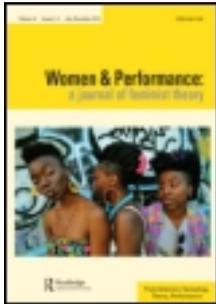


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Riot Grrrl, Race, and Revival¹

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This essay ventures a critique of the existing historiography of riot grrrl and how the movement is narrated both “then” and “now” to contain and subsume the disruptions of race. The first counter-story commences with and departs from that scene of intimacy that is the semi-secret heart of riot grrrl’s resonance, an aesthetics of access – to the means of production and creative labor, but also to more ephemeral properties of expertise and self-knowledge – through which the personal and the political are collapsed. The author argues that the resistive properties of intimacy might also replicate its intrusive ones, and conceive of change narrowly as the adjustment of the individual subject – recalibrating her capacity for love or shame, for instance – to the structural determinations that constitute the historical present. In doing so, the author shows how race confounded such intimacy in order to demarcate the boundaries of riot grrrl aesthetics as both form *and* critique. In a second counter-story, with riot grrrl now becoming the subject of so much retrospection, the author argues that how the critiques of women of color are narrated is important to how we remember feminisms and how we produce feminist futures. Here the author locates riot grrrl within a broader critique of the historiography of feminist movement, to question then the progressive teleologies of origin, episode, and succession that would limit the internal disturbances within feminisms to its critics, or to the past. Discussions about the contours and contents of these historiographical impulses are always political ones, insofar as they establish what forces should be considered memorable, and what crises be deemed responsible for unsettling feminist movements. These discussions are happening now, and will continue no doubt into the future, and the author offers this interruption as an alternate genealogy through which we might pursue a politics as “destroyers of the status quo.”

Keywords: riot grrrl; race; zines; feminism; genealogy; punk; affect

In 1991, the shooting death of a Salvadorian man by a rookie police officer sparked two days of rioting by black and Latino youth in the Mount Pleasant neighborhood in Washington D.C. One of the more infamous origin stories for riot grrrl lies peripheral (or perhaps parallel) with these race riots, recounting how musician Jean Smith was inspired to write to Bratmobile band member Allison Wolfe, “We need to start a girl riot.” There are of course other beginnings, but we know for certain what followed: riot grrrl press-ganged punk and its discordant, splintered noise into an

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uneasy fit with pop and melodic froth, ungrounding noise and froth from either negative delirium or cheerful myopia, and channeling both toward a dream of feminist futures. Not that punk had never seen feminisms before. An insurgent and often incoherent set of scenes emerging in the 1970s, and in the aftermath of multiple, devastating anti-imperial wars as well as a global economic restructuring, punk manifested all the contradictions of a modernist avant-garde movement – unsentimental *and* romantic, revolutionary *and* reactionary, a draw for queers and freaks *and* the worship of tortured white male genius.² From this incipient hue and cry, a roster of women artists seized punk by the throat, including Los Angeles’ Alicia Armendariz and Pat Morrison of The Bags and Teresa Covarrubias of The Brat, England’s Poly Styrene of X-Ray Spex and Eve Libertine and Joy de Vivre of CRASS, San Francisco’s Penelope Houston of The Avengers, Pearl E. Gates from Pearl Harbor and the Explosions, and Jennifer Miro of The Nuns, and still more others. These women in each their own way refused to believe that the avant-garde, the revolution, and the work of art that challenged but also channeled both were only masculine provinces. But riot grrrl also carried the difference that two decades of feminisms made – whether confronting violence and misogyny in punk as disparate but connected cultural forms, in song or scene; or denouncing “instant macho gun revolution” as the failure of punk’s *realpolitik* impulse (where it had one at all) in recognizing only statism and capitalism as conduits of power. As the 1991 *Riot Grrrl Manifesto* argued, “Riot grrrl is . . . BECAUSE viewing our work as being connected to our girlfriends-politics-real lives is essential if we are gonna figure out how what we are doing impacts, reflects, perpetuates, or DISRUPTS the status quo.”³

It may be that we more or less know this history by now, but how we relate it matters still.⁴ This essay ventures a critique of the existing historiography of riot grrrl and how the movement is narrated both “then” and “now” to contain and subsume the comparisons and provocations that lie with the origin story that begins with race riots and ends with (we could say) another. (Because the Mount Pleasant riots erupted around immigration, race, and police brutality, what does imagining a girl riot entail – especially where these concerns did not often surface?) The first counter-story I want to tell commences with and departs from that scene of intimacy that is the semi-secret heart of riot grrrl’s resonance, an aesthetics of access – to the means of production and creative labor, but also to more ephemeral properties of expertise and self-knowledge – through which the personal and the political are collapsed into a world of public intimacy. This is not necessarily a bad story, or a wrong story. However, the resistive properties of intimacy might also replicate its intrusive ones, and conceive of change narrowly as the adjustment of the individual subject – recalibrating her capacity for love or shame, for instance – to the structural determinations that constitute the historical present. This essay follows from this observation to show how race confounded such intimacy in order to demarcate the boundaries of riot grrrl aesthetics as both form *and* critique. In other words, whereas the insistence on intimacy may indeed be a revolutionary charge within the circumstances from which riot grrrl emanates (including girl jealousy or subcultural cool), such an insistence, when viewed in light of histories of desire for access and

attachment to racial, colonial others, may turn out to be the reiteration of those histories in new idioms.

In the second counter-story, with riot grrrl now becoming the subject of so much retrospection, I argue that how the critiques of women of color are narrated is important to how we remember feminisms and how we produce feminist futures. If riot grrrl fell apart because of a race riot, how is this to be remembered – as catastrophic melee, as course correction, as brief interruption? And how then are we to face the future – with certain progress having been achieved, or with violence (including erasure, deferral, or annexation) not having ended? Here I locate riot grrrl within a broader critique of the historiography of feminist movement, to question then the progressive teleologies of origin, episode, and succession that would limit the internal disturbances within feminisms to its critics, or to the past. Discussions about the contours and contents of these historiographical impulses are always political ones, insofar as they establish what forces should be considered memorable, and what crises be deemed responsible for unsettling feminist movements. These discussions are happening now, and will continue no doubt into the future; I offer this interruption as an alternate genealogy through which we might pursue a politics as “destroyers of the status quo.”⁵

PART I. *Hey, white girl!*

Hey, white girl. Why don't you break my heart one more time?
– Elizabeth McAdams, *Hey, White Girl*⁶

In the most familiar histories told about riot grrrl (in academic study, and in popular or underground accounts), a new strain of punk feminism, weary of both the soul-crushing criterion of commodity culture and the masculine bravado of punk subculture distancing girls from knowing themselves and one another, posed the solution through the promise of do-it-yourself – that is, make music, make art, make the world, *make yourself*. Girls pushed their way to the front and onto the stage with guitars in hand; girls sent concealed dollar bills in exchange for each other's passionate manifestos passing as cut-and-pasted zines; girls traded mixed tapes of favorite bands, and each song, and every page, was a revelation. Doing it yourself made it possible to know yourself as a revolutionary act; or as the third issue of *Riot Grrrl* put it, “tired of being written out – out of history, out of the ‘scene,’ out of our bodies...for this reason we have created our zine and scene.”⁷

In the world-image riot grrrl conjured forth, the feminist movement argument that *the personal is political* again became a revolutionary form. (Punk also propagated the modernist consciousness that self-actualization must be found in something other than dominant cultures or other coercion, against those external forces imagined to separate and distort true selves; riot grrrl followed this prescription closely.) Through the radical reinterpretation of individual experiences as social phenomena with histories and political consequences, and the subsequent rejection of these structural determinations, an individual might become a radical object of knowledge, a sovereign subject who tells the (albeit ever-changing) truth

about herself in order to *know herself* and to be *known by others*. Riot grrrl of course engaged rage, contempt, scorn, revulsion, satire, derision, mockery, irony, and other so-called negative emotional forms and rhetorical practices familiar to feminist and punk politic and art making; these shaped eloquent and often haunting responses to the violences of patriarchal and punk forms and practices. Simultaneously and seemingly of necessity, however, riot grrrl also pursued a radical politics of intimacy or girl love – and indeed, in academic studies of the movement, this is perhaps the most remarked-upon feature of its feminism. Through girl love (girls learning to love themselves, and each other, against those forces that would otherwise see them destroyed or destroy themselves), riot grrrl engendered an aesthetics of self-referentiality and transformation as a means of producing an experimental feminist bloc. As the slogan went, “every girl is a riot grrrl” unties a knot of promises that bound self-actualization to communion with others. In this way, girl love was at once radical – and yet not quite. In *The Empire of Love*, Elizabeth Povinelli brilliantly theorizes such intimacy as a liberalist fantasy of self-actualization and abstraction into a compassionate collectivity. In such a fantasy, “subjects in the liberal diaspora constantly urge one another to be open to the possibility that in recognizing each other in intimate love they will experience each other as different than they were before – they will experience a break, a rupture from their prior selves and experience a purer, truer form of self, a form they have always truly been. *We literally reform the social by believing in and demanding this form of love.*”⁸ Thus did an aesthetics of depth and true feeling (though not of necessity distinct from a stance of parody and critique of the same, as we shall see) presume to grant access to other girls and their secret hearts made audible, made visible. As the cover of the second issue of *photobooth toolbox* announced: “this is my life, this is my scream, this is my anger, this is my pain, this is my strength, this is my growth, this is my spirit, this is my voice, this is my heart, this is my song.”⁹

Some features of this intimate aesthetic are already well observed, so I simply rehearse their contours here. Self-styled clearinghouses such as Riot Grrrl Press and Pander Distro, zines like *Maximumrocknroll* and *Factsheet Five*, and also newsletters *Riot Grrrl Review* and *Action Girl Review*, performed the function and provided the form for erecting a collectivity of geographically distant persons on a foundation of seven-inches, zines, and mixed tapes. Through zines especially, combining Xerox collage, desktop publishing, and other photo-techniques, and refusing a property relation to information and art (and in doing so referencing earlier generations of artists including Hannah Höch, Barbara Kruger, and Cindy Sherman, as well as punk’s improprieties), their appeal lay with their handmade nature, the feeling that someone somewhere used scissors and glue and their mother’s old typewriter to make this thing, a labor of love, with equal emphasis on both the durational nature of such industry and the imminent promise of intimacy.¹⁰ As Cindy Crab told Alison Piepmeier in *Girl Zines* about her third issue of *Doris*, she hoped to furnish a gift of herself to a reader she might never meet otherwise: “I had this thing that was like, I’m going to touch every single page. I only printed 200 of that one, but I had different things glued or taped or drawn onto every page of the zine.”¹¹

As well we also know that the scale of the form also bled through into the prose and premise of this genre. Tackling erotic knowledge and sexual abuse, compulsory heterosexuality and girl-girl intimacy, domestic abuse and domesticity, young women called attention to how such encounters, feelings, and memories that appear to be personal and self-referential, are also ideological and social. Zines such as *Chica Loca*, *I Heart Amy Carter*, *Subject to Change*, and *Jigsaw* rewrote presumed relations to popular cultures in order to produce intricately mapped forms of desire, against a highly feminized ascription of passive consumption but also the implicitly masculinist punk-rock pose of proper rejection.¹² Thus did these feminisms bring Calvin Klein lesbian model Jenny Shimizu, presidential daughter Amy Carter, fictional skeptic Dana Scully, and avant-garde artist Yoko Ono into dialogues about cultural production and consumption, about schemas of gender and sexuality, about identification with or against pop-culture figures, but always in relation to them, and the convergence of pleasure and power. Here, even the crush, that form of love degraded as adolescent feminine fantasy, becomes something *more* in this imaginary – a critique of the social bounds of the possible, as well as an optimism about what lies beyond the moment, a shared dreaming of a feminist futurity.

Of course, an aesthetics of intimacy did not necessarily promise transparency. Zines often enacted a sly awareness of mediation, simultaneously refused and also acknowledged in some of the generic conventions of this intimate culture – the diary entry or the epistolary letter, addressed to historical or fictional figures, to strangers and to family members, to friends or rapists or roommates or others in the scene. Nomy Lamm, for instance, related to Piepmeier: “I really hated when people would be like, ‘Oh, it’s all just girls in their bedrooms, sprawled out writing in their diaries, and then they’ll send them to each other.’ I’m like, that’s an aesthetic choice. You’re still constructing something when it looks like a diary entry. I wasn’t photocopying my diary, or if I was, it was for a specific reason.” At the same time, she asserted: “I’m creating this kind of media that’s literally from my most sacred place to somebody else’s most sacred place.”¹³ These endeavors opted for a public process for fashioning an authentic self (though a process, to recall Stuart Hall, “always constituted within, not outside, representation”).¹⁴ Furthermore, such a quest for intimate self-knowledge is pursued in stated opposition to structural determinations that are perceived as alienating and otherwise damaging – such as capitalism, misogyny, fat oppression – and such that the strategic excavation of the true self also becomes an ethical foundation for communion. Expressing then a wish for an authentic form of knowledge free from error and illusion, intimacy is a sentimental politics as well as an aesthetics. Thus did Basil in *Spiral Upwards* locate the self as the central scene for social change: “i’ve got this idea for a revolution that only includes you if you want to be included. it’s more of a personal revolution. one that waits for you to catch up and doesn’t start without you. all because it makes you the revolution.”¹⁵ Such a revolution through the everyday work on the conscious self, especially through therapeutic techniques of self-examination, confession, and dialogue, is not apart from a larger cultural landscape in the late twentieth century.¹⁶ These aesthetic forms, emerging during the 1990s to now, register how neoliberalism and its emphases on the entrepreneurial subject shapes even

progressive or feminist adjustments to the structural determinations that constitute the historical present, engendering an emotional style, and a rhetorical practice, that sometimes glossed intimacy for reciprocity, experience for expertise, and misrecognized how forces work through these idioms. That is, where such encounters between sacred places might cultivate the soul of the subject toward a capacity to recognize in others love and other virtue and to herself embody the same, such personal revolution most often occurred *outside* of structural critique. And though these intimate cultures sought to build a company of persons whose hopes for authentic self-knowledge and communion somehow become the foundation of a more just world, the absence of justice was too narrowly understood as a problem of ignorance, and distance.

This is not to say that intimacy went unquestioned. Where intimacy provided the dominant rhetoric and form, so a discussion of the violence of intimacy followed. Riot grrrl especially pursued intimacy as a premise for revisiting the home, the family, and the body, as vectors of power and sites for the normalization of violence. Two of riot grrrl's most powerful anthems, Huggy Bear's blunt, buzzing "Her Jazz" and Bikini Kill's saccharine-turned-soul-rending "Suck My Left One," targeted false promises to love and protect. (From "Her Jazz," for instance: "When you say it say it is us two too/true you taught me how to shoot/and best pull up my skirt/and put up with hurt/boy/girl revolutionaries you lied to me!") In zines like *Writing for Beginning*, Zanna and Ingrid deconstructed heterosexual coupling as the penultimate form of love, noting and critiquing, "i equate love with dependency, i equate love with obsession, i equate love with being joined at the hip,"¹⁷ while in *Rock Candy*, Marie criticized her parents' unwillingness to accept their daughter's rape.¹⁸ It cannot be understated that these critiques were incredible, powerful indictments. In these contexts, love was something to be wary of.

At the same time, a more revolutionary love proposed to be the glue that held us together. This desire for intimacy as a political end, and the location of the self as the source of authentic knowledge, proved for some (like myself) to be too close for comfort. Riot grrrl reimagined a punk aesthetics of access to the means of intellectual and creative labor that sought to extend true love and intimate self-knowledge to all girls, all persons, on the convention, and the condition, that they embrace the terms of exposure. As Trish Kelly wrote in *Make-out Club*: "This is our chance to start our girl-boy revolution . . . We are willing to try, TRY to be better and face our shortcomings. And support each other. We try to be better. We are growing together. PROMISE. CHANGE. GROWTH . . . We are the revolution, a revolution of feeling real, thinking, and support."¹⁹ It is as such that the confessional performance especially in zines became a crucial part of an intimate culture given to personal revolution, through which participants exposed themselves as flawed, processual beings, often through personal inventories of attitudinal minutiae ("I haven't written enough about my skinny privilege") – or, in the name of intimate love, allowed themselves to be publicly critiqued for their entitlements. Public shame, whether pursued through rigorous self-critique or delivered through the letters of an interlocutor, served as evidence of accountability. Indeed, these intimate conventions defined some of the more circulated zines, and still

others modeled themselves on this form. (There is yet another story here in what one person described as, “Years of ‘HEY, I’M CALLING YOU ON YOUR SHIT!’ letters.”²⁰) This aesthetic convention however fostered a troubling politics, especially as an informal imperative that exacted a price, and even as a possessive investment that returned a surplus of value – in this case, as other forms of cultural capital. Kristy Chan observed in *Tennis & Violins* that “oppression” functions as a “punk rock commodity,” whose possession enhances an authentic marginality, translating experience into expertise.²¹ In the thirteenth (and last) issue of *Alien*, Whitney excoriated this culture of confession for its ephemeral economy of value and cultural capital: “The perpetuation of craziness is disguised in art, if I were to tell you I was CURED (gasp!) you wouldn’t read on . . . ☺ fuck you ☺ if i were to say i cut myself & my daddy hit me to smithereens you’d ask me when is the next issue coming out. You are reading and I am writing THE COMMODITY OF CRAZINESS in punk.”²²

This subculture of intimacy and self-referentiality borrowed its structure for transformation from consciousness-raising, and the notion that the deeply oppressed had radical knowledge stemming from their specific social positions. That is, from inside the oppressed classes themselves come political knowledges based on experience, which might then be translated into expertise. But the turn to self-referentiality as an escape from falsehood, as the capacity to retrieve instead *reality*, had some obvious limits. For instance, women of color wondered out loud for whom writing “SLUT” across their stomachs operated as reclamations of sexual agency against feminine passivity, where racisms had already inscribed such terms onto *some* bodies, and poor or criminal-class women argued that feminists “slumming” in the sex industry (through stripping, for the most part) as a confrontational act implied that other women in this or other tiers of the industry were otherwise conceding to patriarchy. Or, as Mary Celeste Kearney observes: “the gender deviance displayed by riot grrrls is a privilege to which only middle-class white girls have access.”²³ But there were other, less-remarked consequences, including generalizations about the concrete knowledge drawn from experience as more valuable and subversive than the so-called abstract, alienating labor of theoretical inquiry. However moving, it often appeared to me that the reification of structural determinations in the unreliable minutiae of personal experience about girlhood, or class convention, often failed to confront the conditions that enabled such assumptions to stand in the first place. The raising of consciousness did not aim to end structural determinations, and instead ossified its categories of class or gender as an absolute reality to predict social expression (such as the commonplace claim that working-classness manifested loud, straightforward, and therefore *truer* speech). But how then could experience yield revolutionary knowledge about race, where the dominant experience was whiteness?

It is as such that *race* as a reminder of hard histories – within feminisms too – operated as an obstacle to hoped-for collectivity, knocking the promise of girl love and punk rock revolution askew. In her report for radical feminist newspaper *off your backs* from the first riot grrrl convention, held in Washington DC in 1992, Melissa Klein recounts the racism workshop (run by an older, African American woman from outside riot grrrl, she notes) as troubled by the young white women’s

clear discomfort with the prospect of their complicity. In her history of riot grrrl called *Girls to the Front*, Sara Marcus describes the scene in retrospect:

This conversation called for a serious switching of gears. The girls had just spent the morning talking about and connecting based on the shared ways they were disadvantaged and put down. Now the white girls –which meant a majority of the people there – were being told that they were oppressors as well.²⁴

The antiracism workshop at the 1997 Bay Area Girls Convention was similarly disturbing, but the reverberations echoed also throughout the event. As detailed in Bianca Ortiz's *Mamasita*, the Mexican girls found themselves in the kitchen cooking for the other participants during the vegan workshop:

They were busy with the revolution while we fried tortillas until the grease from the pans stuck to the grease on our faces, while our backs stiffened up and the hours passed, while we were so confused and disturbed with what was happening that the only thing we could do was laugh and try not to think about it.²⁵

Celia Perez in an issue of *I Dreamed I was Assertive* recounts a conflict on a zinesters' messageboard online, during which some young women sought to recuperate "white pride" apart from racial supremacy.²⁶ Is it any wonder, then, that Lauren Jade Martin wrote in *You Might As Well Live*:

and yeah some of you say we are "out to kill white boy mentality" but have you examined your own mentality? your white upper-middle class girl mentality? what would you say if i said that i wanted to kill that mentality too?

would you say: "what about sisterhood?!"²⁷

One response to this distance, keyed to the culture of intimacy cultivated thus far, was expressed as the desire to *know race better*. But this desire to know race, to know it intimately *especially as an experience* as that which yielded expertise, presented a series of problems about the violence of desires to be close to the other, as histories of colonialism and imperialism (and feminisms' function in many of these ventures) amply demonstrate.²⁸ This desire ignores the multivalent character of intimacy – race, as colonial studies scholar Ann Laura Stoler notes, is as integral to the education of desire as it is to disgust.²⁹ Therefore, establishing the intimate as a preferred and privileged mode might mirror the forms of *surveillance* that required some persons –persons of color, for instance – to reveal themselves, to bear the burden of representation ("you are here as an example") and the weight of pedagogy ("teach us about your people"). As such, the demand for proximity and intimacy is unequally distributed, burdening some in perturbing ways. For example, in the zine *Mamasita*, Bianca Ortiz criticized the violence of intimacy as a salve to racism, citing her feeling of time and emotional labor wasted writing personal letters to "one million white girls," especially where women of color critics (such as herself) are relegated to the role of educator, which required their interventions to remain at the level of the "personal," a framework that seemed to replicate the toothless multiculturalism of dominant cultures; or in their critiques be labeled the enemy for violating the comfort of others. "I am sick of being the example, the teacher, the scapegoat, the leader, the half Mexican girl in the group of 'allies' who either attempt to praise me or destroy me, or both at once."³⁰ This oft-cited piece became a

standard within riot grrrl as a critical response to an aesthetics and a politics that posited intimacy – its performance, the desire for it – as the pathway to social bonds and from there, racial justice. As such, we can observe that such desire for a relation to the object who is the racial, colonial other passes through infrastructures of intimacy that are historical, political. Because, as women of color feminisms, “Third World” and postcolonial feminisms argued, the desire for intimacy with the other congeals rather than disorganizes the person who does the desiring, replicates rather than disrupts the forms and facts of power, the style in which riot grrrl imagined collectivity points to the necessity that we look not just to the scars that riot grrrl lay bare, but also to the wounds that riot grrrl *made*.

Riot grrrl drew from liberal formulas that define racism as ignorance, and ignorance as the absence of intimacy; in the words of a zine I admittedly have long discarded, “racism is a lack of love.” (We also know this in the familiar disavowal, “I’m not racist, I have black friends,” which suggests that proximity is a social prophylactic against virulent racism.) In the name of a transformative love, white girls (and some boys) confessed to failures of social bonds – admitting a lack of non-white friends was popular – and proposed solutions through which racism might be overcome through experiences that would then yield intimate knowledge of the other. The presumption is that intimacy is a pathway to a good relationship is the passage to social justice, or as Lauren Berlant observes of its limits, “sentimentality’s universalist rhetoric gains its authority not in the political domain, but near it, against it, and above it: sentimental culture entails a proximate alternative community of individuals sanctified by recognizing the authority of true feeling – authentic, virtuous, compassionate – at the core of a just world.”³¹ Thus *Slambook*, a zine by one of the multiple incarnations of NYC Riot Grrrl, topped its list of “twenty-two quick ‘n’ easy (not even) things white people can do to fight racism” with “nod and say hello to latina/black/asian/native people as you pass them on the street.”³² In *Fantastic Fanzine*, Erika Reinstein wrote: “i think growing up around people of different cultures, religions, and races has helped demystify the whole issue of racism in my mind. plus my cultural experiences growing up were not typically ‘white,’ especially compared to my more middle class friends.”³³ In *Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars*, Tony took note: “Erika told me that if I want to understand and work on my racism, classism, sexism . . . that I need to actively pursue intimate relationships with less privileged people and prove I can be a real ally to them.”³⁴

There are multiple concerns here. First, what does it mean to disseminate such confessions as part of an aesthetics of access to the individual, the interior? If we are conscious that an aesthetics of intimacy is not the same as transparency (though as I earlier observed it sometimes makes claims to it), what then is the relation between the performative confession of bad feelings and a desire to be good? Sara Ahmed suggests that such confessions might allow guilt to be displaced with the certainty that feeling bad actually means being good (or at least appearing to be good before others). In her critique of Australian “sorry books,” compendium of apologia for indigenous genocide, Ahmed usefully observes that: “Shame isn’t after all just about feeling bad *for* others, as it is about feeling bad *about* oneself *before* others . . . My shame in the face of the exposure of my failure to embody an ideal shows my love,

and my desire to embody that ideal in the very moment of experiencing its loss as failure.”³⁵ Following from Ahmed, the pain of others then is not the object of alteration in such professions of desire as, “I need to actively pursue intimate relationships with less privileged people . . .” Instead, the object is the speaker’s sense of being converted through confession into a better person, or as the second half of that statement notes, “. . . and prove I can be a real ally to them.” Thus, it may be that the expression of shame is less about the thing one is ashamed for (the failure to be intimate with racial, colonial others, for instance) than a hope for recognition that others might witness one’s shame as proof of good faith.

Second, we also find a formula that supposes the authentic (white) self, especially the self who transgresses social determinations as punk claimed to do, is enhanced through proximity to the racial, colonial other. This might entail an encounter in a material (such as Erika’s disclaimer of “typical” whiteness through childhood experience with the other) or even metaphorical register. In his study of the 1970s Los Angeles punk scene, Daniel Traber notes that the punk narrative of self-actualization through such proximity, especially as part of the disavowal of bourgeois norms, is square in a long, liberalist tradition of fashioning a sovereign individualism through such flirtations. Writing of punk residency in neighborhoods otherwise populated by working poor or people of color, Traber states: “This is turned into prestige by punks; acquiring rebellious symbolic capital is how the appropriation of Otherness ‘pays,’ and assuming the underclass is there for their emulation becomes the imperial gestures in punk’s self-escape.”³⁶ As he records, and as Fiona I.B. Ngô in this volume elaborates, punk membership was therefore often understood as the negation or at least the diminishment of whiteness, oftentimes through the misplaced but much abused analogy with nonwhiteness. (Such an analogy – blue hair as equivalent to brown skin – is all too familiar, bearing a troubled history in feminisms and rights-based gay and lesbian discourses.³⁷) In response to another essay claiming such an analogy, published in the now-defunct independent magazine *Clamor*, musician and author Gordon Edgar penned a letter detailing some of its abuses, writing: “Let me see if I got this straight . . . two (visibly) white women on a bus give another (visibly) white woman a little shit for dressing punk and all of a sudden the punk woman is John Brown?”³⁸ Such a desire for intimacy with disenfranchised others whether as experience with, or even near –through geography or analogy – informs a strategy of self-aggrandizing individuation through social transgression.

For our purposes, we might usefully reflect upon Rey Chow’s astute observation: “Our fascination with the native, the oppressed, the savage, and all such figures is therefore a desire to hold onto an unchanging certainty somewhere outside our own ‘fake’ experience. It is a desire for being ‘non-duped,’ which is a not-too-innocent desire to seize control.” In which *the native, the oppressed, the savage, and all such figures* stand in for some more true, more genuine knowledge, the desire for intimacy with this other enacts an unrealized intersubjectivity in which a performance of address can nonetheless take place. The confession of desire then is not about the professed object (the other with whom congress would inoculate the speaker against ignorance), but the animation of the speaker who experiences a break from her prior

state of ignorance and realizes a truer self, a differently possible self. This is a liberalist fantasy of self-actualization and enlightenment that requires no reciprocity, because to enunciate the *hope* for intimacy or love may well be enough for the speaker's sense of her own flourishing.

Thus does this loving (and here white) subject instrumentalize his or her social transactions in terms of the rules of an economy, assigning value to intimate experiences with racial, colonial others – collected for the express purpose of gaining value – which ground his or her claims to knowledge as property, as self-possession. Where intimacy with the other faltered, however, the self could still be reconfigured as a source of authentic knowledge about that other – through analogy, for instance, or appropriation. Citing a “possible Ethiopian ancestor,” *Fantastic Fanzine*'s Erika Reinstein drew upon the “one drop rule” that once legislated race as a zero-sum physical property of blood inheritance to identify herself as a black woman. In such a formula racism as an existential crisis is resolved through individuated recognition of that one drop, which is in fact a profound misrecognition of the structural determinations of race and their historical violences. In this fantasy of intimacy as interiority (or a too-literal melting pot), race is mistaken as a *problem of distance* that not only can be overcome by destroying its phenotypical or genotypical character, misreading race as a set biological reality rather than a mutable epistemic quality, but also through a series of appropriations of supposedly discrete objects (such as blackness) into an existing interior in such a manner as to become part of this interior's infinitude.³⁹ (“I am Scottish, German, African, Newfoundlandish, etc.”) In construing her “revelation” as a passage to an unalienated self, Reinstein also adopted a bizarre application of proximate osmosis, claiming the racial identifications of her intimates *for herself*: “Justin and I just got married and we decided to take on each others' racial identities as part of that commitment to each other.” Race in this idiosyncratic formulation was both mobile in its conscious transferability from body to body, if nonetheless fixed as particular and discrete essences seemingly divorced from history. While furthering her own progress toward greater virtue (no other consequence is claimed), this story radically estranges the phenomenology of historical violence, and eliminates the necessity for others to be addressed at all! This fantasy of referential self-enclosure, published as an interview called “We are family” in the collaborative zine *Wrecking Ball*, was secured through the sharing of race as a *property* that then enhances a transgressive whiteness through a disturbing investment not just in an experience of intimacy, but also in its ownership. As such, her speech acts – “I am African,” “we are family,” presented to the reader as evidence that *something* has been overcome – posit the (white) speaker as a revolutionary ideal, through her claims to incorporate others into her self-possession and *therefore to love others as herself*.

In these and countless other examples of how the difference of race both confounded (and was contained by) the prescription of intimacy, it became apparent that girl love could easily, intensely, perform as a feminist mode of control and psychic violence. Such confessional gestures and professed desires for intimacy with the other produce possessive investments in an antiracist whiteness. That is, confession here enacts ownership, naming one's property (“I am owning my

whiteness,” “I have friends of color”) or the desire for it (“I need more friends of color”) to enhance one’s holdings. Here I borrow the concept of a *possessive investment in whiteness* from George Lipsitz, who describes it as the accumulation of properties that secure “the distribution of wealth, prestige, and opportunity,” in order to suggest that certain, perhaps less tangible if no less valuable, properties also accrue to complement an antiracist whiteness.⁴⁰ Thus does bell hooks suggest that guilt is the continuing manufacture, not the collapse of, whiteness.⁴¹ The hope to pursue “intimate relationships with less privileged people,” for example, depends upon a logic of accumulation as self-betterment – indeed, even as a public performance of apparent unselfing (because the speaker presumes she is made vulnerable in confession, or incorporation of the other) it enacts a possessive investment in one’s own transgressions of boundaries. As Nia King observes in *Ungrateful Black/White Girl* about this “unconquerable monster”: “You get to give yourself little anti-racist points for every time you don’t flip out or break down crying when someone calls you a racist, whether it’s blatant or sugar-coated. You get [...] a little merit badge and to move on the next level. That’s the monster part. If you are the POC [person of color] who is doing the calling out, you are throwing your defenses at the monster and it is just eating them and getting stronger. You can’t win, because ultimately your accusations benefit them.”⁴² For just these reasons, through which antiracism becomes both a property in the twofold sense of an accumulation of value and of an immanent quality of the “good” revolutionary, Sara Ahmed warns: “indeed, antiracism may even provide the conditions for a new discourse of white pride. Here, antiracism becomes a matter of generating a positive white identity, an identity that makes the white subject feel good. The declaration of such an identity sustains the narcissism of whiteness and allows [...] white subjects [to] feel good by feeling good about ‘their’ antiracism.”⁴³

Critiques of this aesthetics of intimacy would thus refuse to allow the violence of such displacement that would center these professed feelings. The refusal of this gesture is the critical recognition that the confessional gesture is not about the ostensible object of desire – the person of color, the mentally ill, the poor – but about the one who speaks that desire. Furthermore, such desired intimacies that appear to reveal a history of committing injury to others, actually controvert the complex personhood of those others. Or, as San Francisco-based multiracial queer band Sta-Prest sang in their sarcastic 1996 single, “Let’s Be Friendly with Our Friends,”

Uh huh I see
 Mm-hmm oh, I see
 You, So Aware
 but my I.D. is your novelty

 and now I know
 you’re one of the Good Ones
 It’s hard 2 B sharing and caring now
 Please teach me more about me Whitey
 Alrighty-Titey Whitey?
 Let’s be friendly be with our friends⁴⁴

As Traber notes, these notions of transgression reified otherness as unproblematic scenes of authenticity: “Punk’s crossing of racial and class borders can be read as a

commodification of the Other that aestheticizes identity for capital in a symbolic economy of signification.”⁴⁵ Such fantasies of intimacy functioned as fantasies of knowing, even owning – operations which, as I argued earlier, are not distinct from racial, colonial schema that sought to “fix” in place the assumed properties of the other (even as resistant) and their structural determinations. In *Pure Tuna Fish*, Rita Fatila lists among her pet peeves the whitening and subsequent reification of a homogenous working-class culture in zines, while in *Funeral*, Sugar Magnolia Edwards points to the ignored complexities of poverty and criminal classes in the same.⁴⁶ In doing so, Fatila deconstructed a punk romanticization of an “authentic” way of being in the world – as “loud,” direct, and without illusions of propriety and therefore *ideology* – that simultaneously mythologized working-class figurations and insulated them from the privileges of whiteness and even citizenship to the Global North. For her part, Edwards consistently critiqued the cooptation of “criminal-class sex-work culture by the dominant (punk), mainstream (punk, popscene).” Here, Edwards refers to punk feminists who pursued stripping as feminist reclamation of the so-called male gaze.⁴⁷ She astutely observed that the “passing thru” of some punk women into the sex industry detrimentally alters the “class/beauty standards” (because of lifelong access to healthcare, for instance) that others whose survival depends upon an underground economy must accommodate thereafter. Moreover, such questions of travel, here denoting a privileged mobility and a hunger for access to the so-called margins, are standard tropes for liberal individuation that depend upon the *immobility* of racial or social others. Or as Gayle Wald writes: “white subjectivity [is equated] with a social entitlement to experiment with identity.”⁴⁸ Thus did Edwards, among others, identify such impulses as colonialist in form and content. “What I’m saying is that rich girls slumming it in the sex industry for arts sake/for glammers sake/for the illusion of street tuff is a joke and a bunch of crap.”⁴⁹

However, such critiques of access and intimacy as social goods were often met with accusations of invalidating and more fundamentally violating the principles of girl love and sovereign selfhood. It is as such that the *proximity without intimacy* of the feminist of color got in the way of love and revolution. In which the refusal to be intimate was perceived as an act of bad faith, to insist upon continued presence was to further disturb the comfort or happiness of loving others. Sianne Ngai, who points out that there is too often “an underlying assumption that an appropriate... response to [...] violence exists, and that the burden lies on the racialized subject to produce that appropriate response legibly, unambiguously, and immediately,” thus powerfully recalls Bianca Ortiz’s piece, condemning the circumscription of women of color in an “educator/enemy” duality. Audre Lorde described this scenario thusly: “When women of color speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with white women, we are often told that we are ‘creating a mood of helplessness,’ ‘preventing white women from getting past guilt,’ or ‘standing in the way of trusting communication and action.’” We find just such a reaction in the aftermath of the *Wrecking Ball* interview, perhaps the most controversial incident in this politics of intimacy. Confronting the problematic racial twists of this interview in his zine *Kreme Koolers*, Keyan Meymand, who lived at the

time in the same town as its authors, was subsequently subjected to much informal and institutional harassment, including charges of anti-Semitism and violence against women circulated in the social scene – premised on the fact that Erika was a Jewish woman, and thus criticisms of her statements were also attacks upon her ethnicity and gender – and also baseless legal charges of intimidation that nearly led to a trial. Erika’s defenders argued that Keyan “invalidated” her “opinions about race,” that his “wanting erika to make a public show of her process is about power, and that power is sexist, and classist” amounted to an act of epistemic violence – while denying whatever epistemic violence (or “process”) she herself strategically performed in public shows, such as claiming intimacy with the African other inside her (through a fiction of blood as experience, or expertise). Such troubling recourse to sovereign selfhood as an authentic source of truth sought to shield this person from necessary critique.⁵⁰ (It should also be noted that defenders also claimed that Erika had been an “ally” to many people of color, a tactical invocation that demonstrates once again a possessive investment in antiracist whiteness, through which intimacy with the racial other becomes a prophylactic property for the “good” person.) His refusal to accord to her opinions the status of irrefutable argument was perceived as an injury, generating social and psychic negativity and even aggressivity. This is perhaps the most extreme example through which critiques of racism were deemed reprehensible, and otherwise responsible for the failures of riot grrrl to maintain unity. That is to say, after Ahmed, the exposure of violence becomes in this reversal the *origin* of violence, a reversal that thereby denies structural racism (while also notably hierarchizing gender violence as a more heinous crime).⁵¹ Thus are some kinds of violence presumed to be social goods, like love or intimacy, which may have the more terrible outcome of annulling and banishing those who experience violence as violence to an outside of “community” altogether.

This is one subterranean story of a particular moment, or movement, which is not widely told about riot grrrl and its resonance.⁵² It is a story about the violence of girl-girl intimacy, the force of smothering love, the menace of liberal subjecthood. But it is also important to observe that people of color made significant connections *outside* of these conversations, writing – or singing – about language loss and acquisition, the ghosts of empire, mixed-raced identifications, migration histories (because of war, or the demands of capital), the pitfalls of non-profit organizing, queer of color critique, “black girl travel stories,” and much more. We assembled compilation zines like *Race Riot*, *How to Stage a Coup*, and *Chinese, Japanese, Indian Chief*, made documentaries like *Afropunk* and *Mas Alla de los Gritos (Beyond the Screams)*, reclaimed the too-often unobserved significance of pioneering women of color including Poly Styrene, Alice Bag, Conflict’s Karen “Nurse” Maeda Allman, and the Go-Go’s Margot Olaverria,⁵³ and otherwise pursued what might be called a multisubculturalism (a coinage I attribute to Sta-Prest), traversing punk, hip hop, and other scenes to trace their entangled genealogies. Such connections can be found in zines including *Gunk* (Ramdasha Bikceem), *Housewife Turned Assassin* and *Revolution Rising* (Dani and Sisi), *Framing Historical Theft* (Athena Tan), *Quantify* and *You Might As Well Live* (Lauren Jade Martin), *Hermana*, *Resist* (Noemi Martinez), *Paint Me a Revolution*, *How to Stage a Coup*, and *Hard as Nails* (Helen

Luu), *I Dreamed I was Assertive* (Celia Perez), *Bamboo Girl* (Sabrina Margarita Alcantara-Tan), *Nappy Bush* (Dionne Herbert), *Wild Honey Pie* and *Tennis & Violins* (Kristy Chan), *Consider Yourself Kissed* and *External Text* (Yumi Lee), *Funeral* (Sugar Magnolia Edwards), *Slant*, *Slander*, and *Race Riot* (Mimi Thi Nguyen), and *Pure Tuna Fish* (Rita Fatila), and later zines in the years following, such as *Finger on the Trigger* (Adee Roberson), *Ungrateful Black/White Girl* and “*The First 7-inch was Better:*” *How I Became an Ex-Punk* (Nia King), and *Shotgun Seamstress* (Osa Atoe).⁵⁴ In these other histories, other archives, race is not an interruption into a singular scene or movement but the practice of another, co-present scene or movement that conversed and collided with the already-known story, but with alternate investments and forms of critique. These other stories of riot grrrl in particular and also punk at large unfolding enact historical and theoretical provocations with which we have yet to reckon, then or now.⁵⁵

Through such stories we might importantly learn that for all that this historical moment is remembered as bounded – a brief irruption in the early part of that decade before it splintered, or became a more “mainstream” commodity – we continue to live with such things having not ended. There is no end I can tell, for instance, about the incidents detailed above – while the names might have changed (and perhaps some of the persons named above have since changed their minds), these dynamics are with us still – not least because they are so often rooted in the assumed scenes of liberalism, including self-sovereignty as the property and precondition for freedom. This is a history that is yet to be told – not as episode, or interruption, but the shadow that is with us still. Over 10 years afterward, Nia King ends her zine “*The First 7-inch was Better,*” a meditation on her disillusionment with punk politics, with this familiar observation:

Punk was an incredibly important formative influence in my life because it was my first activist community, where my politics grew up. I still like some of the music and see having come up in that scene as an integral part of who I am. But it shouldn't surprise anybody that I grew out of and grew alienated by the punk scene, then submitted to a punk zine to talk shit about it. In a culture where you prove how down you are by judging others, what could be more punk than biting the hand of your formative heroes?⁵⁶

PART II. *Where's the riot?*

In recent years, we have been witness to appeals and attempts to remember, record, and even to revive riot grrrl circulating throughout punk and popular cultures. Recent endeavors include, but are hardly limited to, Kerri Koch's 2005 documentary *Don't Need You: The Herstory of Riot Grrrl*; scholarly treatments including Mary Celeste Kearney's 2006 *Girls Make Media* and Allison Piepmeier's 2009 *Girl Zines*; Goteblud zine bookstore and gallery proprietor Matt Wobensmith's 2009 traveling exhibition *You Are Her: Riot Grrrl and Underground Female Zines of the 1990s*; the 2010 establishment of the Kathleen Hanna Papers at New York University and “The Message Is In The Music: Hip Hop Feminism, Riot Grrrl, Latina Music, and More” conference at Sarah Lawrence College (I presented an earlier version of this piece on

that conference's plenary panel); Sara Marcus's much-lauded *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*; the 2010 compilation zine *The International Girl Gang Underground* by Kate Wadkins and Stacy Konkiel; and the most recent releases in 2011 of *Who Took the Bomp? Le Tigre on Tour* (dir. Kerthy Fix) *Grrrl Love and Revolution: Riot Grrrl NYC* (dir. Abby Moser), and *From the Back of the Room* (dir. Amy Oden), focused on women punk musicians (including but not exclusive to riot grrrl), to be followed by the in-production documentary about artist and musician Kathleen Hanna called *The Punk Singer* (dir. Sini Anderson). The impetus to remember also circulates, proliferates, in more ephemeral ways – online forums and blogs, casual conversations – such that the resonance of riot grrrl, and wishes for its revival or something like it in the seeming absence of an equivalent movement in the present, renders especially pertinent questions of how we remember.

These are each important records of a historical moment, or movement, but at the same time certain stories are easier to tell than others. This became clear to me in my ill-fated editorial encounter with a celebrated music critic, as we clashed repeatedly over a piece I was invited to write about riot grrrl for an encyclopedic entry. Through comments that passed between us via our mediating editor, we battled over whether the conclusion of the riot grrrl story should end with a spectacular, world-shattering bang, in which punk subcultures were forever changed (his choice), or with a more ambiguous denouement, in which some things are not yet ended (my choice). And indeed, the fact that I had such an exchange is itself evidence that some things are not yet ended; as recent remembrances show, the deferral of race in the making (and not just the unmaking) of riot grrrl continues. Sta-Prest musician and artist Iraya Robles, interviewed with Akiko Carver for *Girls to the Front*, observes that women of color are often called upon to respond to, and to otherwise enhance, privileged feminisms rather than recall what they themselves built. “In Sara Marcus’ *Girls to the Front*, for instance, unfortunately every person of color appears to be a big bummer for riot grrrl. We are continually narrated and approached, even in retrospect, like we’re a scar or a painful memory for punk feminism – in that story, we ruined it. And there is so much more to our story than that.” Robles continues:

The question also remains – where’s the work we made? With California being missing in the timeline, you just erase so many people. Where are the Los Angeles riot grrrls, or the punk women of color in the Bay Area who did so much art and activism related to riot grrrl or queercore, or which these movements benefited from? How come all the women of color who making impactful zines and bands are left out?⁵⁷

The recent retrospective turn to tell the story of riot grrrl brings to the fore an anxiety about history, which is an anxiety about duration, which is an anxiety about the relation between past and future, which is an anxiety about lessons we might have – or should have – learned and those we did not. In short, all those things that are the hinge upon which we generate a feminist future tense. In what follows, I worry about the absence or the containment of the controversies outlined above, because how we narrate the historical and theoretical provocations of women of color is important to how we describe feminisms and how we produce feminist futures. And I want to consider what it means, exactly, to name *certain lessons as*

learned, with all the implications that the past tense entails for how we might understand the future. The problem for me lies in a form of periodization – that is, how certain critical feminist inquiries are corralled as belonging to a particular historical moment, as uttered (for example) in the sentiment, *Theirs was an important intervention during a period of crisis, and we learned our lessons thusly and thereafter*. We can see this logic operating in retrospectives of riot grrrl in which the story of race is contained as a chapter, or a part of a chapter, in its history – if it appears at all.⁵⁸ Incorporated as such, women of color feminisms appear to be temporally, and temperamentally, managed as historically bounded interventions. What I would like to extrapolate from this practice is a challenge to this not uncommon periodization of women of color feminisms, as a mere moment in our political and intellectual reckoning with the “big picture” of any given movement, such as riot grrrl.

This troubling relation to feminist pasts is not unrelated to Wendy Brown’s ruminations on “Resisting Left Melancholy,” or the conservative attachment to a lost historical moment. “Left melancholy,” a phrase she borrows from Walter Benjamin, describes this attachment as a temporal immobility, a fixation upon a utopian feeling since disintegrated or destroyed by disjointed forces, forces that variously name the rise of neoliberal capital matched by the fall of socialist regimes, but also the fragmentation brought about by so-called identity politics as well as postmodernist and poststructuralist theories.⁵⁹ And indeed, we are certainly witness to a feminist melancholy for some prior moment of feminist optimism in which the present can only be understood as failure, as Robyn Wiegman diagnoses, a relation which potentially becomes apocalyptic – heralding violence and judgment, she writes, the feminist apocalyptic predicts “the spectacular end of all things.”⁶⁰ The apocalyptic story is, as Wiegman observes, “deeply troubled by about the internal dynamics of ‘difference,’” and its non-identical or non-continuous temperament across generational time. We can see just such an undercurrent troubling Marcus’s *Girls to the Front*, in which the penultimate chapter, titled “A cruel revolution,” records the deterioration of the movement through the narration of a harsh incursion upon a DC-area punk collective, as some of its members (Riot Grrrl Press’s Erika Reinstein among them) accused the collective of racism (an escalating argument that resulted in small vandalism and an unprecedented banning). Even as white women are problematically identified and indeed self-appointed as a vanguard in confronting race and racism in riot grrrl (“Girls of color were discussing, among themselves and with white girls, their sense that Riot Grrrl was, in fact, ‘too white’ for them to feel at home there. But it was Mary and Erika who had the means to push the discourse in the movement as a whole”⁶¹), the historical figures who invoke race (even if disturbingly) are also the most polarizing persons, whose increasingly strident measures mark the catastrophic end of an era.

Repudiation or resentment, as a sometimes unarticulated wish to disavow certain critiques (poststructuralist, postcolonial, woman of color feminist) that might otherwise taint or mutate feminisms, is a familiar feeling as numerous scholars including Lorde, Weigman, Ngai, and Ahmed, and also Edwards, Fatila, Martin, and Ortiz, aptly demonstrate. But I want to suggest that rehabilitation – that is, the affirmative incorporation of women of color feminisms as a necessary

intervention – might *also* be a problematic teleology for feminist futures. As I know from watching too much reality television, the concept of an intervention is tied to temporal measures, to “good” and “bad” timing. In the vocabulary of intervention, an event is staged in a crisis (a crisis that may or may not be acknowledged as such by the person who suffers from it) to forestall a catastrophe – naming the problem (“drug addiction,” “cult brainwashing,” or “imperial feminism”), acknowledging it *as* a problem, and then acting upon the problem to help the addicted, the brainwashed, the imperialist feminist, to regain and restore their corporeal or intellectual integrity. Interventions are best staged before it is “too late” and someone is lost, beyond rehabilitation. Interventions then must be opportune, timed to occur within a brief window during which an intervention is efficacious, beneficial. Interventions are thus both irruptions of a progressive time and also course corrections that, incorporated, allow for a return to it.

Here I draw upon Michel Foucault, who warned in *The Archeology of Knowledge* against the periodization of crisis as containment:

In this system, time is conceived in terms of totalization and revolutions are never more than moments of consciousness. In various forms, this theme has played a constant role since the nineteenth century: to preserve, against all decenterings, the sovereignty of the subject, and the twin figures of anthropology and humanism.⁶²

So do I worry that riot grrrl retrospectives will take the form of a story of the loss of a more utopian moment of feminist intimacy, into which race is either a disruption (generating bad feelings) or an intervention (feeling bad to assure that we are good) and otherwise contained as such. Such a continuous history locating women of color feminisms as a historically bounded moment along a progressive teleology would deny these feminisms a *co-presence* in our contemporary political and intellectual life, and their arguments a urgent relevance. Worse still, those practices of violence *with which we continue to live* are consigned to other times. Indeed, in an untitled piece in the recent compilation zine *International Girl Gang Underground*, consisting of pieces exploring the resonance of riot grrrl in the present, K. writes: “The volume of people I have seen saying that when it comes to the riot grrrl revival ‘race won’t be a problem, class won’t be a problem, transphobia won’t be a problem,’ seems to suggest a complete and total lack of both interest in and willingness to seriously engage around these issues and what they meant for riot grrrl/what they will mean for a riot grrrl revival, and that lack of serious engagement leads me to think that issues will continue to be problems within the context of a ‘future’ riot grrrl movement.”⁶³

Such worries are well worth observing, such that we might posit another historiographical gesture. That is, what if we refuse the emplotment of antagonism and subsequent redemption (a makeover to make better) that would render the woman of color feminist critique as mere *course correction* in feminist teleological time? What if the irruption, tolerated (kicking and screaming) or taught in the course of the “becoming” of feminist futures, is *the* story of these futures? What would this mean for riot grrrl retrospectives that “hold a place” for women of color to say their piece, but in such a way that contains their critique and segregates it from the story of the movement’s contribution? What if their critique *was* the contribution?

These questions matter as a story about how feminisms are narrated through rubrics of community and antagonism, “big picture” and episode. Here, as I argue for displacing the given history of riot grrrl for another yet untold that understands this movement instead through the continuing presence of problematic investments in progressive time, or possessive selfhood, I’m reminded of Sara Ahmed who conjured that frightening figure of the feminist killjoy, who often appears to us in the form of the angry woman of color who refuses to *move on* from either institutional or epistemic violence, even *after* the tearful apologies and soul-searching late nights.⁶⁴ In being named a killjoy, Ahmed observes, the violence the woman of color names is displaced into “the past,” and her continued insistence that such violence intrudes upon the present is understood to be untimely – in thus naming her a killjoy, this allochronic gesture insists that time’s passage makes increasingly tenuous the casual temporality of the violence she names as *still here, with us still*. Thus her refusal to *move on* is named the source of unreasonable violence – a binge of pain and pain-giving, a crisis of proportion and duration – through which she is subsequently accused of disrupting feminist futures. After all, in a teleology in which the intervention is understood as timely but also *temporary*, to claim that we continue to exist in a state of emergency is to insist that feminisms cannot hope to remain self-identical – or the same, but better – after irruption.

In this essay, the lesson of the first part for the second then may be that feeling bad and looking back allows us to acknowledge that feminist futures cannot look like feminist pasts, in which the interventions of women of color are incorporated as a brief disruption into a feminist teleological time that emphasizes origins, episodes, and successions. I’m reminded here of Elizabeth Grosz, who writes that: “The project of radical politics, and thus of a radical feminist [and queer] politics, remains how to envisage and engender a future unlike the present, without being able to be specific in advance what such a future entails.” To undertake this project then is to insist that feminisms cannot hope to remain self-identical – or the same, but better – after irruption. Perhaps we should *allow* the intervention to become an interval in which we linger – not as a past that must be explained neatly or reproduced faithfully, but as a past that continually presses us to imagine a “something else to be.”

Note on contributor

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and her zine writing is archived at thread & circuits (<http://threadandcircuits.wordpress.com/>). She is also co-author of the research blog on dress and beauty threadbared (<http://iheartthreadbared.wordpress.com/>).

Notes

1. This essay has been a long time in the making – almost the entire duration of my life in punk! – having first been conceived as a seminar paper in 1997, delivered as a keynote address at a riot grrrl convention in 1999, published as one of my columns in *Punk Planet* in 1999, and revised much later for a plenary panel at the 12th Annual Women's History Conference "The Message Is In The Music: Hip Hop Feminism, Riot Grrrl, Latina Music, and More," at Sarah Lawrence College in March 2010. I have many people to thank for the conversations that led to this essay, including all those zinesters of color I cite and mention herein, especially Kristy Chan, Sugar Magnolia Edwards, Rita Fatila, Yumi Lee, Lauren Jade Martin, Keyan Meymand, and Bianca Ortiz. I also thank Beth Stinson and Fiona I.B. Ngô for the prodding to finish this latest iteration, and Janice Radway and Christina Hanhardt for their generous, generative engagement with it. Last but not least, I thank Iraya Robles, who has been my collaborator in this ongoing inquiry for over 20 years. To our friendship I owe much of the difficult but also joyous labor of living through and understanding this history. LYLAS, Iraya.
2. See Ngô (2012) for an argument about the impact of these wars and restructurings upon Los Angeles punk in the 1970s.
3. *Riot Grrrl Manifesto* (1991).
4. There is a significant amount of scholarship on riot grrrl, including Gayle Wald and Joanne Gottlieb, "Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution, and Women in Independent Rock," in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture*, eds. Andrew Ross and Tricia Ross (New York: Routledge, 1994), 250–74; Mary Celeste Kearney, "The Missing Links: Riot Grrrl-Feminism-Lesbian Culture," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Shiela Whiteley (London: Routledge, 1997), 207–29; Marion Leonard, "'Rebel Girl, You are the Queen of my World: Feminism, 'Subculture,' and Grrrl Power," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Shiela Whiteley (London: Routledge, 1997), 230–55; Jessica Rosenberg and Gitana Garofalo, "Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from Within," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 23 (1998): 809–41. There are also several non-academic studies, including Nadine Monem, ed. *Riot Grrrl: Revolution Grrrl Style Now!* (London: Black Dog, 2007), and Sara Marcus, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010).
5. "We are destroyers of the status quo" is the first line from Wendy O. Williams's song, "Destroyers."
6. McAdams (n.d.).
7. *Riot Grrrl* 3 (n.d.).
8. Povinelli (2006, 191).
9. Fernandez Henriquez (n.d.).
10. See Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (London: Verso, 1997). For more detailed analyses of the materiality of zines made by young women, and especially their literary and aesthetic qualities, see Mary Celeste Kearney, *Girls Make Media* (particularly her chapter "Girls Zines") (New York: Routledge, 2006); Adela C. Licona, "'(B)orderlands' Rhetorics and Representations: The Transformative Potential of Feminist Third-space Scholarship and Zines," *Feminist Formations* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 104–29; Alison Piepmeier, *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism* (New York: New York University, 2009); Kristen Schilt, "'Til resist with every inch and every breath': Girls and Zine Making as a Form of Resistance," *Youth and Society* 35, no. 1 (2003): 71–97. Emerging from within zine cultures, scholars such as Elke Zobl and Jenna Freedman are doing important work as well. See Elke Zobl,

- “Cultural Production, Transnational Networking, and Critical Reflection in Feminist Zines,” and Jenna Freedman, in the “Comparative Perspectives Symposium: Feminist Zines” published in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 35, no. 1 (2009).
11. Cindy Crabb interview in Piepmeier (2009, 73).
 12. See Andreas Huyssen for more on modernist (and masculinist) autonomy as resistance, abstention or suppression of mass culture. “Mass culture as woman,” in *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 55.
 13. Piepmeier (2009, 90).
 14. Hall (1989, 68).
 15. Shadid (n.d.).
 16. Eva Illouz writes of the concurrent rise of a similar discourse in that most mainstream of cultural venues, *Oprah*. Eva Illouz, *Oprah Winfrey and the Glamour of Misery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
 17. Ingrid and Zanna (n.d.).
 18. Marie (n.d.).
 19. Kelly (n.d.).
 20. Whitney (1997). We might recall that Diana Fuss writes: “The problem with attributing political significance to every personal action is that the political is soon voided of any meaning or specificity at all, and the personal is paradoxically depersonalized.” Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 101. Or, as Keyan Meymand observes in *Kreme Coolers*: “Like maybe I enjoy sitting here by the bay because I just fucking like it and it’s a nice day, and not because it’s framed by some experience I’ve had being biracial or bisexual or whatever.”
 21. Chan (1997).
 22. Whitney (1997).
 23. Kearney (2006, 65).
 24. Marcus (2010, 165).
 25. Ortiz, *Mamasita 5* (n.d.).
 26. Perez (Winter/Spring 2000).
 27. Martin (1996).
 28. The scholarship of Lila Abu-Lughod, Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, Minoo Moallem, and Ella Shohat, among many others working in transnational and postcolonial feminist studies, aptly demonstrates these congruencies.
 29. Stoler (1995).
 30. Ortiz, *Mamasita 5* (n.d.).
 31. Berlant (2008, 34).
 32. Riot grrrl NYC (Spring 1995).
 33. Reinstein, *Fantastic Fanzine 6* (n.d.). Erika Reinstein now goes by Billie Rain.
 34. Perkins (n.d.).
 35. Ahmed (2005, 75).
 36. Traber (2007, 134).
 37. In *I’m So Fuckin’ Beautiful 2*, Nomy Lamm analogizes fatness with blackness as genetics. Lauraine Leblanc starts her chapter, ““Oh, I hope I don’t catch anything:” punk deviance and public harassment,” with a tale about how being punk, and subject to public harassment, is not unlike being black in public. In *Pretty in Punk: Girls’ Gender Resistance in a Boys’ Subculture* (Newark: Rutgers University Press, 1999).
 38. The essay in question was called “Not just posing for the postcard: A discussion of punk and the new abolition,” authored by Amanda Luker and published in *Clamor 2*, April/May 2000. Edgar also takes issue with the author’s complaint that she is not recognized as an “ally” by several black youth. “I guess I could just leave it at the fact that there are many ways to read someone’s appearance, and relying on fashion to convey your ideas is, to say the least, dubious. Unless you expect people from other cultures or subcultures to understand the minutiae of ours and say ‘Hey wait, she has a

- Profane Existence* patch not a Skrewdriver logo. She must be down with us.' (And assuming that if they read *Profane* that would be their conclusion.)" *Clamor* 3, June/July 2000, 6. Profane Existence is a long-running anarchist punk collective based in Minneapolis.
39. Reinstein and Fondreist (1996). This interview also included some unexplained equations. Asked to tell Mary about "all the beautiful races that you are," Erika replies, "lets see. my mom is scotch-irish and newfoundlandish, which probably means English and german i think. she's a strain and a martin. she's also salvation armyish. and my dad is, well i'm not sure everything but i think he's swiss, and scottish and jewish, which equals portugese [sic], possibly polish/prussian and african and that's all i know."
 40. Lipsitz (1998, vii).
 41. hooks (1989).
 42. King (1998).
 43. Ahmed (2005, 82).
 44. Sta-Prest, "Let's Be Friendly with Our Friends/You Are the Company Spy", 7-inch single, Kill Rock Stars, 1996.
 45. Traber (2007, 131).
 46. Fatila (1997); Edwards (1997).
 47. Sarah Marcus chronicles some of the frustrations one woman encountered in her efforts to confront the so-called male gaze through stripping in *Girls to the Front*.
 48. Wald (1997, 153).
 49. Edwards (1997).
 50. Meymand (1997).
 51. Ahmed (2010, 68).
 52. I have found a scant few scholarly examinations focused on such race "troubles," including Kristin Schilt's "'The Punk White Privilege Scene:' Riot Grrrl, White Privilege, and Zines," in *Different Wavelengths: Studies of the Contemporary Women's Movement*, ed. Jo Reger (New York: Routledge), 39–56.
 53. San Francisco-based queer musician and filmmaker Jill Reiter with Iraya Robles created a short film in the 1990s called *In Search of Margo-Go*, starring Kathleen Hanna, about a young woman "searching" for Margot Olaverria, an original member of the Los Angeles all-girl band who quit in protest of her fellow band members' desire to sign to a major label.
 54. I also note that Ericka Bailie of Pander Zine Distro carried many zines by people of color during the 1990s, and was oftentimes foremost among a cadre of allies who engaged questions of race and gender together meaningfully.
 55. See the other essays in this special issue.
 56. King (n.d.).
 57. Robles (2011).
 58. As just two examples, a 2009 Guardian feature on the "legacy of the Riot Grrrl scene" and a 2011 NPR retrospective called, "Revolution girl style, 20 years later," nowhere mention the subjects of race (or class). See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2009/mar/04/grrrl-power-music> and <http://www.npr.org/blogs/therecord/2011/09/20/140640502/revolution-girl-style-20-years-later>.
 59. Brown (1999).
 60. Wiegman (2000).
 61. Marcus (2010, 251–2). It is debatable whether Mary and Erika were the only persons with the means to push the question of race to the forefront, since there were numerous women of color whose zines and critiques were well circulated at the time. It is perhaps more accurate to observe that Mary and Erika's declaration that riot grrrl must see race, and especially whiteness, assumes that race had been previously unseen; but of course, race, and especially whiteness, have not been invisible to those who bore witness to them. It is only from the perspective of whiteness, then, that race had not already been "a discourse in the movement as a whole."

62. Foucault (1982, 12). My italics.
 63. K. (2010, 45).
 64. Ahmed (2010, 68).

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