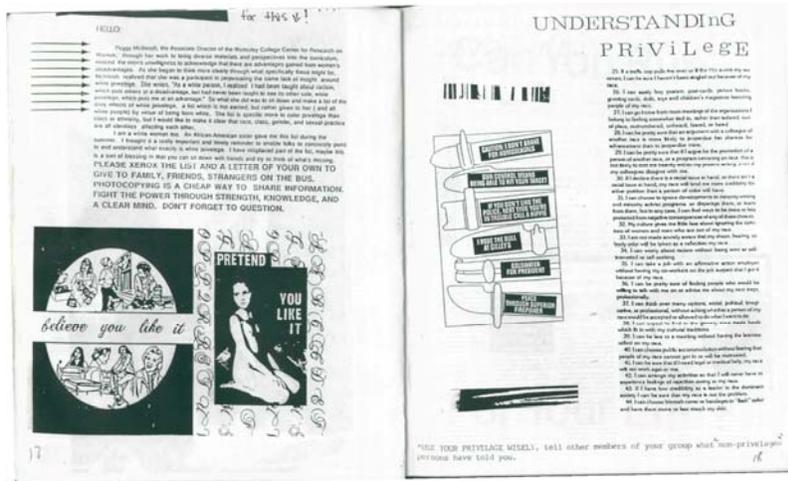
This world is not a place where only two distinctive realities exist. Call it Yin/Yang, Right/Wrong, Male/Female, Feminist/Homemaker.... I don't care what you call it. This is the '90s, give it up. Dualities support hierarchies ---- which is what sexism, racism, heterosexism, specieism, classism, etc..are all based on and supported by. (*BK #2*, "You Are Not Really a Feminist Because....")

Some RG zinesters wanted to resist the simplification of oppression into the axes of male and female; they wanted to allow the expression of girls who had experiences of racism, for example. Indeed, their work realizes the explicit problem in binary thinking, and *BK #2* uses the word "pluralistic" to describe RG thinking (*BK #2*, "You Are Not Really a Feminist Because...."). However, Cixous' influence was strong, and she continually concentrated on women's experience and writing in dichotomous contrast to men's experience and writing. This position tends to underwrite a binary system seen in early RG zines.

Cixous acknowledges various forms of difference but collapses them into gender. Cixous outlines a binary of master/slave and details the multiple axes of oppression that fall under that binary. She highlights similarity and disregards divergence: "I saw how the white (French), superior, plutocratic, civilized world founded its power on the repression of populations who had

suddenly become ‘invisible,’ like proletarians, immigrant workers, minorities who are not the right ‘color.’ Women. Invisible as humans” (Cixous, “Sorties,” 70). Cixous distillates all oppressed groups into the overarching category of ‘Women.’

In much the same way, zinesters do mention white, class and heterosexual privileges to recognize other forms of oppression, but I would argue they are tokenistic mentions that don’t



significantly shape the zines.

Various early RG zines,

including *BK #1* and “riot grrrl

HUH?,” re-print Peggy

McIntosh’s 1988 article, “White

Privilege: Unpacking the

Invisible Knapsack” (see fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Attempts at racial awareness in tokenizing Peggy McIntosh’s article (*BK #1*, 17-18). Courtesy of Kathleen Hanna and the Barnard Zine Library.

The text clearly made an

impression on RG zinesters. *BK*

#1 urges readers to “Learn how your behavior and/or privileges [sic] affects people who do not

fall into the same categories as you” (*BK #1*, “Revolution Grrrl Style Now”). RG zines

commonly — and briefly — insert such statements but continually return to gender. For

instance, however accessible and useful it was to its readers, McIntosh’s article is nevertheless

the only article early zinesters print on the topic. Other writers briefly reiterate points found in

McIntosh’s piece when writing of white privilege, but they were unable to carry the conversation

forward. The re-prints and mentions serve as token gestures. Chidgey notes, “Despite the rote

list of oppressions riot grrrl manifestos and zines claim to protest against, including racism and

classism, systems and structures of oppression were rarely tackled in zines beyond the occasional

grrrl admitting that she was white and privileged and working on it” (Chidgey, 128). Zinesters robotically regurgitate the necessary mention of white privilege without cultivating it in their work. Similar to Cixous, they compel commonality and ignore disparity, which collapses difference into a binary of man/woman, boy/girl.

Indeed, the first page of *BK #1* stresses parallels in girls’ experience: “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” (*BK #1*, 1). The writer describes that she doesn’t own her girlfriends, which implies that they are not in a romantic, lesbian relationship; indeed, she details their heterosexuality in writing they “have cringing and choking on boy cum in common.” The zine describes an assumed-heterosexual gender similarity that puts them at odds with men. The gendered opposition becomes more important than potential differences in sexual, racial, or class background that shape and heighten discrimination. The writer only recounts gendered similarities in experience rather than variation that could differentiate their experience.

Riot Grrrls also sporadically use racial diction and writing with the result of appropriating early ethnoracial participation and associating themselves with intersections of oppression they do not experience. Early Riot Grrrls lifted terminology from the 1991 Mount Pleasant race riots to create the term ‘girl riot,’ associating themselves with a racially charged revolt while failing to recognize ways in which ‘girl’ could overlap with race and class to create multivalent forms of oppression. They took advantage of the term “riot’s” implicit origin in racial and class oppression, though ethnoracial girls played little to no role in the early Riot Grrrl movement. The undated (but recognizable as early 1990s) *Girl Germs #3 (GG #3)* features a personal piece written by “Lainga,” a Chinese-American girl who writes about her family’s experience of

immigration and discrimination and the sacrifices her mother made. However, RG zines did not otherwise feature Lainga, and *GG #3* does not record that Lainga had her own zine, which zines often would do if the author was a contributor. Lainga's piece illustrates Riot Grrrls' awareness of minority issues, yet such awareness is politically expedient rather than foundationally integrated.

Indeed, early Riot Grrrl zines feature the imagined presence of minorities instead of the participation by or with them. *GG #3* prints a photograph that captures an African-American community of kids as two young kids look directly at the camera (see fig. 7). A marked-in caption reads, "the gaze the gaze Whose

gaze?" (*GG #3*, 14). The photo means to represent an awareness of minority issues — that African-American communities are watched and discriminated against — and show their similarity to Riot Grrrl issues. But the photo actively illustrates that African-American kids are looking in on Riot Grrrl zine-ing, as a window shopper looks in on the purchases of the privileged. The photo rests at the bottom of the page, so the African-American children in the photo are not of central concern. Zinesters capture the images to 'represent' a group and highlight a parallel experience, but the kids in the photo are left staring from the outside, rather than participating from within. Riot Grrrls thus appropriate such imagery to misleadingly augment their own oppression.

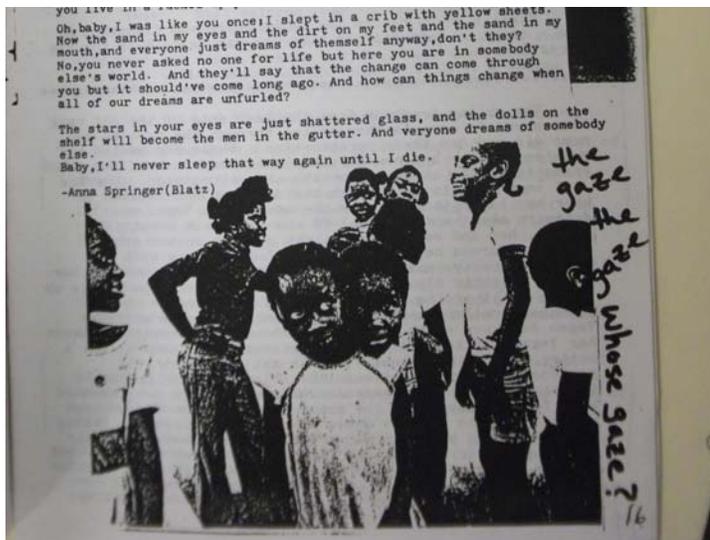


Fig. 7. African-American girls look in on Riot Grrrl from the outside (*GG #3*, 16). Courtesy of the Fales Library's Riot Grrrl Archive at New York University.

Cixous similarly appropriates imagery of African (rather than specifically African-American) communities to create a metaphor for women's experience. She compares women's space to the "dark region" and "Africa" as she speaks to her woman reader: "because you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark" (Cixous, "Sorties," 68). As is true in some RG zines, Cixous connects racial imagery and women's experience. She uses the African metaphor to say that women's bodies "have been colonized" like Africa (Cixous, "Sorties," 68). However, she doesn't recognize the particularity of African colonization; it becomes merely a trope to appropriate. She wants to highlight the commonality of black and women's experience without acknowledging intersections of race and gender that powerfully influence oppression. She wants resemblance rather than difference, generalizations rather than specifics. Indeed, Cixous wants to be able to claim that 'blackness' as female power: "we are black and we are beautiful" (Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 30). Perhaps Cixous uses the African metaphor to gesture toward solidarity in oppressed groups, but as *GG #3*'s use of Lainga's personal piece and the African-American image, the result is that the mention of 'blackness' seems to lend power to her cause — seems to allow her to claim oppression she doesn't experience.

hooks notes that white feminists of the 1970s similarly promoted racial presence rather than participation to legitimate, but not distract from, the feminist causes against patriarchy. They wanted the appearance that ethnoracial women participated without having to deal with the complexity their arguments might lend to the discussion. Feminists in the '70s encouraged the presence of women of color because they "were needed to legitimate the process," but they were not treated as equals — a marker also seen in early Riot Grrrl zines (hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 11). White '70s feminists wanted women of color to speak from pain rather than resistance, as she notes by ventriloquizing white feminists: "Only speak from that space in the margin that is a sign

of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing. Only speak your pain” (hooks, *Yearning*, 152). Riot Grrrl’s white zinesters similarly appropriate that racial pain, compare it to their pain and monopolize struggle. As in hooks’ reading of ’70s feminists, early RG zines include token mentions of privilege and racial oppression that effectively gloss over and appropriate difference. Following hooks’ argument about white feminism, I argue that in Riot Grrrl zines the political correctness of appearing to include ethnoracial women, and the resultant proximity to ethnoracial oppression, lends problematic power to their movement.

White feminists, including Cixous, and Riot Grrrls continually emphasize the gender binary that elides and appropriates other axes of difference, thus masking the experience of people at the intersections of oppression, which hooks further explicates. Under hooks’ theory, movements like ’70s white feminists and ’90s white Riot Grrrls focused on sexism to the detriment of other forms of discrimination. For hooks, the term ‘oppression’ implies a total lack of choices, and she stresses that so strong a term doesn’t always apply to women, especially white, middle-class women (hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 4). She criticizes ’70s feminist theory in the United States that simplistically emphasized “common oppression” because that emphasis appropriates “radical political vocabulary” and masks “the extent to which they shaped the movement so that it addressed and promoted their class interests” (hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 5-6). Class is deeply tied to race, so promoting ‘class interests’ implies promoting white interests. Indeed, that critique also applies to Cixous, a ’70s French feminist, and Riot Grrrls. White appropriation of racialized diction is clear in *BK #1*’s use of the word “enslaved” to describe the role of “taboos that keep us enslaved IE, “Don’t talk about sex or rape or be sensitive or corny” (*BK #1*, 4). Rape is certainly a radical issue, but the term “enslaved” has a potent history and is

problematic when applied to different contexts. In hooks's terms, Riot Grrrls focus on common oppression to the extent that it skews the actualities of oppression for racialized groups.

In pushing against the gender binary, hooks seems to theorize multiplicity beyond binaries, which is how Edward Soja interprets her work. Soja argues that binary modes that order dominant and subordinate groups force a "universalist encompassing of other radical subjectivities" (Soja, 91). Binary modes of thought also compete for importance, which can only lead to division: "When the primacy of one binary opposition is viewed as competing with the privileging of another, the prospects for flexible and cooperative alliance and 'empathy' (a key term for bell hooks) are likely to be dim" (Soja, 91). Rather than preferring the black/white binary over the woman/man binary (that of Riot Grrrl), Soja asserts that hooks wants to develop a useful "radical postmodern subjectivity" that transcends the binary structure to look at overlapping difference, "difference as the basis for a new cultural politics of multiplicity and strategic alliance among all who are peripheralized, marginalized, and subordinated" (Soja, 93). hooks chooses a margin in contrast to a center, which seems to create or work under another binary. However, Soja argues that hooks' move to choose the margin does not re-inscribe a binary of center/margin. For Soja, hooks' margin exceeds notions of the marginal and the central because it is both and neither.

Although Soja's reading of hooks opens up the landscape of multiplicity I want to traverse, I disagree with his argument that hooks transcends the center/margin binary. Because hooks notes that claiming the margin transforms it from a "site of domination" to a "space of radical openness," Soja argues that hooks transcends binaries because her 'margin' becomes powerful like a center (hooks, *Yearning*, 152, 149). However, I argue that her margin remains a margin, a dangerous and disempowered space: "Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary.

It is not a ‘safe’ place. One is always at risk” (hooks, *Yearning*, 149). It is clearly still an oppressed space — a margin. She describes the margin as a “central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse” (hooks, *Yearning* 149), but that is not the ‘center’ she describes elsewhere as academia, spaces of class and cultural eminence. Indeed, she differentiates being “in” the margin and being “at” the center (hooks, *Yearning*, 151), the difference between living and visiting. The language of “in” and “at” a space parallels hooks’ description of her initial margin/center experience as a child living in the African-American community across the railroad tracks who could visit the white, wealthy neighborhood to work but had to return (hooks, *Feminist Theory*, preface). hooks “works, produces, lives, if you will, at the center,” but the center is not the place she claims (hooks, *Yearning*, 150, emphasis added). She remains in the margin.

I argue that hook’s claim to a marginal location neglects the point that once-marginal groups can create spaces of power and authority that go beyond mere resistance. She extensively speaks of white feminists as holding positions of relative power, positions from which they can discriminate against her. However, as to their place in the margin/center binary, hooks only notes that they meet her “at the center” as “colonizers” rather than in the margins (hooks, *Yearning*, 151). Were white women always at the center? Are they exclusively at the center? Are they also “in” the center? Did they create that center? Do they have a space in the multiplicity of the margin, to use Soja’s terms? Even though early Riot Grrrls largely ignored and appropriated ethnoracial oppression, they also (as hooks does) locate themselves in the margin in opposition to a center: “marginalized groups must take it upon themselves to educate each other and figure out how to survive in this planet run by pigs” (*Riot Grrrl #4*, “Y.G.L.G.”). This is to say there is more than one margin and center. hooks might disagree that white Riot

Grrrls are exclusively “in the margin,” but would she assert that all white women are always, or have always been, in the center? Riot Grrrl zinesters thus challenge the adequacy of a language of margin/center that categorizes some groups as in the margin and some as out. Indeed, they illustrate that hooks’ binary is no more adequate to express subjectivity than other binaries that force commonality and opposition, such as Cixous and Riot Grrrls’ binary of gender. Thus, hooks’ use of the terms “margin” and “center” establishes or reinforces a binary — the very thing she wants to avoid. Such a binary ignores multiplicity and mobility.

However, the *idea* of hooks’ space as interpreted by Soja, if not the language used, hints at the conception of space proposed by the ethnoracial zines I will turn to next. Soja rightly pushes for multiplicity, but in doing so he misreads hooks’ margin/center language. Ethnoracial zines will argue that it is vital to dis-order binaries, examine intersections of discrimination and evaluate positions that reinforce systems of discrimination. hooks writes, “when we cease to focus on the simplistic stance ‘men are the enemy,’ we are compelled to examine systems of domination and our role in their maintenance and perpetuation” (hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 25-26). Similarly, ethnoracial zinesters will argue that we must eschew “simplistic definition[s]” in favor of complex and overlapping subjectivities and spaces that surpass girl/boy, black/white and margin/center binaries (hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 18). Soja grounds those subjectivities in spaces, as there is “a ‘real’ world populated by multiple subjects with many (often changeable) identities located in varying (and also changeable) subject positions” (Soja, 91). The push for complexity of subjectivity intertwines with a push for multiple spaces. Language, as we have seen in early RG zines and will see in ethnoracial zines, holds power to create and influence those spaces. As hooks states, “Language is also a place of struggle” (hooks, *Yearning*, 145). Ethnoracial

zinesters illustrate that a look toward variant uses of language helps decipher the multiplicity of space.

Chapter Two: Ethnoracial Grrrls Write their Multiplicity and Mobility in Zines

Ethnoracial Grrrls countered white Riot Grrrls' emphasis on a binary of girl/boy because they felt the binaristic creation and division of space could not represent their own multiplicity. Such a realization of Riot Grrrls' whiteness arose a few years into the movement when numerous white zines and interactions with white zinesters revealed their unawareness of race-gender intersectionality. Ethnoracial zinester Lauren Martin reveals in an interview with Piepmeier that initially, Riot Grrrl was a "place where she belonged and felt part of a community" (Piepmeier, 139). Martin explains that a 1996 RG convention, however, "turned out to be a real wake-up call for me, when I could see with my own eyes just how white the composition of riot grrrl was, and could hear with my own ears the racist and classist words that came out of some riot grrrls' mouths'" (Piepmeier, 139). Martin began to see the whiteness and racism that was often implicit in zines. By using racialized imagery without acknowledging ethnoracial participants and their intersectional identities, white Riot Grrrl zinesters masked the contributions of ethnoracial Grrrls and appropriated racial experiences that truly affected the everyday lives of zinesters such as Martin and Mimi Nguyen.

These ethnoracial writers still associated with Riot Grrrl even while writing their critiques and demanding their own space. Indeed, they often note that they criticize in order to improve. Although Nguyen has concerns about the Riot Grrrl movement's exclusion and appropriation of ethnoracial Grrrls, she emphasizes, "I want to make it crystal clear that I totally support riot grrrl as a feminist project, period. I care, therefore I critique" (Nguyen, *Slant* #5, "Revolution don't come easy, honey"). Nguyen wants to challenge Riot Grrrl's feminism in order to make it stronger. In the compilation zine "Evolution of a Race Riot," Martin similarly questions yet

encourages the Riot Grrrl movement: “sisterhood, yes. revolution, yes. but what is a predominately white suburban upper-middle class girl revolution going to accomplish?” (Martin, “EoRR,” 16). Martin critiques Riot Grrrls so that they can grow — figuratively and literally — as a movement. She adds, “p.s. I still love you. I still believe” (Martin, “EoRR,” 16). She still believes Riot Grrrls can establish a potent revolution that includes Grrrls like her. Although these ethnoracial zinesters identified as Riot Grrrls, they wanted space that would contain their multiplicity. Early Riot Grrrls identified as punks but wanted a distinct powerful feminine space; ethnoracial writers identified as Riot Grrrls but wanted an ethnoracial space within and without the Riot Grrrl movement. As early Riot Grrrls wrote their gendered existence in alternate zines, ethnoracial Grrrls set out to write their multiplicity and mobility in zine spaces of their own.

Ethnoracial Riot Grrrls theorize their own dis-located intersectional and mobile subjectivities while writing a space for them. An awakening to the racism in the feminist Riot Grrrl movement often meant a deep exploration of intersectional identity. Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 theorized intersectional identities as being “both women *and* of color” “within discourses shaped to respond to one *or* the other,” which results in ethnoracial women being “marginalized within both” (Crenshaw, 358). To combat such repression, ethnoracial zinesters tell personal stories of intersectional oppression, exclusion and dislocation to describe the kinds of subjectivities and experiences that white Riot Grrrls don’t recognize. Piepmeier argues that ethnoracial Grrrl zines “offer a kind of vibrant feminist theorizing, an articulation of intersectional theory that is methodologically and visually different from that emerging from many mainstream third wave feminist publications” (Piepmeier, 126). The representative introduction to Mimi Nguyen’s *Slant #6* posits a subjectivity that moves between spaces and does not have a space of its own. Nguyen notes “this issue is about travel,” but she quickly

problematizes the connotation of travel as freedom because ethnoracial Grrrls often don't have a choice in moving: "*it's a travel zine in the sense that i critique the notion of 'travel' in relation to punk rock and to American middle-class 'tourist' culture. it's a travel zine in the sense that i talk about the viet nam war, forced migration and refugee status*" (Nguyen, *Slant #6*, 2). She uses proximity of the sentences and italics to contrast the optional, privileged travel of white (mainstream and punk rock) Americans (such as taking a greyhound to crash "at some punk rock house hundreds of miles from 'home'") against the compulsory, dire 'travel' of migrants and refugees (often dis-placed by American forces) (Nguyen, *Slant #6*, 2). In this move, Nguyen contrastively theorizes the mobility and multiplicity of her subjectivity as a Vietnamese woman refugee. The content and form of Nguyen's sentences travel and transform across the page to surprise readers with a new vista, a new vision, a new space.

For Nguyen and other ethnoracial zinesters, many spaces, including the space of Riot Grrrl, don't recognize ethnoracial residency because they disallow multiple, intersectional, subjectivities. She continues her critique to argue that white Americans – particularly "white, heterosexual, middle-class, male" Americans — not only travel with ease and volition but also monopolize spaces: "*it's a travel zine in the sense that i talk about how i'm still 'alien' in some spaces here, though i've lived in the united states for over twenty years now*" (*Slant #6*, 2). The inhabitants she comes in contact with recognize her as an unwanted visitor, reminiscent of hooks' being *at* a space, rather than a fellow resident, living *in* a space. She ends the introduction with the phrase that serves as the epigraph to this thesis, "i'm always being asked: / *why are you here? and when are you going / home?*" (Nguyen, *Slant #6*, 2). An ethnoracial subject does not fit in a simple theorization of space and is forced to move from space to space as a result. Nguyen wants to write the zine as a space of origin and action. The

ethnoracial zinesters in this chapter theorize that binaries, even the binary of margin and center, are faulty, and they see those opposed spaces as multiple and their subjects as mobile and ambiguous. Ethnoracial Grrrls move between spaces, but they argue for a space of their own through a discourse of multiplicity.

This chapter will use ethnoracial Grrrl zines to elaborate a concept of ambiguous subjects moving in multiple spaces and to describe how zinesters tactically claim space. In the first section, I will analyze zines by Lauren Martin to trace the emergent importance of race and intersectionality to ethnoracial zinesters. That exploration offers an account of multiple and mobile subjectivity. I will use the theory of Kathy Ferguson and Geraldine Pratt to analyze Martin's imagination of multiplicity. The second section examines Mimi Nguyen's zines in conversation with Ferguson and Michel de Certeau to outline a theory of how subjects use daily linguistic tactics to claim space from the imposition of dominant powers. I also draw on the descriptions of LANGUAGE poetry by Charles Bernstein and other LANGUAGE poets and theorists to describe Nguyen's linguistic tactics. I conclude this chapter by pointing toward how the spaces that ethnoracial zinesters claim have the powerful potential to destabilize and displace dominant — and oppressive — spaces and canons, such as that of white Riot Grrrl or white-male punk rock.

I. Ethnoracial Zines Take the Scene

Ethnoracial Grrrls scarcely participated in the Riot Grrrl movement from 1991 to 1993, but they shook up the scene in the mid- to late- '90s, a turn that RG scholars often neglect. The most recent history of Riot Grrrl, Marcus's *Girls to the Front* only spans from 1989 to 1994, a

truncation that misses ethnoracial zines' emergence.²¹ Even though Marcus's epilogue, "The Feminist Future," describes Riot Grrrls' continuation to the mid-'90s and beyond, she fails to note the appearance of ethnoracial Grrrls — even such prominent zinesters as Johanna Novales, Lauren Martin and Mimi Nguyen. Kearney mentions Nguyen in her chapter on Riot Grrrl in *Girls Make Media*, but she minimizes Nguyen's impact within Riot Grrrl, simply stating, "as much as Riot Grrrl was a positive force in her life at one point, this community never worked for her as an Asian-American woman.... Ultimately, Nguyen decided to leave Riot Grrrl for new areas of cultural and political activism" (Kearney, 84). She deemphasizes Nguyen's long association with Riot Grrrl and her camaraderie with and impact on other ethnoracial Grrrls in the movement. Kearney does describe Nguyen and Martin's zines in a chapter on Grrrl zines. But she devotes just a few scattered pages in a 54-page chapter. Even worse, the Riot Grrrl chapter in Meltzer's book *Girl Power* describes RG zines without mention of the zines ethnoracial Grrrls wrote. She does acknowledge that Riot Grrrl could be exclusionary to non-white and non-middle-class girls because of the money and access it took to produce a zine or start a band (Meltzer, 39). However, she does not grant the myriad contributions and opinions of ethnoracial, non-middle-class zinesters and Grrrls in the movement. She mentions that the D.C. race riots inspired the idea of a "girl riot" but does not acknowledge that a metaphorical "race riot" arose within Riot Grrrl before the movement dissipated. I want to emphasize what other scholars disregard: the powerful spaces of difference that ethnoracial Grrrls established in zines.

Although most Riot Grrrl scholarship does not show it, ethnoracial RG zinesters claim a vast territory. "Evolution of a Race Riot," a hugely influential compilation zine Nguyen published in 1997, lists and reviews 73 ethnoracial zinesters, mostly Grrrls, and ten of those

²¹ Marcus said at a 2011 talk at the University of Michigan that she limited the history to 1989-1994 because her publisher did not want the book to run overly long.

authors had produced two or more running zine titles. In comparison, the foundational running RG zines number fewer than ten.²² Those ethnoracial Grrrls come from divergent racial backgrounds, from African-American to Mexican-American to Filipina-American. Some of the most prominent authors in Riot Grrrl archives include the prolific producers Kristi Chan, Johanna Novales and Sabrina Sandata. *Riot Grrrl Press Fall 1997 (RGP Fall '97)* announces that Chan is producing “asian invasion,” a compilation zine “written for/about asian people” (*RGP Fall '97*, 19). Whether or not that zine ever materialized, Chan’s extant zines include *Riot Grrrl Review*, *Tennis and Violins*, *1000 Barbie Girls Can’t be Wrong* and *Wild Honey Pie*. Novales, a biracial Filipina-white American, wrote *Scarbaby* and *YAWP!* (not an acronym) from about 1993 to 1996. Filipina-American Sandata wrote *Bamboo Girl*, a late-’90s to early 2000s zine with articles and columns mostly dealing with Asian-American or Filipino-American issues. Regular columns include “Fucked Up But Real Filipino Mythology!,” “Tagalog (Filipino) For The Novice” and “Another *Ethnic* Marvel Superhero!” Bianca Ortiz, an illustrious RG zinester, produced *Mija*, *Hey Mexican!*, *Mamasita* and *Ladies Homewrecking Journal*. *RGP Fall '97* writes that Ortiz “is doing all these great projects including the san francisco girl convention, a zine about being chicana/chicano, and the queen scream diy girl comp tape” (*RGP Fall '97*, 19). Ethnoracial Riot Grrrls used their zines and other DIY productions to deeply participate in, yet criticize, the RG movement.

Lauren Martin and Mimi Nguyen’s zines are of particular interest because they represent the potent prolificacy of ethnoracial zinesters and their rising need to write the intersection of

²² Foundational RG running zines include the band Bikini Kill’s zine *Bikini Kill*, Donna Dresch’s *Chainsaw*, Tobi Vail’s *Jigsaw*, *Riot Grrrl* (produced by members of Bikini Kill, Bratmobile and Riot Grrrl D.C. in Washington, D.C.) and Allison Wolfe and Molly Neuman’s *Girl Germs*.

gender and race.²³ Martin, of Chinese-American and Jewish-Hungarian-American background according to her zine *forbidden planet*, debuted in about 1994. During the mid- to late-'90s she inexhaustibly produced *Boredom Sucks*, *Princess Charming*, *forbidden planet* and *you might as well live (YMAWL)*. Martin produced two comp zines, "Prude: compilation sexuality zine" in 1996 and "Hard as Nails: A Tough-Girl Comp Zine," which is undated, though says Martin conceived it in 1997 (Martin, "HAN," 1). "Hard as Nails" features profiles of "tough girls," most of who are ethnoracial. Nguyen's comp zine "Evolution of a Race Riot" also features two pieces of Martin's work. Nguyen, who is Vietnamese and immigrated to the United States at a young age, arrived in the scene in the early 1990s and promptly began publishing zines. She produced two running zines, *Slant* (later to become *Slander*) and *Aim Your Dick*. In 1995 Nguyen began compiling the 94-page "EoRR," self-published in 1997. She followed up "EoRR" in 2002 with "Race Riot." Nguyen and Martin's individual and compilation zines, like other ethnoracial zines, highlight that zines serve as spaces to represent and empower intersectional identities. Chu similarly notes that zine publishing "reclaims the importance of 'small people' by articulating a place where those on the margins of power and, particularly, 'outcasts' are central to the vitality of the space" (Chu, 78).

II. Lauren Martin's Emerging Multiplicity

After she moved away for college at Bard, Martin launched *you might as well live (YMAWL)* as a zine that addresses her personal frustrations with a wry sense of humor. Martin began *YMAWL* in the fall of 1995 after she distributed the final issue of another zine, *Boredom*

²³ There are numerous Latina and African-American RG zinesters who are equally as prolific as Martin and Nguyen, which I mention in this chapter. However, those zinesters are not as substantially represented in the RG zine archives I was able to visit in New York City, the Barnard Zine Library and NYU's Fales Library. Thus, the decision to focus on Martin and Nguyen also derived from my extensive access to their zines in archive.

Sucks, as known as *fuck you, high school*, which, as the title suggests, contained condemnation of sexism in high-school culture. *YMAWL* issue one chronicles her difficulties during her first semester at Bard College. Martin titled the zine after the last line in Dorothy Parker's poem "Résumé," which Martin prints in the introduction of her first issue:

Razors pain you;
 Rivers are damp;
 Acids stain you;
 And drugs cause cramp;
 Guns aren't lawful;
 Nooses give;
 Gas smells awful;
 You might as well live. (Martin, *YMAWL #1*, 1)

Parker's poem lends humor to the grave subject of suicide, indicating that it may be more trouble to take one's own life than keep it. Martin says of the poem, "it's depression with a sense of humor, which is what i like in a zine" (Martin, *YMAWL #1*, 1). The title demonstrates Martin's interest in exploring difficult socio-personal problems while transgressing the boundaries of how to approach such material, which parallels Parker's use of poetry. It also illustrates her interest in poetry that defamiliarizes conceptions of self-representation, which she will manifest in her extensive original writing in *YMAWL*. However radically inclined in these ways, Martin's initial writings nevertheless safely avoid mention of her multiracial background.

The first issue of *YMAWL* holds latent references to race but only explicitly addresses issues of gender. Subsequent issues powerfully progress to confront how race inescapably collides with gender. The black-and-white cover of issue one features a clean sketch of a formal Victorian-era woman outlined in a haphazard sketch of pen lines. The woman holds a large book, so the image seems an ironic comment on Martin's discontent at school (see fig. 8). Convention dictates that she should be proper, like the Victorian lady, while the sketched lines signify that she feels — and wants to be — anything but proper. The title font in white overlays

a thick smear of black ink, appearing as lowercase handwriting quickly scrawled through the ink. The title, like the pen scratches, contrasts the primness of the Victorian lady, remarking on Martin's messy breach of expectations for femininity. The continual contrast of prim and messy, white and black, evokes a parallel with white and ethnoracial — that which is simple and accepted and that which is complicated and deviant. Indeed, the sketch of the Victorian woman is, expectedly, white.

Martin writes of social exclusion in her initial zines without acknowledging race's

relevance at Bard (a nearly all-white college) — a choice she will later admit and from which she will depart. In the piece, titled “all in a day's work,” Martin writes of feeling like a “tagalong,” or person who serves as an excluded follower rather than an included friend (Martin, *YMAWL #1*, “all in a day's work”). Certainly, issues of exclusion could stem from roots other than race.

Writings on social awkwardness and lack of personal confidence continually surface in Martin's zines. The same issue features a piece, titled “FUCK APPEARANCES,” that reads only of body image. However, from the perspective of Martin's extensive writings on race in later issues, race is a matter that continually touches her day-to-day life. In “all in a day's work,” her experience seems to parallel hooks' experience of being ostracized by white students at a white college, but Martin doesn't once mention race:



Fig. 8. Proper feminine expectations sketched and assessed in *YMAWL #1* (cover). Courtesy of Lauren Martin and the Barnard Zine Library.

not in his world
 not in her world
 not in THEIR world.
 I am not in anyone's world.
 not even in my own little world.
 I am In no world.

always on the outside,
 always looking in.

pathetic, invisible me.

I am a stupid fucking submissive piece of shit. (Martin, *YMAWL #1*, "all in a day's work")

She, recognized as an agential "I," is "In" no world, emphasized with an uppercase "In," neither others' world nor her own. The women at Bard, as Riot Grrrls, have excluded her from the space she was supposed to be able to occupy as a fellow woman. As hooks, she is "at," not "in," the white college and community. Indeed, "THEIR" could refer to racial difference, a white "them" and a racialized "us" in this case, marking the linguistic and spatial separation. Martin feels as if she is "looking in" on the women and men at Bard from the outside, which recalls the photo of African-American children looking in on Riot Grrrl. She feels invisible, reflecting on her appearance, but she does not discuss how her classmates could judge her because her appearance is other than white. She moves to self-deprecation without realizing that her exclusion could stem from structural racial discrimination. She peculiarly leaves out any mention of race, and the absence, in contrast to its weighted presence in later issues, is tangible.

Martin's questioning of invisibility seems, in part, to be an unsaid awakening to how race affects her. Ironically, what is not written highlights that the discrimination may stem from race. Indeed, Martin writes in the 1996 zine *forbidden planet* (*YMAWL #3.5*) that her multiracial friend "rita says that she can tell by what i *don't* say in my zines rather than what i do that i am not a

white girl ” (Martin, *forbidden planet*, “okay”). Her early avoidance of writing race and her lack of white Riot Grrrls’ tokenistic mention of white privilege indicates that she is not white. Martin asks in her first issue, “what the hell *is* it about me that makes people want to pretend i’m not there?” (Martin, *YMAWL #1*, “all in a day’s work”). She cannot fathom why they ignore her, but she realizes it is something in what she “is.” She writes to address the people that ignore her: “i’m so sorry I’m not cool enough, punk enough, pretty enough, outgoing enough, tough enough, interesting enough, popular enough, *anything* enough, to warrant your attention or a piece of your precious little time” (Martin, *YMAWL #1*, “all in a day’s work”). Of all the potential absences, she doesn’t write “not white enough” to recognize the type of discrimination hooks experienced in college — the discrimination that likely occurs at any white college. However, I argue that race’s silent presence is seen in “*anything* enough.” Race is the unwritten weight to the sentence, that which is italicized, that which Martin is beginning to see and cannot yet write.

For Martin, to write something is create a space for its existence and acknowledgement, so to write race would be to fully realize and represent its weight in her life. Martin writes in the same issue, “It’s goddamn *necessary* for me to write. It’s a basic need for survival for me, I *have* to write or else nothing comes out, since I tend *not* to verbalize things” (Martin, *YMAWL #1*, “September 23, 1995”). Expression is central to her existence, and she must *write* that expression. Similar to early Riot Grrrls in chapter one, writing is her “savior” (Martin, *YMAWL #1*, “September 23, 1995”). Writing creates a space that allows her to exist. Thus, if she does not write race, she and her readers do not have to confront its presence. In *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory*, Kathy Ferguson asserts that the clarity of one-dimensional feminisms, like the linguistic feminism of Cixous, disallows the presence of complexity: “theoretical formations enables [sic] a revealing by simultaneously imposing a

concealing; that is, in each case the sharpness of vision offered comes as the expense of that which is unnamed or engulfed” (Ferguson, 156). Such engulfing of difference frequently occurs in RG zines. The lack of writing race disallows a space for race, so if zinesters do not write race, then it does not exist in the movement. When white Riot Grrrls ignore or appropriate race, as illustrated in chapter one, they disallow a genuine space for it. In a later zine, Martin indicates that since white Riot Grrrls will not allow room for race, she will need to write a space for race in zines.

A crucial turning point for Martin occurred when another zinester assumed Martin was white, thus obscuring the diversity within Riot Grrrl; Martin began to address race by writing of the racism manifested in Riot Grrrl. In *forbidden planet*, Martin describes how a white zinester, whom Martin does not name, created a compilation zine that contained the contributions of Martin and Ortiz. But the white zinester, without asking Martin or Ortiz, listed Ortiz as the only “non-white person” (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 4). The move assumed Martin was white and tokenized Ortiz. The experience prompted Martin to announce in an untitled piece toward the beginning of *forbidden planet*, “okay. i really feel the need to do some more serious talking about race and zines and this whole ‘scene’ shit” (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 3). She writes of how she has “always been conscious of my ethnicity” and had communicated with pen pals, including Ortiz of *Mamacita*, of having a multiracial background in the RG movement (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 3). She previously mentioned and alluded to her racial background but didn’t feel the content should overwhelm her zine. However, because the white zinester white washed her, Martin began to feel that white Riot Grrrls masked racial diversity in the movement and ignored the particular experiences of intersectional identities. Martin asserts that she shouldn’t have to state her race because “people should not fucking assume that every zinester is white”

(Martin, *forbidden planet*, 5). She doesn't feel that it is her responsibility to educate white Riot Grrrls about her or others' ethnoracial experience. But race is integral to her experience, and RG zines delve into the personal in order to claim a space for that particular being — powerful feminine being in the case of white Riot Grrrls. Martin comes to believe that not naming race is not sufficient to prevent others from denying her space. Omitting race does not claim a space for her complex being.

Martin asserts that her ethnoracial background should inflect her writing because she wants to write her self on the page. In the first issue of *YMAWL*, she feels as if she is in no world, no space. But writing the intersection of race and gender will create space in the zine for her own intricate experience:

people assume enough about my ethnicity when they see me in person, and now people are going to assume through my writing that i am a white girl? and yet not being a white girl is something i have to deal with, it is something that does affect me and maybe i don't have to state it over and over, but in my writing i shouldn't glaze over my ethnicity and should perhaps bring more of it into my writing. (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 5-6)

If the fact that she is of Chinese-Jewish-American background affects her daily experience, she argues it should affect her writing. Her ethnoracial background is part of her self, and writing claims a space for self. Applying Ferguson's ideas, the inclusion of her multiracial background in her writing will open up a space for her full existence, an existence that is multiple and mobile: "An argument for multiplicity and undecidability in feminist discourses on subjectivity creates a space for partial identities and mobile subjectivities" (Ferguson, 158).

Martin fills out Ferguson's sketch of writing to create space for multiple and mobile subjectivities in how she includes details of her racial background as it intersects with her

gender. She addresses readers with “things that are important for you to know before you can know where i am coming from and who i am,” adding, “hopefully in the future all of this will come through in my writing even when i am not explicitly talking about race” (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 6). She highlights that her multiracial background is central to her being, to who she is. Zines then provide a space for that complex experience to unfold and find representation. She tells readers of growing up in a working-class and multiracial part of Staten Island before going on a scholarship to Bard College. She details that she is “a third-generation chinese-american and a second-generation hungarian-jewish-american,” and describes the family histories of oppression, including the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, that led to her present self (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 7). Her last name reads white, but she reveals that such an impression stems from “the anglicization of it,” that “reveals a history of exclusion and racism” (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 7). Martin emphasizes the historical and present-day oppression that stems from race, not just gender. Martin asserts, “i refuse to be silent about who i am and where i come from,” as she realizes that her history and her experience as a multiracial Grrrl are important to relate (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 7). She argues it is vital to create a space for her experience and for that of others like it. She will write her own full existence.

As Martin begins to try to write her intersectional subjectivity that is multiple and mobile, she has a self-titled “identity crisis,” which she details in *YMAWL #6* and *forbidden planet*. She wants her intersectionality to inflect her writing, but she does not yet know what that looks like. For Martin, an identity crisis is part of exploring race in writing because her multiracial background pulls her identity in various directions. She does not have a clear, singular identity, in contrast to white Riot Grrrls who can simply be “girls” — for whom a binary of ‘us versus them’ feels less problematic. Martin’s introduction to the 1997 zine *YMAWL #6* describes a

dream in which “people kept messing with my hair”: *“I washed it and it turned this freakish color. turns out I was part of this game, like those color wars we used to play in camp, and my shampoo had been sabotaged. trouble is, I didn’t even know I was playing”* (Martin, *YMAWL #6*, 1). In the dream, she is forced to play “color wars,” even though she is not sure if she is part of the game or not. The dream seems to be a metaphor for how white mainstream and punk society aggressively treats her, an ethnoracial Grrrl, as if she is on an enemy team. She is Chinese and white, so why is she on one team and not the other? How can she know what team she is on? Why does she have to play? Her friends tell her that she is “identity crisis-ing all over the place” (Martin, *YMAWL #6*, 1). As Martin starts to describe her multiracial background in writing, she realizes the confusion it adds to her life. She is longer a simple subject with one side — and with the option to play. She realizes that she never was that subject.

The zine provides a space for her ambiguity, which, in Ferguson’s terms, is ‘mobile subjectivity.’ Mobile subjectivities, for which writing can create space, are not stationary or stagnant and account for myriad complexities. Ferguson details what that subjectivity may entail:

Mobile subjectivities are temporal, moving across and along axes of power (which are themselves in motion) without fully residing in them. They are relational, produced through shifting yet enduring encounters and connections, never fully captured by them. They are ambiguous: messy and multiple, unstable yet persevering. They are ironic, attentive to the manyness of things. (Ferguson, 154)²⁴

²⁴ Ferguson’s book aims to highlight the contrasts and unseen similarities in feminist theories (which she categorizes as linguistic, cosmic and praxis feminisms) to “force open a space within feminist discourses for greater acknowledgment of discontinuity, incompleteness, and tension” (Ferguson, 156).

Martin's mobile subjectivity is embedded in "color wars," in which she moves between and among "axes of power" while encountering individuals, groups and spaces that inflect her identity. She is certainly multiple, as she feels she plays for various teams. She is definitely ambiguous and attentive to the "manyness of things." Indeed, *YMAWL #6* also features a piece titled "ambiguous" that addresses people's reaction to Martin's multiplicity: "they are scared by my ambiguity. they are scared by what they do not know. they cannot place me into a neat little box therefore they don't know how to react to me" (Martin, *YMAWL #6*, 8). People who want a simplistic and easily categorizable identity ask Martin to explain herself, and Martin resists such falsifying reports. However, Martin is also hesitant to describe a self that is diffuse — even scattered. She too is scared by what she does not know. She cannot yet embrace her complexity on the page.

In the introduction to *forbidden planet*, Martin declares her search for identity, and she seems ambivalent about whether her identity will be singular or plural. Mainstream and punk cultures ask her to fit into a categorizable box, which she cannot do. But she still hopes to locate one describable identity as a stable core. In a letter to Milly Itzhak enclosed with the copy of *forbidden planet* that I viewed in the Fales Library's Riot Grrrl archive at NYU, Martin explains that the zine "is all about me searching and dealing w/ identity" (Martin, "Itzhak/Martin letter," 1). The zine begins with a declaration of that search for identity: "this is bare bones, getting real. stripping myself of illusions. this is not fitting into any rigid categories and not caring anymore (or at least trying not to). this is me throwing my hands in the air and declaring that the search for identity has begun" (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 1). She admits her identity does not fit "rigid categories" and even asserts that such simplistic categories are illusions. However, the action of "stripping" herself to "bare bones" indicates that there is a single, foundational,

describable self at the core. She searches for one identity. She seems to say that categories mask her true identity, and once she sheds them she can locate someone “real.” Ferguson argues that mobile subjectivities “trouble fixed boundaries, antagonize true believers, create new possibilities for themselves” (Ferguson, 154). Martin troubles fixed categories, but she is still a true believer in a locatable self. She wants to create the possibility of genuine, rather than imposed, singularity.

Although Martin continues to hope for a singular identity, she begins to theorize the mobility and potential multiplicity of her experience:

i am sifting thru.

i am finding my way.

there is a person within this
 frame and i am going to
 drag her out by her hair.
 nothing will ever be forbidden
 on the forbidden planet. there will never be any reason to hide.

sick of lying. sick of hiding. (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 1)

The “frame” is the imposed “rigid categories” she wants to escape as she persistently pursues the writing of her identity beneath and beyond categories. However, that identity remains hopefully singular in the term “person,” which indicates that she stays trapped in society’s expectations for singularity just as she habitually uses cultural clichés, such as “drag her out by her hair.” At the same time, she does seem to allow that her optimistically singular self is mobile. Martin is “sifting thru” the multiple spaces in which she exists — spaces that inflect her self — as she tries to find her “person.” The route is not clear, so she is continually “finding my way.” Ferguson notes that she chooses the term “*mobile* rather than *multiple*” subjectivities “to avoid the implication of movement from one to another stable resting place, and instead to problematize

the contours of the resting one does” (Ferguson, 158). Martin problematizes the resting she does too, as she drags “[herself] out by her hair.” Martin also seems to hint at, if not embrace, a multiplicity of identity with that figure (one part of her drags and the other part is dragged) and in the term “forbidden planet.” What exists on a forbidden planet that her regular cultures forbid? It can be said that mobility seems to be forbidden, as early Riot Grrrls wanted to remain in established powerful feminine spaces. It also seems that multiplicity is forbidden, as Riot Grrrls dealt in a simple binary of “girl” and “boy,” which didn’t include intersectional identities. Martin’s forbidden planet certainly exists as a space without rigid categories, and it seems those would include binaries. A space without binaries is opened to the full expression of multiplicity. As Martin will later write, exploring her intersectionality means coming to terms with her own multiplicity. Although the zine *forbidden planet* expresses her ambivalence toward multiplicity, Martin’s forbidden planet will include mobile *and* multiple subjects.

Martin’s messy and forbidden breach of categories leads her to explore the strata of self beneath those structures, which strengthens, but does not complete, a picture of multiplicity. Her exploration unearths a plethora of creative and contradictory imagery that explain her self. Indeed, Piepmeier notes that the zine “is a medium that captures, flux, contradiction, and fragmentation and uses those things not as problems to be resolved but as sources of creative energy” (Piepmeier, 91). Martin details her understanding of plurality that stems from her ethnoracial background in most of *forbidden planet*’s writing, including “insider - outsider,” “Gemini” and “alien i.d.” The piece “insider – outsider” details Martin’s experience of visiting Chinatown in New York with her grandmother and mother and how she feels stereotyped as white in Chinese communities and as Chinese in white communities. She feels that her self is not an intact identity but mutates from space to space. She has multiple selves. However, she

still wishes she could integrate those identities into a single person. The manifold imagery in “Gemini” represents such a desire. She first describes her “layered identity which is covered with blankets of different consistencies and textures — some harsh gray wool all scratchy and rough, others soft and plushy flannel” (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 16). The blankets represent the personalities she sports in different spaces, and the imagery depicts an identity beneath the blankets, which she wishes she could throw off. The primary metaphors of the piece are strata of wallpaper, which she draws from “The Yellow Wallpaper,” and dual personalities described by the Gemini horoscope. She also explains her multiplicity as a “Russian nesting doll,” as furniture with layers upon layers of paint and as a present “waiting to be unwrapped,” which are figures that imply a singular self at the core (Martin, *forbidden*, 17). She explicitly, tenuously hopes “at the core” there is “one central integrated personality” (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 17). Nevertheless, she reveals she has yet to see such a person. Although she wants a single self, she comes to realize that she draws such a desire from culture’s expectations and begins to embrace her non-conform multiplicity. Martin’s assertions in “alien i.d.” suggest that a search for one identity is coercively instigated and flawed, because ‘self’ is an innately manifold being.

Martin works past her core self fantasy in writing “alien i.d.” to permit the mobility and plurality of experience. Martin writes that she has “been thinking about my identity a lot lately,” and “it seems like i’ve just got a million of them and they all seem to interact and contradict each other as i move from one to the other” (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 14). She feels she has a personality for every setting and peer group in her life. Her self is complex, rather than a simple category like “girl,” and it moves and changes from one space to another. Although she initially feels disconcerted by her plurality as she moves to accept it, she begins to recognize and shed her fantasy of singularity. Martin adds, “the only place that i am me, lauren, whole, is within my

own head” (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 14). She realizes that being a “whole person” is a fantasy in her head. Ferguson asserts that it is the task of the mobile subject to recognize that the inward and outward push toward singularity is a mystification: “Ironic recognition of their own patterns of insistence can help balance their desires for a stable and simple home in the world with recognition that neither stability nor simplicity is available” (Ferguson, 183). In “alien i.d.,” Martin seems to consciously weigh her contrastive desires and privilege her felt experience of multiplicity. She directly ties her recognition of multiplicity to her zine: “and this all relates to how i’ve been thinking about my zine and what i want it to be” (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 14). She worries that her earlier zines are “melodramatic or childishly superficial or idealistic,” but realizes that “i AM a dramatic person, i can be immature, i do believe in change” (Martin, *forbidden planet*, 14). She moves to accept her self, even if a full person, as multiple and mutating, neither continuous nor coherent. And her zine serves as a space to represent her multiple and complex experience.

Indeed, Martin argues that her zine should reflect her self and thus should be multiple as well. Her zine becomes a space for her diffuse being. She is a Riot Grrrl, and her zine is a RG zine, but she refuses to be just a Riot Grrrl:

like there are all these things pulling me from the inside, trying to take me into a certain direction with my zine. do i want YMAWL to be a lit zine or a riot grrrl zine or a personal zine or a political zine or an indiepop zine and shouldn’t i make up my mind already? but why should i separate these things out in the name of coherence and continuity? i am nothing but coherent. they are all part of me therefore they do relate. because i am a whole person, not just a writer or just a riot grrrl or just a person inflicted with depression, etc. etc.

it's just that i don't know. i don't know exactly who i am these days or what my zine is.

(Martin, *forbidden planet*, 15)

She has various elements “pulling me from the inside,” pulling her into different selves, and her zine reflects that plurality. She wants to blend the personal and political, as Adrienne Rich did in the 1970s, yet she also desires to transcend Rich’s push for the expression of essentialized “women’s” experience (Rich, 1095-1096).²⁵ There certainly remains a desire for coherence, a desire to know who she is and what her zine is. But she is no longer scared by what she does not know. Through creating her zine space, she accepts her indescribable multiplicity. Indeed, Ferguson asserts that the mobile subject finds “the resources for de-articulating and rearticulating” herself in the various locations she occupies (Ferguson, 163). Zines are a location and a resource for articulating Martin’s multiple self. A zine of multiplicity, rather than a search for impossible singularity, grounds her identity.

The zine as a grounding and grounded space indicates that it remains important in a study of zines to maintain a concept of actual spaces and borders, even though mobile subjectivities seem to have limitless movement. I thus cannot fully adopt Ferguson’s theory of mobile subjectivity, as Geraldine Pratt critiques it in asserting that Ferguson does not attend to “the boundaries that anchor identities”:

There are many forms of domination, many borders, operating at different scales, and we continue to be situated within and by them. It seems important to thematize the construction of boundaries and to understand the complexity of this boundary construction in ways that take us beyond the dualities of center and margin. (Pratt, 18)

²⁵ Rich invokes Mary Daly’s women’s space “on the boundaries of patriarchy” to describe a space of expression by and for women: “Women are speaking to and of women in these poems, out of a newly released courage to name, to love each other, to share risk and grief and celebration” (Rich, 1095-1906).

Just as there are certainly spaces dominated by power structures — a county court house for example — there are spaces that the disempowered create and intermittently inhabit. Those spaces do not flow one into the other but rather have shaped borders that situate individuals who live in and around them. Pratt, like Ferguson, asserts that the language of center and margin cannot describe such actual spaces and their boundaries. They argue that a model of mobility between a multiplicity of specific spaces, rather than one of stagnant and vague positions in either the center or the margin, more closely matches the reality of subjectivity. Indeed, Pratt adds, “By understanding that we as individuals move between/across margins and centers, we can destabilize unexamined dualisms and boundaries” (Pratt, 15). Note that Pratt refers to the plurality of margins and centers, spaces of power and disempowerment, rather than a binary of margin/center. Piepmeier describes that Martin increasingly theorized space and identity in zines, as manifested by *Quantify*, the zine she wrote in graduate school: “*Quantify* zines ... are as theoretically rich and sophisticated as many academic feminist publications, grappling in nuanced ways with the power structures that shape her social location and the ways in which she can manipulate those structures and work within them” (Piepmeier, 128). Ethnoracial zinesters, including Martin, grasp and assert that they operate in various spaces, some dominant and some dominated, that influence their multiple selves. They claim the zine as a space of empowered self-representation that can subvert spaces that dominate them.

III. Daily Practice and Michel de Certeau’s Tactics to Claim Space

With Pratt’s actual spaces of power and disempowerment in mind, it becomes important to analyze exactly *how* mobile subjects can move between and claim spaces, and Michel de Certeau’s theory of tactics becomes especially illuminating. Ferguson theorizes that mobile subjects employ subversive “daily practices” to resist imposed structures of power, which

resembles Michel de Certeau's *bricolage*, or "poetic ways of 'making do'" (de Certeau, xv) in their creative re-working of given material: "The practices by which mobile subjectivities produce their provisional identities open up the possibility of producing against the grain, of participating in the daily practices that mark gender, race, and class in an unpredictable way, on a slant, and thus making a difference" (Ferguson, 162). Ethnoracial Riot Grrrls' ironic re-use of cultural material such as advertisement imagery to critique gender and racial stereotypes seems a perfect example of practice and participation that marks categories in "an unpredictable way" — in a way that shapes their own identity. In a lecture quoted in Piepmeier, Radway asserts that zines illustrate "radical generativity" in "the way they combine and recombine rich repertoires of contradictory cultural fragments" (Piepmeier, 91). De Certeau would term such practices "tactics" of the disempowered, which include bricolage. He asserts the distinction between *strategy*, which the empowered use to establish place in order to impose structure and law (as in the modern city), and *tactics*, which the disempowered use in temporal moments of opportunity (de Certeau, 39). He sees tactics in daily practice, like reading, shopping, and, especially, speaking. As bricolage, these tactics or daily practices take material imposed by the structures of power and re-work it to undermine power in moments of opportunity. These subversive tactics have potential for taking the space governed by systems of power.

While there are clear similarities between Ferguson's daily practices performed "on a slant" and de Certeau's tactics, Ferguson's emphasis on geographical language, including "mobile" and "spaces," adds an important qualification to my use of de Certeau. Ferguson's assertion that mobile subjects produce and participate "on a slant" to negotiate hegemony insists on the importance of space to the disempowered, which contrasts de Certeau's assertion that a subject with tactics "does not have a place" (de Certeau, xix). De Certeau does concede that

tactics “redistribute” space that an order creates, or they initiate “at least a certain play in that order, a space for maneuvering of unequal forces” (de Certeau, 18). However, elsewhere he asserts of a tactic, or of a subject using a tactic in my use, “Whatever it wins, it does not keep” (de Certeau, xix). There is certainly an argument that no space is permanent, but I rather want to highlight Ferguson’s addition to de Certeau’s tactics: if a mobile subject constantly inhabits one or another space and employs tactics (or daily practices) from its present location to move between and use spaces, it seems tactics must have a spatial point of origin. Subjectivity requires space, and tactics stem from subjects, so tactics are also spatial. Therefore, I argue that tactics can, indeed, claim space in a significant way, as seen in the example of zine space.

Thus, I use de Certeau’s ideas surrounding tactics while problematizing the binary of strategy and tactics that grounds his work. A binary of empowered and disempowered (which is useful to describe states in the world) underwrites the assumption of strategy and tactics, as those in power use strategy and the disempowered use tactics. Yet his distinction that strategy uses space while tactics use time is flawed because subjects who employ tactics exist in space and use tactics to claim space. Riot Grrrls existed in the oppressed spaces of punk and mainstream society before they subversively, linguistically and productively claimed empowered zine space. Although I will use the term ‘tactics’ to describe the subversive practices RG zinesters employed to create space, the relationship between strategy and tactics does not exist with a clear border. As I will show, the disempowered can use tactics to claim empowered spaces. And, though I focus on tactics, it is arguable that the empowered take advantage of time, as in staging a biased public debate before a crucial vote, just as much as space. Furthermore, it remains important to keep in mind a continuum of empowered and disempowered groups so that it remains a more useful distinction than the center and margin.

Zinesters claim the space of the blank page through linguistically and artistically creating and re-creating ‘on a slant.’ De Certeau proposes the concept of *linguistic* tactics, in which language users tactically employ the linguistic material at hand to subvert structure:

There are manipulations of language relative to occasions and are intended to seduce, captivate, or invert the linguistic position of the addressee. Whereas grammar watches over the ‘propriety’ of terms, rhetorical alterations (metaphorical drifts, elliptical condensations, metonymic miniaturizations, etc.) point to the use of language by speakers in particular situations of ritual or actual linguistic combat” (de Certeau, 39).

This tactical linguistic combat subverts a linguistic structure that imposes space by exposing and attacking its foundation; it is what allows the disempowered to claim the space. RG zinesters’ use of purposeful misspellings, lack of punctuation and capitalization, heavy use of ellipses and tight typography defy ‘proper’ language that underlies power. Their re-appropriation of innocent-girl and ’50s-house-wife advertising images, often accompanied by hand-written interpretive comments or printed beside textual or visual pieces that the images ironically contrast, challenge mainstream cultural intention by re-producing them ‘on a slant.’ Indeed, RG zinesters commonly re-print texts without permission, for satirical or serious aims, and comment on texts to undercut or support a message. These linguistic — and artistic — forms of tactical combat claim the space of the zine as a space of Grrrl being.

IV. Mimi Nguyen Tactically Re-presents and Re-tells ‘On a Slant’

Ethnoracial Riot Grrrls, including Mimi Nguyen, particularly master the art of re-telling and re-producing popular and proper culture and language to take space. Nguyen introduces *Slant* in 1995 as a zine that addresses the intersections of racism and gender within and without Riot Grrrl by tactically re-presenting stereotypes and her experiences as a Vietnamese-American

woman (see fig. 9). She picks the title as a way to reclaim the racist term (which derogatively refers to the eye shape of people of Asian descent), which she re-defines and queers in her introduction: “*slant*: that enduring (and *so* endearing) gendered, anti-Asian slur about the angle of my pussy; and honey, if you’re askin’, you’ll never, never know” (Nguyen, *Slant* #5, 2).

Nguyen employs the authoritative format of a dictionary entry to tactically re-define “slant.” She furthermore illustrates how the term becomes personal by shifting from “gendered, anti-Asian”

to “my” in order to confront her oppressors. In changing the term’s meaning to refer to a body part she has agential ability to conceal, she takes control of the term. Even so, the phrase, “honey, if

you’re askin’, you’ll never, never know” could be read

as an appropriation of African-American linguistic usage; ethnoracial Riot Grrrls are not immune to being racially insensitive, but Nguyen’s seeming use of African-American language could stem from actual cultural, rather than conveniently constructed, proximity. Nguyen tactically constructs the zine’s issue number as well as the title; the first issue is officially *Slant number five*, but Nguyen acknowledges in her introduction, “No, there haven’t been four other issues” (Nguyen, *Slant* #5, 1). The fifth issue of *Slant* is her first issue. Her explanation is that she “used to do another zine and hardly wanted to start out at ‘one’ again” (Nguyen, *Slant* #5, 1).



Fig. 9. Nguyen aims to tactically re-claim the language of oppressors (Nguyen, *Slant* #5, 1-2). Courtesy of Mimi Nguyen and the Barnard Zine Library.

Nguyen tactically picks the issue number to obscure time and grant the authority of multiple issues to the new zine. Although Nguyen does not derive the title in allusion to Ferguson or producing ‘on a slant,’ it is difficult to distinguish the approaches. Ferguson theorizes the subversive reproduction of existing cultural material while Nguyen employs such an approach.

The covers of *Slant #5* and *#6*, which feature Nguyen’s hand-drawn images, comment on the tactical purpose of the zine (see fig. 10). *Slant #5* features two women of Asian ethnicity in tough, sagging, workers clothing as if ready to battle, which foreshadows and literalizes a

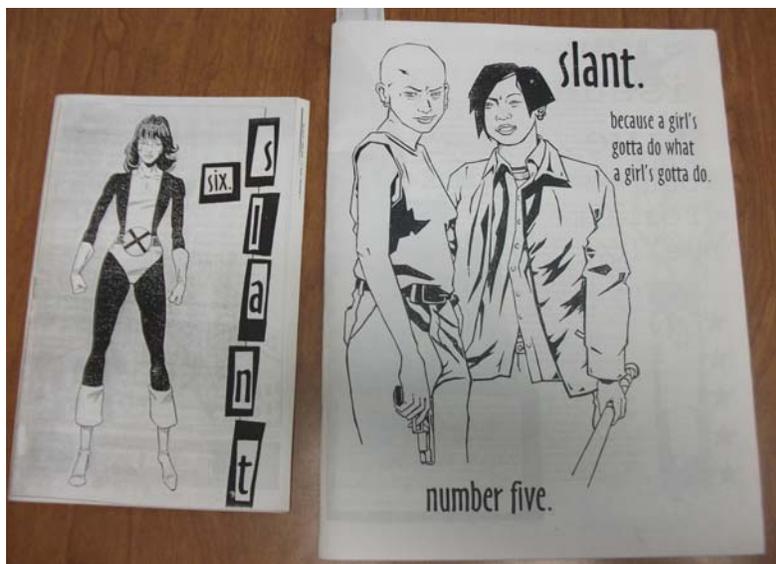


Fig. 10. Tough, tactical ethnoracial women on the covers of *Slant #5* and *#6*. Courtesy of Mimi Nguyen and the Barnard Zine Library.

manifestation of de Certeau’s linguistic combat within the zine’s pages. The image recalls *Bikini Kill #1*’s imagery in chapter one of a woman whose “body says it, slung into my clothes” (*BK #1*, “Boy”). Nguyen proffers a similar image with an ethnoracial slant. The image’s stark black-and-white geometric lines, reminiscent of comic-book sketches, compliment the women’s harsh appearances; one has a shaved head; another has a short razor cut; both wear intimidating scowls directed toward the viewer. Perhaps most importantly, the women grip weapons — a handgun and a baseball bat — as if prepared to fight anyone who dare oppose them. The issue’s slogan reads, “because a girl’s gotta do what a girl’s gotta do,” seemingly to explain why the women on the cover hold weapons yet equally explaining the linguistic content within (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, cover). The slogan

resonates for *Slant*'s struggle to create space for the underrepresented and oppressed groups that include herself. Nguyen highlights that she engages in combat because there is a behemoth force to struggle against. Because she is on the disempowered side, "a girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do." Similarly, *Slant #6* features a hand-drawn image of a woman in a super-hero-like costume with clenched fists; she wears a belt with a large X around her waist and stares down her viewers. The X seems to represent her refusal to accept manifestations of 'proper' power and her commitment to fight against them. The superhero imagery is traditionally masculine, an exaggeration of 'proper' power, but Nguyen re-uses that imagery for her cause. Indeed, Nguyen notes elsewhere that she has re-read Wonder Woman as a powerful image for women. Nguyen's woman, like Wonder Woman, is a strong woman ready to fight an infantry.

Claiming space, as de Certeau illustrates, involves tactically re-claiming representation, which is precisely what Nguyen aims to do in *Slant #5*. Nguyen writes another slogan in large, typewriter print in the zine's introduction: "out to reclaim yellow peril" (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, 1). The term "yellow peril" originated in the nineteenth century to refer to Asian-American immigrants and was used to refer to the Japanese during and after World War II, as both groups were considered to be threats to "American" ways of life. The goal of reclaiming "yellow peril" is inseparable from the title's aim of problematizing and redefining "slant." Both repossessions highlight what is racist/sexist about the terms and urge to take them back so that they cannot be used in the original way. Furthermore, the repossession means to re-define the terms as positive, powerful and in opposition to oppressors. Nguyen is explicitly interested in re-appropriation and re-telling through the zine. She writes of how her younger self thought "a slinky, sequined Vietnamese singer ... was the original crooner of the fabulous 80s hit, 'Hit me with your best shot!' and that Pat Benetar covered *her*" (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, 2). She promptly explains, "I'm

totally fascinated by the ways we appropriate, counterappropriate and otherwise re-define culture, with the differences in how people, depending on their cultural identities, remember these details of origin and imitation and revision” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, 2). Nguyen’s description of differential cultural usage and subversion here mirrors de Certeau’s example of Native American’s negotiation of imposed Western culture: “Indians nevertheless often *made of* the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind” (de Certeau, xiii). Nguyen, similar to Native Americans, refuses to be controlled by American cultural norms and will re-tell culture to subvert it.

Nguyen uses the word ‘strategy,’ rather than ‘tactic,’ but an examination of her application reveals that we can use de Certeau’s notion of ‘tactics’ to explicate Nguyen’s linguistic and representational practices. Nguyen emphasizes that her zine is “completely strategic,” saying further, “I agonized long and hard, debated endlessly, over every word” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, 2). The thought put into each word highlights that she employs time and care to maximize the limited space of her zine because she does not have advantage of power to spit out words on a billboard at the swipe of a credit card. If using the Ferguson-de Certeau model of the empowered and disempowered (taking care to keep a continuum in mind), Nguyen indeed employs mobile tactics. The first page of her zine features a photocopy of a card written in Vietnamese that is given out at women’s health clinics in San Jose, California, which has a substantial Vietnamese population. The zine’s separate English translation reads, “‘i will help you get inside the clinic. please park your car in back’” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, 1). The Vietnamese card works beneath the realm of ‘proper’ English language, thus its form alone subverts the English language and its companionate cultural norms. Furthermore, its content undermines ‘proper’ norms because it helps Vietnamese women get around pro-life protestors, who form an

antagonistic space outside the clinic, to get “inside the clinic.” The card tactically challenges language and employs movement from an antagonistic space to a safe space, which contains the goal of inexpensive women’s healthcare. Nguyen certainly acts and writes with subversive tactics in mind.

Slant #5’s focus on linguistic combat is particularly illustrated in the piece, “war. notagainnotagainnot...,” in which she re-tells a conversation between herself and a revolution-seeking “earnest white boy” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, “war”). She describes the San Francisco boy as having “a well-fingered Fanon paperback shoved in back pocket, cruising Valencia and Mission cafes for the revolution” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, “war”). He is whimsically deviant and blames war on the intangible forces of “the Man/the System/the Motherfucker” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, “war”). He joins her table because “he thinks he has found” revolution in her as she reads “Chomsky with a frown” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, “war”). Nguyen re-creates the scene without dialogue to heighten the interpretation of his racist and sexist behavior. She begins by writing, “This is about a war,” seeming to refer to the Vietnam War, which he asks her about (somewhat problematically) because she is Vietnamese. She quickly comments that she and the boy “are not talking about the same war (not now)” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, “war”). In his forced conversation with her, they imagine the Vietnam War differently, occurring in different ways in different places at different times. He valorizes it as geographically and historically distant from left-wing America’s artistic imagination of the Vietnamese side: “He is thinking Viet Cong, the vibrant glory of the proletariat immortalized in broad, minimalist strokes and sweeping rhetoric. He is picturing a guerilla combustion on celluloid, movie stills from a weekly magazine review of the conflict” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, “war”). He wholeheartedly imbibes glamorized depictions of the past war and appropriates the images to bolster his desire for present revolution.

She, by contrast, resists popular depictions to re-tell the actual effects for her and similar Vietnam refugees in America:

I am thinking of small towns seething with something other than Agent Orange and napalm. The Midwest, for instance, firecrackers in mailboxes on the Fourth of July. Klansmen in Texas fishing towns. Vietnam veterans staring into cups and avenging their imaginary POW/MIAs in elementary school classrooms. AK-47s slung across hunched shoulders. Teenage thugs stomping heads and ribcages. ignoring the pleas, the regrets: 'I should never have come here!' (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, "war")

When she notes "small towns seething with something other than Agent Orange and napalm," she re-uses common imagery of the Vietnam War to indicate that there are effects beyond those the media broadcasts. She re-tells the story of how neighbors left a firecracker in her family's mailbox on July Fourth to highlight another side of the conflict. Towns burn with racism that violently manifests itself in the mailboxes and across the "heads and ribcages" of refugees. Racists have no sympathy because, as the earnest boy, they will only see one side of the conflict. Nguyen points to its complexity and endurance. Vietnamese refugees such as she live with imposed fear, forced regret and raw reminders of the war. Nguyen re-presents the scene, in contrast to the boy's imagination of the Vietnam conflict, to write an experience that is not commonly represented — an experience that subverts the 'truth' of the Vietnam War to which the boy clings. The writing provides a space for the representation entwined with Nguyen's self.

Nguyen continues to re-tell her interaction by drawing out the importance of gender's intersection with race, which also subverts white Riot Grrrls' assertion that race has nothing to do with gender. She suddenly shifts angles by writing, "But no, this is about sex" (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, "war"). Or rather, it is about sex as an ethnic woman. And war and violence do not

fall away. She argues that for intersectional identities, particularly immigrants, gender, ethnicity and violence can be deeply entwined in lived experience and, problematically, from the perspective of oppressive consumers of racialized experiences: “I am supposed to arouse revolutionary fervor and hopefully maybe otherwise. Girls with guns are hot ... Fuck a refugee, it increases your intimacy with a history usually found in textbooks or Time-Life series. War by proximity, poverty through association” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, “war”). Similar to white Riot Grrrls who appropriate racialized imagery to associatively enhance their own oppression, ‘earnest boy’ views her racialized, gendered body as a sexual tool to use in order to get closer to the excitement of revolution, to the pathos of poverty. Indeed, Nguyen continues, “Sleeping with the enemy or the enemy of thine own enemies is a great accomplishment for the self-fashioned guerrilla-hero who imagined that this is as close as he’ll ever get to war, to blood, to death” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, “war”). Here, the boy objectifies her because of her gender *and* ethnicity; Nguyen emphasizes that ethnoracial women are oppressed and discriminated against because of the overlap. To separate race from gender the way white Riot Grrrls attempt would be impossible for Nguyen. She needs a space for both. Nguyen confronts the stereotypes attached to her intersectional identity to claim powerful space for her identity. Indeed, Piepmeier argues that in revealing how stereotypes function, zines “also reveal the ways in which zine creators can use densely mythogenic material of their culture to resist and to create tactical subjectivities and intersectional identities” (Piepmeier, 141).

While de Certeau privileges the linguistic tactics of speech and enunciation, Nguyen uses written tactics to claim space, illuminating the possibilities of written language. De Certeau claims that linguistic tactics occur in speech because the speaker (not writer) appropriates language, addresses an individual or individuals to establish a “contract,” and establishes a

present moment (de Certeau, 33). Furthermore, de Certeau argues the speech act constitutes a “*realization* of the linguistic system,” going as far as to assert, “language is real only in the act of speaking” (de Certeau, 33). He seems to draw an arbitrary boundary between speaking and writing to say that linguistic tactics can occur only in speech. Yet speeches can be read; written prose can seem like spoken language. Using Nguyen’s zine as an example, I argue that writing fulfills all of the features of de Certeau’s idea of speech and thus can manifest linguistic tactics. Her zine, like most RG zines, appropriates language with its frequent poetic form and its improper punctuation, capitalization and typography in prose. She highlights her tactical (what she terms “strategic”) use of language: “everything e v e r y t h i n g i do is completely strategic” (Nguyen, *Slant #6*, 4). Such precise emphasis arguably could only occur in writing. Nguyen, again representative of most RG zinesters, also addresses readers throughout her zine to confront and support them. She furthermore addresses readers outside the zine form. Zinesters often included hand-written notes in mailed exchanges from author to recipient. Finally, I argue that zinesters establish a present moment, which de Certeau says, “creates a before and an after” (de Certeau, 33). Not only are most zines stamped with the issue’s date; many zines are also very aware of their historical moment and acknowledge issues of the time. They do not claim to be timeless. Indeed, the most well-known RG slogan is “Revolution Grrrl Style Now.” They emphasize the importance of the present moment. Writing realizes (and can subvert) the system of language as much, if not more, than speech.

Indeed, LANGUAGE writers and theorists argue that speech’s seeming naturalness can mask the systems of power implicit in language, while writing allows subjects to emphasize that

language is a repository and technique of structures of power.²⁶ Therefore, writing better serves linguistic tactics that wish to challenge dominant cultures and canons. LANGUAGE poets generally rejected “speech-based poetics” and the concept that “words should derive from speech” and turned to language in all its materiality (Silliman, xvi). This turn drew attention to the constructedness of poetry so that, in a line reminiscent of Nguyen, “the poet must be responsible for everything” (Silliman, xvi). The larger point of LANGUAGE writing, according to Allan Quatermain in the introduction to *Disjunctive Poetics*, is that “reality is not a preconstituted world ‘out there’ to be experienced, any more than a poem is a predetermined schematic of rhyme, organised [sic] rhythms, and identifiable themes (Quatermain, 1). They thus hoped to liberate writing and experience from coercively constituted systems. Indeed, Quatermain argues that alternative writing, by “abandoning normative syntax, and even intelligibility,” “undoes the rules of hierarchy and authority as set patterns” (Quatermain, 19). LANGUAGE poets strove to bring forward the purposed structure of language in writing and break its rules in order to weaken the structure and allow room for further creativity.

Similarly, Nguyen uses the tactic of impermeable writing to problematize linguistic representation, thus opening a space to represent her alternate experience. She chooses not to treat her zine as a diary, because she believes representation can never be a ‘pure’ confession. Nguyen writes, “i chose to reveal i do so because it serves a purpose that does not involve being honest, vulnerable, or accessible (‘plain (*english*) language’ doesn’t = accessible)” (Nguyen,

²⁶ LANGUAGE poets did not self-identify with the term, which was drawn from the literary magazine of the same name. A wide variety of writers are often categorized under the LANGUAGE movement beginning in the 1970s, including Lyn Hejinian, Kit Robinson, Charles Bernstein, Susan Howe, Michael Gottlieb, Ray DiPalma and Robert Grenier. Although LANGUAGE poetry is generally considered a postmodern school, some modernist writers, including Gertrude Stein and Lois Zukofsky are often thought of as immediate precursors to LANGUAGE poets.

Slant #6, 4). To use language that assumes accessibility, as conventions serving speech, suggests language is naturally available and neutral. Instead, Nguyen, like LANGUAGE poets, uses language to manifest its structure in order to show how that structure, like culture, reflects and maintains power structures. The revelation of culture's artifice wedges open the space of cultural representation to include Nguyen's experience. Indeed, Charles Bernstein, a primary theorist of LANGUAGE poets, argues that "impermeable materials" in writing, those that resist accessibility to and absorption by the reader, "will work to create the desired *textural* space" (Bernstein, 14). The "anticonventional," "transgressive," "fractured," "diffuse," and "interruptive" nature of impermeable language clears space for a non-conformist representation of identity (Bernstein, 20). Language represents culture, and that representation is a war between groups with cultural power and those, like Nguyen, with only linguistic tactics. Nguyen adds, "i believe politics (as a discursive battleground) is a matter of iconography: who gets to represent? what gets represented how? when?" (Nguyen, *Slant #6*, 4). Language is a battleground, and Nguyen clearly exercises linguistic tactics.

In the piece "not sincere," Nguyen explicitly contrasts sincerity and tactics while refuting the possibility of real sincerity in writing. She writes of zines, "let's face it: this forum is neither open nor honest. this is not me pouring my heart out to you, uncensored, stream-of-consciousness style, vulnerable heart-on-sleeve fashion. i'm a fan of telling lies to power. (do you have power?)" (Nguyen, *Slant #6*, "not sincere"). She resists the tropes of sincerity and honest expression, therefore highlighting their actuality as tropes. Nguyen parenthetically confronts her readers to break the continuity and naturalness of reading. She emphasizes that writing is coercive. Those with power seem to write honestly and openly, like the masculine luxury of carefree expression seen in *Bikini Kill #1* in chapter one. But Nguyen knows those

individuals are not honest and open; she knows they consciously exclude and ignore ethnoracial Grrrls while claiming to include them with a mention of white privilege. Because Nguyen does not have the privilege to write with such false sincerity, she takes up the linguistic tactic of lying. She continues, “i’m about strategy and maneuver ... i have no heart (or none i’ll ever let you see). instead i’m calculated, i analyze everything with a cyborgian eye” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, “not sincere”). If speech makes language seem natural and accessible, she writes to make language seem like a product made, as a cyborg is made, to serve its creators. Those in power can use language as if it were natural and remain pleasingly represented, because language is structured to privilege their representation. Those without power do best to highlight the structures behind power — including language — to independently carve out a space for their representation.

While Nguyen argues against confessional writing that assumes the sincerity of language, she also views tactical silence as powerful. Nguyen emphasizes that she doesn’t feel “safe enough” to “share my secrets” and doesn’t think she’d “feel any less alienated if I did (share)” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, 38). She argues that she doesn’t have to confess the gritty details of her experience in order to claim a space of existence for her subjectivity. Rather, she believes that the stereotype of the “‘inscrutable Oriental’ in Western racial/racist colonialist lore,” though “totally demonized and dehumanizing,” was “a very real anti-imperialist practice that frustrated the hell out of European colonial traders, tourists, etc.. who needed everything fucking spelled O-U-T and were pissed that Asian nationals refused to comply” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, 38). She sees silence and omission in speech and writing as potential tactics to refuse the prying minds of white readers. Indeed, those white readers, like many early Riot Grrrls, often appropriate racial imagery and narrative to bolster their own claims to oppression. Some white readers could also use confessional details of ‘foreign’ experience as further fuel to estrange (in the double sense of

ostracize and make strange) ethnoracial subjectivities. Nguyen refuses to give her white readers the ability to use her life experiences against her.

However, Nguyen still tells stories that represent her experience because she tells the stories on a slant to simultaneously claim space and destabilize existing spaces. She describes her stories in contrast to confessional writing: “The stories I *do* want to tell aren’t really meant to be revealing in *that* way; they’re supposed to represent and reveal parts of that imbalance, to make visible the uneven-ness of the conditions under which we live and decide to confess/not confess/tell/not tell” (Nguyen, *Slant #5*, 38). She writes to draw attention to the systems that shape experiences, like racism and sexism and its intersection, and influence how they can be told or not told. As we’ve seen, discourse itself is one of those systems that shapes how experiences are ‘properly’ told, and to re-tell often means to mis-use language. The experiences she writes, such as her interaction with the earnest, revolution-seeking white boy, uncover the daily discrepancies of white and ethnoracial experience. And *how* Nguyen writes those scenarios then exposes the linguistic difficulties that an ethnoracial woman, a subjectivity that the language isn’t structured to represent positively, encounters.

Nguyen’s writing illuminates the creative tactics she develops to subvert the very language she has to use, which allows her to destabilize the spaces of power while claiming a space of her own. She writes of her re-tellings:

I think I want to be disruptive in these situations, but in a way that isn’t *usual*: though sometimes maybe I’ll yell, other times maybe I’ll just slowly seep under your fingernails and eyelids in the ink and the words imprinted here and plant seeds of uncertainty, doubt, sudden (mis-)recognition. I like better the idea of a slow poisoning that takes its own

sweet, sweet time, better than the forced shock of, say, a stabbing or a gun blast.

(Nguyen, *Slant 5*, 38)

She sees the tactical mis-use of language in zines — “the words imprinted here” — as a weapon to slowly, covertly challenge coercive power. She wants to cultivate doubt in spaces of power in order to disrupt and displace them. She does so to claim her own space, the “here” of the zine. In that sense, the zine itself is a battleground, a site of linguistic combat, the space where she begins to “slowly seep under your fingernails and eyelids in the ink.” She, as other ethnoracial Grrrl zinesters, uses the zine to represent her experience, writing in a way that destabilizes dominant and oppressive spaces and cannons.

Conclusion

In ethnoracial Riot Grrrls, I have argued, we clearly see how tactical writing, writing “on a slant,” contributes to claiming space for representation and power, and those claimed spaces subvert and shift dominant spaces of power. In particular, Nguyen’s zine *Slant* indicates how ethnoracial zinesters consciously employed subversive re-telling and re-presenting to draw out their experienced intersectional identity in the zine. Ethnoracial zine space pushes aside white RG zine space, punk space and dominant spaces of mainstream culture, which lack (or contain flawed) representations of ethnoracial identities. I begin my conclusion by highlighting my main points with a few select examples from Nguyen’s 1997 compilation zine “Evolution of a Race Riot.” I then address an important counterargument to a plural vision of space and subjectivity. Lastly, I will look to consequent directions for my argument and connected fields of Riot Grrrl research.

As early Riot Grrrls claim space for their powerfully feminine selves, ethnoracial Riot Grrrls claim “zine space” to represent their mobile and multiple subjectivities. Participants in both groups require space to representationally exist, and “zine space” moreover enables powerful personal being. In Eliade’s terms, these Grrrls found zine space as a world that organizes and empowers their lives. Ethnoracial Riot Grrrls’ literal displacement from nations, communities and homes augments their need for space. For instance, Nguyen writes of the compilation zine “Evolution of a Race Riot” in its re-printed flyer, “this is about how when they scream ‘go home!’ we don’t know where to go because we can’t reverse a thousand years of colonization, war, or genocide, because ‘home’ is a multinational corporate playground of free trade zones or US military bases or a uranium strip-mine” (Nguyen, “EoRR,” 82). Nguyen, as an ethnoracial woman with an intersectional identity, is not welcome in any existent space because structures of

power dominate those spaces. Her lack of space, which governing groups intend, disallows her empowered self-representation.

Similar to ethnoracial Grrrl zinesters generally, Nguyen wants to destabilize those powers and assert her self in the representational space of zines. She writes, “this is about taking back the conversation @ race & re-centering it around ourselves, not as voiceless victims or the objects-to-be-rescued of white punk antiracist discourses, but as pivotal subjects & political actors (theorists/activists)” (Nguyen, “EoRR,” 82). She writes the zine as a representation of her self on a slant — on her slant, which challenges dominant stereotypes and affirms her identity as a dynamic theorist and activist. Piepmeier argues that zines provide “tools for challenging existing power structures,” and I assert that such a tactical challenge creates and occurs in zine space (Piepmeier, 161). Zines as representations recall Lefebvre’s theory that representations, whether they are architectural or linguistic, produce space and cause it to persist in time. In creating the material zine and altering language within in, Nguyen creates a tangible space of representation, which Nguyen expresses as “this.” She creates and claims zine space.

Ethnoracial Grrrls’ creation of zine space entwines with their mis-use and use of language and linguistic tactics. For zines to produce a representational space, they must displace dominant powers that maintain space. Since dominate powers use language as a coercive tool to control space (and since language encodes certain discursive forms of power), taking space involves altering language. In her re-printed ad for “EoRR,” Nguyen continues, “this is about finding the language & vocabulary to describe belonging to these multiple, provisional & sometimes contradictory social spaces, communities, & identifications --racial, ethnic, cultural, musical, religious, lingual, political, sexual, etc.--and how we negotiate the gaps, friction, etc.” (Nguyen, “EoRR,” 82). Nguyen descriptively embodies mobile subjectivity as she employs

language to move between and negotiate “multiple” spaces, identities and the “gaps” in between. Just as she needs to find space to represent her self, she needs to find a language to describe her mobile and multiple self; she concurrently takes on the two projects. Language enables her self-representation, and space empowers that representation. Nguyen employs lack of punctuation, capitalization, and, most clearly, ampersands —as many LANGUAGE writers did — to draw attention to the constructedness of language and the need to mis-use it in order to destabilize the coercive system and claim representational space. As Cixous wants to imagine a feminine writing to express repressed women’s experiences, Nguyen wants to use language alternatively, tactically — and textually — to communicate her particular experience and claim a space for it.

Indeed, Nguyen’s use of language diverges from most second-wave feminists who favored speech over writing. Mary Daly’s 1973 book *Beyond God the Father* privileges speech as the tool for creating an empowered women’s space, which she also sees as entwined with language: women “are enabled to declare words free from usage insofar as we Speak our lives in an Other context” (Daly, xxvi). Daly capitalizes “Speak” and “Other” to assert the importance of the relation between women’s experience and speech. Similar to Daly, Nguyen’s need to find a “language & vocabulary to describe” an identity of alternate belonging and negotiation deeply relates to creating a space for such being. But, as indicated by Nguyen’s employment of ampersands for example, her use of language is resolutely textual. Directly after Nguyen’s description of finding an alternate language, she concludes, “this is about wanting to create new spaces” (Nguyen, “EoRR,” 82). Nguyen tactically and textually mis-uses the system of language to create her own language, which allows her to displace dominant spaces in order to claim her own.

Lauren McAdam's contribution to "Evolution of a Race Riot" briefly exemplifies ethnoracial Riot Grrrls' inseparable use of written language and zines to claim representational space for subjectivity. The piece, titled "dear You" to indicate its letter form, addresses white punk readers who have repressed and ignored McAdam's participation in punk and Grrrl movements. In masking her expression, white punks disallowed her representation. She uses the pronoun "us/me" when she would regularly use "me," which signifies that her grievance represents that of the ethnoracial Grrrl community. She writes to white-punk readers, "you disguise yerself as conspirators in revolution but you need to examine who's revolution this is gonna be. / who's owning and who's not?" (McAdams, "EoRR," 23). She mis-uses language to write "your" as "yer," which brings attention to and destabilizes ownership. Ownership implies visibility, and thus recognized representation. In other portions of the piece, she demands that they read her printed letter to them and respond. She challenges her oppressors in order to destabilize their space and claim her own on behalf of ethnoracial zinesters.

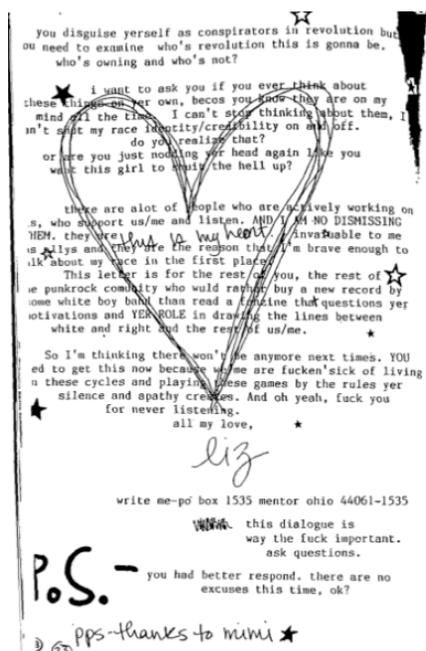


Fig. 11: McAdam's existence on the page ("EoRR," 23). Courtesy of Mimi Nguyen and the Barnard Zine Library.

In criticizing her white counterparts, McAdams writes her self on the page to claim representational space from which to combat her addressees. She first typographically centers her writing on the page to highlight the page as a new and powerful center. In the middle of the piece's second page, McAdams also establishes a typographical gap in her typewriter text to insert the large hand-written cursive phrase, "this is my heart" (McAdams, "EoRR," 23) (see fig. 11). The phrase crucially sits in the center of the zine space, and the hand-written quality reflects a signature of her identity, as if

her 'self' actually exists on the page. Because the page materializes as a space, she exists and operates in a powerful central space. Furthermore, she draws a large heart on top of the text to encompass most of the page. The phrase "this is my heart" rests at the center of the hand-drawn heart to artistically emphasize her presence on the page. McAdams' existence at the center of a textually centered page is vital to claiming the space of a powerfully represented self, and such a discursive move could only occur in writing.

The model of mobile subjectivity and multiplicity of spaces that ethnoracial zinesters propose, which eradicates binary thinking and implies that zinesters can claim empowered space, has an important counterpoint to address. When we remove the clear borderline between empowered and disempowered groups, between men and women or center and margin, it could seem that subjects no longer hold the ability to oppose their oppressors. That boundary, formulated as a binary, could provide necessary oppositional friction for disempowered subjects. Fredric Jameson, Marxist literary critic, posits such a view according to Chela Sandoval, a theorist of third-world and Chicana feminism. In Sandoval's assessment, Jameson argues that in a postmodern world that fragments binaries and beyond, "there is no center to indict, no enemy to accuse, no new revolutionary subject or history to rise and support" (Sandoval, 23). Because subjects no longer think that power stems from one locus, subjective "consciousness" cannot "constitute itself as resistant" (Sandoval, 72). Jameson's argument implies that those who exist in multitudes of disempowered spaces, rather than in the singular disempowered space of a binary, cannot locate and resist imposed power structures, which stem from spaces of power, in order to claim their own empowered spaces for representation. Because I view zine space as just such an empowered space that disempowered subjects can claim, Jameson's argument, at least as Sandoval posits it, could puncture my own.

My argument, which gathers around empowered zine space, requires a view of consciousness as more than oppositional; zine space calls for consciousness that works within and without spaces and their associated systems of representation to create its own space. Sandoval responds to Jameson by positing “differential consciousness” that speaks from — yet deconstructs — “dominant ideology”:

Its powers can be thought of as mobile — not nomadic, but rather cinematographic: a kinetic motion that maneuvers, poetically transfigures, and orchestrates while demanding alienation, perversion, and reformation in both spectators and practitioners. Differential consciousness is the expression of the new subject position called for by Althusser — it permits functioning within, yet beyond, the demands of dominant ideology” (Sandoval, 43).

Instead of oppositional consciousness, Sandoval writes of a consciousness that moves along multiple and intersecting lines of difference. Each space is experientially different, so disempowered subjects can lock onto and challenge dominant spaces in claiming their own. Ethnoracial Riot Grrrls are able to grasp the various spaces of power that oppress them — mainstream culture, punk rock and white Riot Grrrls, for example — because they also work within those spaces. Zinesters subvert those spaces in order to claim a space of power in the zine. Sandoval draws her notion of “differential consciousness” from “U.S. third world feminist theory” that posited “a *tactical subjectivity* with the capacity to de- and re-center, given the forms of power to be moved” (Sandoval, 58). The notion of a tactical subjectivity that can displace spaces of power while claiming its own empowered space parallels ethnoracial Grrrl zinesters. The tactical subject, such as the zinester, employs tactics to destabilize the tools of the empowered; zinesters re-tell ideology, re-present dominant representation and linguistically alter

language. Thus, as illustrations of Sandoval's differential consciousness and tactical subjectivity, ethnoracial Grrrl zinesters function within dominant spaces to master and tactically challenge the spaces' ideology, which enables them to claim a space outside, without, beyond. Ethnoracial Grrrl zinesters manifest Sandoval's theory that refutes Jameson's counterpoint.

In summary, this thesis argued that ethnoracial Grrrl zinesters problematized and pushed aside the white Riot Grrrl binary of boy/girl by confronting the binary and claiming a space for multiplicity and mobility. Both groups of Grrrls used linguistic tactics and represented themselves in the zine in order to produce zine space. However, ethnoracial Grrrls particularly and consciously mastered the tactics of re-telling and re-presenting their intersectional (and stereotyped) identities. Tactics destabilize spaces of power, which allows zinesters to claim and produce a space of their own in the zine. Furthermore, RG zinesters emphasized the importance of written language to tactical subjectivity; their zines highlight the material constructedness of language in order to break its rules and create a new language that helps form a new space.

With my exploration of ethnoracial Grrrl zines, I thus aimed to illustrate how multiply marginalized groups can use tactics to create manifold representational spaces in literature and larger society. Subcultural groups are often aware of language's materiality and its participation in structuring oppression. And they can and do take conscious tactical approaches, such as fracturing language's rules in creating zines, to create their own space that destabilizes and displaces the spaces of societal power. As Lefebvre argues, a representation of space (as in a zine) produces space's existence in time. In departing from Lefebvre (who, like Jameson, is a Marxist critic), I argue that small groups and individuals represent themselves in a DIY zine to create space; they don't have to wait for the forms or content of production and media to change. Indeed, Radway argues that zinesters often wrote zines because they believed our media-based

society “should be altered by the active presence of zines in it”; zines challenged established “hierarchies of forms and voices, the selection of those who are attended to as legitimate, authorized denizens of the major institutions that comprise knowledge production” (Radway, 145). Zinesters produced their own space in zines that actively challenged the dominant spaces and structures stemming from power.

There are two future lines of inquiry that accompany a general study of ethnoracial Grrrl zines: How do ethnoracial zines affect later white zinesters; and how do Riot Grrrl zinesters shape larger society? Riot Grrrl is a particularly zine-based movement that continues into the twenty-first century. In an age of blogs, Riot Grrrls and the underground zine culture continue to produce print zines. The Internet has created new ways for Riot Grrrls to communicate and distribute their zines. While zinesters of the late '90s used chat rooms to network, zinesters now use websites and blogs dedicated to Riot Grrrl, including grrrlzines.net and wemakezines.ning.com (just to skim the surface). A website called zinewiki.com, which runs on Wikipedia software, emerged in 2006 to catalog and describe alternative independent media, including RG zines. A researcher of twenty-first-century zine-ing thus has numerous sites of inquiry available.²⁷ Because my thesis focused on the zines of the foundational Riot Grrrl movement, from the early to mid-1990s, I primarily looked to library archives for research material. I read and analyzed hundreds of zines by white and ethnoracial zinesters from that time period to create a representative argument. A similar intensive project could use the discussions, articles and posts on the Web to examine ethnoracial zinesters effects on their white and

²⁷ Useful sources for such research include “Mags, zines, and gURLs: The exploding world of girls’ publications,” by Katherine Bayerl; “From Zines to E-Zines: Electronic Publishing and the Literary Underground,” a doctoral dissertation by Frederick A. Wright at Kent State University; and “Hands-On Communication: Zine Circulation Rituals and the Interactive Limitation of Web Self-Publishing,” by Jennifer Rauch. See Works Consulted for full bibliographic information.

ethnoracial successors in the 2000s. How did their vision of space and subjectivity and their emphasis on theorizing intersectional identity influence subsequent Riot Grrrls and Grrrl zinesters?

Furthermore, a companion project could analyze RG zinesters effect on larger society, and Ladyfests are prime sites to evaluate such impact. Ladyfest is a non-profit community event for women artists and educators of all kinds. Performances and workshops, films and exhibitions abound at Ladyfest, and it often emphasizes DIY art and media. Riot Grrrls and zinesters, including members of Bratmobile and Sleater-Kinney, began the first Ladyfest in Olympia, Washington in 2000. Since then, local communities, including small towns and urban centers, across the country and the globe have held Ladyfests, which are often annual. Does Riot Grrrls' argument for claiming space influence how Ladyfests claim the space of cities, even if they claim it temporarily? How does the space of a Ladyfest operate similarly or differently than zine space to destabilize and displace dominant cultural spaces? Thus, how do events like Ladyfest influence subcultural and mainstream culture and politics?²⁸

In this thesis, I was able to touch on, but not tackle, Nguyen's immense compilation zine "Evolution of a Race Riot," and I hope, in the future, to engage another project addressing the cultural significance of compilation zines. As I mentioned in chapter two, Martin and Nguyen both created multiple "comp" zines, which were well known in subcultural punk and zine scenes. Some comp zines, including "EoRR," are still available through zine distributors. Comp zines are formally divergent from personal zines because they contain the contributions, original or

²⁸ Helpful articles for research on Riot Grrrl's connection to Ladyfest include, "Connecting the Dots: Riot Grrrls, Ladyfests, and the International Grrrl Zine Network," by Kristen Schilt and Elke Zobl; and "Zines, Half-Lives, and Afterlives: On the Temporalities of Social and Political Change," by Janice Radway. See Works Consulted for full bibliographic information.

reprinted, of multiple to dozens of zinesters. They are generally larger in page count and more internally varied in materialistic style. Comp zine editors gather material from a wide variety of sources to publish on a specific topic of interest, whether that is tough girls (as in Martin's 94-page "Hard as Nails") or alternative sexuality (as in Martin's 39-page "Prude"). The zines are widely publicized in their relative zine scene as editors solicit and collect entries, and the finished zines would seem to attract more readers than do personal zines. How does the zine's cultural (or subcultural) authority change when numerous zinesters endorse or contribute to a project? How can these representative spaces offer heightened power to the zines' editors and contributors? Do these zines have particular ability to shape culture by displacing existent spaces of power?

Finally, I have aimed to recover ethnoracial Grrrl zines in an academic sphere, which leads me to question in what particular ways scholarly recognition of zine space legitimates or empowers past and present zines in subcultural and mainstream realms. In a question that can be traced back to McRobbie's feminist critique of cultural studies in the historical antechamber, does a particular type of scholarly engagement alter how a subculture operates or how the mainstream considers the subculture? As historians, literary scholars, sociologists, cultural theorists, archivists, librarians and other academics, many of whom are former RG zinesters (though I am not), bring zines and Riot Grrrl studies into the academic sphere, we see a concurrent rise of mainstream books on zines and Riot Grrrl. I have already mentioned the burgeoning Internet field for zinesters and Riot Grrrl; could that too be influenced by academic legitimization of RG zine-ing? Can past zine spaces, including Martin and Nguyen's zines (especially "Evolution of a Race Riot," which is still in distribution), become more culturally potent in the present as scholars bring them into an academic space? Can academic interest

provoke increased zine-ing in the present, and will those zine spaces increasingly impact subculture and the mainstream because of the scholarly gaze upon them? Does the academic gaze signal zinesters' creation of scholarly space or their subsumption into mainstream culture? In more concrete terms, what will be the impact of Jenna Freedman, former RG zinester and current zine librarian at the Barnard Zine Library, who brings past and present zines by subcultural women of color into an authoritative academic space?

I include these questions to provoke future thoughts for research, and I phrased them to suggest answers. It seems that as zines become increasingly integrated in scholarly study, subcultures and the mainstream will take greater notice of these underground DIY publications. Mainstream could appropriate and consume zines as the next "big" market gimmick, as it did Riot Grrrl style in the 1990s (many scholars, including Meltzer, argue that the "Girl Power" slogan began with Riot Grrrl). I could foresee "Make-Your-Own-Zine" kits on the aisle for girls ages 10 to 14 at Big Box stores throughout the nation. However, perhaps the authoritative gaze of academia could spark genuine interest in past and present zines and the subjects represented inside. Perhaps those spaces and views of mobile and multiple subjectivity will gain wider consequence and consideration. Yet that seemingly positive direction is not without potential problems. The academic gaze certainly acts as a lens that directs attention to particular qualities of zines and zinesters. Thus, I believe it remains important to balance the common scholarly depiction of Riot Grrrl zines with a vision of those zines as representing multiple, mobile, intersectional subjects who claim a subversive space of power in the zine, a project I hope I advanced in writing this thesis.

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