2006

Cultivating dissent: Queer zines and the active subject

Angela Connie Asbell

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CULTIVATING DISSENT: QUEER ZINES
AND THE ACTIVE SUBJECT

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Angela Connie Asbell
September 2006
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8/23/06
ABSTRACT

This study performs a rhetorical analysis of several zines that deal with gender and sexual identity. Zines are self-published, non-commercial magazines that highlight the individual creativity in writing and the participatory aspects to writing, publishing, and distributing texts. The Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethic is the centerpiece of political self-motivation and connection to other activists through non-hierarchical media forms. Through the employment of a subversive rhetoric blending pastiche, performativity, and moments of strategic essentialism, zinesters create meaning through the disruption of meaning. This continual différence of signification creates a context for writing wherein readers must actively construct meaning for themselves. This thesis resists objectifying zines and focuses more on zines as actions and ways of being. Publishing and distribution characterize the genre as much as the writing itself, further crystallizing the connection between writing and doing. This analysis looks in particular at zines that focus on gender and sexuality, for it is here that we can see the rhetorical choices that problematize identity politics at the same time as they identify spaces
for unity. That is, gender/sexuality (or "queer") zines appropriate these categories of social identity in order to both celebrate and subvert these ways of "doing gender" and writing. This study outlines some shared aesthetics and ethos of zines and zinesters, then connects the rhetorical and stylistic choices of zinesters to their searches for political and personal identity.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincerest thanks to Ellen Gil-Gómez, Jacqueline Rhodes, Annie Knight, Trenetta Asbell, Alaska Whelan, Micah Stevens, and Paula Arnett for all your support throughout this project. I could not have completed this thesis without your invaluable guidance, help, and love.
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CHAPTER ONE
THE AESTHETICS AND ETHICS OF ZINES

How can we conceive of a revolutionary struggle that does not involve a revolution in discourse?

-- Julie Kristeva

Across the globe, the power of print is in the hands of thousands of writers who self-publish zines. Those who make zines believe that our cultural environment is dominated by corporate media, and the polish and gloss of consumerism fails to reflect their everyday lived experiences. As zinesters compose and design their zines, the act of creating a space for new kinds of writing, rhetoric, and ways of being raises questions about the authority of print and the role of participatory cultures in shaping discourse. Such self-publishing as an act of cultural production is at once a communal and individual act of defiance, as the disenfranchised and subjugated find a space to write their realities.

Although self-publishing takes many forms, the form that proliferates is that of the zine. "Zines" (short for "fanzines") are "non-commercial, non-professional, small-
circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves” (Duncombe 6). The defining elements of this genre remain loose, leaving room for the author to develop her own personal aesthetic and style. While the form can loosely define the genre, participants place more emphasis on defining the genre based on the purposes and motivations to self-publish than formal elements per se (A Hundred Dollars and a T-Shirt: A Documentary about Zines in the Northwest US). As zinesters forge writing styles that convey their intent to write and create selves outside of mainstream ideology, zinesters constantly redefine the genre. Zine styles range from professionally printed and intricately laid-out texts to handmade and personalized art pieces. As with any art that comes together in a shared ethos, there are some elements that many or most zines share: zines tend to prize the personal, the handmade, and the unconventional; the layout tends to resemble the cut-and-paste aesthetic of collage. Michelle Comstock explains: “composed of ‘rants’ against the homogenizing effects of mass culture and popular media, zines forgo the grammar, layout, content, and distribution methods of conventional publications” (384). However, it is more the case that
the resistance against conventional publications and mass media impels zinesters to create new ways of communicating with each other; the desire to create new ways of thinking and being shapes the aesthetic of zines.

Avoiding the objectification of zines is of utmost importance because making zines is an act of subversion, not just the production of a text. Because zinesters see their writing practices more as a way of being/resisting, grouping zines for the purpose of observation or definition of the movement is nearly impossible: "This movement isn’t one that is static, finished, or easily categorized and captured" (Green and Taormino xiii).

Anything that could be theorized about zines in this text can be proven "untrue" by hundreds of others, which compels any good study of zines to adopt a Derridian method of de-centering the genre: just as there is no transcendental signifier for language, there is no traditional origin or center of the genre. This very difficult task of making assertions about zines can itself be an objectification of zines and zinesters, which is dangerous because objectifying zines and zinesters steals their subjective and cultural power, and zinesters are
keenly aware of this power dynamic in publishing and writing.

For this reason, zinester culture looks upon “outsider” research as objectification. The zinester ethos emphasizes that real, practical experience authorizes the writer to produce theory, and many zinesters emphasize a balance between the two. The largest part of understanding how zines work involves not just analysis, but the actual production of a zine, so it is important that I acknowledge and integrate my involvement as a zinester into this text in order to establish my “authority” to make assertions about them. Production of a zine leads to better insight into the process of being a zinester and of creating a zine, for participation is an important part of the aesthetic of the genre. I also will ground my insights into practices and subjectivities of zines and zinesters in my own participation in the sub-culture; clearly, my discussion of zines must pivot around the words, ideas, and aesthetics of zinesters themselves, especially because zinesters are sensitive to issues of textual representation.
Zinesters are also sensitive to the normalization that happens within groups, so while recognizing the necessity to come together for political change, zinesters value the power of individual dissent. Ramsey Kanaan, founder of AK Press, a distributor and publisher of independent books, zines, magazines, and CDs, explicates: “I would argue that the term ‘fanzine community’ is meaningless. There’s no community of ideas... zines are produced from every conceivable angle, aptitude, inclination, and interest” (“AK Distribution” 112).

Although similarly minded groups use zines to communicate and come together, the breadth of subject positions, subject matter, and authorial intent make defining this community impossible.

Most scholarship on zines attempts to piece together some sort of history of zines, collaging the ideas and writing of literary and artistic heroes into a constructed history, evoking a tradition of revolutionary thinking and writing connected to resistance against dominant institutions’ power to dictate popular ideology.¹ For

example, some call Martin Luther the first zinester, most likely because the story of his act of “publishing” his 95 Theses included posting his critique of the Catholic Church on the doors of the church itself, effectively using the Church’s own forum to disseminate critiques of it. Others point to Thomas Paine’s Common Sense as part of the zine tradition, further making the case that their intent to provoke questions, debate, and critiques of power and domination defines the genre of zines. In this same vein, Dadaist manifestos, social justice movements’ newsletters, and the Beat poets all recognized the importance of self-publishing their works, many times appropriating the authority of print to spread the language of dissent, difference, and justice. The most common factors in identifying the legacy of zines is the concept of “Do It Yourself” (DIY), which demands participation in the creation of culture and the concept of opposition and criticism of hegemonic epistemology. For instance, Dadaist artists and writers, participants of an avant-garde art movement during World War I,
appropriated and subverted the conventions of text in their compositions in order to critique the ideology underlying the authority of print.

Zines are printed forms that necessarily resist the authority of print. I see some common methods between the work of Dadaists and zinesters: both communities tend towards forms/anti-forms that contain the possibility of critique and self-critique. These artists use the authority of the printed form to overthrow the authority of the printed form. Dadaist methods and methodologies can be viewed an antecedent of zine aesthetics, although neither of these movements exactly agree about what could be commonly held theories or practices.

Conflating the category of zine with just any kind of artistic and political upheaval is problematic. While there is ideological value in aligning the genre with a tradition of dissent, there is no "center" to their postmodern incarnations, and indeed, this "tradition" is a self-defined one. Zinesters general ally themselves with silenced and subjugated cultures, and perceive the genre as a space for breaking silences. One of the realities of

Power and Political Potential of Grrrl Zines" on page 168 outlines a historical view of independent publishing.
zines is that they are the perceived answer to people's call for discourse surrounding a particular subject. For example, the most recognizable correlation between the history of self-publishing and the modern genre of zines are the science fiction "fanzines" of the 1930s and the zines of the 1970s punk rock movement. In both these movements, self-publishing grew out of necessity: there was simply no mainstream media inciting any discourse around the issues that mattered to the publishers to these texts. These movements were compelled to do it themselves simply because no one else was. The punks of the 1970s and 80s revived and popularized the ideology of self-publishing in an era where methods of communication were increasingly mediated through machines, shaped by corporate structures, and regulated by the government.

In the 1980s, the deregulation of media industries under the Reagan administration signaled a new era in the commercialization of culture (Chu 74-5). As a consequence of mergers between media empires, there were (and still are) increasingly few opportunities for exposure to alternative discourses or critical dissent. While the corporate media became the dominant institution of modern times, the priorities of a marketplace economy began
dictating cultural values and mediating relationships on a larger scale than ever before. The resulting "sameness" that is represented as American culture (and increasingly, global culture) becomes the cultural capital zinesters use to create discourses of opposition. Many zinesters view this commercialization and subsequent homogenization of corporate culture as propaganda, citing Noam Chomsky's notion of "manufacturing consent": hegemony indoctrinated through media influence as the media is influenced by society's most dominant institutions, corporations and government (xi).

Within this framework of consumer culture, zinesters propagate a "participatory culture" set in contradistinction to the homogenizing effects of capitalism, avoiding discourses where they cannot influence or control representation, and instead creating a space for dissent and difference. Zinester culture understands that "our languages and our written texts represent our visions of our culture, and we need new processes and forms if we are to express ways of thinking that have been outside the dominant culture" (Bridwell-Bowles 294). Zinesters create and deconstruct new forms every day; their processes incite participation in the
world of self-publishing. These networks of individuals, working to create culture actively, avoid meaning making as an objective enterprise, and instead encourage meaning making as a negotiation between very subjective individual interests. It encourages people to participate in (as opposed to consume) culture and meaning, allowing all who “get involved” to become agents in creating and shaping cultural ideology. As Stephen Duncombe explains, “the medium of zines is not just a message to be received, but a model of participatory cultural production and organization to be acted upon” (73). A zinester both reads and creates zines, and the genre is defined by the motivation to self-publish. Or, as Larry-bob, the creator of Holy Titclamps and Queer Zine Explosion, says in “Larry-bob’s Guide to Selling Out,” “The message of a zine is ‘do your own zine.’ The message of a glossy magazine is ‘buy this magazine and don’t think for yourself’” (Friedman 19). Zinesters have finely tuned their writerly techniques to explore and critique the nuances of purpose in popular texts. Especially sensitive and resistant to the ideology of the corporate agenda, zinesters interpret the commoditization of culture as a threat to participatory culture.
And mere consumption of culture is not as important as the creation of culture: zinesters create a space that cultivates dissent and active participation. Because a glossy mainstream magazine's advertisers dictate the content and purpose of the publication, zinesters believe that the authenticity or purity of the publication has been compromised. The lack of advertising and professional editorial control in zines frees the writer to explore her own opinionated purposes and content, creating a space to celebrate and explore difference and dissent (Friedman 8). Of critical importance to zine writers is the drive to "redefine the dynamics of their media environment by envisioning a place that is free from the dominion of mainstream media" (Chu 78). Zinester aesthetic demands an awareness of how and why the mass media shapes expression to conform to cultural norms, and moreover zinesters promote the importance of creating a space that encourages and cultivates a language for dissent. In volume 2 of V. Vale's Zines!, many zinesters outline their problems specifically with mainstream media, saying that it trivializes, degrades, distorts their lived realities, and "lacks truth and passion"(49). As zinester Danielle explains, "The media strips out the essence of
any movement...then the media takes that and cashes in on it" (46). Mainstream media is ultimately tied to commercial interests in the minds of many zinesters. As Naomi Klein notes in her book No Logo, because the feminist and cultural movements of the 1980s neglected to integrate issues of class and economics into critiques of cultural power and representation, movements to promote multiculturalism and subaltern subjectivities were co-opted by mainstream media, marketed, and sold back to us.

Aware of the complex cultural context the proliferation of mass media has incited, zinesters look for ways to simultaneously create and subvert meaning. Zinesters actively and consciously resist hegemonic depictions of how and why we make meaning, and even more importantly, who is allowed to make meaning in our culture.

This premise provoked exploration and critique of the role, function, and relationship between artist, viewer, and art within the Dadaist art movement of the early 20th century. The Dadaist art movement prided itself on deconstructing all the premises of "great art," believing the art of this era to be pretentious and stagnant because it was created in a society that had become stagnant and
bourgeois. Dadaists were viciously anti-authority and anti-commercial, presenting themselves in opposition to government, war, and the logic of an increasingly commercialized age. The focus of the movement was to shock their audiences into rethinking and questioning the accepted values and aesthetics of their time. Of particular interest to my discussion here are the ways that Dadaist artists called upon the viewer to participate actively in the creation of artistic meaning through the appropriation and subversion of cultural capital.

According to Marc Dachy in The Dada Movement, these artists "analyzed society by the very means with which it was advertised, using its symbols as an emblem of a larger order" (112). Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades consisted of everyday household items juxtaposed and re-fashioned with the express purpose of questioning the relationship between artist and art and viewer. Dadaists began appropriating everyday items into their art, such as ordinary household objects or mainstream media images and print as a way of proclaiming, as Duchamp writes, "Since the tubes of paint used by an artist are manufactured and readymade products we must conclude that all the paintings in the world are 'Ready-mades aided' and also works of
assemblage" (n.p.). The Dadaists wished to overthrow the pervading ideology of the artist as craftsman and art as product. Cultural production is always bound by societal definitions; what is privileged as art in any given culture reflects status quo values and beliefs. By praising chance, instinct, and individuality during the modern era, Dada artists challenged the zeitgeist of their times, ideologies which were grounded in scientific rationality and progress. Dada artists praised art that was "designed to amuse, bewilder, annoy, or inspire reflection, but not to arouse admiration for any technical excellence usually sought for in works of art. The streets are full of admirable craftsmen, but so few practical dreamers" (Lucie-Smith 143). Under the Dadaists, the artist became not just a creator of objects, but a manipulator of symbols and contexts.

Similarly, the punk movement in the 1970s and 80s, which drew some inspiration from its Dada predecessors, focused on art as an act of subversion (a direct rebellion against art as commodity). Because what constitutes "punk" has been a long-standing debate, there is no handbook to understanding the punk aesthetic; to use the phrase "punk tradition" is nothing short of oxymoronic.
Not long after the Sex Pistols stormed the mainstream media, and Johnny Rotten was urging young punks to "get pissed, destroy!" Steve Ignorant of the Anachro-punk collective/band Crass was proclaiming "Punk is Dead." Stephen Duncombe explores the "problem" with defining punk by highlighting the "conflict between individual expression and community allegiance" (61). As with zines, most of the problem with defining punk stems from problems with methods of definition. While there may be some general aesthetics and methodology to punk, individual dissent struggling within traditional modes of defining a community creates a movement filled more with questions than answers. This was truly a movement of individuals who are proponents of self-rule, proclaiming that freedom is anti-authority, anti-social, and anti-system. Punk can be characterized by its anti-authoritarian, anti-commoditization aesthetic; within these confines of acceptable behavior/aesthetics, punks evaluate the need to self-define, especially in opposition to mainstream culture. The name that independent writers, artists, musicians, and organizers give to the concept of actively creating culture is "Do It Yourself," or "DIY". Duncombe explains that punks believed in DIY as a "reaction against
how the mass media was doing you"(120). As the punk aesthetic was heavily influenced by the concept of DIY, passion is more important than talent or craft, and the genre itself pivoted on the idea that to speak against injustice through art was a revolutionary act.

The ethic of DIY is the centerpiece of political self-motivation and connection to other activists through non-hierarchical media forms (Rosenberg and Garafalo 811). Originally, “DIY once just referred to hardware stores in Britain that supplied amateur repair people with tools”(Wikipedia). The concept of DIY is set in distinction to the marketplace’s concept of “specialization,” the narrowing of an individual’s expertise to a specific function in order to increase efficiency and economic throughput. DIY questions the necessity and validity of expert opinion; punks and zinesters have appropriated the DIY ethic for their own purposes, especially those who see specialization as robotic, constraining, and consequently, as the road to complete dependence on institutions and corporate structures. Zinesters take this creed to heart as they learn to publish their work independently; the basis of any independent publishing project is “taking control of
the entire publishing process—from funding their projects to distributing the finished publications" (Chu 80), for it is necessary to ensure that the project stays uncorrupted by institutional influence, i.e., the marketplace.

The drive to create and circulate one’s art outside of mainstream is strongly connected to the “zone of freedom from social pressures and symbolic control” (Zobl 157) commonly found in zines. The freedom from social pressures creates a safe space for empowered (re-)(self-)definition. The power to create and propagate cultural power stems from the freedom to use symbolic power. Once a zinester begins reading zines, the impetus to create her own zine becomes strong: either by the empowerment rhetoric used by zinesters or the seeming simplicity of “doing it yourself.” The physical act of DIY connects to the ideology behind the project: the project is considered “authentic” and credible if organized entirely by an “uncorrupted activist/artist (or collaboration between “uncorrupted” activists/artists). This idea of ideological and ethical “purity” is important to understanding the aesthetic of independent publishers.
As Stephen Duncombe notes, the zinester aesthetic emphasizes "authenticity" and "sincerity" (35). This ideal, as theorized by Duncombe, is that "by eschewing standards of language and logic the zine creator refuses to bend individual expression to any socially sanctified order...the fact that no one except the creator can understand it means that something absolutely authentic has been created" (34). As noted above, both the punk and Dada movements emphasized the importance of passionate works versus technical perfection. Similarly, Duncombe states that the ethics of authenticity compel zinesters to abandon rhetoric as artifice and instead to write their "true" (pre-social) selves through expressions unconstrained by social order and expectations. Scott Friedman, creator of Factsheet Five, describes this aesthetic as "creating a publication in which readability takes a backseat to passion" (9). The unrestrained passion of the writing found in zines is a discourse shaped by the idea that technical perfection can denote conventional thinking. Although Duncombe argues that these writers resist the use of rhetoric in order to establish authenticity, it is more the case that the zinesters' resistance (made visible through an intentional avoidance
of understandability and persuasion) is itself rhetoric, a sort of "no-rhetoric" of pastiche.

The concept of DIY contains within it the subversive act of appropriation. As these writers control every aspect of the production of their zines, they must look to the resources around them to appropriate. Thusly, appropriation influences directly the style and aesthetic of the zine. Based loosely on the anarchist ideal of expropriation theorized by Peter Kopotkin and the Marxist ideal of "seizing the means of production," zinesters seize the physical as well as ideological means of production. According to anarchist tradition, when a person's needs are not being met by the institutions that "serve" her, it is said that she should "steal instead of starve": Emma Goldman was jailed for telling a crowd "Ask for work; if they do not give you work ask for bread; if they do not give you work or bread then take bread" (Brigati 1). Zinesters are working within a capitalist system that paradoxically provides but limits access to the means of production—Michelle Comstock argues that zinesters see "liberating" computer time, office supplies, and Xeroxed copies as seizing the means of production to further cultural revolution (395). The
range of resources zinesters have at their disposal will affect the style and look of the zine, from the stolen sharpie used to write it or the copyrighted images utilized to create subversive discourses. In this way, the practical source material of a zine has a strong influence on the ideological source material, so the aesthetic of zines is correlated strongly with the resources available to zinesters.

Zinesters also appropriate the symbols of mainstream ideological values in order to subvert and re-define their cultural meanings. Deconstruction of culturally sanctioned symbols makes the “play” of language directly observable; moreover, deconstruction can reveal the social construction of language and underlying ideologies that shape perception and interpretation. Despite this age of sophisticated media, zinesters are recognizing and reacting to the fact that mainstream media fails to provide a venue for many people—women foremost among them, particularly women of colour, working-class women, and queer youth who find themselves excluded or grossly misrepresented. In response, some have taken the tools of cultural
production into their hands and created their own symbols, cultural codes, and images of (self-) representation. (Zobl 156)

Understanding the importance of self-representation and the damage of misrepresentation, zinesters strive to create the nourishing media environment they need to survive—many times creating a supportive environment through the appropriation and subversion of the cultural codes that do the most damage. As zine writing and publishing is a way of resisting this commoditification of culture, zine discourses commonly associate empowerment to oppositional critique: shaped by the American ideal of representative democracy, participants have ideologically linked speaking against injustice with achieving agency.

Zinesters take advantage of the freedom of the zine format when expressing themselves, using non-linear and associational organization to evoke feelings and beliefs in readers instead of preaching at them. Through the use of juxtaposition, zinesters can explore all the issues around a subject without ever making a declarative statement. Make no mistake, by the inclusion and exclusion of certain information, the zinester is indeed making an argument, but associational modes of arguing
invites the reader to make the connections—a technique that simultaneously deconstructs as it makes its case. As a zinester asks the reader to deconstruct, she calls upon the reader to make active meaning for herself. Since zinesters prize communication and dissent, the most effective way to convince, persuade, or inform the reader lies in allowing the reader room to make the connections between points and infuse the writing with her logic and experiences. Simultaneously, the zinester arranges the text in ways that convey the passion in her subjective point of view. In short, zinesters write toward facilitating communication as opposed to the mass media and academia's emphasis on "the word" or objective truth. Zinesters' passion for communication affects the aesthetic of most zines: "it's communication that will help us improve our relations with each other" ("Housewife Turned Assassin" 59).

As corporate media institutions continually mediate and shape the relationships between people, zinesters use rhetorical techniques that evoke Derrida's theory of différence as an interpretive method to reconceive their social and political identities as well as play in the gulf between signifier and signified. In order to make
difference clear to a reader, zinesters often appropriate a symbol, word, or image in order to deconstruct the cultural meanings ascribed to them. Taking advantage of the seeming stability of cultural symbols, zinesters begin at a "common" place: the cultural understandings of these symbols. Whether persuasion takes the form of an elegantly composed argument or an angry, militant rant, many zinesters see more value in a continual différence of meaning rather than the declarative statements found in academic and mainstream discourses; to many zinesters, this deferral of meaning they create can be more representative of their lived experiences than any static assumptions of empirical truth. As mainstream media and academic institutions continually reinforce white supremacist capitalist patriarchal values through attempts to suppress différence, zinesters must find subversive ways to resist these hegemonic depictions of their social identities. The subversion of the symbol becomes a clear political tactic to undo zinesters' preconceived notions of that particular subject position.

Zinester rhetoric evokes the necessity of participatory meaning making. The transmission of information from one respectable source to the rest of the
populace is the communicative method of mainstream media and academia. Zinesters prize the collective generation of information as more democratic, more collaborative, and therefore closer to the reality of their everyday lives. Through their writing, zinesters have discovered that language and ideological systems are constructed, and that they have the power to reconstruct their realities. Zinesters reconstruct their ideological centers actively by sifting through the discourses that surround them, then appropriating and critiquing them to create new ways of being, perceiving their worlds, and writing.

As Derrida asserts that there is no center to language and therefore no center to the ways we make meaning, he evokes Levi-Strauss' concept of *bricolage* to explicate the ways we appropriate symbols and cultural ideas to forge associational meanings (524-6). Derrida argues that we can never really escape a language's history, and therefore any "new" ideas are a rupture or redoubling of old structures. However, as the *bricoleur* uses "the means at hand" (524) to create meaning, "there is therefore a critique language in the form of *bricolage*, and it has even been possible to say that *bricolage* is the critical language itself"(524). *Bricolage* is an
assemblage of discourses that are appropriated, redefined, and employed for the purposes of the writer. As a writer or artist struggles to make new meanings, ones that she feels express her individual reality, she may choose between "purely" expressing her subjectivities without influence, thus sacrificing understandability for subjective purity, or she may find that comprehensibility comes from using the symbols already afforded her. The desire to create something new, to depart entirely from previously held assumptions and beliefs, conflicts with the seeming impossibility of creating something entirely new. According to Derrida, then, the only recourse for the bricoleur is to tinker with symbols that express her perspective; the important part of this process is the act of "pure" expression, of working at creating new participatory meanings. Authenticity is the attempt to depart from hegemonic representations of reality and to avoid positivist knowledge building; the authenticity of the active subject relies in her ability to destabilize cultural assumptions.

As she collages the symbols she deems appropriate to express her perspective, she also develops new ways to critique the language, and by extension, finds new ways to
critique her subject position and the social construction of her political identity. Like Duchamp’s ready-mades, the juxtaposition of symbols, objects, or images that convey cultural commonplaces create new associations and meanings. Also, by changing the symbol’s context, these common understandings become disrupted. When a sign system is disrupted, so are the ideologies they symbolize. Zinesters’ rhetoric of authenticity connects to rhetoric of resistance: that which is being critiqued must necessarily be evoked; this forces the authentic, active subject of zines into the cultural space of rebel or outsider, one who opposes normalizing discourses and ways of being.

Marcie Frank calls this tactic “appropriation and subversion” in her essay “How Did I Get So Anal?: Queer Self-Authorization at the Margins.” In Frank’s discussion of the zine Dirty Plotte, she discusses how the zine “appear[s] to transform points of social and ideological pressure into points of resistance” (246). Mainstream society uses labels to suppress difference, which has the effect of alienating those who identify with these political subjects; activists take the oppressive weight of these labels as a rallying point to effect change: the
very specific change from shame to pride in one's political subject position. Deploying and subverting the symbology of a stable social identity not only serves as a strategy to create a space for societal change, but also as a means to stimulate dialogue around issues of power and oppression. At the same time, the subversion of such symbols and ideas needs to explode any assurance of maintaining a stable, essential identity that can be bounded discursively. Frank evokes the work of Judith Butler and Eve K. Sedgwick to explicate that in order for appropriation and subversion to work as a textual method, there must be "an infinite deferral of stable meaning in order to avoid reproducing the structure it opposes" and that the tactic "raises questions about identity without reifying the place of identity" (249). In reclaiming a symbol to forge new cultural associations and meanings, zinesters problematize not only these symbols and meanings, but also problematize the identity politics and subject positions that surround these symbols. This appropriation and subversion creates cognitive dissonance, defers meaning, and exposes the symbol not as reality, but instead as a socially constructed ideal.
Grrrl and queer zines create a much-needed space for appropriation and subversion of hegemonic depictions of gender and sexuality. Both queer and Grrrl zines are a reaction to a need: if these writers could not find representations of themselves in the mass media, then they must create new ways of being and writing themselves. While queer and Grrrl zines rebel against the sexism and homophobia of mainstream publications, they also rebel intelligently against the commercialization and homogenization of queer and female cultural production. Additionally, many Grrrl and queer zines critique subcultures such as punk, feminist, and zinester culture (not just mainstream culture). Looking at Grrrl and queer zines allows me to analyze the ways that these zinesters deconstruct and evaluate their subject positions to encourage re-writing and re-thinking their positions as political minorities.

In “Punk-lad Love, Dyke-Core, and the Evolution of Queer Zine Culture in Canada,” Rob Teixeira comments that queer punk culture (called homocore or queercore) is “inseparable from queer zine culture”; Queer zines focused on encouraging participation in the queer punk scene as well as a way of reclaiming the queer culture that punk
had appropriated. As queer zines proliferated, Larry-bob began cataloguing them in *Queer Zine Explosion*, and the myriad subjects, perspectives, and interests began to bloom within the queer zine community. A queer zine, simply stated, is a zine that focuses on issues of queer sexuality that works to empower its readers. Teixeira comments "queer zines don’t so much have a history as they do a mythology, a legacy, if you will, of provocation and individual empowerment" (n.p.)

The concept of "Grrrl zine" was birthed in the early 1990s with the explosion of Riot Grrrl, a feminist art movement created to address the lack of female-created culture and art in America. Many Riot Grrrls communicated with each other through zines, and found them to be "an empowering outlet for expressing their experiences, thoughts, and anger that accompany the process of growing up in a patriarchal and homophobic society" (Zobl 156). The riot Grrrl zine explosion was in many ways a reaction to and critique of the male-dominated punk scene; similarly, these women were aware of and engaged in feminist activities and writing. Michelle Comstock argues that Grrrl zinesters are "appropriating the political tactics and writing practices of both the punk scene and
the larger feminist movement" to critique them (383).
There have always been zines created by females, but Grrrl zines tend to focus on rebellion against patriarchal norms and creating a network of active, empowered women.
Is my desire so deeply queer that I internally, subconsciously, am drawn to that which is most subversive?

— "My Queerbo Desire," BiGirl World

Radical simply means 'grasping things at the root'.

— Angela Davis

Shifting Perspectives and the Active Subject

Historically, the genre of the academic essay asks its writers to disengage from the subject of their study enough to provide an "objective" analysis untainted by personal bias; as a consequence, the genre of academic writing tends to erase the personhood of the writer, constructing sentences in clever ways in order to disembody the voice of the text. I understand these boundaries because this was how I was taught to write academically, yet I struggle against this way of writing because of my involvement with zine-making: this thesis has many voices, just like the author who composes it.
When I read and make zines, the genre asks me to inhabit my body as I write, to make visible that which socialization and hegemony has erased from my identity and my writing. Zines make no excuses for being subjective, biased, "interested," and engaged. No excuses are necessary, for many zinesters desire personhood and bodies to inhabit their writings, and wish to explode the notion that objectivity is desirable. Society asks me to view my identity as an official representation that I should conform to; zines encourage me to become an active subject controlling my social identity by re-interpreting my experiences: "zines and underground culture offer up an alternative, a way of understanding and acting in the world that operates with different rules and upon different values than those of consumer capitalism" (Duncombe 6). As a result of my exposure to the discourse of zines, my values, aesthetics, ethics, and consciousness began to change radically, enabling me to change the terms by which I define and understand myself, which made me feel an ethical imperative to participate in self-publishing as a way of creating change.

Since I subscribe to the notion that there is never any such thing as a disinterested study, and feel it is
important to highlight this understanding in my writing, I assert here and now that the way that zines reconstructed my subjective ideological center will inform my theories and methods in analyzing zines. Other participants in this genre most assuredly have different stories of coming to write/participate. I do not intend to speak for other zinesters in highlighting my experiences in discovering and participating in the genre, but instead wish to show the purposes and effect of the zine ethos of embodiment of subjectivity. Because of my participation in the genre, it is now quite difficult for me to write without embodying my text, and nearly impossible to write texts but not be present in them. Maybe it’s a symptom of cozy narcissism, maybe it’s a refusal for my subjectivity to be erased by hegemonic models of meaning making. Perhaps it’s a little of both. Either way, to examine zines without explicating my involvement would do disservice to my writing, but more importantly to the questions I would like to raise about the connections between subjectivity, subversive language use, and zines.

My little smoggy suburban town had a few indie record stores; stores that focused on distributing the music, art, and literature of those who dared do it themselves. I used
to frequent these places because, although at times I felt hopelessly uncool in the shadow of the hipsters that frequented them, I loved the oppositional values and aesthetics that I could only find browsing the magazine and music racks of places like *A Primary*, *Mad Platter*, and *CD World*. The first time I walked into *A Primary*, I noticed a pile of pamphlets, zines, and chapbooks on a shelf to my immediate right. I picked up the first one I saw — a chapbook by Drew Blood, a Riverside poet. His chapbook featured raw poetry directly addressing his queer sexuality, and my jaw dropped. I had never seen anything like it; it was what I had been waiting for. I looked again at the pile of zines, picked up another, and flipped it open to a page with a poem titled “Amerikkka” by A. Razor. Right next to it was the *River Bottom Monkey*, a zine about Riverside, which featured everything from articles about a local historical landmark owned by the GOP to graphs of local restaurant who did not earn an “A” on their Health and Safety Inspection Report. I was hooked.

As I began to seek out and find more zines, and seek out more voices of dissent against the relatively mainstream values I grew up with, the more I began to just — feel comfortable in my own skin. Although I had always
been a bit, ahem, brainy, I had found an art that sparked more passion and thought in me than anything previously before (except for maybe poetry). I identified more with the subjects, aesthetics, and ethics of zines than most of the other literature I had read: the political dissent, the rough and passionate styles used to convey this dissent, and the acts of self-authorization that empowered these zinesters to redefine and reinvent themselves through writing. Most importantly, I felt absolutely compelled to begin publishing my work in this way.

To "Do It Yourself" reclaims the symbolic and cultural power that allows the active subject to re-contextualize and reaffirm the legitimacy of her desire: it resists the mandate of a transcendent authority that mediates and disseminates desire. In this way, the discourse of zines encourages its participants to reconstruct their ideological centers. In order for a subject to reconstruct her ideological center, she must examine the ways that she organizes experience and makes meaning of/in her life. She finds oppression, her oppression, to be systematized. In doing so, she is likely to find that the hegemonic sign/value system does not correspond with her lived realities; instead it reflects
the ideology of a privileged elite as a method of policing normativity. Difference and disruption appear to be more representative of the questions raised in the everyday lived experiences of zinesters than the declarative realities presented in monological, normalizing discourses such as academia or the mass media. However, we are all victims of the cultural assumption that difference must be strictly policed to maintain the social order: humans are socialized into accepting that difference is undesirable in order to police our behavior, thinking, and desire. Radical writers such as zinesters work to expand and disrupt the sign/value system to propel public discourse toward viewing difference as necessary and desirable. Although Derrida theorizes that there is no escaping the sign system, so we are all constrained in our attempts to create new ways of thinking and being, zinesters rebel against the (discursively) improbable: that which can be imagined is valuable to strive for.

Those who write and live in the margins of society usually come to recognize the relativity of their positions on the constructed political spectrum. Western society constructs reality in such a way as to imply that the majority of its citizens occupy the “center” of the
political spectrum: the center of the society maintains the social order, is represented as objective and fair, and represents the views of the "majority." The ideology of the center implies popularity, democracy, and truth stems from this particular subject position; therefore, all "others" are forced into subject positions/political identities that are labeled radical, extreme, instable, on the margins, the lunatic fringe, perverts, terrorists, etc. While the radical subject position/political ideology denotes subversion or overthrowing structures of oppressive authority, relative social locations read and interpret these ideologies differently, depending on their experiences and what discourses are considered familiar/ethical to them. To those "inside" of the radical subject position, subversion of the social order is a means to egalitarian ways of thinking and being, getting to the root of problems/corruption, fighting for freedom from tyranny, and a place of unity. Whether one positions themselves as radical "right" or "left," the "center" (or the "moderate") still holds the cultural capital of influencing and disseminating public discourse, and thusly has the power to define what is normal and what is not. In this equation, those that exist "outside" the
center are always defined as dangerous because they indeed threaten to disrupt the safe, cozy, privileged "inside." All language users are forced into ideological jails; radical writers develop plans and techniques to escape and invite the rest of humanity to join them.

By recognizing and giving voice to the connections and disjunctions between the multitudes of interlocking and divergent perspectives, zinesters redefine notions of "inside" and "outside." Even further, zinesters rebel against "outsider" hegemonic representations and advocate for "insider" subjective interpretation. This recentering redefines the "inside" and interprets it as authentic. Because zine discourse refuses to be dictated by the norms of society, but instead is self- and communally-generated, the active subject constructs the "authentic." To be authentic is to be "yourself": to value and find pride in that which separates you from the norm as you are critically engaged in the "struggle" (however loosely defined). Hegemonic discourse sets up a binary that situates the active subject as rebelling against hyperbolized representations of her subjectivity, or, to put it plainly, discourse defines the rebel then defines her discourse as "rebellious." Zinesters work against
mere reaction by the continual deferral of stable definitions through active embodiment and interpretation of their subject positions. Theorizing as definition become eternally deferred collaborative enterprises that call into to question all cultural authority instead of attempting to re-establish a "new" cultural authority. As a way of resisting the canonical establishment of ethos through authority, zinesters employ the use of sincerity and authenticity as the ethos to establish themselves as credible writers/subjects. The authority of the personal and individual epiphany unsettles status quo logic and redefines authenticity as authoritative within the active subject. This "insider" has the authority to define her subject position and social identity; "outside" representations are not authentic.

The construction of the active subject, someone who defines herself in opposition to traditional hierarchies of power, is a rhetorical move to counter the passive representations with which systems of power demand we identify. The radical rhetorical positions presented in zines are purpose-driven: motivated by the ethical imperative to promulgate justice, zinesters use their talent and passion for words and art to be/write the
change they wish to see. If language shapes our ideas about the world, then we must examine consciously the ways we use language to define and explore our subjectivities. Kate Chedgzoy's statement that "the semiotic can never be fully eliminated from subjectivity" (461) creates an ethical imperative to critically examine the ways that language conveys privileged ideologies of power, and that language itself is ideology. So for writers who feel the ethical pull of social justice, critical consciousness about the way that language reproduces oppression becomes the first step in reorganizing and reimagining white supremacist patriarchy.

In her zine Coming to Voice: Zines, a Cut and-Paste Pedagogical Tool, Julia hv connects Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and the awakening to critical awareness to zine-making; the author asserts that zines are an essential part of critical awakening to subjectivity and that zines are a space to vocalize consciousness from a marginalized subject position:

Conscientização (a deepened awareness form the emergence out of oppression and intellectual/spiritual submersion) is an essential step to move from silenced and
therefore submissive position in history to a pro-active subject position, where one has voice(7)

In an authoritative consumer culture, the motivations of zinesters toward creating new ways of thinking and being situates DIY as agitation. To take action, to become an active agent instead of waiting passively, demands that society produce the conditions marginalized people need to survive and flourish. In this way, speaking against injustice connects ideologically to taking action against injustice.

Zinesters, jammers, and radical artists have long forged a connection between dissent and critical consciousness: direct opposition as a rhetorical technique to expand sign systems and minds forcibly. Artists and writers, always constrained by the cultural associations and audience expectations, still have choices in writing to value difference. Being constrained by the sign/value system, and therefore constrained by audience expectations that have been shaped by this sign/value system, the prison of language as ideology disables critique without knowledge of the sign/value system. To put it simply, in order to change the language, one must know it, in effect keeping
the insiders “in” and the outsiders “out.” Therefore, it is no accident that radical artists and writers deploy the same techniques to express this dissent—what the Dadaists called “inversion,” anarchist Peter Kropotkin called “expropriation,” what the Situationists termed “détournement,” and what Marcie Frank calls “appropriation and subversion” (260). Radical feminists and queers use these techniques as well in order to redefine their ideological and linguistic centers in the struggle with normative discourse that labels their subjectivities as “deviant,” “alien,” or “other.”

By revealing the ways that “deviant” sexualities are pushed into the margins through normative discourse, Gayle S. Rubin’s essay “Thinking Sex” connects social organization to constructed pathologies of “deviant” sexualities as a means to maintain sexual and social order. Rubin posits a hegemonic “charmed circle” of sexuality (also termed “good, normal, natural, and blessed sexuality”) which dictates a moral/sexual order and sets it in contradistinction to “the outer limits” (“bad, abnormal, unnatural, damned sexuality”) (13). For the fortunate folks who fall within the “charmed circle” of the norm, there are rare opportunities to be critical of the way
words represent reality: to those powerful few, the signifier equals the signified, the transcendental signifier exists, and all is right with the world. For those who are cast into the unholy wilderness of "the outer limits," we spend our lives signifyin'\(^2\) and forging alliances with those who we feel understand our experiences.

Appropriation and Subversion

But once one understands the implication of language in reorganizing society, how does one go about changing a society's ideology and especially, how does one revolutionize the way we use language to express this reality? Saul D. Alinsky has the beginnings of our answer in his book *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Reader for Realistic Radicals*: "The basic tactic in warfare against the Haves is a mass political jujitsu: the Have-Nots do not rigidly oppose the Haves, but yield in such planned and skilled ways that the superior strength of the Haves become

\(^2\) In the *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. discusses the ways that speakers of African American Vernacular English trope in order to make meaning implicitly. Gates connects racial oppression to the evolution of this rhetorical form
their own undoing" (152). This aphorism has long been repeated in various cultures throughout history: power creates the possibility of corruption; corrupt power will always undo itself. The physical and ideological resources available to the elite allow them to live in a fantasy of power. Consequently, when a marginalized people become critical of this fantasy, they are able to reclaim the power they have always had. Many radical artists and writers have taken Alinsky’s advice, appropriating cultural symbols in order to disrupt the associations and assumed knowledge they generate.

Artists/revolutionaries bent on social transformation utilize corporate media against itself with culture jamming, agitprop that appropriates the imagery and symbology of corporate-produced culture to subvert the messages that “lifestyle brands” have proliferated. Naomi Klein devotes much time to discussing culture jamming in No Logo, connecting its principles to Alinsky’s maxim of “mass political jujitsu”: the basic principle (with many variations in medium, messages, and style) is to take an advertisement such as a billboard and artistically retouch and notes the ways that it marks the speaker as an insider or outsider within the community.
it until the “truth” of the company or product is revealed. Although there are numerous sophisticated ways to do this, one of the easiest and more popular culture jams is to draw a skull over the face of an “anorexic” model and write “feed me” next to it. In effect, Klein argues that such a technique forces the company to foot the bill for its own subversion, either literally, because the company is the one that paid for the billboard, or figuratively, because anytime people mess with a logo, they are tapping into the vast resources spent to make that logo meaningful. (281)

The appropriation of physical and ideological resources at the disposal of the privileged class reclaims the cultural power attached to the symbol and subverts the culturally proscribed meaning in favor of a more personal, subjective interpretation. These writers recognize that appropriating the meanings of culturally powerful symbols co-opt the authority associated with them. In this act, appropriating the language of privilege is to subvert the language of privilege, and the purpose is to create space for subjective difference. Zinesters connect the ability to
express their difference in public discourse with creating a space for their highly personalized political identity.

The practice of culture jamming highlights the zinester critique of corporate representation. As I argued in chapter 1, mainstream corporate media shapes the values and priorities of public discourse, which has situated our society as consumers of culture as opposed to participants. Within this model, formations of identities become enacted through imitation of hegemonic representations of socially useful/acceptable representations. I define "representation" here as a method of mainstream corporate cultural production, one that asserts hegemonic definitions of sexuality, gender, race, class, ethnicity, and ability as useful to maintain an ordered (racist, patriarchal) social reality. The transmission of these representations perpetuates and maintains the social order; by relying on essentialized notions of social identities, these representations function as a created reality that maintains the interests and desires of those in power.

Consuming easily digestible representations leaves no discursive room for difference, nor for actively creating social identity. Dissent is an interpretive activity; interpretation is an act of dissent. Concerned with the
consumer society they saw as "constrained only passively to spectate" (Downing 58), the Situationists, a movement that blended art and social action in 1960s Paris, envisioned cultures based on individual authority and participation, questioning the authenticity of representational consumer culture. A "spectacular" society is one that is shaped by media with the urge to passively consume "spectacles," situations that are not experienced through direct means process lived experiences into commodity. The "real" and the commodity become synonymous, taking the authority out of direct experience (Debord 2-5). If culture relies on representation to instill false authority, to create an inside and an outside, then encouraging active deconstruction of hegemonic representations engages participants in interpreting their own realities. Instilling the authority of the personal subverts systems of power and representation; subjective interpretation as active meaning making is coded as dissent because it subverts normativity.
Deconstruction, Interpretation, and the Active Subject

Interpretation as a deconstructive method of meaning making allows the artist/writer to analyze and reconstruct her systematic oppression. Through such means as appropriation and subversion of cultural codes, radical writers short-circuit socialized reactions (which are termed "natural reactions" as a way to normalize them) and ask the audience to participate as opposed to merely consume meaning. This highlights the belief that direct experience is a key contributor in interpretation. As such, Situationists also saw participatory culture as means to cultural liberation, and developed a technique called "détournement," which particularly operates by redeploying official language but can also employ official visual imagery to subvert the established order... a subversive plagiarism that diverts the spectacle’s language and imagery from its intended use. (Downing 59)

As an artistic fusion between protest and pleasure, the deployment of détournement asks audiences to rethink how society makes meaning and to disassociate their personal
values, experiences, and language from "official" meanings. Radical artists recognize that although they strive to be free of linguistic and discursive constraints, to be understood requires some adherence to cultural and linguistic assumptions; to circumvent these restrictions, radicals employ the technique of finding the loopholes in sign/value systems in order to disrupt the hegemonic interpretive associations the audience may have. As a means to encourage participation, zinesters do directly eschew the passive representations of mainstream media, appropriating concepts and bodies that have been so socialized as to appear and feel normal then calling into question their seeming naturalness and authenticity. This reclamation of the physical and ideological resources of the ruling classes is a process of renaming and re-identifying words and bodies and experiences, affirming their naturalness in order to assert their right to exist.

The act of denaturalizing cultural givens and naturalizing the "other" is at the root of revolutions in discourse and subjectivity. If any effort to expand discourse is always forced back into hegemonic models, then shock as a technique to re-define alienation deconstructs cultural assumed knowledges. For instance, "[The
surrealists'] work sought to defamiliarize the public with what seems self-evident, most easily taken for granted: 
hegemonic visual and verbal reality” (Downing 58). The breakdown of the aesthetic codes and ideological norms 
shift the cultural associations that compose hierarchical meaning making, a shocking into awareness through bypassing 
socialized reactions. Zinesters’ use of bricolage invites the reader to form subjective associations among various 
juxtaposed symbols, which invites the reader to make connections by deconstructing “normal” reactions, in effect alienating them from the text, and as such facilitates dialogue with the text. Acutely aware of the ways that ideologies and identities are (shaped by) discourse, zinesters’ appropriation from media and everyday life shows the understanding that codes separated from their context and put in another can change the connotations and associations the audience has while viewing the artwork, and thus stimulate critical reflection.

Appropriation and subversion serves as a technique of departure from the hegemonic sign/value system, a departure that is inhabited by the cultural associations it seeks to subvert. As a subject who is bombarded by hegemonic
representations of their cultural and social identities, zinesters appropriate mainstream media in an effort to increase the ideological distance between the discourses of popular culture and the institutions of privilege that misrepresent their identities. In this way, zinesters work to denaturalize institutionalized identity and interrogate political and social subjectivities. Zines ask the reader to play in the chasm between signifier and signified to emphasize that the sign is representation, not the reality. If the sign is not the reality, then our political and social identities are not the "truth" of our experiences, either, merely representations.

In discussing the active subject, the act of subjective interpretation should be delineated from the act of "objective" representation. Those who reside on the margins of power are born into false and exaggerated representations of their identities; many spend a lifetime struggling to interpret their experiences through these inauthentic models. The lure of zines is the motivation to find new ways to self-define. Duncombe discusses how marginalized people with little power over their status in the world still retain a powerful weapon: the interpretations they give to the
circumstances and conditions that surround them, and the ideals and character traits they possess (20).

Duncombe highlights the spaces zines create to naturalize difference, but more important to this discussion is why self-definition is pivotal to the formation of subjectivity. If the way for hegemony to perpetuate itself is for people to buy into the fantasy of idealized values, then the reasoning behind zines and the perspectives explored within them becomes clear: in a space that values and encourages diversity, zinesters seem compelled to participate in various discourses because of their desire to create identities and cultural spaces with which they can identify.

Or, as Julie Chu explicates in “Navigating the Media Environment: How Youth Claim a Space Through Zines,” making a zine “reclaims the importance of ‘small people’ by articulating a place for those on the margins of power” (78). The act of examining the hegemonic values forced upon every citizen disrupts the status quo of mainstream and academic discourse and re-centers natural/normal, creating a “new” space for dialogue and critical consciousness to flourish. The oppositional
stance often assumed by zinesters stems from the way their rhetorical positionings are forced into mainstream representations of the outsider, the freak, or the radical. As disrupters of meaning and instigators of change within a society that purposefully erases difference in order to maintain the fantasy of hegemonic "reality," zinesters are those who refuse to have mainstream representations forced upon their subjectivities. Zinesters are forced into oppositional ways of making meaning because they are situated within a subject position of critical distance: they recognize the flaws with the hegemonic ideals, values, and "common sense" of these discourses as a consequence of their lived realities. Therefore in order to maintain the social order, the power of their subjectivities must be policed, objectified, and commoditized.

To resist the policing of subjectivity creates space to examine cultural values and more significantly, to create alternative ways of being/thinking/writing. Douglas Crimp speaks of art when he says "when the determinants of a discursive field begin to break down, a whole range of new possibilities for knowledge opens up that could not have been foreseen from within the former field" (134), but any sign system is governed by determinants that draw
ideological borders around interconnected ideas: self-definition radicalizes ideological systems in order to re-imagine reality— to create a new sign system of new understandings that are impossible or difficult to articulate within the hegemonic sign/value system. Zinesters attempt radical departure from ideological prisons by displacing the targeted sign/value from its original context, in effect denaturalizing the presumed meanings and forcing the audience to participate in active meaning making.

When zinesters write in ways that ask their audiences to participate in active interpretation, they force the audience to make connections and disjunctions based on their lived experiences. As a reader begins to trust her own abilities to make meaning independently from structures of power, then authenticity stems from a subject authorizing herself instead of looking to structures of authority for approval. What then gains authority is the participant’s subjective perspective, making self-definition and self-authorizing an act of defiance. Those who make zines critically engage their audience into active meaning making by adopting the rhetorical position of agent of language and creator of
meaning; zinesters appropriate the authority of print in ways that call into question that authority, especially by asserting the truth as subjective, and inviting the readers to make their own truth. Recognizing the influence of Paolo Freire on radical art theory, Downing acknowledges that

artwork and media moments in which people may find themselves unexpectedly addressed, challenged to intense reflection on how historical forces have shaped them and the political conjuncture [have the ability to] stimulate critical reflection—conscientização. . . a process of critical engagement with hegemony” (61).

As zinesters confront and redefine their own subjectivities, they instigate confrontation with their readers’ senses of subjectivity and representation.

Grrrl Empowerment

Examining the struggles of feminist social action shows the process of moving from ideological insider to outsider, from abhorrent to acceptable (or at least recognized by the power structure). The history of feminist
struggles in America can highlight the rhetorical ground upon which “outsider” women have been forced: the women of past feminist social justice movements have analyzed mainstream representation and objectification of women, seeing a difference between the ways women are written by American culture and the ways women interpreted their realities. Feminists have been discursively coerced into seeking to “naturalize” their realities as women first, to essentialize their representations in order to achieve equality in their citizen status. While this strategy worked to unify the women within the charmed circle of hegemonic reality, it also worked to alienate all women who did not fit into mainstream notions of femininity (read: white, middle class, heterosexual).

Diana Fuss explores “The ’Risk’ of Essence” as she re-inscribes the nature/culture duality not as a clash but as interdependence. Fuss warns that complete rejection of ideas of essentialism within postmodern constructivist theory is hypocritical, as society constructs social categories and systems of representation based on essentialist notions of self and subjectivity. More significantly, to erase essentialist ideas erases the bodies – the material realities – of subjugated peoples.
Within this paradigm, Fuss explains that "'deploying or 'activating' [essentialism]... implies that essentialism may have some strategic or interventionary value" (20), in *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. If one's subject position is coded as "outsider," it takes considerable work to shift enough ideological centers to make democratic change. In revisionist constructions of social justice, to naturalize the "unnatural" is to create revolution.

Similarly, Gayatri Spivak notes that "to retrieve subaltern consciousness" is "an attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis... a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (213-14). The value in adopting and critiquing these essentialist notions of social identity lies in the conundrum that Derrida explicates— if we are constrained by the hegemonic sign/value system to adhere to a certain modicum of understandability, then it appears that the value in strategic essentialism lies first in persuading those in power to listen. Again, this model suggests that in order to effect change within the hegemonic sign/value system, one must know and understand it to deploy it in subversive ways. But I wonder: doesn't
this method work within the terms of hegemony, re-inscribing new insiders and outsiders, and never questioning the "need" for such divisions?

The 1990s explosion of Grrrl zines spurred by the Riot Grrrl movement, a third- or no-wave feminist movement, provided a larger forum for political and ideological dissent for feminists and queers worldwide. As zine writing and publishing is a way of resisting hierarchical meaning making as a tool of commodity and the powerful, feminists and queers have appropriated the genre for political and social transformation of their social identities and systems of representation. As Comstock explains, "The Grrrl zine scene has offered many young women ways to reconceive their participation in the public sphere not just as consumers but also as producers and writers of culture" (387). As women have traditionally been discouraged from participating in the public sphere and excluded from civic life, zines have become an important method of creating and proliferating female and feminist discourses. Critical engagement with these discourses leads to a critical engagement with the self as an "essence" and the self as a "construction" of society, especially with regards to gender and sexual identity – if
I self-define, then who and what am I? And how do I know? Zinesters assert that authenticity of the subject comes from struggling with these questions and working to re-center personal values and priorities based on subjective experience.

For instance, the Riot Grrrl zine explosion was in many ways a reaction to and critique of the male-dominated punk scene; society codes rebels and punks as male. In zine and punk culture, the implicit understanding that to rebel is masculine guides many rhetorical positions, just as in mainstream media. The Grrrl Zine explosion was a response to not only the slow-moving pace of change within mainstream media, but also grounded in a frustration that their brothers in the revolution were not recognizing the contributions of women to and within punk and zinester culture; Grrrl zinesters are “appropriating the political tactics and writing practices of both the punk scene and the larger feminist movement” to critique them (Comstock 383). These women were aware of and engaged in feminist activities and wanted to create a culture and public discourse around female and queer political identities that were oppositional to mainstream ways of understanding social change. These Grrrls and women feel connected to
the perspectives and experiences of punk and feminism, but want to question and re-define labels like "punk" or "feminist."

In her article "Persephone is Pissed," Elke Zobl dedicates much attention to the ways that Grrrls and queers write and publish to "take an active role in shaping their media environment" (170) and "uncover the hegemonic exclusion of women from societal and political discourse" (169). In doing so, Zobl elucidates the clear connection between independent cultural production and social change: "Zines can play an important role in alerting, educating, and mobilizing people to collectively take actions against the system in power" (169). As outlined above, the existence and proliferation of discourses of dissent is an important part of our society's construction of self: when Grrrl and queer zinesters see themselves as authorized to create and critique culture, the space that they collaboratively create for themselves within the public sphere enables positive formations of identity and subjectivity. This implicit understanding causes many zinesters to see their writing as the communiqué on the battlefield of Cultural Revolution, manifestos for cultural and ideological change. To connect with other feminists
cast as outsiders, they create a powerful social network
that redefines the terms of their belonging and to redefine
the terms of their existence in a society that negates
their identities. In “Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from
Within,” authors Garofalo and Rosenberg reveal that Riot
Grrrls believe that zine making and publishing are
a basic method of empowerment. Zine production
is self-motivated, political activism that a girl
can do entirely independently. Zines subvert
standard patriarchal mainstream media by
critiquing society and the media without being
censored and also give a safe place to say what
they feel and believe. (811)

Grrrl zinesters understand the connections between
empowerment and oppositional critique: participants have
ideologically linked speaking against injustice with
achieving agency and finding community with mobilizing a
social justice movement. Grrrl zinesters create their
community to redefine the boundaries of the human, the
female, and the citizen. In this act of empowerment, Grrrl
and queer zinesters recognize and argue for the value of
their subject positions. Zobl also argues for the
propagation of individual and collective agency through
zine making: "I see Grrrl zines as defined by their DIY, feminist, grrrlpositive agenda that portrays female, queer, and transgender youth as powerful, capable, articulate, and critical" (157); the discourse collectively generated among Grrrl zinesters loosely defines zines according to their political purposes: participation in their own representation and meaning-making. DIY is a way of taking action toward self-definition; by virtue of the way that society constructs passive femininity, for a female or a queer to write their identities in positive and empowering ways is itself an act of social change for both author and audience. Once a Grrrl zinester becomes aware of her voice, she uses it, creating new discourse that reverberates throughout the subculture of zines, but in many cases, throughout mainstream culture as well.

Homosexual Representation and Queer Subjectivities

To grow up queer is a strange cultural space to inhabit: the vilification of the other and difference as pathology defines the "homosexual" identity in western society. In The History of Sexuality, Michel Foucault argues that social practices and institutional mandates
constitute sexuality: legal, medical, and political discourse mediate sexual behavior and desire and represent homosexuality as the other, the pervert, the rebel. Those who are forced to identify with this social identity have been those who desire sexual subversion and difference: society has othered "deviant" sexualities and constructed representation around difference as unacceptable.

Monological ways of organizing queer subjectivity is impossible because of the diversity of queer realities: there is no one economic class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, immigration status, level of ability, family status, culture, or creed that all queers are situated within. This is certainly the case with all marginalized groups, but literally impossible with queers, because nearly our only unified rallying point is the cultural shame of pathology and deviance as well as misrepresentations of our sexual or gendered difference. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "as a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races" (80). Anzaldúa sees cross-cultural connections between different constructions of homosexuality and calls for these tentative similarities as a rallying point. Her subjective interpretation of
queerness stands in stark distinction to monological representations of homosexuality.

The normalizing practices of hegemony constitute mainstream tolerance of "homosexuality"; in cultures that prize homogeneity, queerness focuses on elucidating the desirability of difference. If queers have always been objectified as "homosexuals," then it is a necessary part of our "coming out" to wrestle with our subjectivities and reconstruct our ideological centers through appropriation and subversion of hegemonic representations. Many marginalized persons wrestle with one representation of their identity only to appropriate some other passive objectification of identity: the active subject rejects all representation and instead assembles an identity based on a bricolage of ideologies and values. As queers have no one culture to cling to, the formations of our political and social identities are a bricolage of juxtaposed ways of being and thinking.

As the "homosexual" becomes a more and more visible and contentious political and social identity, queers have become increasingly vocal about the construction of queer subjectivity versus queer representation. As mainstream media culture appropriates representations of mainstream
"gay" culture, constructions of alternative queer subjectivities within zines proliferate. This space for opposition to gender and sexual norms will grow increasingly as "homosexuality" (as defined by the status quo of gender and sexual identity) mixes in public discourse. Many queer zinesters write from a place of frustration with "a growing gay monoculture" and recognize that

like zine culture in general, the queer zine is about pushing individual creative pursuits to the limit and countering the myth of 'all-for-one and one-for-all' community. A disparate group that lacks any easy consensus, laudable all the more for its inherent diversity and autonomous creativity, queer zines don't much have a history as they do a mythology, a legacy, if you will, of provocation and individual empowerment. (Teixeira n.p.)

By connecting the dissatisfaction with mainstream representation and the need for zines as dissent, Teixeira problematizes any notion of "gay" culture representing the political and social identities of every queer subject.
Hegemonic pathology of homosexuality\(^3\) has alienated queers from mainstream understandings of their social identities; official histories of homosexuality are preserved in documented cases of legal and medical abuse: no wonder queer zinesters would argue against the legitimacy of patriarchal history. Consensus is impossible with us: there is no queer paradise that all of us would subscribe to.

Punk queers (those involved with homocore or queercore movements) take this construction of subjectivity to heart as well, using zines and music to shift their ideological centers and encourage other queers to "come out" and be empowered by their difference. A recognized tactic of queercore zinesters is to reclaim the queerness that punk had appropriated and historically embraced (Teixiera 7, Ciminelli and Knox 8). Cimenelli and Knox's book *Homocore: The Loud and Raucous Rise of Queer Rock* discusses the ways that as punk evolved from embracing (sexual) "deviance" and ambiguity to embodying masculine ways of rebelling against the norm(8). In a decidedly queer move, queercore zinesters redefine punk by reclaiming the roots of punk.

These writers used zines to contribute to the public (albeit subcultural) discourse surrounding punk identity and connections to sexual and gender identity oppression. Rob Teixeira declares that the rise in queer punk is "inseparable from the queer zine movement" (n.p.), and like Cimenelli and Knox, makes direct connections between the rise in "out" gay artists and the proliferation of queer zines.

As zines serve the function of connecting people to provide support and a means of unmediated communication, essential in any movement for social change, zinesters are "attuned...to the link between communication and power" (Chu 79). To communicate one's feelings of marginalization from the norms of society creates a space for identification, both for the artist and the audience. As the artist struggles with the confines of the hegemonic sign/value system while writing her subjectivity, as she struggles to define herself in ways that empower her, she begins to identify more strongly with the identity she is creating/discovering than the identity she has been spoon-fed since birth. As she struggles to communicate her subjectivity, the audience is invited to identify with the personal perspective of the author, which is usually set
in contradistinction from hegemonic norms of social identity, then to turn the practice on herself and self-define her subjectivity.

In "(B)orderlands’ Rhetorics and Representations: The Transformative Potential of Feminist Third-Space Scholarship and Zines," Adela Lincona examines queer zines to analyze the rhetorical techniques queer zinesters use to write their subjectivities. Lincona sees a connection between critical consciousness and creating a "third space" to blur the borderlands between hegemonic and "other" sexual and gender identities. Lincona also notices an important technique of subversion used by queer zinesters to reinvent, reauthorize, and re-identify their marginalized identities through reverso (a phrase taken from a Wonder Woman comic in which a mind-altering drug is given to the military power so that they are able to comprehend perspectives different than their own). Lincona argues that this technique is not just a simple reaction or inversion, but a way of turning the patriarchal normative gaze back on itself:

Through the concept and practice of reverso, zinesters are taking discursive control of the disciplinary mechanisms and reversing their
collective gaze in order to reveal the sickness inherent in their societal contexts; both local and global. The effects of these shifting relationships to agency and authority are to create spaces where expert and authorized knowledges can be critically examined. It is in these third spaces that practices and discourses are being resignified, new knowledges gen(d)erated, and where bodies are being re(per)formed and re-imagined. These bodies speak the language of resistance and the potential for transformation. (Lincona 119)

Lincona points out how zinesters willfully turn the patriarchal gaze back upon itself in order to demystify, denaturalize, and defamiliarize the subject positions marginalized peoples have been subjected to. This critical reversal sparks a new awareness of the ways in which language and knowledge can be used to transform “docile bodies” into agents of social change; this critical understanding reauthorizes the subject’s knowledge and experience, stimulating transformation of the subject and her consciousness. As she transforms, she resignifies her
existence, building a new language through opposition to hegemonic standards of being and thinking. In this way, all zinesters are encouraged "to transform points of social and ideological pressure into points of resistance" (Frank 246). In other words, those understandings, which previously subjugated the subject, now serve as the point of departure into a new consciousness. The new consciousness creates space for radical shifts in ideology, or instills the desire to reject the prison of ideologies all together.
CHAPTER THREE

EMBODIED THEORY AND LANGUAGE PRACTICES

We are muff diving, whip worshipping, arse licking, gender bending punks/we are angry at conformist fags, those sell-out liberal lesbians. . . we want no “straight” equality, we DEMAND liberation. . . we will not consort with fascist, racist, misogynist pigs/we will not consort with big business and government, those that will disempower us, keep us quiet, keep you quiet. . . we will FUCK “the machine”/we will not die in secret, we will not disappear

—“We Are Queer,” Issue 3, Clitrocket

Embodied Theory

In chapter 2, I argue that zines and zinesters challenge the dominant view of how knowledge is generated; therefore, DIY situates zinesters as active agents in the creation and propagation of discourse. In this way,
zinesters are not passive consumers of knowledge, they are active agents in the creation and propagation of information. Implicit within this act then is the blurring of the lines between reader and writer, as well as the act of self-definition as creation of a new language in order to articulate what is "culturally unintelligible and impossible" (Butler 148-9). In "A Structuralist Activity," Roland Barthes connects creating art to interpretation because both acts make meaning through the manipulation of cultural symbolic associations. The "dissection" of meaning analyzes similarities and differences, for meaning is distinguished as significant in relation to the concepts and signifiers that surround it (489). Like artists, active interpreters create something new by manipulating and creating subjective contexts for representations/symbols, in effect redefining them or infusing them with new meaning. This effect is one of "dilation," the (forcible) expansion of language; if "the text... practises the infinite deferment of the signified, is dilatory" (1472), as Barthes suggests in "From Work to Text," then symbols are always being appropriated and redefined; the constant reinterpretation and recontextualization of codes are how
language "grows." Language indoctrinates and initiates humans into socialized value systems, and because language is ideology, discursive change accompanies social change.

Looking for ways to expand language and therefore representation to include their subjective interpretations, Grrrl and queer zinesters position academic and mainstream discourse's representations of their subjectivities as physically and ideologically confining. Both constrained by the absence of the body in academic theory and the narrow ideological representations of female bodies in mainstream media, queer and Grrrl zinesters have created space for dialogue around their own subjectivities in zines.\(^4\) In a culture that reviles the

\(^4\) There is no real consensus on how to represent/name/label the amorphous phenomena of Grrrl zines: not all zines made by females are Grrrl Zines, not all Riot Grrrls are zinesters, not all Grrrl Zinesters identify as Riot Grrrls. The phenomena of Grrrl zines is a political space that includes issues of gender and sexuality; therefore, many Grrrl zinesters are queer. Obviously, not all queer zinesters identify as Grrrl zinesters, so generally, Grrrl zinesters who are queer/bisexual/transgender/lesbian identify with both the queer and Grrrl zine movements. I use the terms "queer" and "grrrl" zines as stand-in terms for the diverse subject positions and perspectives in "queer, lady, grrrl and trans folk zines" outlined by Elke Zobl's website Grrrl Zine Network at http://grrrlzines.net/. Zobl goes into some depth in "Persephone is Pissed: Grrrl Zine Reading, Making, and Distribution Across the Globe" on pages 156-7. Also see Larry-bob's zine Holy Titclamps at
female body as abject and the other, queer and Grrrl zinesters use their zines to actively rewrite their subjectivities into new ideological centers based on theorized experience and an embodied critical consciousness.

Whether it is an image, a poem, or letter from the editor outlining a specific purpose, audience, and context, Grrrl zines usually begin with some establishment of purpose and context. Contextualizing their zines is a way of re-centering the reader within the boundaries of their personal subjectivities and perhaps is an act of reaching out to the reader to immerse herself into a new way of thinking. In these texts, the author gives the necessary background information her audience needs to understand the purpose and/or perspective of her zine, in effect situating herself within her personal subjectivity as distinguished from mass media proclamations of objectivity and fairness. These moments show an unequivocal desire to theorize their actions and writings, and in turn a desire to theorize their subjectivities. The anonymous author of "Dark Throat: Mostly True Stories http://www.holytitclamps.com/ for a truly excellent queer zine offered online.
from when I was a Boy-obsessed Bulimic Loser," prefaces her zine with "this zine is limited to the parts of my story I like to leave out"(n.p.), provoking the reader to interpret her zine as an articulation of a silenced subject position, as a space created to name the expectations and behaviors that oppress the author. Through confessional journal entries, the author vividly paints her life experiences as the basis for theorizing about her reactions to the oppressive cultural expectations of female beauty and behavior. The texts I have analyzed in various zines have characterized zinesters as identifying with action more than abstraction, so unsurprisingly their language reflects embodied theorizing. As Barbara Christian explicates in her essay "The Race for Theory," "potentially radical critics... have been influenced, even co-opted, into speaking a language and defining their discussion in terms alien to and opposed to our needs and orientation... the creative writers I study have resisted this language" (1859). Grrrl and queer zinesters see the importance of theorizing, but theorize in ways that embody their subjectivities through creative texts.
While most Grrrl and queer zines at least imply some desire to cast intellectual scrutiny upon their political and social identities, Veruska 0., the author of ClitRocket, cites one purpose of her zine in issue 3 quite explicitly: making zines as a means toward "visibility as political subject" (n.p.). Veruska's multilingual, genre-destroying zine takes up the queer zine legacy by explicitly verbalizing the link between social change through zine production and embodied critical consciousness. Zines offer critiques of hegemonic norms that are grounded in experience: Grrrl zines embrace the emotion that is eschewed in academia and exploited in mainstream media. In her zine I Always Called it Rape, Janni Aragon explains,

What I don't like is the institution of academia (higher education) and the way that the real is intellectualized. ... we need to talk about rape and violence against women and not just intellectualize our discussions. There is a time and a place for theory. However, we also need to remember that the real exists. The women, girls and men who have victimized. (n.p.)
As I related in chapter 2, academic theory tends to erase the emotional and physical realities of the subject being interrogated. Many zinesters recognize this erasure and deliberately create alternative ways of being and relating with one another as a means to challenge the academic norm of merely relaying abstract logic to argue a position. Janni Aragon seeks to give voice to a silenced/marginalized subject position, thereby creating a discourse of empowerment in writing for change. Female subjectivities and bodies have always been confined by physical and ideological bondage and the literal and metaphorical connections between rape and silenced pain show that simply questioning and theorizing about change is not enough. Action must be taken to create real possibilities for Grrrls and queers to reclaim their subjective power through writing.

Female bodies are hegemonically represented as fragmented, hyper-sexualized objects of public scrutiny and abuse. Yet, any serious discourses around female and queer subjectivities and bodies are silenced as passive through the implicit rhetoric of representation. Grrrl and queer zinester explicitly confront issues surrounding female and queer bodies in order to spread information
that offers empowered perspectives and freedom of choice about their bodies. This explicit breaking of silences is discursively necessary in order for these subjugated identities to reclaim their bodies. For instance, many zinesters encourage and proliferate conversations around women’s health in an effort to help the author and her audiences to reconsider the way women are taught to relate to their own bodies. *Alabama Grrrl* features writing about various social justice issues situated within author ailecia’s subjectivity as a queer feminist. In her rant “I Lost Control Today” in issue #8, ailecia uses detailed sensory imagery to deeply embody her struggles with the hegemonic marginalization and willful ignorance of menstruation: “the first thing I attempted was the evil PADS...I could HEAR it crease and crumple as I walked. How EMBARRASSING” (7). ailecia draws attention to the silenced physical realities women live with in a way that highlights the ways that women are socialized to relate to their bodies. Based on cultural silences around menstruation, one wouldn’t think that ailecia’s story is common, but ailecia seems to vent her own frustration about her health problems in for catharsis as well as propagating a discourse around her pain. This is
indicative of the ways that hegemonic discourse and technology alienate women from their own bodies, as well as indicative of the ways that zinesters work to articulate a discourse around important issues surrounding female subjectivity. Later, when she discusses her extremely painful cramps (which she links to bleached tampons and endometriosis), she tells her audience that all of the doctors’ only advice is to tell her to go on birth control to alleviate her pain. ailecia decides “FUCK THE PILL” and shares her explorations with herbal alternatives(9). This text is a potent example of the discourses Grrrl and queer zinesters engage in to discover and distribute alternative ways of being and thinking to represent their alienated subjectivities. Because ailecia has been offered no alternatives, she must search for them herself, and find new ways to reclaim and relate to her body. Her use of personal narrative combines definitional and informative methods, process analysis, as well as comparison and contrast to create a persuasive argument. Her implied purpose in sharing this information is to shift the discourse toward open communication about women-centered, natural health alternatives. The silences around the reproductive health of women and queers are
questioned in order to create space for empowerment and connections between personal reclamation and larger structures of oppression.

Such is the case for Sarah’s Swingset Girl issue 2, which presents the mixed genre text “Abortion”; Sarah presents the personal perspective on abortion first, heavily soaked with sensual imagery that evokes the real emotions of her experience with abortion:

i could feel the fear in my stomach almost jump through my throat. . . my heart had been pounding through my chest all day and the moment was there in front of me beneath big bright lights with my legs suspending into cold plastic stirrups. . . terror. they jabbed me with the iv as i cried and instead of seeing if i was alright, they pumped me full of anesthesia.

(n.p.)

Sarah deeply embodies her experience as she theorizes about it, deploying sensual imagery that evokes emotions in the readers and that mirrors her own fear and confusion about a subject that is discursively silenced. Sarah makes it quite clear that she is heavily influenced by feminist and queer discourse, so the relating of this
experience can be read as catharsis as well as theorizing about social control of female bodies. She juxtaposes her personal account with facts from Planned Parenthood about different procedures for abortion. The personal account situates the subjectivity of the author, thereby situating the facts within that subjectivity. Sarah juxtaposes these genres and embodies the academic or "objective" information with experience to juxtapose the gap between discourses, the silences that need voice.

Juxtaposition is a potent method for construction and deconstruction of difference and similarity. The associative organizational methods that Grrrl and queer zinesters employ reject hegemonic representations of reality/ways of making meaning. When organized by association, the author’s intended meaning is not foregrounded before the reader’s (possibly differing) interpretation. Associative methods draw upon the reader’s rich well of lived experience to make personal connections and disjunctions. When zinesters collage their texts, juxtaposing images or written text, or juxtaposing one written text with another, they lead interpretation as opposed to imposing meaning. In “Assault: Don’t Let it Happen to You” in Salza #3: for
Chick Supporters, Cleopatra collages date rape statistics with advice on how to stay safe (14). To organize in this way invites the reader to participate in a discourse that concerns her. The author literally deconstructs the facts and the lived realities by separating them from their original contexts, yet still makes personal interpretation clear though the inclusion and exclusion of certain information. Associative ways of organizing construct an argument and guide interpretation, but the technique engages the reader into participating in a discussion by asking the reader to make the connections herself and trusting the reader to draw her own subjective conclusions on the subject.

Zines create the opportunity to feature literal embodied subjects as well: Drag Kings, Radical Cheerleaders, Sex Workers, feminist synchronized swimmers, feminist craft/fashion designers, these artists all theorize the body around themes of performance and self-fashioning. Within these subjects about performing, manipulating, and creating the body, the authors generate dialogues around issues of femininity, sexuality, and "othered" subjectivities. In Slant, a zine reflecting the subjectivity of a Vietnamese punk feminist, Nguyen
includes a shadowed drawing of a female form outlining the handwritten words

This body is not for you. You are woman, but not human. You are named life-giver, but you are not life. You are precious, not for yourself, but what you carry in your womb. That life is sacred, yours is not. ("Slant" 63)

Underneath the drawing, escaping the confines of the body, are the words “Sister, Redefine Yourself. Take back your life” ("Slant" 63). Nguyen’s rhetoric questions the hegemonic logic of the constructed passivity of the feminine and draws attention to the objectification of women and how that contributes to the alienation women are socialized to feel against their own bodies. This articulation of pain and oppression reclaims and empowers the female body and subjectivity by connecting individual pain to a system of oppression. Because these issues are embodied in real experiences and existence, because there are many zinesters who participate in grassroots social action, zinesters’ critical consciousness places them in a unique space of bridging the gap of academic theory and direct action: interpretations of their subjectivities create new ways of being, thinking, and writing. In this
active fashioning of bodies are active reconstructions of thinking and writing.

Active (re)fashioning of the bodies and minds of these writers directly rebels against reality as hegemonic representation and instead imagines personal interpretation as an act of subjective, subversive authenticity. Judith Butler elucidates gender as performance in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, arguing that
gender is a repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender. (33)
Butler’s argument denaturalizes the (female, queer) body and examines the practices that construct the “natural”; in this way, identity is established by repeated acts that
constitute the experience of subjectivity as opposed to identity as hegemonic representation, or the expression of a true and natural self. If gender and sexual identity are constituted and policed through normative compulsory frames, then what is represented as natural within hegemonic discourse is actually culturally assumed knowledge used to socialize all people into uniform ways of thinking and being. These uniform ways of thinking and being are then used to justify hegemonic representations as natural. These representations then reproduce identities that benefit hegemony and the white supremacist patriarchal structure of society.

Butler takes to task the postmodern dilemma of agency within hegemonic representations of reality and existence. If gender and sexual identity are social constituted performances that reinforce hierarchical meanings, then dissent, difference, and change come into being through performance as well. Butler explicates that discourse and signification have already constructed alternative ways of being and thinking that are assumed to be "culturally unintelligible and impossible" (Butler 148-9); if a natural can be constructed, then it can be deconstructed and reconstructed to reveal the constitutive reality of
definition. Meaning making is a generative act, forged through repetition, as Butler explicates:

if the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only within the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible.(145)

To dilate language and ways of being, the unintelligible and impossible must first be articulated in order to become possible. Zinesters are well acquainted with the forces of socialization, and in this way have discovered ways to rewrite their bodies and minds: the authentic for a zinester relies upon the belief that deprogramming themselves from assimilation to hegemonic representations can get them in touch with their "real" selves. The body and the mind of the subject seek to create representations of their "true" selves that are based in the immediacy of direct experience and the urgency of change. Zinesters re-fashion their identities, repeating to themselves and others that the subjectivity they perform is their true,
pre-social selves. Butler would assert that the subversive repetition makes change understandable therefore possible.

Butler's ideas of the social construction of gender remind us that the codes of gender and sexuality are worn on the bodies like clothing, hairstyles, and grooming. In this way, fashion, a traditionally “feminine” interest used to control women's bodies and subjectivities, can become a subversive appropriation of cultural assumed knowledge. In Pussy zine’s “FUCK FASHION” issue, the author P5 uses text and image to collage associative and directive arguments about the power of self-fashioning. The back cover features the famous desperate leer of Charles Manson juxtaposed with the image of Joan Crawford wielding an axe in the movie Straight-Jacket (wherein Crawford’s character murders her philandering husband in front of their 2 year old daughter). “Free your clothes and your mind will follow” is collaged across the axe handle and on the bottom of the page is “ANTI-FASHION” is bold letters, making bold connections to the cultural codes of consumer/conformist femininity as an oppressive method of control of female bodies, minds, and behavior.
P5 reclaims fashion as an "art form" and redefines it this way:

it all starts with what you do and how you present yourself! And no, it doesn’t mean copying someone else’s look and calling it your own! No, it also doesn’t mean spending exorbitant amounts of money on designer clothes. It means doing the thing(s) you want to do without censoring it through the eyes of what other people might think. (n.p.)

P5 further explicates the connection between control of women’s bodies and fashion by making connections between foot-binding and anorexia. P5 and her guest designer, Chandi Lancaster of Cunt Clothing, work to reclaim control of their bodies by eschewing and critiquing the standards of conformity in haute couture fashion. They make connections between thought processes and the cultural codes used to define them through social identity: “self-aware style originates in confidence: as a woman, you have a connection to your emotions that you’re not afraid to show the world. Self-expression can be powerful” (n.p.). Instead of glamorizing mainstream representations of fashion and style, P5 and Chandi Lancaster interpret
fashion as a method of encouraging self-expression as a representation of embodied female subjectivity: to represent one’s body as a site of interpretation and dissent against gendered body norms. In this way, they encourage their audience to actively (re)interpret and reclaim their bodies and subjectivities.

Exploring the relationship between activism and fashion, Issue 4 of Clitrocket features an article called “ANTIdogs→noMAD[E]s→noFASHIONrules: revolutionary craft experiments and feminist fashion projects in europe” by Stephanie Müller. From clothes made with bullet- and dog bite-proof fabrics that protect women of color from assault, to skirts with “What I am Needs No Excuses” printed on them that can be quickly removed to become a banner, feminist designers explore the possibilities of clothes and fashion as sites of discourse around artistic, embodied subjectivities. As activist/designer Alison Rasch explains:

the greatest thing about clothing is the range of communication it offers – clothing can serve any purpose you like at any volume. Fashion is a unique medium that reflects and creates culture. (n.p.)
These kinds of articles are commonly found in zines: an informative feature-style piece that highlights the activities of local activists and presents and develops theories about grassroots community actions. Müller appropriates the form of the feature article and modifies it to suit her rhetorical purposes: a typical fashion feature’s implicit purpose is to generate the desire to consume these products. Müller manipulates this form to encourage the reader to get involved and to persuade her audience to rethink their fashion choices and philosophies. Through interviews and subjective interpretation, the author typically mixes evaluation of the event/action with quotes and perspectives from the organizers and participants in order to create a text that emphasizes fashion as a process of rewriting bodies and subjectivities as opposed to fashion as consumption of products. In this text, Müller connects clothing choices to political choices, eschewing the mass production of personal style, and with it, the mass production of identity. Like many who connect design and fashion with activism, Müller, Rasch, and the other designers featured in this text see connections between the creation of
culture, communication, and critical consciousness through fashioning and theorizing bodies.

Embodied Codes

Because feminists and queers live lives on the margins, we are acutely aware of the ambiguity of language and cultural codes; such ambiguity highlights mainstream culture’s inability to accurately reflect everyday lived realities of marginalized peoples. Many who appropriate mainstream codes and symbols resist being identified solely with false representations, but instead aim to dilate traditional boundaries in the subject positions they inhabit. Recognizing that language use is theorizing in and of itself, Grrrl and queer zinesters actively self-define and self-fashion in order to find and create the spaces they need to survive as a marginalized political subject.

By creating new ways of being/thinking/writing that prize the feminine but allow the freedom to self-define and self-fashion, Grrrl zinesters appropriate images and codes of middle class American girlhood to subvert and short-circuit cultural associations surrounding femininity and female subjectivity. Sarah’s Swingset Girl issue 2
has a pink cover with a large pink and white fabric heart glued to the cover, which is tied together with string. An acknowledgment of the influence of female-centered arts and crafts, the fabric heart and binding with string are embodiments of the real physicality of females creating art, embodying their subjectivities by fashioning material codes to represent write themselves. In her introduction, she writes the lines “we used to pretend we were soaring away from all the broken hearts and lies” and pastes them over a picture of a smiling girl on a swing, setting the context of unadulterated pleasure of “innocent” girlhood and its pursuits are constructed as a safe space. Issue 2 continuously appropriates the codes of girlhood and integrates them into her ideas of feminism and female power. Her piece “Crush” appropriates the aesthetic of girlie doodling on notebook paper, showing a flowery drawing of girls holding hands with hearts drawn around them. At first glance, the style of this text evokes elementary school infatuations. As Sarah writes of her crush on another girl, she uses emotionally-charged language: “i wish so much that i could hold her and keep her heart with mine” (n.p.). The author evokes themes and aesthetics of pre-adolescent female friendships and
“innocent” crushes, subverting mainstream representations of homosexuality and female connection. She redefines female connections by reclaiming and subverting young girls’ friendships and love before mainstream society’s construction of female puberty enforces compulsory heterosexuality.

Another staple of All-American girlhood is the cheerleader: the engaged spectator and object of the male gaze. Cheerleading constructs femininity as part of a normalizing gender dichotomy wherein the masculine players whose actions are the center of attention and the feminine spectators who are cheering for them on the sidelines are enacting the ritual of the performed gender binary. In this dichotomy, the masculine “side” is always where the important action and heroism takes place; the feminine “side” is always performing the “menial” tasks of support and encouragement. To appropriate the power of this specifically feminine endeavor, Radical Cheerleaders employ non-traditional cheerleading as performance art in order to subvert the traditional role of cheerleader as object and redefine it as a truly engaged spectatorship. Hollywood Nihil by Mary Xmas includes intense theoretical justification for the Radical Cheerleaders, redefining the
movement as a means to communication and motivation to make change/take action. Mary Xmas illustrates: “This is no football game. It’s people losing their freedom, women fearing rape and murder, queers doing suicide to escape the hate and alienation” (4). Because Radical Cheerleaders use cheers, texts that are rhyming, sing-songy, and designed to motivate, they are subverting a textual form that is conceived of as trivial, brainless, and feminine.

Case in point, the cheer “Sound Off-Queerleader Style” hand written in block letter in Radical Cheerleader Handbook #3:

Repress/Repress/Let’s not ever mention sex. . .
Your lines too straight, your laws too strict/But we got spray paint, ass, and bricks. . . Shout it Out—Liberation!/Shout it Out—Queer Invasion!/Queers must rise up/Enuf is enuf/Fuck the right/We’ll FIGHT FIGHT FIGHT! (32)

Reclaiming the power of a sexualized and objectified subject position in order to shock audiences into listening to the message, Radical Cheerleaders hope to motivate a rethinking of myriad cultural assumptions through the vocalization of silenced subject positions.
Radical Cheerleaders quite literally vocalize the silenced realities of marginalized peoples and social justice movements. From cheers about loving body hair to menstruation pride, Radical Cheerleaders connect articulation with encouragement and creating change; in a society that suppresses the voices, hearts, and minds of women and queers, Radical Cheerleaders transpose their rage into cheers and rants. They write on a variety of social injustices, engage in thoughtful interviews with the press, yet Xmas informs us that the mainstream media continually exploits and marginalizes their group (5).

Zines are place for Radical Cheerleaders to oppose the shallow media representations that reduce them to the stereotypes they wish to dispel, representations that benefit patriarchal meaning-making and reduce their power to create alternatives. Mary Xmas questions why this is the case and comes to the conclusion that “the comfort of the familiar” is what motivates meaning making in many people: “the familiar. . . it’s what we already know. But how do we know it?”(7). The reader turns the page and handwritten in large letters is the word “CONTEXT.” A few lines down she writes: “our present has to be constantly referenced to the past in order to be understood”(8).
Xmas relates this to "spin" in mainstream media to illustrate, then asks "What are people afraid of? What's so damn terrible about trying to live in the face of the unknown and unseen?...Dwell in the Unfamiliar. ... there is still time for everything to not be exactly the same" (8).

To motivate their audiences to overthrow the stereotype of VIRGIN/whore, sex workers have recently began to unionize, and with this political organization, a discourse has proliferated that seeks to politicize their subjectivities. Spread: Illuminating the Sex Industry seeks to politicize and naturalize the subjectivities of sex workers through such texts as "A Whore's Stream of Consciousness" by Juliette Sadaa. Sadaa's author biography tells the reader "always looking for ways to question the dominant paradigm, whoring seemed like a natural path to follow" (60), and she uses this "journal entry" to explain her choice in identifying as a "whore":

I argue that I'm reclaiming the word, that I'm attempting to linguistically legitimate an illegal, contentious, greatly disregarded and contemptuous profession. So I say it casually, for a normative effect, as well as for shock
value, which kind of goes against the desire to create a normative effect. (59)

As Sadaa rebelliously redefines herself, she de-centers the mainstream ideologies through which society perceives and defines females. Females are socialized to perceive themselves not through the lenses of their own subjectivities, but through the lens of hegemony, thusly objectifying and alienating themselves from their own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. In this way, Sadaa is subjectifying herself, opposing the pressure to conform to passive femininity. This critical distance from hegemonic representations of identity allows space for redefinition and reauthorizing of marginalized and erased realities. She identifies the methods of communicating her consciousness by recognizing definition as a comparison between similarity and difference and highlighting the discursive usefulness of deconstructing to normalize as well as to shock. She explicates the violence with which women are coerced into social norms: “I declare, ‘this rape culture no longer keeps me inside, afraid and controlled’”(59), connoting the connections between ideological and physical coercion and the alienation of female subjectivities. As Sadaa legitimizes her
experiences and subjectivity through appropriation and subversion of sexual ideology, she argues for a de-centering of sexual and gender norms in order to reclaim her power and authority.

Similarly, in Pussy zine, P5 says, "I’m reviving the ancient Babylonian law mandating that every woman behave like a slut for at least one day in her life... because a slut who glories in herself is a powerful force" (n.p.). Reclaiming such derogatory terms such as "slut" and "whore" work to critique the signs/values intended to alienate women from their bodies and subjectivities. Derogatory terms are hegemonically deployed to remove the subversive power of a sexually "deviant" subject position in order to control its power. In reclaiming the representative power of a subject position, the author reclaims its cultural power. To change the connotative and denotative meanings associated with the codes in question requires recontextualizing the symbol to dilate culturally constrictive meanings. The message of these texts: legitimizing the power of the sexual deviant promulgates empowerment. To participate in active meaning making is to take the rhetorical position of agent of language and therefore agent of change. To give name to what is
nameless creates language about a silenced subject position, which generates discourse among those who identify with the symbol. As zinesters invite readers to make and disseminate their own truths, they authorize other writers to do the same.

The rhetorical choice of appropriating mainstream or radical codes depends on the meanings that the author needs to convey. In the cases where the author wishes to not only critique hegemony but to offer alternatives, the use of radical/outsider concepts is necessary because the appropriation and subversion of hegemonic codes carry the danger of the audience misunderstanding or misinterpreting the author's purpose and meanings and reaffirming that which it purports to fight. When the author introduces radical theoretical concepts, the audience is engaged to stretch their thinking farther. For instance, in issue four of Clitrocket, a hand-drawn graphic that claims “Gender is A Weapon” is embedded within an interview with Lynn Breedlove, singer of dyke punk band Tribe 8. The “A” in the middle of the phrase has a circle drawn around it, changing the “A” into an anarchy symbol; radiating out of the anarchy symbol are various symbols used to represent gender, including a symbol that consists of the female and
male sign superimposed to symbolize transgender identity. The artist juxtaposes the concepts of anarchism and gender fluidity in order to force the reader to make certain connections: while the meaning is direct, the reader is called upon to create meaning for herself.

Anarchism, very loosely defined, seeks to explore how and why social organization is constructed hierarchically through ideology, how hierarchy creates inequality and suffering, and seeks to explore the ways that societies could be organized non-hierarchically. To implicate gender oppression within the propagation of hierarchical social organization is a sophisticated critique of the ways that discursive symbology and gender boundaries are intimately connected to maintaining patriarchal social order. Furthermore, to state that gender is a weapon is to reclaim the power of gendered subjectivities for re-centering and recontextualizing oppression. To the artist of this piece, gender is not an element of social organization that oppresses her, but instead is a weapon to empower her to take action and forcibly create change. The author immerses these symbols into a new context to illuminate how all symbols are interdependent and systematized to create meaning; that is, a symbol means
nothing without connections to the surrounding context. Finding loopholes in the sign system and exploiting them is a method for critiquing hegemony and questioning what is authoritative and natural within a given culture. The culture construction of the female gender as passive is reliant upon the cultural association of the male as active; when gender is removed from its context to become a weapon, then gender is no longer something that one is oppressed by, but a concept that engages us to take action against that oppression. Grrrl and queer zinesters use recontextualization as a technique to denaturalize passive femininity and naturalize empowered action within their culture.

As participatory ways of making meaning allow the active subject to recontextualize her ideologies and subjectivities, both the creator of meaning and the interpreter are working to dilate the confines of language to create authentic representations of their marginalized realities. Because humans use symbols to make meaning of their experiences and surroundings, to create symbols that carry veracity for the author and audience are monumental in empowering personal and social change. The initial motivation for DIY publishers surely connects to the
aesthetic of zines; the rhetorical and stylistic methods of the rough, beginner, cut-and-paste aesthetic compels the zinester to publish because it seems so easy that "anyone can do it." Moreover, the feelings of independence DIYers have when they take action is a motivation to continue. To DIY is active opposition to the confines of passive femininity: women taking action is always subversive in a society that infantilizes and degrades females into passivity. Some women are so socialized to passivity that they believe themselves to be helpless and impotent to create change or influence others. DIY rhetoric reminds zinesters not to rely on others to do anything for you because anyone can publish and everyone should.

To truly identify with the symbols one uses to express one's reality can be a way of achieving authenticity, which is not found in passive consumption of authoritative meanings and identities, but instead is articulated through pride in subjective difference and deviation from hegemonic norms. If hegemonic representations of social identity are methods of social control that reframe experience as commodity, assimilation to these norms is an inauthentic "selling out." Many
Zinesters recognize that political and social identities are not the reality of our experiences, merely representations of reality; thus as humans attempt to interpret their experiences through inauthentic models, they become alienated from the codes and cultural meanings attached to them. Zinesters actively encourage discursive escape and work to introduce alienation from symbols as a method of illuminating the chasm between signifier and signified. Zinesters work to dilate language by praising the ethics of authenticity as located within difference, dissent, and disjunction.

Stephen Duncombe argues that zinesters eschew rhetoric as artifice, and much in the way that language is not reality but a symbol of it, these writers negotiate the creation of meaning by the use of associational methods of organizing and the use of juxtaposition and collage. Zinesters' rhetoric of bricolage makes clear the gaps in between symbol and meaning as well as the connections and disjunctions between meaning making. The rhetoric of bricolage elucidates the ways that discourse is perpetuated: if all communication is an act of appropriating learned concepts and symbols, then all discourse is intertextual and pieced together as it suits
the author. To employ rhetoric of bricolage is to acknowledge the ways that readers come to a text and how they interpret texts. This rhetoric praises the subjective ways that readers make meaning. As these writers collage discourse, they collage their identities from the scattered concepts, experiences, and beliefs and values that constitute their realities. Many zinesters apparently use their zines to appropriate different cultural codes in order to build personal discourses and identities.

Analyzing the subversive writing practices of zinesters allows us to examine the role of participatory cultures in shaping discourse. From the sophisticated recognition of how nuances of purpose construct pop culture texts to their explorations and critiques of the functions of and relationships between artist, audience, and art, zinesters construct an active writing subject who makes clear connections between symbolic and cultural power. If dissent is an interpretive activity, and interpretation is dissent, then to insist that the outsiders and the disenfranchised have the ethical imperative to interpret our own subjectivities is to insist we have the right to exist.
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