

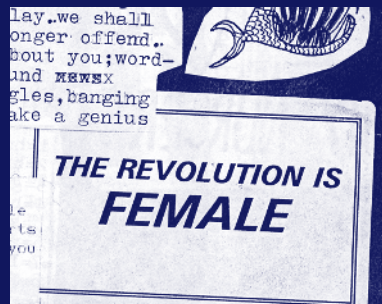
Professorial Platforms
Professor Teal Triggs
**'Do it Yourself' Girl Revolution:
LadyFest, Performance
and Fanzine Culture**



Image: Angel, Bitter Strawberries (c.1999)

“There is no one Riot Grrrl ethic, one politics. Riot grrrl is connected by feminism – is that fair enough?”

unknown author, ‘Ladyfest 2001, Glasgow and what riot grrrl means to me...’, *Riot Grrrl Essex* fanzine, 2003



Subcultural Studies has moved on since Dick Hebdige’s seminal *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979). Today there is even room for some female voices, and books and articles about the riot grrrl phenomenon have become common. Riot grrrl, for the uninitiated (with an emphasis on the three ‘r’s and the growling sound it makes when spoken), began as an indie music phenomenon in Olympia, Washington in 1991, drawing upon the politics of third wave feminism. Since then it has grown to mean an international feminist network, which is played out at music gigs, festivals and within the pages of riot grrrl fanzines. Recent studies have included Nadine Monem (ed.) *Riot Grrrl: Revolution Girl Style Now* (2007), Marion Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock Discourse and Girl Power* (2007), and Janice Radway’s forthcoming *Girls, Zines, and their Afterlives: Sex, Gender, Capitalism, and Everyday Life in the Nineties and Beyond*. Indeed some of the authors and contributors to these studies were themselves riot grrrls when it all began. Yet one area that has been under-explored is the connection between riot grrrl fanzines, performance and event culture more broadly.

Let’s begin with a zine.

Vaginal Teeth, 1998. Six years after the first UK riot grrrl meeting was held in Leeds, a group of young women returned to the city to create a fanzine in which they remembered why they had ‘made the effort in the first place’ (fig.1) The fanzine (a term which conflates the notion of a fan magazine) was a 20 page, A4 photocopied and stapled publication (300 copies) whose interior pages were comprised of personal writings reflecting on what it had meant to be part of the riot grrrl movement. The movement significantly fostered links between communities and the fanzines became their political mouthpieces. As one *Vaginal Teeth* contributor explains of her experiences:

‘I saw a wistfulness, a searching for connection that would be tantamount to approval, for communication in a world that is still alien and discomforting. The girls who wrote



1. *Vaginal Teeth*. 1998, UK. This fanzine was written and produced by Maddy, Geraldine, Aisha, Kate, Clare, Vic, Andy Simone, Karren and Cazz. It was edited by Clare, Simone and Cazz. 300 copies were printed and distributed to the riot grrrl network

fanzines taught me that having a little bit of self-belief wasn't dirty, that the dreams fed to us by magazines and mothers were all a lie, that what I thought wasn't stupid and what I feared was real but could be overcome.'⁽¹⁾

Although *Vaginal Teeth* is a post-Spice Girls fanzine, it belongs to a group of early 1990s punk-inspired publications where political attitudes were fostered and represented by slogans such as the 'personal is political' and 'collective action'. Clearly there are references here to early feminist positions. For example, themes often associated with first wave feminism appear throughout – politics and sexual identity, health issues, self-worth, lesbianism, women's rights, networking and so forth.

Visually, *Vaginal Teeth* harks back to the production techniques used by producers of late 1970s punk fanzines where black and white collaged images and hand- and type-written texts contribute to a 'do-it-yourself' aesthetic in which the production values indicate a sense of urgency and immediacy in the conveyance of its message. Like other riot grrrl fanzines, *Vaginal Teeth* appropriated images of first, second and third-wave feminist culture and resistance. For example it references Gloria Steinem's *Ms. Magazine*, specifically the July 1972 cover featuring the DC comic book character Wonder Woman – herself a 'feminist'. The image used on *Vaginal Teeth* however, is appropriated from a 1973 newspaper cartoon published in *Sister* magazine, where Wonder Woman appears in her bedazzling stars and stripes costume and 'slashes in the air' with a speculum – an instrument which had become a symbol of the Women's Liberation Movement and health awareness in the early 1970s. In the *Sister* magazine version she directs her protest to an audience comprised of doctors and medical experts, family planners, and right-to-lifers.⁽²⁾



Flyer, Riot Grrrl Chapter, Washington DC, c. 1991

“With this whole Riot Grrrl thing, we’re not trying to make money or get famous; we’re trying to do something important, to network with grrrls all over, to make changes in our own lives and the lives of other girls”

Riot Grrrl Events and Performance

So what is the connection between fanzines and event culture? An event may be defined as a particular type of gathering: Theodore Adorno talks about an event as taking the ‘form of work – labor – performed in time and realized through time’s unfolding’.⁽³⁾ It is also worth noting Ken Friedman’s description of an event and its resulting form. He remarks, ‘Events may be realised in several ways. As ideas, we think them. As scores or instructions, we transmit them in some form, printed, broadcast, exhibited, or even spoken. As process, we perform, enact, or realize them – that is, we make them real. As artifact, events take a form that may represent or replicate the idea, the score, the process, some trace or relic of these, or possibly a completed work that remains when the score is realized.’⁽⁴⁾

We can say that the making of a fanzine is a form of event. If we return to *Vaginal Teeth*, we can say that as the producers came together in Leeds to collaborate on the production of a fanzine, they did so with the idea of participating in an event. One of the producers clarifies that their intent was not to publish a ‘record’ of the Leeds ’98 event: rather for each participant the fanzine was a site in which they could say why riot grrrl and these meetings were important to them in the first place. She explains:

‘So, on the 7th February 1998 I made a pilgrimage to Leeds for the first Riot Grrrl meeting in the city for over five years. Why? Well for one thing, I was only thirteen when the last Leeds meeting had taken place.... and I wanted to go to this because I’d never been to a meeting before and was curious as to what I’d been missing.’⁽⁵⁾

Another writes about this event:

‘I believe that in Riot Grrrl we can support each other to get these things sorted, to share ideas about ways to get stronger and ways to get help if it is necessary. After that, when we are confident and strong in ourselves, action comes easy.’⁽⁶⁾



2. Bikini Kill, *Bikini Kill: A Color and Activity Book*. c.1991. In the introduction to this fanzine, the band and zine producers, rallied their readership into action with feminist slogans such as 'Grrrl Power', 'Revolution Girl Style Now'. The fanzine and band were part of a bigger idea of 'revolution'.

The resulting artifact, *Vaginal Teeth*, which was produced in a and accessible fanzine form not only resulted in a social document of their gathering but, more importantly, encapsulated its process in the written and visual language offered by each participant. For riot grrrls, collaboration reinforced a sense of community and a shared group identity while still providing individuals a separate, but equal voice. Such social cohesion was further established by the production of a riot grrrl manifesto by Katheen Hanna, one of the early 'founders' of the movement. It begins:

'BECAUSE us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US that WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways....' ⁽⁷⁾

As Mary Celeste Kearney point out in her book *Girls Make Media* (2006), riot grrrls took control over the modes of cultural production. ⁽⁸⁾ Along with the production of fanzines, riot grrrls were involved in many aspects of the creation of music, visual art and films and 'BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own moanings (sic).' ⁽⁹⁾ Each stage of this process of cultural production including the artifact's creation, production, promotion and distribution, was fostered by the DIY nature of the movement itself. For example, early riot grrrl bands such as Hanna's Bikini Kill, refused to talk directly to the mainstream press, preferring instead to do interviews with fanzine producers. This also became an event. As Hanna (2003) writes,

'Performance isn't just 'bout what happens when a performer is on the stage; it's also about context. The context includes what happens before, during, and after the performance, as well as the general climate the performance takes place in.' ⁽¹⁰⁾

GIRL GERMS



THE GLORY ON HIGHWAY 69

Ladyfest and Performance

Since its inception in 2000, the main event in the riot grrrl calendar is Ladyfest. It was given the name of Ladyfest as a way to 'reclaim the word "Lady", much in the same way riot grrrl wanted to reclaim the word "girl"'. Alison Wolfe of the band Bratmobile and co-producer of the influential *Girl Germs* fanzine, (fig.3) remembers that founder Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill had remarked: 'We will have to find a new word when we get older and become Ladies.'⁽¹¹⁾ Riot grrrl supporters organised the first Ladyfest convention which was held in Olympia, Washington. It was organised primarily as a response to the way in which riot grrrl music and the movement had been absorbed into the mainstream. Wolfe, one of the event's organisers, reflects,

'We were discussing how alternative music had been co-opted by the mainstream. Our culture had been taken from us and sold back to us in a "higher" form. We wanted to create our own communities instead of buying it'.⁽¹²⁾

By 2009 over 100 Ladyfests had taken place internationally including in America, Europe, and Australia. As an organised event, the main aim of each Ladyfest has been 'to raise the profile and support the artistic development of female musicians and artists'⁽¹³⁾. In doing so, organisers have had to establish new types of organisational structures to ensure financial backing and delivery of the event and its related activities with workshops, fanzine stalls, lectures, and so forth. This is different from earlier riot grrrl meetings which had been set up in a more spontaneous and ad hoc manner and did not require the coordination of for example, paying bands or arranging ticket sales. With the first Ladyfest Olympia, a template for organising Ladyfest events was established. It is now available on the Ladyfest website and includes general guidelines and advice on how to produce your own event as well as archiving examples of more recent Ladyfest events. Yet, despite the pragmatic formalisation of these event management structures and the template guidelines, the original intention of riot grrrl to provide spaces where

LADY
FEST

3. *Girl Germs* cover, Issue 4, produced by Alison Wolfe and Molly Neuman. The original Ladyfest logo from the Olympia, Washington event (2000) is now used in conjunction with more localised graphic identities.



4. Ladyfest Scotland (2001) was held in Glasgow where organisers produced its programme in the form of a fanzine.

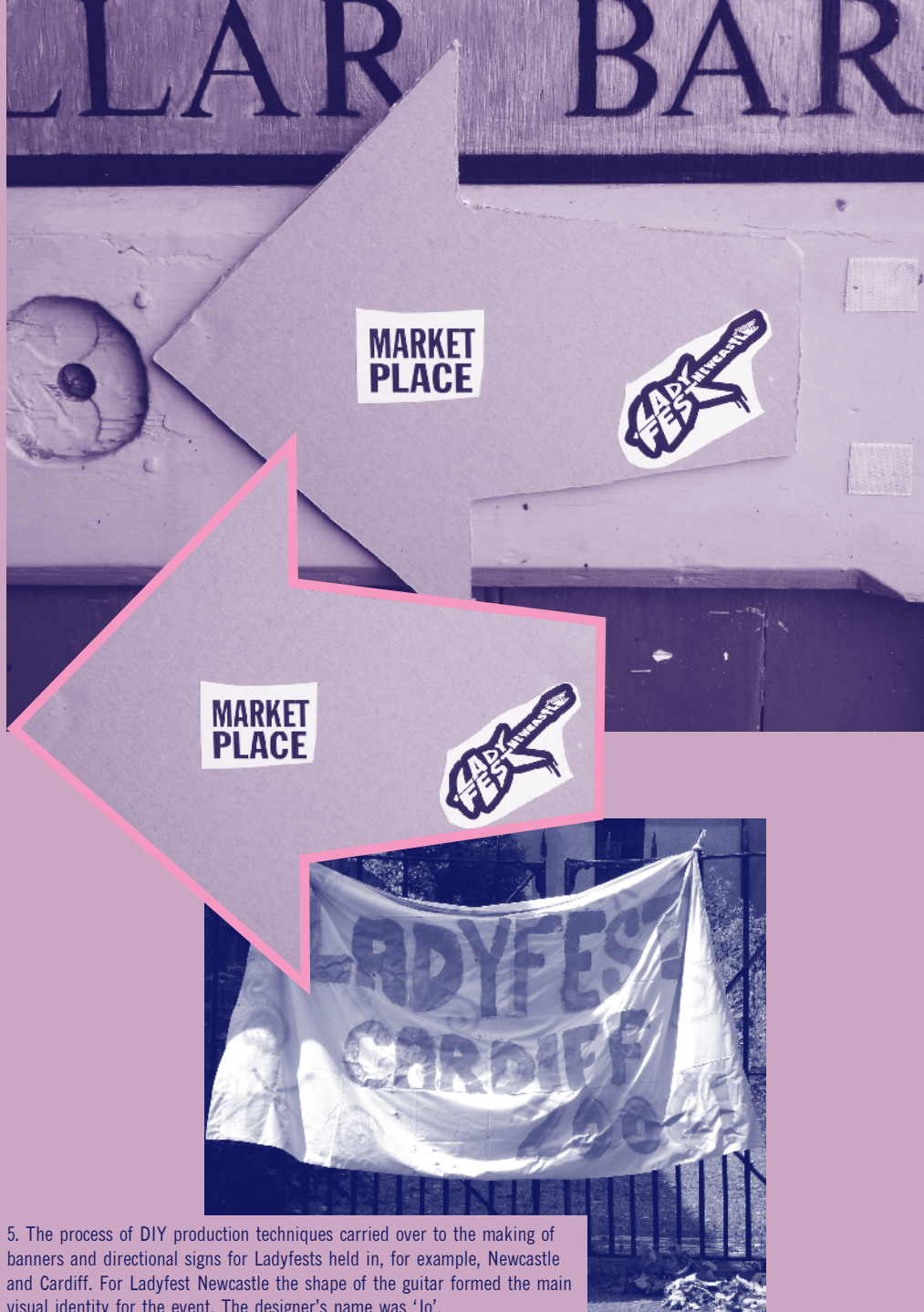
individual voices come together remains an integral part of the Ladyfest rationale.

For example, each city-based organiser remains committed to producing Ladyfests that also serve to represent local community needs and concerns. The first European Ladyfest was held in Glasgow, Scotland at the 13th Note Café and Bar. Lee Beatie, co-organiser of Ladyfest Scotland, wrote in the fanzine-inspired Ladyfest programme (fig.4),

'It was important to all of us that we didn't just consume the Ladyfest message and talk about it until it just became a nice memory, but that we actively took it forward and produced something of our own. We wanted to see the event in the context of our own community.'⁽¹⁴⁾

Taking place over a three-day period Ladyfest Scotland 2001 (Glasgow) attracted several hundred young women and girls who participated in a series of practical workshops, literary and stage performances as well as attending concerts given by bands hailing from America, Britain and Scandinavia. The event was organised by seventeen young women (with the help of their mothers), who had attended the inaugural Ladyfest that had been staged in Olympia, Washington a year previously. The input into the local community continues as a theme of all Ladyfests where organisers donate any remaining proceeds from the sale of tickets to local women's charities. For the Newcastle Ladyfest (2006), organisers stressed the benefit to potential funding bodies in that the event would raise the profile of 'local female artists as well as a catalyst to inspire more women and girls to get involved in creative activity.' This would in turn, they argued, contribute to the development of 'new talent in the North East which will enrich the regional arts scene.'⁽¹⁵⁾

But how might we bring a discussion of events back to fanzines? It is worth reminding ourselves of Friedman's description of 'event' where he proposes that 'as artifact, events take a form that may represent or replicate the idea, the score, the process, some trace or relic of these, or possibly a completed work that remains when the score is realized.'⁽¹⁶⁾ In keeping with the idea of communication and



5. The process of DIY production techniques carried over to the making of banners and directional signs for Ladyfests held in, for example, Newcastle and Cardiff. For Ladyfest Newcastle the shape of the guitar formed the main visual identity for the event. The designer's name was 'Jo'.

dissemination, Ladyfest events have each produced their own range of promotional materials (which we may now consider to be graphic artifacts) such as logos, posters, flyers, websites as well as event programmes. (fig.5) These identities were also used on posters and flyers advertising pre-Ladyfest events which were organised to help in fundraising. In a self-published zine document titled *UK Ladyfest Artwork 2001-2008: The Collected Interviews*, the editors explain:

'We were interested in how these events were represented visually depending on where they were, what they were predominantly showcasing (arts, music etc) and how the creators of these art works felt their pieces spoke to their audience, and what it could say to new audiences.'⁽¹⁷⁾

Each Ladyfest produced an event programme which listed the schedule, venue location, description of the bands and other performers, etc. These were produced in the form of a fanzine and took on the overall identity of the specific Ladyfest event and the city in which it was located. We have already seen for example Ladyfest Scotland's use of the format and techniques associated with fanzine production. A black and white photograph of Barbie, in this case, provides the main image on the front cover commenting upon a culture of the objectification of women. Other Ladyfest programmes followed suit. For example, Ladyfest London 2002 logo was created by designer and illustrator Xtina Lamb with the programme artwork by Rachel White, featuring a screened colour photograph of Beth Ditto stripped down to her bra and panties while singing on stage. By now, the fanzine aesthetic had shifted from the black and white photocopied imagery to a more sophisticated use of desktop publishing and printing. But the political concerns remained the same. The use of Ditto on the cover, for example, highlighted the festival's emphasis on a celebration of 'unconventional' body shapes.

Events and the Zine Connection

The selling of a fanzine can be a form of an event, where distribution takes place and stalls are the focus for discussion and promotion. The annual London Zine Symposium (2008) or the Women's Library Zine Fest! (2008/9) are two recent cases in point where stall holders come together to celebrate independent and small press publishing. As we have seen, fanzines are also an integral part of the Ladyfest circuit. These spaces are where riot grrrl zine producers meet, share stories, exchange zines and interact with other like-minded individuals. Stalls are often decorated and zine producers hawk their wares much like market traders. At Ladyfest Scotland, fanzine producers such as the women's collective Las Sin Fonteras decorated their stall space with washing lines of hanging panties and tampons which reflected the content of their zine *Menstrama* and the workshops they held on women's bodies and health.

More obviously, the content of the fanzine may contain reports and/or commentary on specific events to do with neo-feminist subcultures. These may be reviews of Indy music gigs, or 'zine symposiums. This is information not normally covered by the mainstream press such as the *New Musical Express*. They form part of this broader 'event' culture. And, is also a key arena for the evaluation of what Sarah Thornton has described as subcultural capital.⁽¹⁸⁾

And finally, fanzines can be part of a performed event where fanzine producers read from their own publications. This trend toward spoken word performance has its roots in the late 1960's feminist art where lyrics, prose and poems were spoken rather than sung. Early feminist performance art developed in the areas of identity and political action. Performers in the 1960s included artists such as Carolee Schneemann and Yoko Ono, while in the 1970s Judy Chicago, Eleanor Antin and Suzanne Lacey were rooted in a sense of female community (such as the Feminist Studio Workshop of the Women's Building). Linda S. Klinger, in exploring the relationship between critical theory and women artists

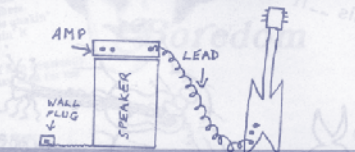


6. 'Zine Symposium held in London, 2008. The performative nature of bartering, zine exchanges, and producers selling their wares take the form of market trading stalls.



"It's too complex, It's too heavy, It's unfeminine" Etc, etc, etc...

know anyone else who's interested, try putting ads up at your school, or youth centre (especially if they have a girls night). Try any places you know where there are young women. If you go to local gigs, try asking if they'll announce something over the P.A. (Public Address-Microphone) or best of all put an ad in Shocking Pink (free) and meet lots of other fabulous young Women.



Once you've decided which instrument you'd like to play, the first obstacle will be that most vulgar and constant problem, MONEY. . . AGH. . . but. . . you can pick up bargains if you shop around.

COST

these are examples of cheap 2nd hand prices.

Electric Guitar and Bass – £25-£35 playable, but not good (junk shop or market price) £60-£70 good.



Electric instruments need a 'lead' and an 'amp' (see diagram). Practice amp: £15, from a market. You can also plug it into an old tape recorder or radio. Keep the volume down and be especially careful with a bass, and its possible to blow the speakers. (tends to annoy parents).



Photos by Fran Rayner.

Thanks to Alison Rayner and Deirdre Cartwright.



When you start playing, something quite cheap will probably be good enough just to have a bash on, learn a few basics and get used to the instrument.

Drums – DEIRDRE: "Proper kits are very expensive and most people start by hitting packing cases or saucepans. Buy some drum sticks and hit anything you want." The best way if you haven't much money (who has) is to build up a kit gradually, one drum at a time, until you have enough.

A very cheap full kit will cost £100-£120. £200 – something quite good. **Saxophones** are expensive: not less than £100 for a playable instrument. With drums and sax, its not always good to buy the cheapest, because old drums can fall apart, and old saxes can be difficult to play. (see next section).

ALISON: "What's really bad is that the more you pay for an instrument, the easier it is to play."

BUYING EQUIPMENT

Always buy 2nd hand. You pay VAT on new instruments, and they don't hold their value.

Whenever possible, get someone who knows about the instrument to go with you. It's very important and will save you a lot of time and money. It also means that you can buy from junk shops or markets, where the prices will be much lower than in music shops, and you're far more likely to pick up a bargain. If you don't know anyone, ask around, your music teacher might suggest someone, try a sixth former, or if there's a band at school/college/locally and they look reasonably friendly, go up and ask if they know anyone, they might offer to help you. Try local Women's Liberation groups – feminist musicians will almost certainly be sympathetic.

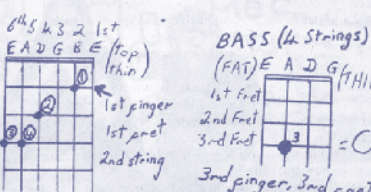
The main places to look for instruments on sale are:

- 1) Classified Ads (back pages) of the Melody Maker, published weekly, 30p.
 - Exchange & Mart, published weekly, widely available. 20p Mixture of cheap and expensive – look carefully to find instruments in your price range.
 - 2) Card Ads, in book/music shops, Newsagents etc.
 - 3) Junk shops or markets.
 - 4) Second hand from Music shops (look in yellow pages)
- The main problem buying from papers in that you need transport. If you're stuck, buy from Music shops. Its likely to be more expensive than other methods, but some give guarantees, and you can take it back if something goes wrong.

WHERE TO PLAY

Once you have a merry little band, and something to play, you'll need a space where you can get together. Try asking a sympathetic teacher if you can use a room after school, or at lunch time. This may entail being nice to the head of the music dept. (yuk). Take advantage of all available facilities. If you're not at school, try community centres, youth clubs, scout huts, anywhere you can think of.

Don't be intimidated or put off by boys who might try and make fun of you. Remember, that's *their* problem, *not* yours. It's easier to understand their pathetic insecure gestures when you have support from other young women. Just to start you off, here are a couple of simple chords.



If we can help you at all, if there's anything you'd like to know, please get in touch. Also if there are any musicians who would be willing to take a workshop or put some time and energy into helping young women learn an instrument, we'd be very glad to hear from you. We can publish details in the next issue.

Hona

Spot the difference!

This is intended as a rough guide to help you avoid the pitfalls and overcome the problems involved in buying equipment or forming your own band. It includes information on cost, instruments, places to play etc. Although it can't go into great detail, hopefully it'll give you a few ideas and maybe help break down some of the crap which is built up round most traditional male domains to mystify and keep women out, "It's too complex, It's too heavy, It's unfeminine" etc, etc, etc. . . Well it's rubbish, if you want to do it you can.

If you've never played an instrument before or if you're a bit unsure about which instrument you'd like to take up, a good way of helping you make up your mind and meeting others is to go along to a girls music workshop. Here you don't have any of the hassles or embarrassment of playing in front of people who might make fun of you. Like at school, even if you have access to a set of drums, the chances are, you won't feel confident enough to get up and play if there are people listening.

JULIA: "I'd really like to play drums, but whenever you want to have a go there's always boys showing off, hitting them really hard and thinking they're brilliant. The girls don't get a look in. Even if you have a go you're too embarrassed to try anything."

Two musicians who have run girls only workshops in London explained,

ALISON: "Boys have had a lot of encouragement and access to both equipment and knowledge (brothers, mates in bands etc). We want to encourage girls and help redress the balance."

The workshops are not competitive and you can do or play what you want.

DEIRDRE: "We keep the different instruments separate at first so people can go and try them out. Then in the afternoon everybody gets together. Maybe they've learned two guitar chords which sounds a bit weak on its own, but when you play it with bass and drums you can see how it all fits."

ALISON: "Sometimes its a bit chaotic, but people always enjoy themselves and often swap names and addresses".

The main problem with workshops is that they only happen occasionally and so far most of them have taken place in London. However there is of course nothing to stop you and a few friends organising something in your area. It doesn't have to be a workshop, an informal group, with or without a 'teacher' can be a lot of fun. If you don't

7. A precursor to riot grrrl fanzines, *Shocking Pink*, ran from the 1980s-1990s and billed itself as a 'radical magazine for young women'. This spread shows their female readership that anyone can form a band. 'It is easy as 1-2-3', has its roots in punk where the three chord diagram was found in early zines such as *Sideburns* (c.1976).



“Reading a fanzine may inspire a performance”

Ayesha, producer of *Interrobang*, 2006



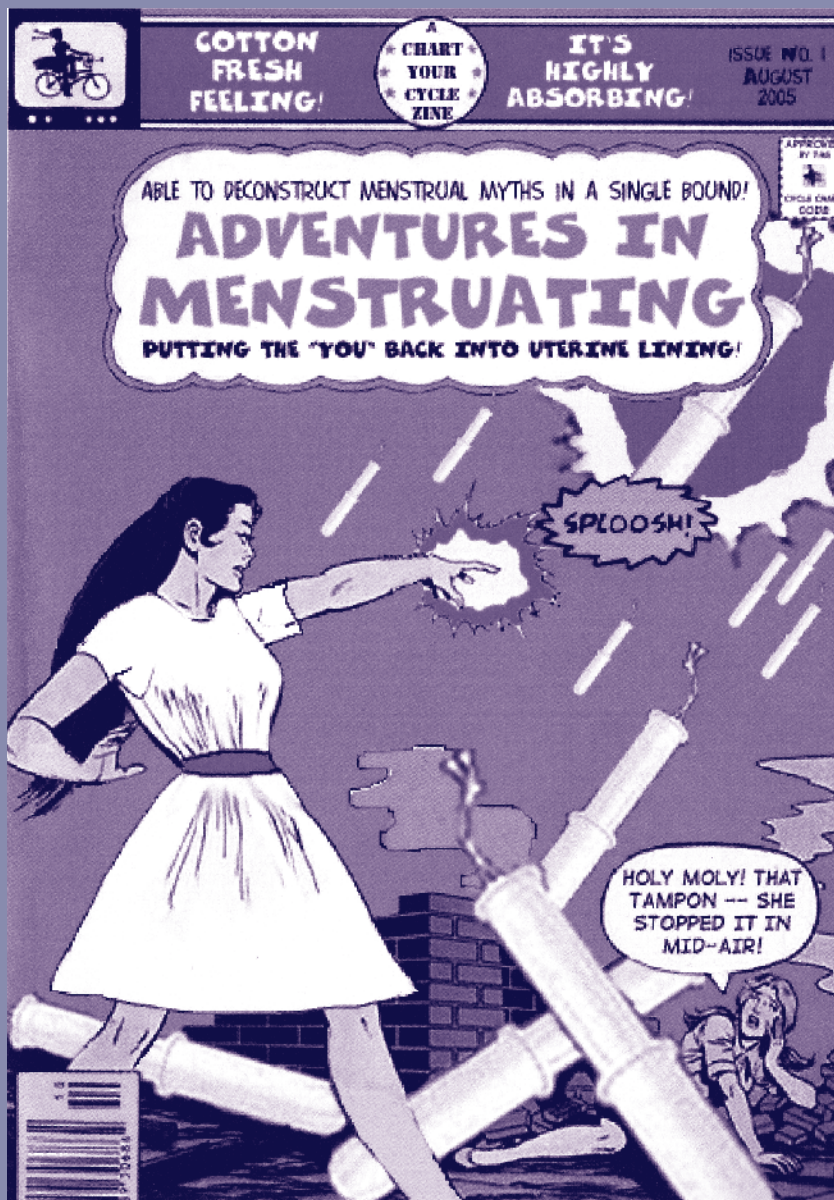
for a special issue of *Art Journal* (1991), advocated for the renaming of women ‘artists’ as ‘authors’. Her essay was written at a time when a critique of authorship presented some debate within discussions on poststructuralism. Klinger provides a number of specific examples of this shift in the work of feminist artists such as Carolee Schneemann whose performance ‘Interior Scroll’ (1975) shows her reading a text to the audience from a book and subsequently from a scroll. While the performance raises a number of questions regarding the position of ‘woman as artist’ and feminists’ notions of the body, for our purposes though it is the way in which the book/scroll text is conceived as a performative narrative. Klinger explains that Schneemann ‘...(she) speaks its words as their writer, performer and as the protagonist of the narration.’⁽¹⁹⁾

Today, Ayesha, producer of the fanzine *Interrobang* (2006) speculates that ‘reading a fanzine may inspire a performance.’ This has been the case with Charlotte Cooper – a fanzine producer and spoken word performer – who is a regular at Ladyfests in the UK. Cooper’s fanzines include *Big Bum*, *We Are the Charlotte Cooper* and *Safety Pinz*, focussing on issues of identity, sexuality and the body. On her website she comments on the act of performing,

‘I love to read/perform my writing in front of an audience. I love to collaborate with people. In the past I’ve devised and run workshops around fat and body stuff, zine-making and creative writing. Wanna invite me to do something?’⁽²⁰⁾

Cooper is also producer of ‘You are a Lucky Man’ – a fanzine which was published on the occasion of a live performance in 2006 where she and two friends created a ‘pretend band project’.

Comedy has also played a key role in riot grrrl spoken word events. The two producers of the popular fanzine *Adventures in Menstruating* (and also *Chart Your Cycle*), (fig.8) Chella and Sarah use their performance as a combination of giving fanzine readings, sketch comedy and lectures. They have brought to Ladyfests their Mobile Menstruation Zine Library which is on display in the area set aside for stalls where their



8. *Adventures in Menstruating* Issue 1, August 2005 produced by Chella and Sarah. The fanzine's content deals with the harsh reality of monthly cycles and related stories featuring the individual experiences of young women.

zine is also for sale. In keeping with the light heartedness of their comedy routine, producers include advertisements from the 1950s and 1960s where you are asked to write captions for questions such as 'Are you a modern mother who can frankly tell your daughter these intimate physical facts?'.⁽²¹⁾ (fig.9) These images are reminiscent of early spoofs on adverts reprinted in feminist magazines such as *SpareRib* and *Shocking Pink*. Today riot grrrl-inspired magazines such as *Bust*, still rely on the parody of advertising traditions.


The producers are aware of the taboo subject of their performance and the fanzine itself. They write: 'Menstrual taboos are alive and well among twenty-somethings of all genders in England. I've got one neighbour who actually cringes and flaps her hands in embarrassment whenever the subject of menstruation comes up....'⁽²²⁾

The story continues by describing some of the incidents which women have encountered as they were growing up. In order to defuse any taboos, the producers build into their act readings, which play on the audience's insecurities. A poem is written to 'the leaking girl'; readers send in stories on 'leakage horror', and a comic book strip 'Claude Monet and the Menstrual Cycle' provides a new twist on the famous paintings by the Impressionist artist. In terms of political intervention, Chella and Sarah actively encourage an anti-capitalist message in the controlling of women's bodies. The 'Stealth Tampon' (seen at the LadyFest Newcastle 2006), is a performance, which encourages women to go out to their local pharmacy and replace panels of Tampon packaging with subverted messages.

At the same time, the relationship between popular culture and feminism is exemplified in the Radical Cheerleaders, many of whom are fanzine producers and in various incarnations have performed at Ladyfests internationally. Emerging as a 'global movement' radical cheerleading was founded in 1997 by two American activists in Florida who put together squads whose politics were 'traditionally feminist, anarchist and anti-capitalist'.⁽²³⁾ In the *Ladyfest Cheerbook*

ARE YOU A MODERN MOTHER WHO CAN FRANKLY TELL YOUR DAUGHTER These Intimate Physical Facts?


IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU THINK I SHOULD KNOW BEFORE GETTING MARRIED, MOM? **YES, DEAR, REMEMBER THERE'S A WOMANLY OFFENSE GRAVER THAN BAD BREATH OR BODY ODOR**



YEP IT'S ANOTHER WHITE ALI AND IT'S TIME FOR A CAPTION COMPETITION! CREATE A NEW ANSWER FOR MOM AND EMAIL IT AS A JPEG FILE TO: charlyandcyclo@gmail.com


TOP 5 ENTRIES WILL BE PUBLISHED IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF ADVENTURES IN MENSTRUATING! Winners receive a small, improvised prize!

Warning: Don't Embarrassing Let One of the Most Effective Methods




Riding the crimson wave sounds less like a menstrual euphemism and more like being in an Ocean Spray commercial. As I remember that cranberry juice is supposed to help with urogenital health, I wonder...are those clever folks spinning copy on Madison Avenue banking on the more metaphorically minded among us making this connection? The new ads seem to be aimed at women...

At times, at those times, on those days, on those days that pose special problems, those difficult days, that time of the month, when a woman is feeling less than fresh, less than shiny, on those occasions, those women's concerns, those womanly fears, a woman's issues, the age old problem...is when we shed our bloody uterine lining and then have to figure out what to do with it.



There once was a woman, they said, Who clearly was wrong in the head, Her panties were stained And she always explained That they got that way each time she bled!




9. Once considered a taboo subject, riot grrrl (as their feminist predecessors) celebrate women's monthly cycles through the fanzines (e.g. **Heavy Flow**, c.1993), advertising spoofs and the Menstruation Zine Library.

PUNK ROCK
FEM-
INISM
rules
okay



★ RADICAL CHEERLEADER ★

10. Slogans such as 'Punk rock feminism' became a rally cry for members of the riot grrrl movement. Here the image of the all-American cheerleader takes on international symbolism.

riot
grrrl

というムーブメント
—「自分らしさ」のポリティックス

大垣有香
Yuka Ogaki





11. The return to DIY crafts such as knitting, sewing and quilting has made resurgence under riot grrrl. For example, this handmade riot grrrl dress is displayed as part of an art exhibition accompanying Ladyfest Cardiff, 2006.

(August 2001), the Radical Cheerleaders (Chicago) write: 'Radical Cheerleading equals protest plus performance. It's doing the splits with middle fingers extended. We think protesting shouldn't have to be boring.'⁽²⁴⁾ (fig.10) These squads perform at Ladyfests and other related riot grrrl events. Radical cheerleading draws its inspiration from American cheerleading squads and in the place of team-spirited chants; their cheer lyrics focus on feminism, gender, the beauty myth, queer politics and anti-capitalism. In one Ladyfest programme (2006) the 'Radical Cheerleaders' listing explains to the reader that 'they make lotsa noise, dress up in cool all-American outfits and wave their pom poms. They'll be bringing a few extra pom poms to get audience members joining in.'⁽²⁵⁾ Fanzines (produced by the squads or by others) are also used as a way of publishing the lyrics and chants in order to disseminate them to the riot grrrl community.

Active Audiences

Riot grrrl producers are members of what Janice Radway has termed an 'active audience', an audience which moulds media productions and is not just 'passively soaking up their messages'.⁽²⁶⁾ Such grass roots initiatives are reminiscent of the 1960s hippie underground press movement and of 1970s punkzines, and are found in riot grrrl fanzine producers who are empowered to effect change. Hanna has written extensively on the relationship she has with her audiences.

'We need audience members who are willing to open themselves up to the possible instead of just reinforcing bullshit rules about consistency and image (Whether the image is one of an aloof rock star of a completely giving martyr-like entity, it is still 2D and fully boring). I mean, if we are really going to successfully challenge capitalism's intrusion on live performance, we not only need performers who are unwilling to commodify themselves, we also need audiences who will actively participate instead of just consuming.'⁽²⁷⁾

Sindy's Fashion Fun

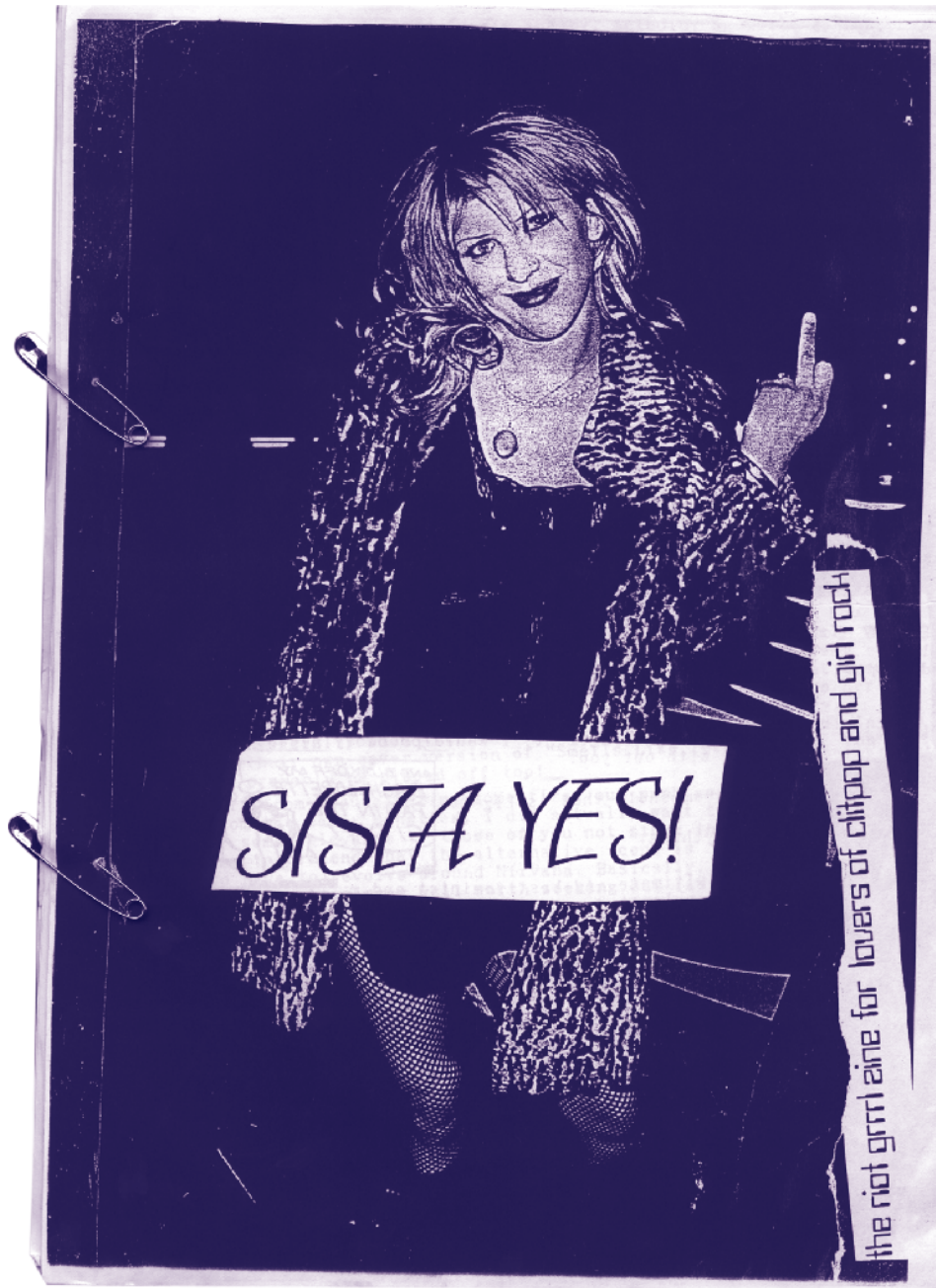


“There isn’t a ‘riot style’ – at meetings: to look at us there isn’t any defining commonalities. But within zines, there can be common use of magazine cut-outs – images of women: yet, the representation is quite uncritical”

Unknown author, *Riot Grrrl Essex*, 2003



12. A popular doll amongst UK girls, Sindy's fashion cut-out paper doll with accompanying outfits, operates in the context of *Shocking Pink* (a 1980s radical feminist magazine) as a metaphor for the objectification of women while at the same time playfully highlighting the ongoing struggle with stereotyped images of women.



That is why these productions – be these fanzines or events – are about community. For example, personal girl's fanzines often use the fanzine format as a way of sharing experiences with young women on highly sensitive issues relating to eating disorders, rape, health and sexuality. Sophy, producer of the fanzine, *Sista Yes!*, explains,

'the point IS that the zine provides a forum in which to have your ideas put into print and distributed across the country to people who actually give a dam (sic) about what you are saying. If the zine sparks debate concerning feminist issues and icons than that can only be a good thing. People need a way into this community and zines can provide that.'⁽²⁸⁾ (fig.13)

In summary, Riot grrrl fanzines provide a space for political thought but also political action. 'Space' in fanzines is understood in the following ways 1) conceptual space where identity is examined and (re)constructed or 'shaped' 2) a social space in which relationships are formed and networked, and finally 3) as a physical space where the page and format are designed visually to accommodate as well as facilitate action.⁽²⁹⁾ Describing the fanzine in terms of architecture helps to give a physical shape to seemingly abstract concepts and dynamic social relationships.

So far we have seen spaces which are sites for official and unofficial events, and spaces where the collective engagement results in fanzines that become social documents for a particular period of time in history. These are spaces where young women feel 'safe' in which to engage in a political and personal discourse with others who share similar experiences. Overall these spaces facilitate the formation and maintenance of riot grrrl networks.

Now I would like to turn to the pages of the fanzines themselves as sites of performance.

13. *Sista Yes!* Issue 1 produced by Sophy harks back to 1970s punkzine production – safety pins as fasteners and black and white photocopied imagery.



SUPER HEROIN

TANK GIRL

"Isn't that gonna piss all over my nineties woman, devil-may-care, riot grrrl, am i a hedonist or am i a feminist repliaction just a little?"



Cuz she is baaaad
 Cuz she has the best clothes ever
 Cuz she swears like a brickie
 Cuz you wish you could be that kool
 Sexually liberated
 Shaven headed
 Bitch power
 Ferocious
 Violent
 Rude
 Foul mouthed
 Sexy
 Saves
 Fights
 Doesnt give a fuck
 Heroin



CATWOMEN

slinky style, sick smile, big whip baby

Catwomen has been the worlds greatest cat burglar for over 50 yrs. She prowls the streets of Gotham in search of ass to kick. She is not out for world domination or mas destruction, she just wants \$\$\$ (how else does she afford all that pvc?) Catwomen can stand her ground against any man & it is said that when she is surrounded by good she is abd, but when surrounded by bad she is good. When surrounded by Batman, she gets her claws out and works the sex kitten thing to death, AND HE IS A SUCKER. She does nit like to kill. It's Catwomens nature to rebel against authority, to cut away anything she thinks is restraining her. She breaks the law. Femme Fatales are supposed to be sexy, vicious, money



In c:14. Twinkle Eye Issue 1 2000. Comic book heroines such as Tank Girl and Cat Woman are celebrated in this story about notorious femme fatales. The juxtaposition of the real and the fantasy characters is played out in this double page spread which represents visually the dichotomy created between women who are both 'gorgeous' and empowered.

FEMME FATALE

“It was Ladyfest that started me off doing graphic design.

Doing this gave me so much more confidence in my work”

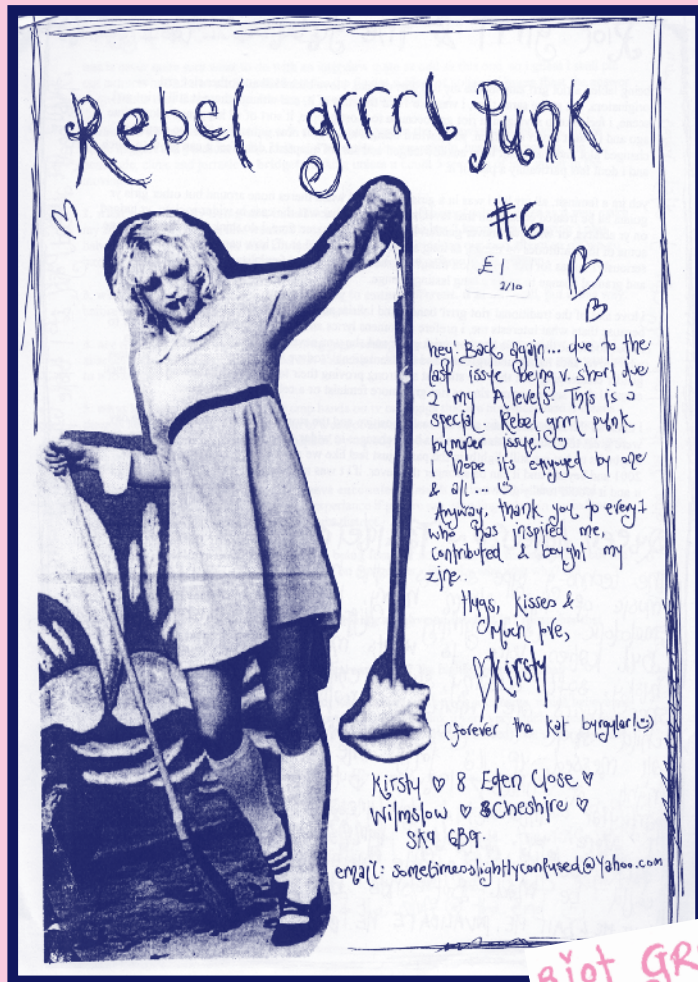
Monica Gromek interviewed in
*UK Ladyfest Artwork 2001-2008:
The Collected Interviews*

The Performativity of the Fanzine Page

‘Zines construct not unitary, authentic selves. Instead they stage a tense cacophony of contending voices; they ventriloquize subject positions that jostle for control and dominance. One gets the impression that zine writers are dissatisfied with all the positions they find on offered within the culture that surrounds them. As a result, they careen energetically from position to position. They perform endlessly. They exuberantly multiply personas in defiance of demands that they be only one way and not others. Zine writers stage their determination to escape the culture’s discipline. They refuse to remain docilely within the lines, within the margins of a page, within the proper sequence of a book’s pages...’⁽³⁰⁾

I’ve quoted at length from Janice Radway’s essay ‘Girls, Zines and the Miscellaneous Production of Subjectivity in an Age of Unceasing Circulation’ (2001), in order to argue the extent to which fanzines may be considered as a site of performance. Radway’s use of descriptive phrases such as ‘stage a tense cacophony’ and ‘refuse to remain docilely within the lines’, accurately reflects the way in which a graphic language of riot grrrl is operating visually within the design of the fanzine page. We have already explored the way in which an ‘active audience’ promotes a type of cultural activism, yet we may extend this idea to help explain why riot grrrl fanzines take on the appearance that they do. The fanzine is a discursive form, and as such, Radway argues that ‘zine writers portray themselves as if in constant conversation with imagined others. Virtually every utterance and every representation is staged as a response.’⁽³¹⁾

A good example is *Rebel grrrl punk* – an autobiographical fanzine that began in an A5 format, with about 12 pages, stapled and photocopied. (fig.15) It was produced as an integral part of the second wave of riot grrrl self-publishing that took place in 1997 (the first wave took place from around the inception of riot grrrl zines in 1991 until shortly after the movement came to the UK, 1993). *Rebel grrrl punk* was



15. Like *Sista Yes!* the cover of *Rebel grrrl punk* features high profile celebrity figure, Courtney Love of the band Hole, who has become a riot grrrl icon. The babydoll frock-look, blonde ringlets and heart-shaped symbols demonstrates that riot grrrls could still be feminine and create a revolution. Her image appears frequently in fanzines where she represents the 'bad girl' spirit of women in rock. More recently, *Elle* magazine (January 2009) published fashion spreads of Love. 'Truly, Madly, Courtney' took the idea of handwritten texts and symbols – hearts and cross outs – found in fanzines to duplicate the riot grrrl DIY attitude.



produced irregularly from 1997 with promises of publishing Issue 7 in 2001 (to my knowledge this did not take place). The fanzine producer is Kirsty (from Winslow) who became the main protagonist in the narrative about a young woman growing up as a teenager and then going off to college. She writes in Issue 1: '...hello erm, I'm not too sure where to start first off...' And, then goes on to say '...I'm also not sure when the next issue will be out either. It depends on college, moving house etc...' (32)

Much like conventional mainstream magazine design, the covers of the fanzine are torso images of celebrity female musicians. Issue 1 and Issue 6 for example, have images of riot grrrl icon Courtney Love from the band Hole on their covers. On the interior pages of *Rebel grrrl punk*, its producer Kirsty reviews films (e.g. *Sid & Nancy*), albums (e.g. *Babes in Toyland*), and fanzines (e.g. *Kitten Scratches*). Each page is visually overwhelming, with every white space covered with her teenage penmanship – daydream-like swirly, handwritten texts (where on the back of the fanzine she apologises – 'sorry this isn't typed up.'), as well as cut out images from the mainstream media collaged in 'girl-inspired' visual rhetoric – the Little Mermaid, Cruella Deville from the film *101 Dalmatians*, and promotional photographs of female musicians such as Love. (33) Symbols used by Kirsty help to define her authorial voice, her 'subject position' as fanzine writer. These include hearts, stars, flowers and images of the Japanese character Hello Kitty and are found throughout. Such images symbolize the space between feminist rhetoric and the riot grrrl who also wants to be feminine. As Erica, a UK-based comic artist and producer of the comic-zine *Girl Frenzy* wrote,

'P.S. – re. symbols – looking through *Girl Frenzy* again, the obvious symbol which I use a lot is the ♥ – probably the most typical symbol of girl zinesters as opposed to boys. I've always liked ♥ – strong, and sexy and giving. I never think of it as "sissy", but empowering. "Girl love can change the world, etc..." Also those kissy 'x's. Erica xxx' (34) Riot grrrl producers may employ a generic set of graphic



devices such as the use of photo-booth images, hand-drawn comic strips, collage illustrations and cut-n-paste ransom note lettering, but each producer has brought this together in their own unique DIY 'style'.

Kitten Scratches, subtitled, 'a riot grrrl & feminist zine', took a similar position in the design of its A5, 12 pages. (fig.16) Rachel who also relied on writings from contributors produced the fanzine. It was photocopied in the local library and distributed by 'people who reply to my flyers' as well as through fanzine distros and as give-a-ways at music festivals. Rachel's use of symbols is similar to that of Kirsty's – visually filling every empty space available. However, she also reflects that her reference to the use of black backgrounds with white type reversed out is drawn from the graphic language of Bikini Kill's early fanzines.⁽³⁵⁾ In other fanzines of this period, producers draw from 1950s American adverts, which are collaged alongside the use of more traditional 1970s feminist symbols such as the woman's clenched fist and the international gender symbol for woman. Reproductions of the 1940s Rosie the Riveter poster with the accompanying slogan 'We can do it' are located in the same zine as 1990s images of riot grrrl icons Kathleen Hanna and Courtney Love chanting 'We are the revolution'.

In other words, riot grrrls are searching for a kind of revolutionary counterpoint to the male-dominated punk underground. In some ways, this is post-feminism with an angry edge. As one member of the 'Feminist History' discussion group at Ladyfest Newcastle 2006, remarked 'at the end of it all, I still want to go to the hairdresser and get my highlights done.'⁽³⁶⁾

16. This cover of Issue 1 of *Kitten Scratches* (1997) maintains the cut-n-paste aesthetic of punk alongside radical feminist imagery. The use of cutesy cartoon characters such as Hello Kitty bring an added dimension to the riot grrrl message.



17. As one of the first UK chapters, the Leeds and Bradford riot grrrls (who ranged from ages 17-30) created this fanzine in which they wrote: 'We might be called RIOT GRRRL, but we're aware of the media deadtime deadlines that crush anything it discovers...Seeing all that we use their media while we sneakily construct girl lines of communication.' By the time of this fanzine's publication (1993), riot grrrl had hit the world stage.

As we have seen, the graphic language of riot grrrl fanzines has emerged out of a relationship to feminist rhetoric but also in the way it has emerged from a DIY aesthetic linked to their punk predecessors. Punk's design strategies fostered a culture of ripping and tearing, of cut-n-paste, collage and scrawled graffiti – all of which are physical in technique. The way in which the elements were laid out was haphazard, intentionally chaotic and made hard to read to those unfamiliar with the visual language outside the punk scene. Little or no white space exists on the pages of riot grrrl fanzines in an attempt to look 'weighty', but also in that the producers felt they had so much to say.⁽³⁷⁾ The placement of texts, headlines, typographic elements and the format of the publication are inextricably linked and are reflective of both their political alignment with feminism (and queer identity) as much as their DIY approach. It is a space for social and political change, much like the cultural performance of identity found in artistic practices of the 1970s.

“The creation of a singular, static image has never been a priority for me. In fact, it runs contrary to much of my value system...



being a performer I realize that there's a certain amount of objectification going to happen. It's just that I'd rather play around with the idea of images and roles that fit into a specific one.”

Kathleen Hanna, *Riot Grrrl Essex*, 2003

Notes

- 1 Maddy is quoted here as one of the contributors to *Vaginal Teeth*. Cazz Blase, Clare Von Stokes and Simone Ivatts (eds.), *Vaginal Teeth*, Stockport/Leeds, 1998, n.p.
- 2 *Wonder Woman* appeared on the newsstands in 1941. The comic book story reflected the research interests of its Harvard-trained psychologist creator, Dr William Moulton Marston's who wrote under the pseudonym Charles Moulton. This was in the area of behavioural psychology – dominance and submission. The original 'Wonder Woman and the Doctors' cartoon appeared in the July 1973 issue of *Sister: The newspaper of the Los Angeles Women's Center*.
- 3 Ken Friedman, 'Events and the Exquisite Corpse'. Unpublished paper, n.p.
- 4 Ibid., n.p.
- 5 Cazz Blase, et.al (eds.), *Vaginal Teeth*, 1998, n.p.
- 6 Karren Ablaze, *Vaginal Teeth*, 1998, n.p.
- 7 Kathleen Hanna, *Riot Grrrl Manifesto, Bikini Kill 2*, 1991, Washington D.C. The manifesto is also available online: <http://www.feastofhateandfear.com/archives/hanna.html>
- 8 Mary Celeste Kearney, *Girls Make Media*, New York: CRC Press, (Taylor and Francis) 2006, p.68.
- 9 Kathleen Hanna, op.cit. 1991, n.p.
- 10 Kathleen Hanna, 'On Not Playing Dead', *Riot Grrrl Essex*, 2003, p.10.
- 11 The conversation took place in a workshop held during Ladyfest Scotland (2001) titled 'Grassroots Festival' (The 13th Note Club, Glasgow). The intent was to pass on experiences and knowledge of organising Ladyfest events to the next group of young women who were planning such events in their cities.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Lee Beatie, 'Grants for the Arts. Proposal: Ladyfest Newcastle', Newcastle, unpublished application, July 2006, p.1.
- 14 Lee Beatie (ed.), *Ladyfest Scotland*, programme, 2001, n.p.
- 15 Lee Beatie, op. cit., 2006, n.p.
- 16 Ken Friedman, op. cit., n.p.
- 17 Heather Crabtree and Melanie Maddison (ed.), *UK Ladyfest Artwork 2001-2008: The Collected Interviews*, Leeds, 2007, n.p.
- 18 Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, Cambridge: Polity, 1995. p.11.
- 19 Linda S. Klinger, 'Where's the Artist? Feminist Practice and Poststructural Theories of Authorship', *Art Journal*, Vol. 50 No. 2, 1991, p.42. Riot grrrl performers such as Lois Weaver, Peggy Shaw and Deb Margolin (Split Britches) have continued today in this tradition of performance art practice. The use of the body as a space of performance introduced by 1970s feminists (e.g. Karen Finley), was also taken up by singers such as Kathleen Hanna who famously scrawled the word 'slut' in red lipstick across her stomach in 1992.
- 20 Charlotte Cooper, <http://www.charlottecooper.net/docs/zines.htm> (Accessed 24 January 2009).
- 21 Chella, *Adventures in Menstruating*, Issue 1, August 2005, p.22.
- 22 Chella, *Adventures in Menstruating*, Issue 2, April 2006, p.1.
- 23 Radical Cheerleaders, <http://www.nycradicalcheerleaders.org/index.php?name=about> (Accessed 24 January 2009).
- 24 Haymarket Hussies. *Ladyfest Cheerbook*, August 2001, n.p.
- 25 Amy Lou (ed.), *Ladyfest London Festival Programme*, Ladyfest London, 2002, p.25.
- 26 John Downing, *Radical Media: Rebellious Communications and Social Movements*, London: Sage, 2001, p.7.
- 27 Kathleen Hanna, op. cit., 16.
- 28 Sophy, 'Riots Not Diets', *Sista Yes!*, Issue 2, 1997, n.p.
- 29 Jos Boys, 'Windows on the World? Architecture, Identities and New Technologies' in Cutting Edge, The Women's Research Groups (eds.), *Digital Desires: Language, Identity and New Technologies*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000, pp.125-147.
- 30 Janice Radway, 'Girls, Zines, and the Miscellaneous Production of Subjectivity in an Age of Unceasing Circulation', *Speaker Series No. 18*, Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing and the Literacy & Rhetorical Studies Minor, 2001, p.18.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Kirsty, *Rebel grrrl punk*, Winslow, 1997, n.p.
- 33 In an interview with the author, Kirsty comments that many of her images are cut out of magazines such as *NME*, *Kerrang*, *Melody Maker*, (21 August, 2001).
- 34 Erica, *Girl Frenzy*, correspondence with author on the back of a mailing envelope. c.2001.
- 35 Rachel was kind enough to respond to a questionnaire from the author on riot grrrl zine production, c.2001.
- 36 Unknown respondents in a workshop on 'Changing the World with a Zine', Ladyfest Newcastle 2006.
- 37 Lucy O'Brien. An interview with the author, London, 1999.

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