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A Zine of One's Own: DIY and Alternative Expression among the Beats and the Riot Grrrls

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A Zine of One's Own: DIY and Alternative Expression among the Beats and the

Riot Grrrls

By

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Senior Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Honors in the Department of American Studies

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Abstract

BROWN, LAUREN A: A Zine of One's Own: DIY and Alternative Expression among the Beats and the Riot Grrrls

ADVISOR: Professor Lori Marso

In my thesis, I investigate the cultural, artistic and political effects of the Beat Generation and a subculture within Generation X known as the Riot Grrrls. Both groups serve as an alternative to their mainstream cultural counterparts—the Beats are a reaction to 1950s post-war suburbia, and the riot grrrls subvert the pop-culture overload and the backlash against feminism that is indicative of Generation X. Arising in the midst of the conformist 1950s, the Beats were a group of writers and artists, some of them women, who were willing to fight against the constraints of male-dominated “Wonder bread” culture. Similarly, the riot grrrl movement of the 80s and 90s subverts the punk movement and combats anti-feminism, using their words, music and cut-and-paste skills to assert both their collective feminism and their individual identities. Both of these groups of women sought a more active role in a counterculture that still valued a passive female participation—in both the Beat and punk circles, the majority of the women participated as wives, girlfriends and muses of their male artist counterparts. In the first chapter, I outline the historical and cultural contexts that surround both the Beat generation and Generation X. I examine the artistic, cultural, political and historical impacts of both these marginalized groups and their forms of DIY “do it yourself” self-expression. Specifically, I look at self-made zines from the riot grrrl generation alongside Beat publications such as Diane di Prima’s *Floating Bear* newsletter. The second chapter

focuses on di Prima, *The Floating Bear*, and her contributions to the Beat community, while the third chapter focuses on the world making and zine circulation of the riot grrrls. I consider these works to be exemplary representations of their respective counter-publics. Through examining their creative output within the theoretical framework of Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics*, the fourth chapter assesses the ways in which these movements are able to challenge and offer alternatives to the existing defined social constructs.

Introduction

My interest in subversive cultures and their alternative means of expression was first piqued after taking a research-intensive class centered around Generation X and global remix culture. I was drawn to the idea that culture, and subsequently, artistic expression, could be expressed in different ways than how MTV or any of the glossy, highly refined mass-printed magazines was telling me to absorb it. Gen X literature was written in new ways, and the novel idea of using the margins as an alternative space as a means to further the story as opposed to its normal function of defining the physical limits of the plot astounded me. The music was even better, and I was reassured by the fact that for every record-label groomed boy group was being pushed onto the scene, there were just as many independent bands and labels (some were even run by women!) that created their own sound and their own message without compromising on their artistic vision. My anti-establishment fascination with Beat literature, specifically the poem *Howl* by Allen Ginsberg, was further cultivated through a few different American literature courses focused on Beat and alternative literature, shedding an academic light on a group of writers, poets and artists who aren't always taken seriously in an academic sense. Here, I discovered the women who were just as a part of the movement as Jack Kerouac or Allen Ginsberg. Yet I learned about them mostly through anecdotes told by these men, or by a professor, or perhaps through a photograph or the assorted poem. Yet I found, despite their involvement, essential works read in these classes were very male-dominated. *On the Road*, *The Dharma Bums*, *Naked Lunch*...even the documentaries focused on the men and *their* artistic contributions. In the

background of these films, in an interview, or posing next to Ginsberg in a picture, perhaps, I would see a woman (usually in all black, as was the beatnik dress code du jour.) I would wonder to myself why we didn't learn more about these women. What were their stories? When we did, it would be in relation to these great men. We would learn that Jack Kerouac was a notorious ladies man, and that his character of Marylou was a real person, but nothing more would be said about her. Was she also a poet? Where did she go to college? I was determined to learn more about these women. But more importantly, I was determined to learn more about any accomplishments that extended beyond their personal relationship to the male Beats. All of these courses led me to question the kinds of artistic expression that exist outside of mainstream media.

Finally, a course on Queer Theory led me to Michael Warner's seminal work *Publics and Counterpublics*, a book that, after digesting thoroughly, led me to some interesting conclusions on the public nature of what some consider to be private matters. This idea of making a private thought public, as a means to create an understanding community, was an empowering one, and I felt drawn to the world of possibilities it opened. How many times have you discovered, upon divulging a secret, or in search of a like-minded group of individuals, that you weren't the only one after all? These feelings of isolation, of aloneness in one's thoughts or desires are one that we all understand and at times, struggle with. Learning that there are others just like you is both reassuring and empowering. The riot grrrls sought to facilitate this kind of empowerment, to make sure that even though we are all individuals, a collective could still exist, without judgment. All of these courses led

me to question the kinds of artistic expression that exist outside of mainstream media.

I find the loosely defined term “marginalized cultures” appealing to me, and it is this loosely defined term that describes my area of study as an American Studies major. Independent film, self-published books and lo-fi music are all interesting topics to explore in the context of American history, as it points to the kind of expressions that are offered as an alternative to mainstream media. Pioneers in all of these forms of artistic expression chose these mediums because the mainstream wasn’t accommodating enough, accepting enough, or required too much compromise on behalf of the artist’s vision. Just because the mainstream doesn’t like doesn’t mean it’s not a valid point of view.

In this thesis, I will explore these expressive forms that present themselves in the context of these subcultures. More specifically, I will explore the creative expression that is evident within the subcultures of their respective generations. This will include the Beat movement and the riot grrrl movement. In the context of the Beat movement, I will examine the artistic and intellectual endeavors of Diane di Prima, a noted Beat writer and artist who I argue is a precursor to the feminist movement that will happen in the midst of her discovery of Zen Buddhism and communal living. I will then examine more closely the cultural impact of the Riot grrrl subculture of the 1990s, which both grew out of and challenged the male-centric punk movement. Both groups of women use DIY publications and alternate forms of expression to subvert mainstream politics and methods of communication and media to allow for the formation of a different sort of public. Finally, I will

attempt to draw some conclusions from the study of these two subversive snapshots as part of a larger generational context. What is the significance of the DIY aesthetic within these two movements that take place within two different generations?

Although not the main focus of my thesis, I will attempt to find any similarities that exist between the Beat Generation of the 1950s, and Generation X, focusing primarily on the late 1980s to 1990s. Both of these generations share a surprising resemblance in their characteristics and their ideals, despite the fact that they were a result of two very different historical and cultural eras in American history. The idea behind this thesis is primarily to study and analyze the spaces that artists, writers and other members of these two marginalized cultures (namely, women) created and occupied because the spaces were not available to them in the mainstream or normative cultures or spaces of the time. The spaces and counterpublics in question are the zines and DIY publications created by the riot grrrls and the Beat authors, and their subsequent circulation, both of the physical works themselves and of the ideologies and political messages behind them, especially the process of, “using “low-end—or ‘democratized’—technologies and alternative media to produce hybrid political texts such as ‘zines and music through which they disseminate knowledge and information about subjects...” (Garrison 381). I consider these works to be exemplary representations of their respective counterpublics, and I want to assess the ways in which these movements are able to challenge and offer alternatives to the existing defined social constructs.

Historically, the term DIY is often applied to the aesthetic of both the Beat Generation and the punk movement that started in the 1970s. The main cultural

(and subcultural) definition of DIY ('do it yourself') involves a creation or a repurposing of something in a self-sufficient manner. Often applied to a self-published genre of magazines, books, cassette tapes (mix tapes) and recordings, it is also more loosely applied today as a type of crafting. I argue that this DIY aesthetic is indicative of the desire of these two groups to express themselves in a way that does not concern themselves with the mainstream and allows them to be creative without compromising on any part of the creative process. One of the most interesting thing that I notice as a similarity between these two "generations" or "youth movements" is that mainstream society, especially the media, is constantly trying (and failing) to define these two groups or create some sort of classification in order to create a contextual meaning. In their disunity, they are unified and therefore, their message is conveyed more assertively. In the first chapter, I outline the historical and cultural contexts that surround both the Beat generation and Generation X. I examine the artistic, cultural, political and historical impacts of both these marginalized groups and their forms of DIY "do it yourself" self-expression. The second chapter focuses on di Prima, *The Floating Bear*, and her contributions to the Beat community, while the third chapter focuses on the world making and zine circulation of the riot grrrls. I consider these works to be exemplary representations of their respective counter-publics. Through examining their creative output within the theoretical framework of Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics*, the fourth chapter assesses the ways in which these movements are able to challenge and offer alternatives to the existing defined social constructs, providing unity in their disunity.

Chapter One: Cultural and Historical Context

“[Subcultures are] expressive forms but what they express is, in the last instance, a fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives.”
The Meaning of Style (Ulrich 11)

The Beat Generation

Defined as a group of post-World War II intellectuals, the Beat Generation was comprised primarily of artists, writers and musicians who came to prominence in the late 1950s before any major feminist awakening took place in America. They flocked to New York City, bringing their inspirations to the streets—namely, the streets of the Village. New York thus became the new cultural and intellectual epicenter of post war America. In contrast to the description of the Beats quoted above by John Clellon Holmes, (a journalist whose article “This is the Beat Generation” helped bring the term—and the lifestyle—to the public) the characterization of the rest of the post war generation was one of labeled uniformity, as opposed to transient weariness often associated with the Beats. Holmes contends that, “any attempt to label an entire generation is unrewarding, and yet the generation which went through the last war ...seems to possess a uniform, general quality which demands an adjective...the origins of the word “beat” are obscure, but the meaning is only too clear to most Americans. More than mere weariness, it implies the feeling of having been used, of being raw (Holmes 10). This “rawness” is often reflected in Beat literature, with stories of road-weary travelers, struggling artists and drinking and drug binges as common artistic fodder.

The 1950s are characterized as a “time of omnipresent, and incredibly stringent, gender norms. And conservative politicians regularly evoke the 1950s as a time of great stability, when men and women enjoyed the comfort of clearly marked gender roles” (Neuhaus 531). The post war boom led to the creation of the baby boomer generation, economic growth, and an overall domestic and marital stability that became the aspiration of any young couple. But for those who did not understand or perhaps contested the suburban lifestyle, the options were limited. To contest these clearly marked gender roles (one such aspect that characterized an overall stable yet constricting society) the Beats sought respite in other writers, artists and musicians who also shared the belief that, “Sensationalism and mass success, by its very nature, negates that which is Beat” (Knight 5). This relief was found, at the outset of the movement, in New York City. But why did the Beats choose New York, and more specifically, what was the significance of and the popularity surrounding Greenwich Village? Not only was the city itself an artistic and intellectual breeding ground, but also the areas of Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side were welcoming for a large concentration of writers, poets and artists. The neighborhood-like feel of the area, created by the geographical size of the locale, was also another major contributing factor to the overall vibe of the village during that era.

“Greenwich Village was truly a “ ‘village,’ a small town within the large city of New York...everybody knew everybody, and it was like a family get-together” (McDarragh iv). This, of course, is in direct opposition to the neighborhoods that were being built in the suburbs across America. There was a communal feeling for those searching for a community of equals without the restrictions imposed upon the inhabitants of

Levittown. In short, an alternative community was created within the confines of New York City. Most important, perhaps, is their rejection of the uniform sprawl of suburban neighborhoods for the noisy streets of New York City. Upon examining physical descriptions of Levittown, the first planned suburb in America (and the model on which future suburbs were planned upon) “the typical Cape Cod house was down-to-earth and unpretentious” (Jackson 235). Furthermore, everything was uniform, from the construction method to the materials used, from the streamlined loan process to the floor plans:

In order to simplify their methods and reduce design fees, most of the larger developers offered no more than a half-dozen basic house plans...the result was a monotony and repetition that was especially stark in the early years of the subdivision...but the architectural similarity extended beyond the particular tract to the nation as a whole (Jackson 239-240).

Mainstream suburbia and all of its constricting conformities was, however, precisely what the Beats were rallying against. It is the material construction of suburbia that is perhaps most indicative of the 1950s in America, and the physical structure of these cookie cutter neighborhoods mirrored society and its “Wonder bread” values. Glossy media such as *Time* magazine, frozen foods and manicured lawns (without fences) were the norm, yet this lifestyle, as the suburb was seen as a “pastoral haven from the harsh realities of the city” (Sharpe and Wallock 2). It could also be seen as a haven from a society on the cusp of great social change: “...daily life was changing rapidly and in innumerable ways. Suburban living...racial tension and the beginning

of the civil rights movement, and the spread of television were just some of the factors which contributed to the ways that the daily life...in the post-WWII was dramatically different (Neuhaus 537).

In contrast to the rigid and constantly shifting set of rules that constituted “society” in the 1950s, the Beats searched for something different. “...“Not only is the Beat Generation interested in intellectual work, they themselves are very social people. It’s an attempt to cry out that what we need is a sense of society. If it’s necessary to be part of a crazy, offbeat group, all right, it’s better than being detached.” (McDarrah 4). Belonging to an offbeat community established and then perpetuated new and inspiring work for all of these artists. This feeling of community subsequently produced physical communities, most notably in the coffee houses and jazz cafés located predominately in the Village. Unlike other establishments that drew nightlife crowds, the coffee houses were a significantly more inclusive environment that provided an alternative form of entertainment and a social outlet for the young beatnik. The Beat Movement was still quite unknown outside of New York City or even outside of the cafés of Greenwich Village and the classrooms at Columbia at this time, and “from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, the beats were under wraps” (Raskin 6). Their message had yet to have been made public, and it really wasn’t until Ginsberg left New York in 1954 and published *Howl* in 1955 that their voice became one that was heard nationwide.

Occupying an integral role and voice of the Beat Generation, Allen Ginsberg’s writings and life in the public eye artfully articulated the disdain and alienation felt by an entire post-World War II generation. The “best minds of his generation,” those

who were “dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn/looking for an angry fix” or who “bared their brains to Heaven under the El and/ saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tene-/ment roofs illuminated” (Raskin 9). were given a voice by Ginsberg’s poetry, along with a creative outlet for the marginalized art and creative expression that was not considered to be acceptable or as mainstream during the late 1940s. Largely an unnoticed movement until the publication of Ginsberg’s *Howl*, Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* and William Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch*, The Beat efforts were largely ignored—and disdained—by mainstream society as well as by academia:

Although influential in many artistic circles and bohemian enclaves and celebrated in the burgeoning youth culture, these writers and many other less famous Beats were condemned and ridiculed by mass media journalists, the then-reigning public intellectuals, and by academic critics. Thus, very little serious criticism appeared in the 1960s and ’70s, and the Beats were largely excluded from academic discourse (Skerl 1).

Despite later recognition of artistic merit, it remains to be seen that the artists paving the way at the time were predominantly male. For the women who were a part of this movement, they were largely left ignored intellectually and artistically. “As a marginalized group within an already marginalized bohemia...undervalued productivity of this underground of female artists suggests that the hipster code of silence...and even their entrapment in stereotype provided cover for them to develop despite prejudices against female literary expression” (Grace and Johnson

5). Women were more likely to participate passively: as wives, as girlfriends, as partners or as muses to the Beats rather than through their own active participation. “In this discourse, the situation of women remained very much a secondary issue. Although the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* was imminent, it was still possible simply to elide evidence of women’s alienation or to blame it on modernity’s erosion of traditional masculinity” (Skerl 27).

Furthermore, women were not portrayed in the most positive light in the context of Beat literature. Kerouac was notorious for creating flat, uninspired female characters in his books—if they were present at all. “For the most part, like the problem of modern conformism itself, rebellion was considered to be “man’s work” in this pre-feminist era and so, as Joyce Johnson writes, “we fell in love with men who were rebels.... We did not expect to be rebels all by ourselves... Once we had found our male counterparts, we had too much blind faith to challenge the old male/female rules” (Skerl 27). Despite their marginalized role in the movement, women were nevertheless present. Some, such as Diane di Prima, were extremely active participants. Di Prima was one such woman who was able to overcome any preexisting gender stereotypes, crash the old boy’s club, and create a name for herself as a Beat, an artist and as an intellectual. This isn’t to say that she felt disdain for these men, however. On the contrary, she admired them; she sought out their advice, and was eager to maintain an intellectual dialogue with anyone she happened to meet. Like others who felt a connection to the Beat message, she was thoroughly inspired by Ginsberg’s *Howl*, believing it was the common thread that connected all of the Beats. Here, she describes the situation in the Village before and

after the publication of *Howl*, describing the close-knight community of misfits that had been constructed:

As far as we knew, there was only a small handful of us— perhaps forty or fifty in the city— who knew what we knew: who raced about in Levis and work shirts, made art, smoked dope, dug the new jazz, and spoke a bastardization of the black argot. We surmised that there might be another fifty living in San Francisco, and perhaps a hundred more scattered throughout the country . . . but our isolation was total and impenetrable, and we did not try to communicate with even this small handful of our confreres (1988, 126) (Skerl 25).

This isolation would change, once the Beat sensibility became more widely known (accomplished, perhaps somewhat ironically, through the mainstream media exposure of Allen Ginsberg's obscenity trial for the publication of *Howl* in 1957).

“Through the creation of a subculture and their own public performance spaces, the Beats sought and reached an audience for their art outside established mainstream cultural institutions (Skerl 9). “ This is certainly the case with Diane di Prima, who not only created a public performance space, but was also able to circulate such a collection of ideas among other like-minded people through her role as editor of *The Floating Bear* newsletter. In the next chapter, I will more thoroughly examine di Prima's artistic impact, specifically the significance of her self-published magazine *The Floating Bear* and her community during the Beat occupation of New York City.

Overall, the desire of the Beats was to create a new kind of community, one that was ultimately unachievable and undesirable in post-war suburbia:

The effect of this move was to create a new, albeit unstable, sense of community...and this movement did pressure the commonsense underwriting the growing homogeneity. In the postwar period, the Beat movement became one focal point for the exploration of a complex set of cultural constraints, resistances, and desires as a claustrophobic conformity, frequently described in the literature and social commentary of the period, led to an unusual willingness to investigate various folds of heterogeneity that persisted in the increasingly uniform fabric of American modernity (Skerl 33).

Although the Beats can be considered both a generation and a subculture, the group called Generation X is much harder to define. Unlike the Beats, they are not linked together by rebellion from traditional norms—but like the Beats, they are grouped as a generation that has certain defining characteristics. Gen Xers could potentially be the children of the Beats, but more likely they are the children of the parents who belonged to the post war suburban lifestyle that the Beats were rejecting. In between these two culturally significant eras, there was another marking event or series of events that bridged the gap between these two generations: The second wave feminist movement of the 1960s-1970s. Compared to the first wave of women's liberation, the second wave focused primarily upon issues such as sexuality and reproductive rights, family and equality in the workplace. In many ways, the same issues that women were fighting for during the second wave movement become defining characteristics of Generation X—and consequently, have a profound effect on its children. A quest for sexual liberation led to the

legalization of The Pill in 1960, and a legalization of no-fault divorce and the outlaw of intermarital rape redefined the domestic and professional boundaries for women. In fact, the children of Generation X was born into the throes of the second wave feminist movement—which lasted from the 1960s until the mid 1980s, ultimately defining the conditions under which these children would be raised. Allowing one movement to influence another, this series of events allowed for the Beat generation to exist prior to the second wave feminism movement, and perhaps more importantly, allowed for the riot grrrls to pick and choose their own preferential forms of feminist expression. “The change from the early to late sixties was due, in large part, to the readiness of a small number of women who dared to harness a wave of economic and demographic changes, fortuitous to their cause, that rose in the aftermath of World War II” (Giardina 15-16). It is precisely these small groups of women that existed both prior and subsequently to the second wave movement and that were so involved that allowed future feminist movements to have their own forms of expression—paving the way for self-directed, pastiche artistic expression that is indicative both of Generation X, and more specifically, the group of third wave feminists that called themselves the Riot grrrls.

Generation X

Sandwiched between 80 million baby boomers and 78 million millennials, Generation X — roughly defined as anyone born between 1965 and 1980 — has just 46 million members, effectively creating a generational middle child (Stephey). This generation, born between 1946 and 1964 approximately, comes directly after the

Baby Boomers and comes before Generation Y or the Millennials, who were born between the early 1980s and 2000. The Boomers were celebrated for their youth culture. More importantly, perhaps, the members of the so-called “greatest generation” were young during a more economically prosperous and stable time than when their children would come of age. Shaped by the victory of World War II, the affluence that was a result of post-war housing and education subsidies and a prolonged period of economic growth, the boomers were able to profit from their youth and the ever-increasing opportunities made available to them. Nicknamed “Baby Boomers” for the temporary increase in birth rate, the generation preceding Generation X was one with entitlements—and a sense of entitlement—that didn’t exist before and hasn’t existed since.

Additionally, the sharp increase in divorce rate, partially attributed to the introduction of no-fault divorce in some states, signifies that this was a generation that experienced more one-parent households, less traditional nuclear families and more working mothers than ever before. The term “latchkey kid” didn’t exist until this generation, further reinforcing that this was truly “The Generation that raised itself” (Holtz 3). Left to their own devices, consumer culture caught on to the overwhelming need and desire for a youth-friendly culture by this neglected—and undefined—Generation X. Coincidentally, and perhaps detrimentally, these advances in the domestic and professional spheres for women—precisely what the second-wave feminists fought for—were seen as a drawback to the youth growing up in the shadow of the Boomers:

"Boomers," born from 1946 to 1964, grew up in affluence: economic progress was assumed, freeing them to focus on idealism and personal growth. Young Xers, however, lurched through the recession of the early '80s, only to see the mid-decade glitz dissipate in the 1987 stock-market crash and the recession of 1990-91. Gen X could never presume success (Time).

Major political events such as the Cold War (and the impending threat of nuclear Holocaust,) the Reagan presidency, The AIDS crisis and Iran hostage crisis are all exemplary events that were traumatizing for the nation—most notably, the nation's youth. Milestone historical events have a way of shaping a generation, and, "...the subcultural theory aphorism that a society's structural inequalities and major movements are manifested most noticeably in its youth"(Lee 2). However, despite the influence these damaging events may have had on the collective psyche of Generation X, some of the major historical moments are positive ones worth nothing. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the 1990s economic boom marked the Xers politically, but perhaps what defines them more than what happened to them is what didn't happen to them—this generation did not grow up with a war that affected them directly—something that has defined the generations that proceed and follow them. Baby Boomers lived in the shadow of World War II, and then find their voice as the dissenters of the Vietnam War. By the time Xers come of age, there is nothing left to fight for. Generation X is often characterized as a "nothing" generation—one that is missing that essential event or cultural unifier that allows for the members of the generation to identify with each other. What defines them,

ultimately, is their lack of any real identity. Some of the most important feature of Generation X is the destructive measures their parents, or the Boomers, took, which resulted in the heightened anxiety of the Xers. They are best lumped into the following destructive aspects of their generation, including, “elevated divorce rates, cosmetic surgery, the rise of hippiedom, recreational drug use, increased violent crime, peep shows, free-love communes, sex clubs, sex tourism, snuff films, and the destruction of the nuclear family” (Varsava 151). The definition of Generation X is often precisely that it evades a singular definition: For Douglas Coupland, who is often credited with coining the term Generation X after the publication of his book *Generation X: Tales of an Accelerated Culture*, the “X” connotes the generation’s “random, ambiguous, contradictory ways” (Stephey). And this is precisely how this generation is viewed: aimless and indifferent, without any real goals or convictions. Geofferey Holtz, however, offers a more positive spin on their moniker: for him, the X means, “free.” He prefers to call them the Free Generation, in the sense of being “liberated or emancipated...[they] have grown up in a world that offers more choices than have ever before been available...” (Holtz 3). Yet again, he also points out that Generation X is “free” of any defining events that shapes or applies universally. They are characterized instead by the things that are lost or are negative than the positive events of the post-war boom. No wonder cynicism is one of the pinpointed characteristics among the Xers. When the Xers were coming of age, there were increasingly fewer opportunities offered than before. Newly created jobs paid less and offered fewer benefits. Sharp cutbacks in federal grants starting in 1981 meant that 1 out of 3 students worked and attended school at the same time,

giving rise to the term “McJobs” among other negative buzz phrases that led the older population to assume that Xers were lazy, unmotivated and indifferent. The creation and subsequent legalization of the birth control pill, along with the sexual and cultural revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s are two such events, along with the aforementioned events, that brought a culture into the world that wasn’t as lauded over as before.

The collective cynicism and despondency was exacerbated by recessions in the early 1980s and 1990– 1991. The crash of the stock market in 1987 capped a dismal decade of economic hardship...the youth entering the employment sector during this period labored longer hours for considerably less pay. For those who opted to stay in school, there were also signs that the education system was also failing them (Lee 20).

This later translates into the “slacker” stigma that is put upon the Gen Xers by their elders, and “since the 1960s, the term has continued to be closely associated with subcultural negationist practices and their often-conflicted relationship to mainstream consumer culture” (Ulrich 3). Fitting in nowhere, this marginalized culture had to go somewhere: choosing to become one of the most diverse and creative generations thus far. This generation then chooses to take their thoughts, feelings, opinions and expressions elsewhere. What was once a demographic identity in previous generations becomes a subcultural one for the Xers. It is evident that the riot grrrl movement is another interpretive expression of this rebellion against mainstream America, as a result of dissatisfaction with what was being

offered by normal society. A large part of this frustration comes from the backlash against and experienced by women in the 1980s. However, this is also the generation that experienced some of the most vital technological and cultural advances of the 20th century such as cable television, personal computers, video games, music videos (specifically the rise of MTV) alternative rock to the likes of grunge and artists such as Nirvana Pearl Jam and Beck, and finally hip-hop and the remix culture that is created as a result of the ever-increasing availability (and ubiquity) of digital media. For the first time, teenagers had access to computers and the Internet, and music videos, films, books and technology reflected the rapidly accelerating media culture. Mix tapes morph into remixes and “sampling”—taking portions of one song and adding them to another—becomes commonplace. This discontent, coupled with new artistic expression (that extends beyond music video culture of MTV) gave rise to alternative communities centered around music, around art, and around public demonstration of new ways of thinking. Women who come of age in the 1980s and 1990s give rise to a new, more individualized feminist movement known as the third wave.

The rise of Grrrl power

“...A feminist politics has to take into account the many differences that make of the category ‘women’ and to recognize that these differences are all part of feminist politics” (Hewitt 387).

Women that came of age and experiences a rising of their feminist consciousness in the late twentieth century did not have the context or the experience of the second wave feminist movement to go on. Rather, the women

instead learned from their own encounters with feminism—or a lack thereof. The third wave then can be defined “by a different set of historical events and ideological movements, especially the (fundamentalist, Moral Majority, neoconservative, Focus on the Family, antifeminist) backlash that emerged in response to the women’s movement in the 1970s and so-called post-feminism” (Hewitt 379-380). What is most often seen as third wave feminism in youth form, riot grrrl culture in the context of Generation X is best explained by this third wave movement. Because these women have a plethora of feminist ideals to choose from, they are able to create a feminist agenda that suits their individual needs instead of attempting to meet the needs of a group. Unlike the second wave movement, which relied heavily on group settings to raise consciousness, the third wave relies instead on smaller, more individualized and more self-sufficient forms of communication to spread their ideas: “I do not assume that activists in the second wave didn’t also use grassroots forms of communications technologies...the third wave has a different relationship with these technologies” (Hewitt 381). The third wave of feminism—more specifically, the subject awarded to the grrrl movement—is difficult to define as the women of whom this movement is comprised define themselves individually and not collectively. “Another indicator of the “postmodern” nature of the third wave is its reliance on networking among different cohorts of women who compose a movement culture that is disparate, unlikely, multiple, polymorphous” (Hewitt 386). This is a theory I will delve into further in my second chapter, as I explore what it means to be a riot grrrl and their ability to find solidarity in such differing opinions. It is precisely this lack of unity that seems to unite the riot grrrls, which is

fascinating in its contradiction. In the context of the riot grrrls and other members of the third wave, is it important to remember that zines, music, and documentaries all fill the role of a type of “democratized technology” that is used to appeal to individual sensibilities as opposed to a collective consciousness:

Democratized technologies become a resource enabling young women to get information to other young women, girls, and boys, a means for developing political consciousness, and a space that can legitimate girls’ issues. Technology that is accessible to young people alters the controlling role of adults and other authority figures in the production of youth cultures and in the selection of political issues in which young people become involved (Hewitt 389).

As a result, information and self-expression has been made even more available—and accessible to other publics—than before. This was an essential means of communication, as the third wave of feminism was addressing a more tech and culture savvy generation than previously known. Riot grrrls use this technology to their own advantage. Recording their own songs, starting their own bands, creating their own zines and finding online communities of likeminded girls allow for a variety of ways for the riot grrrls to make their voices heard and their ideas known. This third wave is as much a product of “postmodern cultural conditions” as it is a product of the first and second waves, or of women’s studies, or the media backlash, or violence. Perhaps it is more appropriate to say it is a product of postmodern cultural conditions because it is a product of the first and second waves; the media backlash; violence; and other kinds of historical remnants, products and monsters

(Hewitt 386). All of these topics that I have touched upon here will be further analyzed in the third chapter of my thesis, especially the artistic endeavors of the riot grrrls through punk music and self-made zines.

In the second chapter of my thesis, I will further explore the countercultural backlash against suburbia and conformist ideals within the Beat Generation. More specifically, I will view Diane di Prima's self-driven artistic endeavors (mainly, her editing and publication of *The Floating Bear* newsletter) as an exemplary indication of her subversion of a male-dominated cultural scene in an attempt to create a more inclusive and intellectually driven community.

Chapter Two:

Marginalized voices in a “Beat” generation: Diane di Prima and *The Floating Bear*

If you want to understand Beat women, call us transitional—a bridge to the next generation, who in the 1960s, when a young woman’s right to leave home was no longer an issue, would question every assumption that limited women’s lives and begin the long, never-to-be-completed work of transforming relationships with men—Joyce Johnson (Knight 1).

In the introductory chapter, the historical and cultural context of the Beat Generation is addressed and outlined. This chapter will delve deeper into the cultural “happenings” and accomplishments of the Beats during their occupancy in New York’s Village, and will showcase in particular the accomplishments of the women of this artistic and cultural movement, who are often overlooked, not only by their peers, but also by modern day Beat scholars. The Beat movement, though open and defiant of stringent mainstream oppression, is often seen as an “old boy’s club” where women were able to participate, if only in a passive manner. In *Breaking the Rule of Cool: Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers*, Nancy Grace and Ronna Johnson address this phenomenon of women being “seen but not heard” for their artistic and intellectual merits in the Beat Generation when they assert, “Beat women writers have often found themselves positioned as women but not read as writers” (Grace and Johnson ix). This is in sharp contrast to the riot grrrls’ willingness and the assertion of their presence in their own subversive creative scene, which will be examined more thoroughly in the third chapter. “Indeed, the Beat movement is notable for the considerable number of women writers who were a part of the scene, but dismissed or overlooked” (Grace and Johnson ix). Although women were often secondary in literature and in their own

artistic advancement, a small group of women still managed to make a significant impact. They inhabited the spaces that were already created, and then were able to carve out new spaces, ones that allowed for new ideas. In fact, “The narrative of female Beat bohemia presents them not only as inhabitants and caretakers of preexisting bohemian spaces but also as creators of those spaces, both public and private” (Grace and Johnson 48). The original spaces may have been unwelcoming, but of their own volition, these women were able establish their artistic credibility. One of these women who manages to assert her status as a serious writer, artist and as a prominent Beat name, is Diane di Prima.

Celebrated as one of the few women who was both able and willing to distinguish herself from the male dominated Beat movement, Diane di Prima transcended both race and gender, choosing instead to immerse herself deeply in the artistic and intellectual culture that would later define the Beat Generation. This chapter will discuss the creative, scholarly and cultural achievements of Diane di Prima and her exemplary status as a pre-second wave feminist. Although the second wave of feminism started in the 1960s, and therefore after the publication of a large portion of seminal beat works, it can be argued that the Beat movement was, in many ways, a precursor to the feminist movement of the 1960s. While popular publications pays as much attention to the passive participants, (The Muses, as they may be known) or the women who supported the men as wives, girlfriends and artistic inspiration, it is possible—and essential—to pay attention to the women that played a more active role in the artistic and political ideologies behind the Beat Generation movement. Diane di Prima is undoubtedly one of the exemplary women

who was able to provide a voice for her gender and advance herself artistically before there was a real mainstream desire for women's liberation that the second wave would bring. Diane's involvement with the Beats was extensive, and she was able to play an integral role in the creation and circulation of new ideas in a relatively new medium—a do-it-yourself artistic newsletter that would provide a public for writers and artists who may have been previously unable to find a forum through which to express themselves with a wide-reaching audience.

The DIY—or Do It Yourself—movement that was at the forefront of the Beat Generation—and later becomes an integral aspect of Generation X and the riot grrrl movement. This is especially evident in the publication of *The Floating Bear*, a literary newsletter that Diane di Prima created, edited and distributed with the help of LeRoi Jones, another prominent Beat writer and poet. Understanding the cultural context of New York City—the place where the newsletter was created and circulated—will bring a more profound meaning to the work that di Prima creates and is inspired by.

New York and the Beats

“Postwar America was the richest, most powerful nation in the world, busting with industry, pride, and the Puritan obsession with work and perfection. Or so it seemed. As it turns out, not everyone in America shared this swaggering posture. The Beats were simply the first to very vocally and artistically decry American materialism and conformity” (Knight 3).

New York was—and still remains—a social, artistic, cultural and intellectual breeding ground. The proximity that New York provides is certainly responsible for fostering intellectual, cultural and artistic stimulation for all those who search for it.

Writers, artists and musicians flock to the clubs, the studios and most importantly, the streets, in search of ultimate inspiration. New York was the source of a new cultural, political and intellectual revolution known as the Beat Movement, with Allen Ginsberg at the forefront along with the other prominent and influential Beat Movement writers such as Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassady and William S. Burroughs.

Historically, the Beat movement has been known to possess a dual meaning. “Beat” can signify one of two things: it can mirror the rhythm of the poetry and the prose of the movement, which was often written to closely resemble the written word or the rhythm of a song. Additionally, “beat” refers to the beaten down, defeated attitude that this generation felt as a result of World War II. This general sentiment was widely experienced, but there was not yet a name to associate along with this movement. Regardless of their social status, and “despite its excesses...it is moved by a desperate craving for affirmative beliefs” (Holmes).

People like di Prima came to New York in search of a broader cultural base, and of course, for more freedom. Born in Brooklyn, NY in 1934, she became friends with the new bohemians before the beatnik scene started, pioneering both the Beat movement and later, some may argue, a feminist movement. After two years at Swarthmore College, di Prima dropped out and moved to the Lower East Side in the early fifties, well before the arrival of any “scene.” Choosing a self-directed approach to education, di Prima decided that formal education served no real purpose for her, seeing Swarthmore’s bookstore as its only redeemable quality:

... Around fourteen, I realized seriously that I had to commit myself to being a writer...So then I decided that what I would do is just write

every day. I just had these school composition books with the black and white covers, and everyday I'd write something and—then, when I went away to college, the only use the college was to me really was they had a bookstore (Grace and Johnson 92).

However, her intellectual and artistic pursuits were most certainly in line with those of the Beats. She started a correspondence with Ezra Pound back in 1953, and her desire for academic discourse only strengthened—the “desire to connect with other strong minds led her to a literary correspondence with several other poets” (Knight 124). Like other literary and cultural movements, the Beat Generation was very much an “old boys club” of writers and artists. The most notable oeuvres to come out of the movement—*Howl*, *Naked Lunch* and *On The Road*, for example—were all written by male authors—Ginsberg, Burroughs and Kerouac, respectively. Although these men were successful in writing about unorthodox subjects in untraditional ways, they were less successful in depicting women in any other way than in the traditional heteronormative gender roles that still prevailed despite the freewheeling beatnik lifestyle that men and women alike led in the Village. “The marginalization of women undermines the Beat generation’s myths of rebellion...contradicting its claims to antihegemonic status” (Grace and Johnson 5). Unfortunately, the most notable and notorious authors and artists of the Beat Generation were in fact male. This does not indicate, however, the presence of women in the scene, and most importantly, the artistic and intellectual contributions they were able to make. “The Beat generation’s patriarchal core, mirroring that of the mainstream culture, relegated women to secondary positions,

often disrespecting their art, intelligence...” (Grace and Johnson 50). Despite the intellectual marginalization that took place, the women still felt a sense of community—with each other and with the other Beats. In an interview, di Prima reveals this sense of community that was created among the Beats. A community that filled some of the same roles as suburbia, while still in direct defiance of it:

There was a very strong sense of...us against the world. So it was very easy to form extended family communities that took care of each other. I think we may have all come from the dysfunctionality of post-Depression and then that crazy Second World War situation, but we all felt like we had to take care of each other” (Grace and Johnson 87).

DIY Publications as Communities: The exchange of ideas in *The Floating Bear*

“No I think we were the community. We made the community. There was no community” (Grace and Johnson 88).

“The Beats helped make literature a democracy, a game with no rules. All you needed, they believed, was passion and a love of the written word” (Knight 2).

Like any aspiring Beat writer, di Prima had a love of the written word. Her self-education inspired her and drove her to devote her life to writing and intellectual exploration. Since she did not feel comfortable in the confines of a normal college education, (as evidenced by her anecdote about the Swarthmore bookstore) it is only fitting that di Prima would choose to create a publication that would put her in control of content and distribution.

Before starting *The Floating Bear*, di Prima assisted her friends Hettie and LeRoi Jones publish another periodical Beat publication, the literary journal *Yugen* between 1958-1962. Subsequently, LeRoi and Diane had a daughter together and founded a mimeographed subscription newsletter, *The Floating Bear*: a newsletter in 1961(Birmingham). In this “newsletter,” they published the work of many Beat writers, both those who became legendary and those who have slipped into obscurity including Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs and Robert Duncan (Knight 125). Di Prima served as co-editor with LeRoi Jones on the first twenty-five issues of *The Floating Bear*, a publication where membership was accrued through the mail, with issues being sent out semi-monthly. Di Prima started her own press in her own right, rather than wait around for a big publishing house to want her work—she could do it herself more quickly more efficiently, and the gratification was instant.

When it came to the inclusion of material, it was important to di Prima that the works being published by herself and Jones was original, revolutionary in some way, and most importantly a piece of work that was rendered accessible by a public that would not have been able to gain access previously: “...the intention was to publish only original material, and at first the intention was very much that it should be technically innovative material, or that it should introduce a new writer who hadn’t been seen before. We often gave a whole issue, or a large part of an issue, to a new writer...” (Di Prima viii). Additionally, the subscription was only as exclusive as being on a list could be: “Anybody who asked for the Bear got put on the list” (di Prima xii). It is interesting to note that although it was an exclusive mailing list (one

had to be on the list in order to receive a copy of the magazine) it was also extremely inclusive in the sense that the community could be expanded if need be. All you had to do was ask. Not only was di Prima creating a new space for which unpublished, ignored or new writers could share their work publicly, the medium through which she was able to circulate this information was self-made and self-directed—apart from her collaboration with Jones, di Prima decided what material made the newsletter and what didn't. She was the one who continued the newsletter after Jones quit the publication and moved, and her name was always attached to every issue, both as the editor and sometimes as a contributor. She was then able to participate and advance her poetic work while maintaining an active role in the creation of a public text. The newsletter adapted to fit her needs and the changing needs of the literary and artistic community as she saw fit.

When LeRoi Jones left, Diane di Prima decided that it would be more beneficial if the Bear were to come out less regularly and with larger issues, as she explains, "it made sense to do fewer, larger issues, because money was available in large lumps when it was available at all" (di Prima xv). From this point on, di Prima became in charge of the publication and distribution of the newsletter. Despite the fact that di Prima and Jones had quite a collaborative relationship, it is important to note that especially for the later issues, Di Prima made content decisions, effectively driving the artistic message of the magazine. Furthermore, in an interview about the creation and distribution of *The Floating Bear*, di Prima elaborates on the physical process of creating this new forum for circulation of ideas:

A lot of what went into the early Bears was stuff that LeRoi got in the mail through his having already published *Yugen*—people sending him poems and things, and him slowly getting in touch with the main body of writers who were working in that period. It wasn't simply one clique of writers throughout the country. There were still a lot of people working quietly and separately in a lot of funny little places. Then, too, we didn't know too much about the West Coast writers except for a few well-publicized ones, like Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti...Nearly everything that appeared in the Bear was published there for the first time...(DiPrima and Jones viii).

This decentralized form of circulation—that is, the spread out nature of the source material, along with the mail order subscription and distribution service—serves as an indicator of the DIY nature, both of the distribution of information as well as the creation of it. Because the newsletters weren't based in one place—at a coffee shop or handed out at one particular street corner, for instance—this community of artists and intellectuals was far spread. Indeed, at the zenith of its distribution, issues were bicoastal, being mailed to New York as well as San Francisco, and to Canada and Florida to the North and South (Birmingham).

Because she was so involved with the editing and publishing process, issues of *The Floating Bear* did not feature works from DiPrima on a regular basis. She might have played a significant role in editing and distributing *The Floating Bear*, and she may have been exceedingly involved in the Beat scene in other DIY ways, but that does not mean she did not have time to pave her own creative path. A

prolific writer, she is the author of forty-three books of poetry and prose and her first book, *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward*, was published in 1958, “deserves more attention than she has received. She mastered very early a colloquial style which is derived perhaps from William Carlos Williams but is distinctly her own” (Foster 190). While editing the newsletter, however, di Prima was able to channel her creative process into the more concrete art of the creation of the newsletter. In regards to that creative process, she revealed to Anne Waldman in an interview in the 1980s that:

...However great your visioning and your inspiration, you need the techniques of the craft and there’s nowhere, really, to get them because these are not passed on in schools. They are passed on person-to-person, and back then the male naturally passed them on to the male. I think maybe I was one of the first women to break through that...(Knight 124).

It is possible to see, upon closer examination of the newsletters, that Diane Di Prima played an essential role in realizing its production and distribution. In interview transcripts, she discusses the physical labor and process necessary to create one issue of *The Floating Bear*: “...He [LeRoi] had done the first Totem Press things himself, with the help of Hettie and me, typing them up on an IBM typewriter and pasting them up at home.” (Di Prima and Jones viii) “...I would type directly on the mimeograph stencils, and most editing decisions would happen while I was typing: lay out and edit and type all at one time” (di Prima and Jones xi). *The Floating Bear* is formatted and distributed in a unique manner. Unlike riot grrrl zines, which might

have been handed out at shows or in local bookstores and coffee shops, *The Floating Bear* was distributed almost exclusively by mailing list. Typewritten and mimeographed to make copies, the newsletter was stapled in the upper left hand corner. "I tried to keep the look of the page the same as the author's page" (di Prima and Jones xi). Because of the size and the shape of the newsletter (it was made on standard size paper, as opposed to riot grrrl zines, which can often vary in size and shape and therefore require individualized work for each copy), di Prima used typewriter paper for ease of reproduction and to make sure the format of a particular poem or story wasn't compromised. "This was the big advantage of the Bear format. You didn't have to guess where to break the stanza if both you and the poet were using 8 ½ x 11 paper. Almost everybody writes on typewriters, and I felt that a lot of what they were doing had to do with the shape of their page" (di Prima and Jones xi). The newsletter was then folded in half and stapled, the address was written on the top of the publication, above or in between the masthead, featuring the title, issue number and editor's names. The newsletter was then mailed out as is; no envelope was used, as the postmark, stamp and handwritten address can be seen clearly on hard copies of the newsletter. *The Floating Bear* was a compilation newsletter, with di Prima and Jones amassing manuscripts and unpublished works of Beat writers from across the country. It featured a combination of poetry, prose and plays. The newsletter served as more than just a venue for writers to showcase their latest efforts. The newsletter also served as a community bulletin board, announcing upcoming shows, concerts and exhibitions, showcasing reviews of such events, as well as providing announcements at the bottom of the last page about

other similar DIY newsletters and publications, as well as soliciting for money. In issue #17, the long list of notices at the end include announcements for dance concerts, subscription solicitation for a poet Philip Lamatia's new book of poems *Destroyed Works*, and most importantly, an announcement that "*The Floating Bear* wishes to announce its abject poverty" (#17). In fact, the notices at the end of most issues include a plea for funds. At the end of issue #6, Hesiod composes the clever couplet "We need some dough or the Bear must go" (#6). Nevertheless, the fundamental goal of the literary newsletter was not one of profit, but one of pleasure and intellectual circulation. Di Prima started her own press and took charge of *The Floating Bear* in her own right, rather than wait around for a big publishing house to want her work—she could do it herself more quickly more efficiently, and the gratification was instant. Di Prima's self-sufficient approach to education is one that she has maintained throughout her life, finding her own means to produce and circulate scholarly discourse (one of her main reasons for spearheading *The Floating Bear*.) This DIY method can then be traced to her concept of community building, and finally, to her artistic endeavors and achievements and ultimately her overall feelings on those achievements in the larger community and the constructed community of the Beat Generation:

You know, it's hard to think about oneself as a piece of a movement, because you're yourself. The movement stays the movement and you keep changing...I think that part of the message that the young people keep picking up on is the importance of really being yourself, and

staying with your feelings, that your feelings are worthy of writing about, worthy of that consideration (Grace and Johnson 95).

On top of the New York Poet's Theatre, her contribution to *Yungen* and *The Floating Bear*, di Prima was also founded the Poets Press, which published new and unknown authors from the period: "In March of 1965 I put together a print shop on the lower East Side to publish Poets Press books, and I typed and ran off the next few issues myself." (Di Prima xvii) Diane DiPrima was extremely involved with the artistic, cultural and intellectual endeavors of the Beat Generation, defying an all-too rigid gender stereotype that was still in place, even somewhere as progressive as the East Village of New York City. Including the foundation of the New York Poets Theatre and her contributions to the New York Poets Press, it is evident that one of di Prima's main concerns, along with creating and stimulating a rich intellectual discourse, was to create spaces and publications to circulate her ideas and the ideas of others, spreading a voice that was, up until this point, unheard, and especially not from a woman a erudite as di Prima. To offer new and different points of view to a public, di Prima realized, you had to do it on your own terms. Along with her publication and distribution of artistic periodicals such as *The Floating Bear*, di Prima was also one of the founding members of the New York Poet's theatre. Because she was so involved with the editing and publishing process, issues of *The Floating Bear* do not feature works from di Prima on a regular basis. Diane di Prima might have played a significant role in editing and distributing *The Floating Bear*, and she may have been exceedingly involved in the Beat scene in other DIY ways, but that does not mean she did not have time to pave her own creative path. A

prolific writer, she is the author of forty-three books of poetry and prose (dianediprima.com).

Unlike other female writers and artists, then, di Prima did not stay attached to one cultural identity, thus making it easier for her to adapt to the ever-changing ideals of the counterculture, ultimately allowing her to continue to contribute without “burning out.” In the film “New York in the Fifties,” one of the interviewees points out, being a woman herself, that during that time, “I would say women writers were seen as a lesser breed” Even the women were made acutely aware of this, and unlike the second wave movement that would happen in a few years time, they didn’t appear (at least outwardly, or at first) to want to do anything about it. Very few women were directly involved; it was the 50s, and it was very much a boy’s club. Consequently, di Prima was often seen as sandwiched between two generations—and subsequently, between two ideologies. Diane di Prima “was one of the heroic precursors of second-wave feminism, and her poetry achieved its own unique vision” (Grace and Johnson 46).

Today di Prima is often considered a feminist, but she was always one to elude boundaries. When she strays from the progressive fold, she does so with a vengeance. Though she is often understood to be “deconstructing patriarchal definitions of gender” (Friedman, A., 204), di Prima represents herself as male defined both personally and aesthetically. Almost by definition, to live as a woman Beat poet in the fifties was to be defined by men; coolness and the cool mode of rebellion were at the time primarily masculine attributes...the various

boundaries di Prima wandered were drawn by men, from Ezra Pound through Ginsberg and Kerouac... (Grace and Johnson 47).

This is an interesting commentary, both on the way that life was lived in the 1950s and subsequently, how di Prima was both a part of and so vehemently opposed to the patriarchal structure that defined the fifties. But perhaps the more she became a part of it; the more she was able to change the definition and reclaim it for herself.

“Di Prima was also arguing for the solidarity of women as being stronger than race and in this she may have been more radical than many radicals dare to be now.”

(Grace and Johnson 49). Di Prima’s abundant works include a well-known epic poem *Loba*, which is often considered the female counterpart to Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*. A long lyrical poem, *Loba* (meaning “she-wolf” in Spanish) employs the rich symbolism of the wolf goddess to explore the female and the journey towards self acceptance “Di Prima was so hip that she had found a way to exploit her “minor” status and gain strength from it” (Grace and Johnson xii). Primarily because she appeared to live outside and simultaneously in unison with sexual and gender constructions of the era, she was able to operate under her own conditions. “If di Prima’s accounts of sex can be marked by anger, her anger also found more direct outlets. Rage drives much of her poetry of the sixties and early seventies, a time of anger often misremembered and romanticized simply as a decade of love.” (Grace and Johnson 56) This anger that is associated with and from sex resonates when compared with the angry sexual declarations made by the riot grrrls, who will be examined, along with their artistic accomplishments, more thoroughly in the next chapter.

It is important to recognize the lasting impact Diane di Prima made on the Beat culture, not only as an artist, but also as a woman. At least outwardly, it does not appear that she did so to make any sort of political statement, but rather as a statement about her intellectual, artistic and cultural desires that were not being met in a culture that was coincidentally predominately male. Instead of shying away from this culture and its male-dominant tone, di Prima chose instead to make it her own, reclaiming the outsider-ness that existed among the other like-minded inhabitants of the Village. When viewed in this manner, it is not a question of gender, but rather a question of inclusion and the cultural language that is created among this band of outsiders: "So her sisterhood is a sisterhood of outsiders. Among all her blending of opposites, the final paradox, one not unusual among the most creative humans, involves the solidarity of extreme individualists" (Grace and Johnson 67).

This "solidarity of extreme individualists" that is created through a "sisterhood of outsiders" is not limited solely to this time period nor this generation. It is this same outsider mentality, paired with a thirst for creative and intellectual stimulation that will later define certain marginalized groups within Generation X, and most notably, the Riot Grrrls. The women of the Beat Generation, especially di Prima, represent a subversive movement that was able to foster their own individual artistic impact. In the case of di Prima, her hands-on involvement in the creation and distribution of *The Floating Bear* both reflects the DIY mentality of the Beat generation and asserts her authority within it. Despite the common thread of marginalization that wove throughout the personal and artistic connections the

Beats had with one another, the women claiming a spot in this culture were further ignored. “Ironically, because the women in the movement have, to a certain degree, been ignored and marginalized, they represent the precious little of that which remains truly Beat” (Knight 5). In creating a community, both for women and for fellow Beats, di Prima took big strides in the creation of a lasting countercultural movement. Di Prima is exemplary of a world maker because she found a way to make her mark in a movement that was largely unwelcoming to women, or an “inhospitable boy gang” (Grace and Johnson 6). In the next chapter, I will examine another marginalized female subculture, shifting forward roughly forty years. The times are different, but some of the messages and the means of communication remain the same. I will look at another kind of DIY publication that was a common form of artistic and political expression among the riot grrrls known as the zine and attest to their importance within the context of alternative world making.

Chapter Three: The Riot Grrrls: Alternative Expression in a Mainstream Media

“We know that this is why the three of us left our lives behind us and came to the desert—to tell stories and to make our own lives worthwhile tales in the process.”
Generation X: Tales of an Accelerated Culture, page 14

“Zines subvert standard patriarchal mainstream media by critiquing society and the media without being censored and also give girls a safe place to say what they feel and believe” (Rosenberg 811).

In this chapter, I outline the context that situates the Riot grrrls within their larger generational membership of Generation X. Generation X thrived first on the success of mass media such as television and mass-produced music, and then on the rejection of such mainstream media forms, as evidenced by the riot grrrl's reclaiming of DIY culture in the form of zines and riot grrrl music—a self made adaptation of male-centered punk music. These artists find new topics or alternate forms of expression that allow their subculture and its ideas to be rendered public. And for Generation X, this meant that music, film, and pop culture was being created and shared on a large scale—first with television, and then with an eventual shift over to the internet and a move into not a physical space but a virtual one. The rise of the 24-hour music video channel MTV in 1981 was one of the milestone events for the Gen X twentysomethings. From this point on, music becomes a multi-media format that changes the way the younger generation consumes and thinks about media, creating what we now know today as “pop” culture. The spaces that these artists occupy within the confines of their work can be seen at first glance as inherently different. Rejecting mainstream culture for a life on the periphery, at least initially, was the original intent for authors and artists alike. Mass media,

consumerism pop culture have become ubiquitous expressions of the self in modern society, and with the emergence of rapidly changing technological advancements and the rise of “cyber culture,” Generation X was confronted with more available options of self-expression than any other so called “lost” generation that lived before them. One of these methods of alternative expression was the rise of a new kind of fiction known as the blank novel.

So-called “blank” novels such as Douglas Coupland’s *Generation X: Tales of an Accelerated Culture* and Brett Easton Ellis’s *Less than Zero* are exemplary of Generation X’s method of writing. “Blank” fiction is devoid of major character formation, storyline or form, as well as formal organization or chronological mapping. These novels are exemplary of a larger classification of the artistic and cultural base of the twentysomethings—a generation that seems to have no defining or unifying characteristics. Despite a sincere plot structure, the literature of this genre often explores the hyper-consumerism that was so rampant during this time, focusing on disillusioned youth, confusion and the “sense of marginality in a world of fast cars, fast money, fast drugs and fast youth.” (Lee 36). The marginality of the world is reflected in the margins of the books themselves, which, instead of remaining blank or fulfilling their role of defining the physical limits of the text, they are used to their fullest extent. Footnotes, images, side stories and historical context are added to the margins of the text. This both reflects the need to tell the stories in a new way and the fact that quite literally, this generation felt as if collectively, they were being pushed to the margins of society.

"The family dynamic and the rise of the "teenpic" are also indicative of the 1980s and the backlash against the youth. "The eighties was the period when parents were away for the weekend for an entire decade, leaving the kids in charge of the movie industry. Suckers" (Lee 28) So once the youth started to reclaim the media—both mainstream and subcultural—for themselves, all bets were off:

...The dominance of the youth demographic in consumer culture and in the media was met with a general mentality that saw youth as a problem to be solved. The 1950s and 1980s were both defined by ultra social and political conservatism. Youth cinema of the 1980s reappropriated the popular memory of the "rebellious teen" that was crystallized in the 1950s to represent the cultural anxieties of its context of production (Lee 31).

Despite the abundance of alternative expression in mainstream media, there were still those who felt marginalized and whose voice was not appropriately represented. This is especially true among young females of Generation X. Some of these women found support in the punk scene, as the punk cause was already an alternative to the alternative (or at least the mainstream's answer to the alternative.) Proponents of a self-directed culture, the punks (and later, what would become the riot grrrls) focused on an accessible, come-as-you-are type of cultural, political and artistic mentality that became known as DIY:

Perhaps McNeil and Holstrom's strongest and most enduring anticipation of alternative youth in the 1990s is their emphasis on what came to be termed DIY culture (also known as "do it yourself",

though disaffected independent youth is an equally plausible translation) (Ulrich 114).

Often viewed as “gimmicky” or as “a passing fad,” these forms of mainstream media expression, especially when viewed through the lens of MTV, fashion trends and popular music sales, become a reclaimed form of cultural expression for these twentysomethings. It wasn't until Coupland's *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* and Richard Linklater's breakout film *Slacker* that the rest of the world started to take notice of Generation X and its cultural merits. Essentially, their ideas, along with their voice, were introduced to the mainstream. Along with the formation of the grunge music scene in Seattle, these three artistic milestones can be used as a benchmark for the beginning of the cultural influence that Generation X begins to wield. This, paired with the ever-increasing consumer culture resulted in a pop culture that was both a rebuttal to as well as an acceptance of the mainstream consumer culture. Additionally, the kinds of artistic endeavors that arise from this generation harken to the days of the Beat Generation and the ideals of DIY, or Do-It-Yourself, culture. Self made zines, indie publications such as *Spin* magazine, and later, blogs, become the exemplary form of periodical circulation and the way to keep up with cultural trends:

Whereas their older brothers and sisters (or parents) embraced a politics of engagement and a drive towards standards (on the left or right) of social engineering and moral correctness, the newer agenda played on the margins of culture, waged guerilla war on the values of its elders, and understood that while media construction may be

inevitable, it can begin to be de-fanged by a subtle dialogic of style (Ulrich 106).

At the same time as alienation and marginalization is being experienced by the youth, there is a greater access and possibility for expression, and therefore the perfect set of circumstances existed to both create and render heard this new subcultural mentality through that “subtle dialogic of style.” “Punk had so many of the same ideals as Riot Grrrl. Rebelling against what you’re supposed to do and how you’re supposed to act.” ...Punk was smarter and more socially conscious [than its contemporaries]. It was a natural evolution” (Rosenberg 831). The introduction of alternative rock, starting with punk rock in the late seventies and capped off with grunge rock and the rise of lo-fi bands such as Nirvana and Pearl Jam in the 90s, along with the underground hip-hop movement are also new forms of musical expression end up becoming mainstream during the youth movement of Generation X. Consequently, these new forms of expression become, after a time, the mainstream, and are no longer an exclusive outlet form to this band of outsiders. The DIY ethic as interpreted by the punks centered on self-empowerment and independence from authority, and as a result, the original punk scene of the 1970s was very pro-feminist. Commercialization of punk music, however, exposed their ideals into a more mainstream, patriarchal structure. This can be seen as a shift away from the acceptance of women in punk rock and perhaps one of the motivating factors in the founding of the riot grrrls. The idea, founded in Olympia Washington, was that of a group of like-minded musicians and women searching for an encouraging artistic community where the girls could get just as rough as the boys.

It seems only natural that the movement would begin in Olympia, as it was the breeding ground for all different kinds of independent music, culture and politics (It is where Nirvana and Hole got their starts, and most of the well-known riot grrrl music of the time from bands such as Bikini Kill and Bratmobile got their start there.) Then it started morphing into riot grrrl, and although the riot grrrls have claimed this community and reclaimed punk for themselves, yet they still think people see them as doing something odd if “they’re not staying inside the lines,” especially when it comes to music and the anger that is most often expressed in this genre of music—it’s not the typical girl rock, and is often viewed negatively as “unpretty” or “unfeminine.” Screaming and playing out of tune was not inherently accepted, and when asked about the male reaction to riot grrrl bands, the girls interviewed reply, “You know what kind of scream it is? It’s like when you’re a little girl—you’re not supposed to make that sound.” (Rosenberg 832) This, of course, only inspired the riot grrrls to make this sound—and even louder than before.

As previously mentioned, the one unifying factor of Generation X is their lack of cohesive identity. That being said, members of other generations are often quick to pigeonhole the Xers as overly cynical and disparate, ultimately unaffected and uninterested in any cause or even their futures. The Riot Grrrls defied this stereotype, challenging both the backlash against political activism and the silent backlash against feminism that was taking place in the early 1990s. They were not a part of the more “mainstream” elements of Generation X. They didn’t belong to MTV or L.A. or any of the places and spaces that were popularized and epitomized as a result of this fragmented, pop-cultured, remixed culture that attempted to define a

generation that was largely indefinable. These Riot Grrrls turned a marginalized culture on its head and around another 180 degrees with its pastiche, empowered grrrl-centric challenge to the patriarchy that would come to inspire and re-inspire music, literature and feminist movements—for both girls and boys alike—for years to come.

GRRRL LOVE: Riot Grrrls and their zines

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.

BECAUSE we wanna make it easier for girls to see/hear each other's work so that we can share strategies and criticize-applaud each other.

BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own moanings.

BECAUSE viewing our work as being connected to our girlfriends-politics-real lives is essential if we are gonna figure out how we are doing impacts, reflects, perpetuates, or DISRUPTS the status quo.

-Excerpt, Riot Grrrl Manifesto

“Riot Grrrl is about me.”
-Rosenberg 817

The Riot Grrrl movement, started by a group of girls in Washington D.C. in the summer of 1991, was inspired by the DIY (do it yourself) ethic of the punk movement that came out of the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was initially a way for girls to get a leg up in a punk scene that was previously dominated by white males. This was a scene, not unlike the Beats, where the girls participate mainly through their status as girlfriends of the punks. As a result, these girls who were not welcomed in the punk community as artists—as it was largely a boy’s club—sought an outlet through which to express their thoughts, opinions, artistic talent, creativity and political message. As previously mentioned, the Riot Grrrl Manifesto speaks to

the desire of an accessible process and medium through which to distribute these ideas—primarily through the creation of zines and girl bands. This was the ideal opportunity for these girls to reclaim the punk mentality for themselves—and thus create their own counterculture. Now, culture belonged to the youth, and they could do with it what they pleased. Riot Grrrl thus became a subversive culture that was separate yet concerned with some of the same political and social issues as the punks—namely the DIY aesthetic that was so important to the creation and distribution of music—heralding a new kind of youth generation for the Gen Xers of the 1990s. Associated with girls who create their own zines and perform in bands, usually of the punk variety, “the name Riot Grrrl was chosen to reclaim the vitality and power of youth with an added growl to replace the perceived passivity of ‘girl’” (Rosenberg 809). Unlike the punks, however, the riot grrrls’ focus was on women (or womyn) and the creation of a space that didn’t exist for them in male-dominated punk scenes.

Riot grrrls, though drawing inspiration from the DIY aesthetic of punk music and consciousness raising of second wave feminist groups, choose to instead focus on the individual and personal expression instead of the voice of a group—because everyone’s voice is inherently different. It was important, however, that these voices be heard. “Riot Grrrls are loud and, through zines, music and spoken word, express themselves honestly and straightforwardly. Riot Grrrl does not shy away from difficult issues and often addresses painful topics such as rape and abuse” (Rosenberg 810). Indeed, zines were used as a public form to discuss often taboo and private topics such as rape, incest, sexual abuse and eating disorders. The “self-

determined and grassroots” nature is the greatest asset to riot grrrl culture, giving girls room “to decide for themselves who they are” and provides “a viable alternative to the skinny white girls in *Seventeen* and *YM*.” Most importantly, according to Kim, a self-declared Riot Grrrl, points to the importance of the equality that is provided in these choices. “ I really believe in equality, not just making the girls the greatest above all. The goal of Riot Grrrl is for everyone to be equal, and that’s what I love” (Rosenberg 817).

Riot Grrrl is much angrier than the second-wave feminism of the 1970s, but this anger is by no means misguided. The Riot Grrrls are more than just angry and straightforward. They use this candid style to evoke a political movement that is far beyond the angry façade that is so often stereotyped as the *raison-d’être* for the third wave feminists. Their goal consists of more than just about getting angry—because they were angry, but in a different way from the second-wave feminists. In *A Girls’ Guide to Taking Over the World*, R.G asserts that the riot grrrls are indeed angry, they are “pissed off how we as grrrls (females) are treated in society...we are angry that the media continues to promote and condone the abuse and rape of womyn. Womyn are seen as the lesser gender...we are angry that more people don’t stand up and tell patriarchy: FUCK OFF AND LET ME BE” (Magnuson, Green and Taormino 185). It is the effect of writing this anger down, sharing it with others and creating a safe and open community that the politic of information exchange and DIY artistic expression thrives. It is about making both the personal and the political accessible and public. Despite this anger, their focus is not as reactionary as one might think. Rather, the public sharing of private ideas (such as the ones found in a

diary) only reinforces the importance of the individual voice and the everyday struggles of the riot grrrls:

While other feminist movements have been geared more towards political action, Riot Grrrl, although remaining staunchly political, also pays attention to the personal and the everyday. It focuses more on the individual and the emotional than on marches, legislation, and public policy. This creates a community in which girls are able to speak about what is bothering them or write about what happened to them that day (Rosenberg 810).

The riot grrrl community, then, becomes an accessible safe haven for both likeminded as well as divergent feminists. No longer limited to the bourgeoisie, the educated and well-connected middle classes, “...riot grrrl was by far one of the most undeniably effective feminist movements, turning academia into an accessible down-to-earth language, making feminism a trend for the first time in history” (Monem 8). These spaces allowed these girls to simply *be*, without pretense, expectations or patriarchal social constructs—or judgment from other women. Women could agree to disagree, and no one was no less feminist than the other as a result. Everyone was equal. One element that all the riot grrrls interviewed for a Spring 1998 issue of *Signs* express as essential to their culture is the necessity for communication and providing an opportunity and a space for girls to be able to talk openly and honestly. For them, this is one of the most crucial goals of riot grrrl; help others by helping yourself. The connection and sense of community that is created

among other riot grrrls is completely unique and essential to propagate the cause of riot grrrl, whatever each girl involved identifies that to be.

Madhu Krishnan, one of the girls interviewed for the *Signs* discussion meanwhile, identifies the movement in a different way, again emphasizing the equality that is created under individual expression:

i probably wouldn't call myself a riot grrrl per se, because I don't think you can BE a riot grrrl, although you can be part of the MOVEMENT of riot grrrl. i can't see something like riot grrrl separate from other struggles and movements for equality, as to gain equality in one area means it is necessary to gain it in all others (Rosenberg 815).

An American of Indian descent with two immigrant parents, Madhu, unlike most of the other interview participants—or a large majority of the other self-identified participants of the movement, for that matter—has a racial and cultural component of her identity struggle that makes her rebellion different from the girls in the interview. Riot Grrrl was in fact and overwhelmingly white movement, mostly attributed to the fact that the punk underground was a white-dominated community, as well as zines and word of mouth tend to stay within racial lines among girls, as friend groups often correlate with racial segregation. (Rosenberg 811) However, the group of girls interviewed present a wide array of racial, economic and geographic backgrounds. Madhu is Indian, Kim is a gay half-asian half-chicana member of the riot grrrls, and all of these girls struggled to assert their creative identity before discovering the riot grrrl movement.

Just like the larger generation to which they belong, the Riot Grrrls and the Gen Xers are difficult to categorize: their array of interest, politics, backgrounds and cultural comprehension renders their collective identity elusive.

More importantly than riot grrrl's niche within third wave feminism is that its members viewed it as something other than, or perhaps even beyond the third wave. In that same interview for *Signs*, Lailah Hanit Bragin, a sixteen year old Riot Grrrl growing up in Brooklyn said, "...i think it's important that riot grrrl as a movement is documented as a 'youth feminism' of the 1990s. riot grrrl has made really significant contributions to the lives of many girls and should be recognized as a valid form of feminism and youth resistance" (Rosenberg 813).

The also distinguish themselves from the second-wave feminists of the 1970s, occupying a different mindset:

Riot Grrrl was reinvented through every young woman who took it up and made it her own, and through every band, zine, and agit-prop art attack those women undertook. Riot grrrl was a movement without leaders or a centralized ideology, but rather made leaders out of anyone who chose to pick up the task of carving out a cultural place for herself where there wasn't one before (Monem 7).

Revolution Reclaimed: The political message of the riot Grrrls

"If writing is revolutionary, just being honest and talking about your life is revolutionary. If everyone did that, it'd change things. If you start to chip away at walls that are within you, you'll eventually get revolutionary writing." *Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from Within*, page 825

One of the most essential components of any alternative culture is the necessity to circulate information and make such ideas and ideas public and therefore, easier to circulate. For Riot Grrrls, the most common form of communication and information exchange was through the creation and distribution of zines. Part of the appeal of these zines is despite their material quality resembling a mainstream magazine, (occasionally) the physical appearance—from the size, the homemade, often bordering on crude look, and casual tone in the writings and content—they are anything but a mainstream magazine. Therein lies the appeal. The most important alternative that these zines provide, especially for young girls, is something different from the *Seventeen* and *YM* magazines that was and still is a formative part of female youth media culture. These glossy publications are made to sell copies, one riot grrrl points out, and the creation of zines is a blatant rejection of mass media (Rosenberg 826) While to them, mainstream publications mean a sacrifice of content, zines indicate a self-sufficient form of publishing that doesn't sacrifice form or content:

“We define ‘girl zines’ as do-it-yourself publications made primarily by and for girls and women...As more publications for women attract high-price corporate advertising, girl zines often skip high production values and wide distribution to focus on a grassroots approach to publishing” (Magnuson, Green and Taormino xi).

Ironically enough, the commercialization of riot grrrl through mainstream magazine profiles in publications such as *Sassy* and *Newsweek* was exactly what the Riot Grrrl revolution needed to spark a nationwide revolt. Girls that lived in the suburbs or

between the two coasts hadn't previously heard about Riot Grrrl until it received mainstream attention. This does not mean that the mainstream exposure of Riot Grrrl made the movement less subversive; rather, the exposure awakened a more mainstream America to exactly what was going on in Olympia, DC and now slowly, throughout the rest of America. This goes beyond the public desires and goals of the second wave feminists because here, the voice of the individual is just as valid, if not more so, than the voice of the group.

The zine, then, can be considered a public version of the personal and the political. By sharing with the public their thoughts, desires and beliefs that were once considered secret, the public becomes transformed, accepting private thoughts in the public sphere. The personal thoughts of these girls, often entwined with political rhetoric, are then made public through the format of a zine and its distribution. Riot Grrrl is a communicative community; it's an inclusive atmosphere that encourages everyone to do their own thing. "This is important. Girls are going without a genuine voice, at least [a] mainstream and widespread [voice]. Riot grrrl is about Riot Grrrls getting girls to do it for ourselves, changing the stuff going on in our lives, change it ourselves because we can't wait for someone else to do it."

(Rosenberg 817-18) For the girls (and grrrls) that create and distribute these zines, the importance is lies not only in the ideas themselves, but also in rendering them available to a public. This allows for two publics—that of the riot grrrls and that of the recipients of their work—access to ideas that previously went unshared by the writers and went unlearned by the recipients of such information, respectively.

Because there is a community that is created from a new awareness:

This is about opening the eyes to what's going on—dieting, the fashion industry. There's a lack of knowledge about others—racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia—for no reason. It pisses me off. It's frustrating. It's not getting through. The whole supposed liberation movement—women are still being raped, sexually harassed, earning seventy-five cents for every dollar a man earns. There's still a lot of ignorance and bigotry. Riot Grrrl is speaking out against this, [saying], let's change it (Rosenberg 818).

The community that is created among and for these riot grrrls, however, is not solely a political one. Like diaries for the self-aware, zines provide a therapeutic outlet for girls to express political commentary or perhaps to merely talk about their day and what is bothering them. And unlike blogs, the modern interpretation of zines, the tangible qualities that shape the identity of each individual zine, “Blogs do not connect human bodies in the same way that material artifacts do, and they also do not have the intentional visual components of zines. Zines demand a level of aesthetic decision-making that blogs do not.” (Piepmeier 221) The physical limitations and margins of zines allow their authors to use any and all physical space with zeal: zine writers use the margins to their advantage, rejecting and reclaiming the margins of society to which they have been pushed. Looking at a sample of riot grrrl zines, the one thing that is absent from these publications is blank space of any sort. Margins are filled instead with doodles or cartoons, or the collage of pictures and text fill or spill over the page itself. The one thing that is not missing, however, is creativity. Drawing from a sample of physical zines, as well as reading about zine

titles in scholarly works, it is evident that the title of the zine may be the most important element. Filled with wit, wisdom, tongue in cheek humor and assertive language, titles such as *Queer Fish*, *Reject Gene*, *Ballroom Etiquette*, *kittybrat*, *secret language*, *soiled princess*, *Glamour Queen*, *Racecar*, *Rome Wasn't Built in a Day*, *Baby Fat*, *Pressure Points*, *Lucid Nation*, *You Can't Bring Me Down* and *Oh Boy* showcase the wide array of zines available in circulation. This circulation of ideas and the printed word means that the riot grrrls have complete artistic control over their own printing process encourages circulation of *their* ideas. This means that they are still able to reach a decent audience, but they do not have to compromise their artistic, cultural or intellectual values:

To reach the mainstream, you [have to] sacrifice content. One isn't better than the other. In that situation, it's impossible to do that and say what it is. Commercial people want control—you don't control yourself. They say, "You can't do this, you can't write this." It means giving up something of our work [in order to reach the mainstream (Rosenberg 827)].

Here, mainstream circulation is not the ultimate goal even though circulation still remains important. It is more important that the ideas and the integrity behind the zine remains intact, without any sort of third-party or mainstream intervention. Complete creative control means complete creative control, from start to finish.

So if these zines are meant for others to see, how are these zines distributed? Posted on bathroom stalls, handed out at punk shows, and distributed by word of mouth, the riot grrrls stress in *Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from Within* that the most

important aspect of the movement is getting their voice out there, in circulation for others to see and hear. The girls all agree that word of mouth is the most important, as not all riot grrrls are into the same “scene.”

Zines are a very accessible form of media. Anyone can buy them, and anyone can make them. Physically speaking, the zines vary in size, shape, color and layout almost as much as they vary in content. *Babelicious™ number four*, for example, is about 6 full size pages of paper folded in half widthwise and stapled together. A combination of collage, copied typewritten material and hand-drawn details and cartoons, the cover page is neon pink, while the pages inside are white. Another zine, *ego records*, consists of one sheet of computer paper folded over twice, making a tiny booklet/pamphlet combination. When unfolded completely, the inside of the zine features one full page of cut-and paste strips of text and advertisements. When folded back into its original pocket-sized format, there is another section of text. *My Room Records*, meanwhile, is folded into a three-paneled pamphlet, and is entirely black and white with a wide array of images and cut-and paste text. Drawing only from a small sample, it is evident that physical features (layout, size, shape, color, etc.) are just as important to the integrity of the zine as the ideas that are being presented to the public.

Originally meant to be fan “magazines,” zines became an indispensable part of riot grrrl culture. Anyone, anywhere, could create one. And therein lies the secret to the riot grrrl revolution: it belonged to everyone and anyone. These few titles pay tribute to the wide range of ideas and creative impulse that fuel an equally wider variety of riot grrrl zines that exists—some of which are still in circulation today.

Some of these zines such as *You Can't Bring Me Down*, are more personal in nature—more akin to a diary than to a magazine that is meant for circulation and discussion of its innermost thoughts. The author's first story addresses friend trouble and not being accepted by her brother's girlfriend. Some, meanwhile, *Bratgirl*, are meant to circulate very public ideas—thoughts on politics, media, sexual violence and popular culture. Katie, one of the contributors to *Bratgirl*, brings up issues of white privilege and female empowerment. Still others, such as *ego records*, speak to the fan nature of zines, selling music and writing about favorite artists through a mail order mix tape process. Despite the public nature of these zines, this music and the subsequent politicization of zines and riot grrrl gatherings were intended to talk about very private concepts. Girl zines were and are still important because they tackle important issues that seem more important to girls such as body image, sexuality and violence, as well as it pushes the boundaries of genre and gender (Magnuson, Green and Taormino xi). Any of these zines or topics would be right at home in a girls' diary, locked up and shoved under her bed. But since these zines were then handed out and distributed, the content has become publicized and politicized. These musings that were previously ignored, simply because these ideas were being expressed by "girls." Making their private ideas public, instead of merely relegating them to their journals, was one such way the riot grrrls were able to challenge what was so readily accepted by the rest of society—the submission of women. A risky move, as, "girls keep secrets for a reason. Writing can destroy and distort meanings, intentions and experiences by twisting them into an uncomfortable order: confinement in language and linearity" (Monem 12). Despite the personal risk, it

was the way for girls to express themselves, both creatively and verbally, and for some, it was the most relevant way to do so:

ok—so i wasn't even gonna do a new issue of Babelicious™BUT—ALL
OF A SUDDEN—i feel like i need to/wanna. WRITING IS MY
SALVATION. totally. (*Babelicious* number 4, page 1)

Despite the fact that these publications were intended for a public audience via circulation, written expression was by no means edited or perfected. Rather, choosing not to use proper grammar spelling or any other conventions of language that is usually observed in the academic world was rather tossed aside and became instead another part of self-expression. The previous quote from *Babelicious* highlights these linguistic discrepancies, but also reinforces the importance of self expression that the Riot Grrrls believed to be missing from mainstream and MTV era media:

People in magazines are in positions of high power. *Time* is meant to sell copies; it's glossy. Zines are a rejection of mass media. If I want to [abbreviate] a word, use a heart instead of the word "love," spell words in different ways, who says I can't? You can't tell me that's wrong. It's legitimate. There's nothing wrong with that. There aren't rules (Rosenberg 826).

"There aren't rules;" this seems to be the foremost rule in riot grrrl methodology: nothing is off limits and rules are limited to the patriarchy. This is precisely why the variety of zines address and precisely what this variety is trying to address;

The mainstream audience is of no interest to the riot grrrls if mainstream attention requires any sort of compromise; morally, artistically, ideologically or otherwise. Best said by Karen Green and Tristan Taormino in the introduction to *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World*, Barbara Findlen says in her introduction to *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* that "Generation X, thirteenth generation, twentysomething—whatever package you buy this age group in—one of the characteristics we're known for is our disunity. Maybe we're not as unified as the generation that preceded us. Maybe we're just not as categorizable" (xii). It is precisely this lack—or perhaps unwillingness—to be categorized that is reiterated time and again by both riot grrrls and the scholars that study their cultural patterns. Just like the elusive definition that escapes generalizing all of Generation X, there is not one defining characteristic that applies to the riot grrrls. Neither their feminist nor their creative ideologies can be compartmentalized so neatly. In an interview study published in *Signs* in the Spring of 1998, the discussions the authors had with self-identified riot grrrls across the country revealed one unifying fact: "the Riot Grrrls' [resist] hegemonic interpretations of themselves and the Riot Grrrl movement(s)" (Rosenberg 809). They refuse to be defined, and therefore were able to create a culture that was entirely their own, without pretense or restriction.

Chapter Four:
Private Ideas, Public Spaces: The counterpublics of DIY

“A public is a way of imagining a speech for which there is yet no scene, and a scene
for which there is no speech.”
Publics and Counterpublics, page 158

As outlined in the last three chapters, both the Beats and the riot grrrls are considered societal subversions in contrast to their inherently more mainstream cultures. The Beats become a response to the homogeneity of 1950s suburbia, while the riot grrrls were able to create an alternative to recycled feminist ideals and a generally apathetic mainstream in which the majority of their generation participated. Because it is easy to view these two groups as marginalized, or at the very least, out of the loop of mainstream culture, it can also be inferred that a common thread—besides a lack of belonging to normal society—was not shared. This, however, is not the case. It is precisely these differences, this lack of belonging, of a common understanding, that allows for these publics (in this case, these cultural communities) to simply *be*. In outlining the importance of texts in a public that the role imposes Warner contends that, “...A public enables a reflexivity in the circulation of texts among strangers who become, by virtue of their reflexively circulating discourse, a social entity” (Warner 11). The power of a public ultimately rests in its ability to both create an appeal for and provide a space for a group of people who neither have the voice nor the space through which to express themselves in a public manner. They may be participating in such things privately, (a lonely teenager may write about her sexual abuse in her diary, for example) but it

is the public declaration of such ideas that offer the possibility for like-minded individuals to find a community.

But how were these groups able to communicate, share their ideas or gain new likeminded members if they were both indefinable and so widespread, both in terms of individual characteristics and geographic location? The discursive visibility of publics, counterpublics and their corresponding texts that Michael Warner provides and analyzes in his book *Publics and Counterpublics* allows for the understanding of ideas, cultures and subversive versions of these two entities to exist within their own context and become more widely understood, while still maintaining their counterpublic status. But for whom does one speak? Where is one's public? The inherent nature of publics allow for a certain degree of innocuousness on the part of both the creator and the recipients of the texts. What does it mean to create an alternative world? Or in this case, an alternative public? Public world making is essential. Counterpublics are, at their most fundamental, a reaction to a larger public. At the base, counterpublics are "defined by their tension with a larger public" (Warner 56). It is this tension with a larger public that structures counterpublics, within their subordinate status to a larger public, as an alternative to what the public has to offer, and thus the key to world-making.

Subordinate groups, superior works

Is its oppositional character a function of its content alone; that is, its claim to be oppositional? (Warner 120)

In attempting to define or categorize a culture like the Beats or the riot grrrls, there is an inherent flaw. These two movements thrived on their contingency,

refused labels or definitions, and built a collective community based on individual desires. A more appropriate grouping, perhaps, is one that allows for a community to exist without a label but place the label instead on the ideas that these communities create and circulate. In other words, label the public, not the member of the assumed public. In this way, it is easier to assess the political validity of the texts of these counterpublics. It is the participation in publics that allows for the creation of counterpublics. A counterpublic is, at its most fundamental, a reaction to a larger public. They make different assumptions than their public counterparts. Most importantly, they are aware, and indeed, embrace their subordinate statuses (Warner 56). Examining the political, cultural and artistic alternatives that are provided by the Beats and the riot grrrls as counterpublics allows a closer examination of their countercultural and subordinate status as women. The Beats seemed to be an exclusive boys club, the riot grrrls were considered too delicate to endure the hardcore male punk shows—and participate in them bodily. As Warner frames his concepts of counterpublics and radical resistance around alternative texts of his own, it is similarly applicable to choose any sort of subversive text or resistance media and argue its merits in the creation of a counterpublic or alternative sphere:

Counterpublics face another obstacle as well. One of the most striking features of publics...is that they can in some context acquire agency. Not only is participation understood as active, at the level of the individual whose uptake helps to constitute a public; it is possible

sometimes to attribute agency to the virtual corporate entity created by the entire space of circulation (Warner 123).

Warner asserts that, “participation is understood as active, at the level of the individual whose uptake helps to constitute a public”(Warner 123). This idea is essential in contextualizing the work, creative output and drive that was required from the riot grrrls in making their zines accessible and known. They were not getting paid for their work; in fact, a lot of the costs of the zines came out of the pocket of the girls themselves. They had no obligation or assignment of any kind to make these zines. They simply made them because they wanted to, because they had to of their own volition. Their active participation is what manifested and perpetuated the public that allowed zines such as *Babeland* and *Veronica Lodge* to exist in such a way. Similarly, there was no particular conventional monetary or career-oriented goal that drove di Prima to create and distribute *The Floating Bear* with LeRoi Jones. In *Breaking the Rule of Cool: Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers*, Nancy Grace and Ronna Johnson points to the importance of the subordination of women, both in mainstream and countercultural society, as one of the defining characteristics and primary tools used for Beat woman writers: “The narrative of female Beat bohemia presents them not only as inhabitants and caretakers of preexisting bohemian spaces but also as creators of those spaces, both public and private”(Grace and Johnson 48). They too, existed in both public and private spaces, hoping to shirk the stigma of private life and become part of a more public one. Di Prima is able to effectively bridge this gap through her artistic and

political involvement through the creation and the circulation of the public through *The Floating Bear*.

Warner uses the subordination of women to great effect when describing the ideals behind public and private, especially in the division of labor that is not far removed from the classification of Beat women. One of the best examples Warner employs to explain the difference between public and private also addresses gender divisions and the traditional, gendered division of labor. The sexual division of labor is unequal, and promotes men's role in the public sphere, while domestic labor is private, takes place inside the home, is unpaid and is fulfilled by the woman of the household. The men's labor, meanwhile, is paid, fulfilling and essential for their masculine identities (Warner 37). Here, gender relations and the public and private spheres (and their separation) have a corresponding relationship. "The marginalization of women undermines the Beat generation's myths of rebellion...contradicting its claims to antihegemonic status" (Grace and Johnson 5).

Publics vs. Counterpublics

On the other hand, the difference between a public and a counterpublic is different from the versions of what is public and what is private. Though the Beats—especially its women—and the riot grrrls were not seen as influential or legitimate in the eyes of a more mainstream public, the virtue of their texts (music, art, zines, poetry and prose) addressed, and therefore, created a public of those who understood and rallied around such ideas.

While Warner describes at length three different kinds of publics, it is the third kind of public that I want to focus on in relation to the kinds of publics that the Beats and the riot grrrls were attempting to create. As opposed to the first kind of public, (or *the* public, which is a social totality) or the second kind of public, (a crowd or an audience in a visible space) the third kind of public that Warner emphasizes concerns itself largely with the relation between a text and its circulation as the main proponent in the creation of a public (Warner 65-66). In addition to the relationship between texts and their public, the public that Warner envisions here is in fact one that is purely text based. “Texts cross one’s path in their endless search for a public” (Warner 7). Exemplary of the riot grrrls, zines were passed out haphazardly, at random, left at coffee shops, passed out at punk shows and even taped to the back of bathroom stalls in search of a readership. In this way, it is possible that the information that was being circulated in these zines never reached an audience—intended or otherwise. The Beat publications, meanwhile—especially *The Floating Bear*—were more methodical in their distribution process. The creation of an exclusive mailing list creates a limited, albeit more intimate public. Readings, exhibitions and “be ins” were also Beat publics that were of an exclusive nature. It wasn’t the free love, inclusive community that the hippie movement would later become, but rather, it was more of an artistic collective that allowed for a very specific public to remain under the radar until it then crossed paths with another, very public, public of the mainstream media.

Most of our life is surrounded by “invisible” unacknowledged publics. And yet, Warner points out, they are there, as “members of our world” (Warner 7). So

the age old question: if there is newsletter handed out at a show but no one reads it, does it have any sort of profound impact? If the zine is hung on a bathroom stall but the message is instantly forgotten, or if half of the newsletters meant to be sent out were never stamped, addressed or mailed, does that lack of readership render a public any less legitimate, influential or self-sustaining? Warner uses pop music as a concrete example to point out, “there is no such thing as a pop song, for example, unless you hear it as addressing itself to the audience that can make it ‘pop’” (Warner 7). So if a text is created with the intention to appeal to a public but that never happens, what is the result? Warner insists upon the correlation between the text that generates the public, and the circulation and reception of such a text, which maintains this public. Therefore, texts in the broader sense (which here, include zines, music and poetry, and other forms of DIY expression) are essential in the creation of such publics. If we are all, however, “transient participants in common publics” as Warner suggests, then there is no one way for a public to remain unadulterated. Everything ultimately becomes an influence. As a result, mass media becomes celebrated as “pop culture” and therefore becomes the more accessible and acceptable form of media, communication and transmission of ideas. But sometimes its options are limiting.

Warner’s definition of a public also requires other criteria. A public is self organized and exists solely by virtue of being addressed. It is organized around a text and most importantly, is organized independently of state institution. He goes on to elaborate that “neither ‘crowd’ nor ‘audience’ nor ‘people’ nor ‘group’ will capture the same sense (Warner 67). This reinforces the necessity for a public’s

creation through a text base, which I argue is the means through which both riot grrrls and Beats are able to distribute their information, thus making their own kind of public, unique entirely to their respective groups, no matter how small or varied the readership. Their group identity is not centered on a common interest, but rather, a common public. In this case, the common public is the zine or print publication in question; it is the rallying around a certain speech, or punk concert in Seattle, or poetry reading in the Village. It is these expressions that take place in these spaces that create the public, and not just the people or the spaces that they occupy. Simply being in a common space or sharing a common idea does not suffice. Rather, there must exist a central text around which to gather a public. Secondly, as previously stated, a public is also a relation among strangers. In a public, strangers belong to our world, and therefore a public orients us to strangers and in relation to strangers. This does not mean, however, that being in the same place as another person automatically orients you to the same public. Perhaps most importantly when discussing public discourse, the address of public speech within a public is both personal and impersonal. In this sense, it can be seen that although the text may be going towards an intended public (the personal) the impersonal are privy to this information as well. Another thing to consider when framing the publications of the Beats and the riot grrrls is examine the difference between public and private. Warner does a very good job at doing this, providing the reader with a coherent list of the tangible or describable differences between the two. Whereas the private is nonpolitical, nonofficial, concealed, circulated orally, only known to a select group of people (initiates, he calls them) and tacit and implicit, the public is open to

everyone, accessible, political, official, common, national or popular, in physical view of others, circulated in print or in electronic media, known widely and finally, acknowledged and explicit (Warner 29). Texts such as riot grrrl zines were an important public to consider in contrast with the more mainstream public that the riot grrrls tried to create an alternative to because when compared to this list, the riot grrrls ensured that, to the best of their abilities, their texts were made available to everyone. Circulation is key: who is the public? The public, in the context of di Prima's *The Floating Bear*, was an exclusive one, as it came into existence through a mailing list. The publics created by riot grrrl zines and punk shows, among other DIY cultural expositions, however, left the definition of the public open for interpretation.

In analyzing George Orwell's character Winston from *1984* and his confessional diary entries, Warner lends a critical eye to the importance of a public within a private text such as a diary. "Orwell has come to stand for the opposite of this sentiment—that carrying on the human heritage requires that one be heard by as many people as possible. We might also read the diary scene, and its intense melancholy, as an unrecognized allegory of the displacement of the writer by the technologies of the mass (Warner 131-132). Similarly, riot grrrl zines are often likened to (and indeed, do resemble at certain points) the aesthetic, physical layout, informal language and private content that are all characteristic of a diary. There private ideas become public in the process of being distributed to others, even if the physical format resembles that of a diary or an arts and crafts project. Unfortunately for Winston, his intentions were not for the private ideas and their political

consequences to become public ones, even though Warner defines publics as “imagined entities with very real consequences.” Additionally, publics and their texts are seen as a state of discourse that differs from a crowd or audience because it requires an additional layer of text circulation:

The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public but a dominant one. And the conflict extends not just to ideas or policy questions but to the speech genres and modes of address that constitute the public or to the hierarchy among media. The discourse that constitutes it is not merely a different or alternative idiom but one that in other contexts would be regarded with hostility or with a sense of indecorousness...Friction against the dominant public forces the poetic-expressive character of counterpublic discourse to become salient to consciousness. Like all publics, a counterpublic comes into being through an address to indefinite strangers (Warner 120-121).

The address to indefinite strangers is just as crucial to the creation of a counterpublic as it is to a public, as it is the means to the dispersal of information and the subsequent creation of counterpublics.

A public in the margins: Importance of the aesthetic of riot grrrl zines

Warner uses rhetoric as a kind of public service announcement; rhetorical strategy is seen as a way to create communities outside of a theoretical realm.

Warner’s definition of a text is in some ways reclaimed in the context of the zine and

its creation. In Allison Piepmeier's article *Why Zines Matter, Materiality and the Creation of Embodied Community*, she points to the success of zines as being a product of their materiality, or their aesthetic appeal. "Zines instigate intimate, affectionate connections between their creators and readers, not just communities but *embodied* communities that are made possible by the materiality of the zine medium" (Piepmeier 214). Piepmeier also insists on their materiality as a fundamental characteristic that allows the information to be spread both more effectively and more intimately. She references her interactions with students, noticing an interest in and inspiration by these zines, but only after she shows them physical examples. Simply assigning an anthology, a scholarly text or a web source doesn't provide the same impact that seeing, touching and examining an actual zine provides. "In a world where more and more of us spend all day at our computers, zines reconnect us to our bodies and to other" (Piepmeier 214). This speaks to the embodied power of the circulation of a physical text, and how the zine is the most effective in its pure DIY form:

Indeed, the zine structure offers a greater sense of intimacy even more than other print media. Books can pretend to be a diary or can even be the publication of a diary, but the mechanisms of publication and the formal structures of books make it apparent to most readers that they are not actually privy to someone's confidential information. With zines, however, there are fewer layers of separation between the reader and the creator. The imagined community is less imagined and more embodied (Piepmeier 229).

The kind of physical action—and interaction—required to make, distribute, read and react to these zines required engagement from all those who are a part of its community, therefore creating “a kind of surrogate physical interaction and offer mechanisms for creating meaningful relationships” (Piepmeier 215).

However, since zines vary so widely in content, physical structure, appearance and process as well as in their aesthetic and creative merits, is it possible to shape a public around so many different kinds of texts? Since the riot grrrls concern themselves with the circulation of new ideas, no matter how widely they may be accepted, it is therefore necessary to have different ideas and points of view presented to their publics in a variety of text formats. That is

Zines’ trashiness may, in part, explain the reluctance of literary and art scholars to analyze them: zines revel in informality and threaten conventional boundaries. They explicitly reject the standards, methods, and visual vocabulary of mainstream publishing and the art world. Rather than appearing as well-wrought artistic pieces, zines take the form of ephemera, notes passed in class, doodles (Piepmeier 228).

Accessibility in an Intellectual Public

In Warner’s section titled “Styles of Intellectual Publics” the question of how to address such an audience is established and clarified. One such problem lies in the phenomenon of normalization. In this theory, Warner postulates that a god style, or one that is readily accepted by the public, is a normal style. When considered in

the context of the Beats and the riot grrrls, these mainstream, “normal” styles would include mainstream media and art forms that were readily accepted. For the Beats, this would presumably include *Time*, big-name publishing houses and displays of other art and music forms that didn’t take place at small East Village Jazz cafes or in the basement of a church. The normal public would be one that was mainstream and easily accessible by a large assembly, allowing for widespread appeal and influence. A clear style results in a popular audience, but not always in the most effective message, according to Warner:

Accessible prose alone gets you nothing if the ideas are unpalatable for other reasons, or if the public is structured in such a way as to be substantively prejudicial... Just as it is a mistake to equate good writing with accessibility, so also is it a mistake to equate an easy style with effectiveness (Warner 141).

This misunderstanding of effectiveness, style and accessibility is an important distinction to make in understanding what precisely motivates these publics into existence. While Warner might insist that clear style is what results in a popular audience, I would like to argue that a popular audience does not necessarily signify an effective public. When examining a riot grrrl zine such as *Bratgirl*, the politics involved in the embodied creation of this zine are more important than a popular audience interested in a popular text; this is precisely why these grrrls have become a part of a countermovement in the first place. For a large portion of these girls, the distinct difference from the content of their zines and a more polished creation such as *Seventeen* lies in the perception and reception of the text; the riot grrrls simply

did not care. Mass appeal was not their mission, nor was compromising their voice to achieve such mass appeal. While this chapter of *Publics and Counterpublics* largely concerns itself with the importance of scholarly works and rendering erudite texts more accessible to a public (and the public) the importance of accessibility of texts is certainly applicable to smaller and more independent texts such as *The Floating Bear* and zines such as *Bratgirl*. In summation, there are four important characteristics of Warner's public: its relation among strangers, its self-organized nature, impersonal mode of address and constitution through attention. All of these characteristics help distinguish and showcase the qualities of these publications. Even if the zine *Babeland* was only read or circulated among 20 people per issue, for instance, or if the 24th issue of *The Floating Bear* was only mailed out to about half of its recipients, does that render the message of the text less effective or invalidate the public to which it appeals? In short: not necessarily. Effectiveness, or a lack thereof, does not necessarily render a text less valid. When promoting artistic texts that in their most raw forms are subversive, either in content or style, effectiveness can be presumed subjective.

Finally, some publics are defined by their tension with a larger public. Their participants are marked off from persons or citizens in general (Warner 56). Participation in a public—or a counterpublic—requires a subcultural desire that is different from that of the mainstream, and such a desire that allows for novel opinions to flourish. Although a counterpublic is sometimes compared to a subculture, there are distinct differences between the two. Warner's main distinction is that "a counterpublic, against the background of the public sphere,

enables a horizon of opinion and exchange” (Warner 56). This horizon ultimately serves as a means to generate, exchange and advance new ideas, leading to what Warner believes is a public discourse that provides change: “The discourse of the public is a linguistic form from which the social conditions of its own possibility are in large part derived” (Warner 105). Furthermore, there is a significant difference between *the* public and *a* public. This is the kind of public that is in being in relation to texts and their circulation. The public is “kind of a social totality” (Warner 65) while a public possesses a series of qualifiers and traits that advance ideas that are more than likely subverting the ideas of *the* public. It is a public, or one that allows for these texts to come to fruition that slowly allow societal norms to become less prevalent and slowly render private ideas more public—even if that public only exists currently as a counterpublic.

When people address the public, they engage in struggles. When people address publics (as opposed to one public,) they engage in struggles over the conditions that bind them together. This circulation of texts renders the private, public—ultimately making these struggles known to others who may wish to share in these struggles—and perhaps even to combat them. Making private ideas public ultimately permits for the creation of new publics, and especially permits for the creation of new counterpublics that serve as a rebuttal and perhaps a change to mainstream norms. In short, the public/private dichotomy defines space, but it is not limited to this definition. It also provides perspective for social contexts, feelings and genres of language. All of these elements are appropriately reflected in the DIY publications of Diane di Prima and the riot grrrls, as well as their distribution and

readership. Although Warner may believe that “the idea of a public is a cultural form, a kind of practical fiction,” (Warner 8) it is precisely these cultural forms and these practical fictions that make room for less realistic counterpublics to come into existence, and thus a reality.

Conclusion

“A public is poetic world making”
-*Publics and Counterpublics*, page 114

If the world, or at least a larger public, isn't affected or changed in some way by these alternative worlds that have been created, what is their point, precisely? Are they still important? Still relevant? Were they ever? Their importance, ultimately, lies in their existence. Because these alternatives are available, even to the smallest public (or counterpublic,) they propose a world of possibilities outside of a mainstream one. These zines, these self-made publications, these assertive poems, these angry punk songs; they all help us to see the world in a new way, rendering a new world—and ultimately, a new way of thinking—possible. For the rest of us, stuck in the mainstream, it presents subversion, a challenge, an assertion to our preexisting ideals and social norms. It allows the voice inside of our heads, no matter how faint, to ask such questions as, “why is this still the norm?” or “why does so much inequality still exist” or “is that the only way to look at things?” Simply asking these questions, even if there does not yet exist an answer, is a crucial step in the fight for change. For the participant of such a counterpublic, a space is established in which to participate, to build this world, to add to its ideas. But as previously mentioned, for the outsiders, for those not a part of a particular public, but perhaps part of a larger one, the option is available. And options are essential.

Both the Beats, especially Diane di Prima, and the riot grrrls presented—and present us today—with alternative worlds, shaped by their individual ideals and styles. Beat poetry and punk music have been the bases for many subsequent

cultural movements and have provided countless artistic inspiration. The women who took part in creating a space for their own voices and the voices of others to be heard—no matter how discordant these voices may be—opened up a whole new world of possibilities for the rest of us.

After extensive research and analysis, I have come to the conclusion that for the women who were able to make a name for themselves despite the male-dominated culture of the Beat Generation, their work has stood the test of time. They paved the way for future countercultural movements to find their respective voices and to thrive. Di Prima's leadership in the creation, distribution and community building of the *Floating Bear* newsletter was beneficial both to unknown artists who wanted to circulate their texts within a public, and to women as an inspiration. If your needs aren't being met—if there isn't enough academic discourse or if no one will publish your poetry—*do it yourself*.

Though not directly inspired by di Prima and other Beat women, the riot grrrls nonetheless adapted the do-it-yourself lifestyle to create their own subversive public based on private ideals. This, then, constitutes their counterpublic. Their defiance of male-dominated punk culture, where they were pushed over in a mosh pit or not taken seriously as an artist ultimately led to a community of womyn, ideas and music that was just as much about the individual as it was about feminism as a whole. They doodled and Xeroxed their way into an embodied public, creating zines holding discussions, and staging punk concerts that allowed for important feminist issues to be addressed in non-threatening way—unless that's how they chose to express themselves. It's their prerogative.

Ultimately, the world making that di Prima and the riot grrrls accomplished serve as a guide and an inspiration today. Marginalized within two already relatively marginalized cultures, the women of the Beat Generation and the youth movement of riot grrrl within Generation X found alternative means to convey their radical ideas or showcase a different artistic form that wasn't accepted or perpetuated by mainstream culture and society. Their mere existence as a counterpublic, through the circulation of a text, signifies that there is a community that exists beyond the dominant mainstream one. This circulation of texts renders the private, public—ultimately making these struggles known to others who may wish to share in these struggles—and perhaps even to combat them.

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