

CYBORG GRRRLS: NEW TECHNOLOGIES, IDENTITIES, AND
COMMUNITY IN THE PRODUCTION OF 'ZINES

by

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in the Faculty

of

Education

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

May 1996

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**Cyborg Grrrls: New Technologies, Identity, and Community
in the Production of 'Zines**

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Abstract

Cyborg Grrrls: New Technologies, Identities, and Community in the Production of 'Zines

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This thesis is an exploration of new technologies, the people who use these technologies, and the spaces in which these interactions take place. It is also an exploration of the ways in which these things, subjects, and places are being reconfigured in contradictory, partial, and seemingly impossible ways.

The group of young women involved in this study are poaching various new technologies in order to re-invent their selves, bodies, and notions of community. Focusing on the use of new technologies in the production of young women's 'zines, this study considers how the appropriation of new technologies can be directly linked to personal, cultural, and political struggles.

When situated in relation to Haraway's cyborg myth, these 'zine producers are seen to be using new technologies to tell boundary stories, the sorts of accounts which appear to exist outside fixed categories and conceptual frameworks. In the analysis particular attention is paid to the ways in which these accounts reconfigure identities and experiences in ways which call normative notions of sex, gender, and desire into question.

The 'zine producers' vigilant uses of new technologies are also discussed as tactics which work to reorganize spaces in new and unexpected ways. This study considers how communities and sites of political organizing and cultural production may exist in ways which cut through and across geographic and physical boundaries.

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Chapter One

Introduction

...the cyborg is a bad girl, she is really not a boy. Maybe she is not so much bad as she is a shapechanger, whose dislocations are never free. She is a girl who's trying not to become Woman, but remain responsible to women of many colors and positions, and who hasn't really figured out a politics that makes the necessary articulations with the boys who are your allies. It's undone work. ¹

- Donna Haraway

When I initiated this research I wasn't looking for cyborgs. I set out to examine young women ² involved in the production of feminist and queer youth 'zines. However, as my collection of 'zines grew I realized that the issues being raised by these young women were only part of what made their publications interesting. I also became aware of the degree to which these 'zine producers were appropriating and manipulating various new technologies and how their use of technologies was both politically and socially significant. The 'zine producer's use of technologies seemed to challenge the assumption that girls and young women are necessarily intimidated

¹ Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, "Cyborgs at Large: Interview with Donna Haraway," *Technoculture*, eds. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) p.20.

² I am reluctant to use the term "young women" to describe the subjects of this thesis both because I do not know the exact ages of most of these 'zine writers and because many of the accounts in these 'zines call the categories of "youth" and "woman" into question. On the other hand, the fact that at least some of these 'zine writers are young and female - or have constructed themselves according to these subject positions in the context of their 'zines - seems too significant to ignore. As a result, I use the term "young women" tentatively recognizing that both the categories of "youth" and "woman" must continually be called into question. I will discuss this issue in more detail throughout the thesis.

by new technologies and that they are less likely to use these technologies in their leisure time.

However, the 'zine producers' use of technologies alone is not what led me to think about them in terms of Haraway's cyborg myth.³ Like the cyborgs described by Haraway, I found the young women producing these 'zines to be committed to girls and women's rights but to be equally committed to unsettling normative notions of what the categories of "Girl" and "Woman" might mean to different people in different contexts. In this way, their use of technologies seemed to do much more than enable them to produce 'zines. It also seemed to be connected to their desire and ability to "shapechange" - to reinvent their bodies, selves, *and* their experiences of social space or community. In this thesis I examine how young women involved in the production of 'zines are appropriating various technologies as tactics⁴ - tactics capable of transforming their bodies and selves, and tactics capable of reorganizing space in ways which moves them far beyond the limits of their physical locations.

It is important to note that when I discuss identities as "bodies and selves" it is not to suggest that bodies and selves are opposites

³ See Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991) pp. 149-181.

⁴ In the context of this text "tactic" is used in de Certeau's sense. In short, it will refer to an 'everyday practice' which enables marginalized people or groups of people (and here 'marginalized' refers to people who lack a proper place) to 'make the most of their situations'. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

which must be kept separate. Haraway writes about “Our bodies, ourselves” explaining “bodies are maps of power and identity.”⁵ Stone also discusses identities as bodies and selves not because they must be kept separate “but because the coupling between our bodies and our selves is a powerfully contested site.”⁶ Thus, in this discussion, references to “bodies and selves” is meant to draw attention to the ways in which identities are inscribed on the surface of bodies, and to the ways in which our bodies are shaped by certain presuppositions about identity.

Fanzines or ‘Zines

...fanzines aren’t supposed to be catalogued and historicized and analysed to death, for Christsake. They’re supposed to be disposable. That’s the whole point. Throw your fanzines away right now. Go ahead. Xeroxed material doesn’t last forever anyway, you know. It fades.⁷

Like the Xeroxed material ‘zines are printed on, the images, names, and ideas which circulate in these publications also fade. As suggested above, ‘zines (and other elements of youth cultures, subcultures, and popular cultures) are not supposed to “catalogued, historicized, and analysed.” These publications often seem to be made in great haste suggesting that at least part of their significance

⁵ Haraway, 1991, p.180.

⁶ Allucquère Rosanne Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995) p.84.

⁷ Bruce LaBruce, “The Wild, Wild World of Fanzines: Notes from a reluctant pornographer,” *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, gay men and popular culture*, eds. Paul Burston and Colin Richardson, (New York: Routledge, 1995) p.193.

is their immediacy, their disposability.

On the other hand, the fact that 'zines are often produced by people who do not have access to traditional publishing opportunities makes them an interesting site of social and political dialogue. Cut loose from editorial policies and writing conventions, 'zines present writing which under most circumstances would remain unpublished and unrecognized. Austin and Gregg draw attention to the origin of 'zines and the unique style of these publications. They write:

What distinguishes the 'zine genre from other small, alternative publications is its location in youth culture, its punk roots, its exaltation of unpolished, raw presentations of ideas and images - and its taste for the outrageous. 'Zines tend to have a format antithetical to the design and editorial style of conventional publications. They also reject political and aesthetic orthodoxies of all sorts, and have created a new forum for exploring perspectives not represented in straight, gay, or feminist presses, or in dominant culture at large. ⁸

Sara, who publishes a zine called *Out of the Vortex*, also writes about 'zines as an alternative to both mainstream and "alternative" presses. Sara is one of many self-identified "riot grrrls" ⁹ who has learned a lesson from the punk generation before her on the potential and power of the 'zine genre. She explains:

Always in my life I had handed my writing to teachers, parents, older writer friends, to give me their opinions about what I'd done, then depended on editors of literary magazines and so on to get my work read by others. Suddenly all this seemed unnecessary. The confidence people gain from this tremendous

⁸ S. Bryn Austin with Pam Gregg, "A Freak Among Freaks: The 'Zine Scene," *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers: beyond the lesbian nation*, ed. Arlene Stein (New York: Penguin, 1993) p.82.

⁹ Discussed and defined later in this chapter.

self-sufficiency can carry over into all aspects of their lives. This is particularly important to kids, girls, minorities, anyone who is discouraged from taking charge in their lives. ¹⁰

Sara draws attention to the way in which the 'zine genre enables people to by-pass the literary and cultural gate-keepers (be it teachers, parents, editors, or anyone invested with the authority to determine where and how one's work can circulate) in order to get on with the task at hand - in this case, to get the text or image or idea "out there," wherever that may be.

However, any understanding of 'zines must also be situated in relation to technology. Austin and Gregg argue that "Crucial to the growth of 'zines was the photocopier-and-personal-computer revolution of the 1980s, which gave renegade publishers a quick, easy, and accessible medium to work with." ¹¹ In "Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics, and Technology," Penley describes the ways in which women involved in the production of K/S (Kirk/Spock) ¹² fanzines have developed an ideology about technology through their 'zine production. She explains:

The term *appropriate technology* refers to both everyday uses of technology that are appropriate to the job at hand and the way users decide how and what to appropriate. To avoid becoming dependent on sources that extract too high a price, or to ensure that the technology will be available to everyone, one

¹⁰ Sara, *Out of the Vortex*, 7, 1995.

¹¹ Austin and Gregg, p.62.

¹² As Penley explains, "The slash between K(irk) and S(pock) serves as a code to those purchasing by mail amateur fanzines (or "zines") that the stories, poems, and artwork published there concern a same-sex relationship between the two men." Constance Penley, "Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics, and Technology," *Technoculture*, p.137.

appropriates only what is needed. The slashers (their name for themselves) are constantly involved in negotiating appropriate levels of technology for use within the fandom. ¹³

In this way, it becomes possible to see how 'zines are both dependent on using technologies and on making decisions about how to use these technologies "appropriately" or in ways which keep 'zines an affordable and accessible medium for writers *and* readers.

I think it is also important to recognize that many 'zines have focused and continue to focus on speculative fictions about science and technology. For example, the K/S 'zines discussed by Penley as well as the more common ST (Star Trek) 'zines - action-adventure stories based on the Star Trek series - have given Trekkies an opportunity to further explore Gene Roddenberry's fictional universe. However, in *The World of Fanzines*, Wertham notes that science fiction and fantasy fanzines apparently date back to the 1930s. With names like *The Comet* and *Time Traveller* these early fanzines, like much of the science fiction writing in the early part of this century, focused on the utopian and disutopian future of science and technology, and the unexplored "frontier" of space. ¹⁴ Ross argues that technologies, far from neutral, are constantly being used and read "against the grain." He explains, "There is no frame of technological inevitability that has not already interacted with popular

¹³ Penley, pp. 140-141.

¹⁴ Fredric Wertham, *The World of Fanzines: A Special Form of Communication* (United States: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973) pp. 38-52.

needs and desires, no introduction of new machineries of control that has not already been negotiated to some degree in the area of popular consent.”¹⁵ The research, writing, production, and distribution of ‘zines is undoubtedly one example of the way in which technologies can and are being read and appropriated “against the grain.” The fact that some of the earliest ‘zines were those dealing with issues of science and technology reminds people living today that we are not the first generation to contest the meaning, uses, and possibilities of *new* technologies.¹⁶

Thus, in spite of Bruce LaBruce’s plea for us to ‘throw our fanzines away’ I can’t help but think maybe we shouldn’t throw them away....or at least, not quite yet. As suggested above, these publications may provide us with an opportunity to examine how new technologies have been and continue to be contested - where we may least expect these negotiations to take place - in the realm of youth cultures, subcultures, and popular cultures. Nevertheless, I think the fact that many of these ‘zines were never intended to be discussed in an academic context is something that cannot be ignored. Throughout this text I have attempted to keep this contradiction up front (in chapter three, I will discuss this issue in greater detail). I encourage the reader of this text to do the same - to constantly interrogate the way in which I have situated the ‘zines in my

¹⁵ Andrew Ross, “Hacking Away at the Counterculture,” *Technoculture*, p. 130.

¹⁶ I discuss the term “new technologies” in chapter two.

analysis questioning whether or not they can be or should be placed in an academic context to begin with.

Young Women and New Technologies

In order to understand why the use of technology in the production of young women's 'zines is significant it is first necessary to briefly examine how girls and young women have been, and continue to be, portrayed in educational research on the intersecting issues of gender, equity, and technology.

Educational researchers continue to place little emphasis on studying girls or young women and their relationship to science and technology. Moreover, as Bryson and de Castell's work on gender, equity, and technology illustrates, those studies that are carried out often do nothing more than reinforce normative notions of gender and technology. For example, studies on gender and technology typically take place within the school system and tend to focus on whether or why girls and young women are under-represented in science and computer related courses,¹⁷ why they are more likely to drop out of science and computer related courses and/or programs,¹⁸ or how

¹⁷ See Alison Kelly, ed. *Science for Girls?* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1987).

¹⁸ See Betty Collis, "Adolescent Females and Computers: Real and Perceived Barriers," *Women and Education*, eds. Jane Gaskell and Arlene McLaren, 2nd ed. (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1991) pp. 147 -161.

they “cope” in these traditionally male-dominated fields of study. ¹⁹
 In other words, these studies have typically focused on “victims” and
 “failures.”

i want to make violent video games where rapists get castrated
 and tortured or you start a band or i just thought of it, a self
 defence HyperCard. WOW!! ²⁰

As suggested above, some young women are not only comfortable with new technologies but also interested in using them in ways that are atypical of assumptions about “women’s nature.” However, as suggested by Bryson and de Castell, these “accounts of equity and technologies reflect differently ordered sets of assumptions about the nature of knowledge and sexual difference, the purposes of schooling, and about the scope - and the limits of - technologies in the classroom.” ²¹ They further suggest that efforts to increase access to new technologies may be “more likely to entrench discriminatory practices and to reduce the range of possible relations to technology than to empower the oppressed.” ²² Like Bryson and de Castell, I am interested in approaching the issues of gender and technology from a postmodern perspective where the

¹⁹ See Arlene McLaren and Jim Gaskell, “School Science and Gender: Now You See It; Now You Don’t,” *Gender Informs Curriculum: From Enrichment to Transformation*, eds. Jane Gaskell and John Willinsky (United States: Teachers College Press, 1995).

²⁰ Cleo, letter to the author, September 29, 1995.

²¹ Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell, “A Chip on Her Shoulder?: New Technologies, Gender, and In/Equity,” *Women’s Education des femmes* 11.3 (1995): pp. 16 -17.

²² Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell, “So We’ve Got a Chip on Our Shoulder! Sexing the Texts of ‘Educational Technology’,” *Gender Informs Curriculum: From Enrichment to Transformation*, p.23.

very notions of “gender” and “technology” are called into question and displaced in order to reveal the ways in which women *are* using new technologies and how these relationships exist in ways and in sites that may have been rendered invisible by typical accounts of gender and technology. ²³

Thus, this study of young women and new technologies in the production of ‘zines is a departure from typical studies on young women and technologies for several reasons. First, this study examines the ways in which young women are engaging with new technologies as opposed to how and why they are not using new technologies. Moreover, this study works to question the conceptualization of ‘gender’ in discourses about gender, equity, and technology. Second, this study is also a departure from typical educational inquiries into gender and technology because it focuses on the ways in which young women are using new technologies *outside* of the school system. I hope that by situating this study in the realm of youth cultures, subcultures, and/or popular cultures as opposed to classrooms the links between new technologies, cultural production, and resistance will become increasingly evident. As suggested by Penley and Ross, technologies are “developed in any one time and place in accord with a complex set of existing rules or rational procedures, institutional histories,

²³ Ibid. pp. 25-34.

technical possibilities, and, last, but not least, popular desires.”²⁴ Thus, to ignore the ongoing relation between the development and use of new technologies and “popular desires” is to fail to acknowledge how technologies are and can be appropriated and contested even as they are developing. However, as I will discuss in the following section, technologies are not only contested through “popular desires” - often these desires are manifested through the appropriation of technologies .

Young Women in Youth Cultures, Subcultures, and Popular Cultures

Very little seems to have been written about the role of girls in youth cultural groupings. They are absent from the classic subcultural ethnographic studies, the pop histories, the personal accounts and the journalistic surveys of the field. When girls do appear, it is either in ways which uncritically reinforce the stereotypical image of women with which we are now so familiar ... or else they are fleetingly and marginally presented...²⁵

When McRobbie's essay, “Girls and Subcultures,” originally appeared in 1978 the role of young women in youth and popular cultures was generally portrayed as secondary. For example, in Hebdige's *Subculture* and Willis' *Learning to Labour* girls and young women are discussed in relation to the young men in these studies. McRobbie wondered, “Are girls really not present in youth

²⁴ Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, eds., introduction, *Technoculture*, p.xiv.

²⁵ Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'* (London: MacMillan Education Ltd, 1991) p.1.

subcultures? Or is it something in the way this kind of research is carried out that renders them invisible?"²⁶ Roman suggests that this invisibility is at least partly due to the fact that Cultural Studies has a tendency to "pay homage to a productivist logic in Marxism, a logic which treats the domination of women by men as either secondary to or a consequence of the exploitation of workers..."²⁷ In both *Feminism and Youth Culture* and *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* McRobbie has argued that the invisibility of girls and young women is connected to *how* subcultural research is carried out and to the actual conditions which shape young women's lives. She writes:

It is not so much that girls do too much too young; rather, they have the opportunity of doing too little too late. To the extent that all-girl subcultures, where the commitment to the gang comes first, might forestall these processes and provide their members with a collective confidence which could transcend the need for 'boys', they could well signal an important progression in the politics of youth culture.²⁸

There is evidence that this "important progression in the politics of youth culture" has now taken place with the emergence of "riot grrrl" in the early 1990s.

Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s riot grrrls were influenced

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Leslie G. Roman, "Intimacy, Labor, and Class: Ideologies of Feminine Sexuality in the Punk Slam Dance," *Becoming Feminine: The Politics of Popular Culture*. eds. Leslie Roman and Linda Christian-Smith with Elizabeth Ellsworth (New York: Falmer, 1988) p. 143.

²⁸ McRobbie, 1991, p.33.

by punk, the "women in rock" phenomenon,²⁹ and by the feminist movement's visibility during this period. As Gottlieb and Wald write:

Riot grrrls not only have reconfigured punk's energy and rebelliousness in specifically female and feminist terms, but have also drawn upon punk's D.I.Y. tradition to blur the boundaries between musical production and consumption. If, according to Frith and McRobbie's models, girls have traditionally participated in rock as consumers (either active or passive), then riot grrrls pose a challenge to these models, insofar as they potentially allow all women - even the ones not up on stage playing guitar or drums - to assume the (masculine) role of subcultural producer.³⁰

Central to this radical turning of tables in the politics of youth culture has been riot grrrl's appropriation of new technologies. As suggested above, riot grrrls have embraced punk's D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself) ethic inspiring girls to start their own bands (often with no previous musical experience). However, the success of bands such as Bikini Kill and Bratmobile, who were among the first bands associated with riot grrrl, has also been linked to an increased involvement of women in the production and promotion of music. For example, independent record labels, such as Kill Rock Stars and Harriet, focus on "girl bands" and support women musicians as well as women working in

²⁹Sometimes confused with Riot Grrrl the more general so-called "women in rock phenomenon" merely refers to the increased presence of women rockers (i.e. Chrissie Hynde, Carole Pope, Siouxsie Siouxsie) and women-led bands (i.e. The Slits) in the late 1970s and 1980s.

³⁰ Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald, "Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution and Women in Independent Rock," *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture*, eds. Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose (New York: Routledge, 1994) p. 263.

the area of music technology. ³¹

When riot grrrl originally emerged, music was a primary focal point and many of the early riot grrrl 'zines were linked to the promotion of particular bands (i.e. *Bikini Kill* 'zine). However, by 1993 several cities in the United States and Canada had riot grrrl groups. One of the participants in this study explained, "...the original people who started Riot Grrrl were in bands...but riot grrrl is now - and even back then - not only about the music. The 'zines weren't really music oriented... And all the meetings, like the ones back in DC, were really personal..." ³² Gottlieb and Wald suggests that the 'zine network that has sprung up in response to riot grrrl has not only helped promote girl-led bands but worked to "construct both female community and subcultural identity." They further explain:

Most obviously, the 'zines foster girls' public self-expression, often understood as the ability to tell private stories (secrets which are other wise prohibited or repressed by the dominant culture. These include girls' descriptions of their experiences of coming out as lesbian...; the disclosure of their traumas as rape and incest survivors, or as women struggling with eating disorders; and their gushy affirmations of girl-love and devotion to punk music. Thus, publicized, such narratives often become the stuff of political commitment and an affirmation of girls' legitimacy within the realm of the political. ³³

³¹ It is important to note that Kill Rock Stars and other independent record labels associated with riot grrrl are not unique - feminist record labels (i.e. Olivia Records) have been producing and promoting women's music for over two decades. However, these riot grrrl record labels are committed to producing women-led punk and rock bands as opposed to the folk musicians typically associated with the "women's music" scene.

³² Interview with Zanna, February 4, 1996.

³³ Gottlieb and Wald, p. 264.

As I will discuss in greater detail throughout this thesis, the 'zines are particularly significant because they have enabled young women to become involved in youth subcultures regardless of their geographic location or domestic circumstances. Like the production and promotion of bands, the 'zines are dependent on the appropriation of various media technologies ranging from computers and photocopiers to Polaroid cameras and public photo booths.

I think it is important to note that while many of the 'zines discussed in this thesis were in some way inspired by riot grrrl they are not necessarily directly associated with this so-called youth subculture. I admit, that when I initiated this research I assumed that the 'zines I was collecting would be primarily connected to riot grrrl. However, I discovered that these 'zines could not be so easily categorized. Some of the 'zines bill themselves as punk or Riot Grrrl 'zines, others mention riot grrrl bands or review riot grrrl 'zines but focus more generally on issues of girl power and feminism, and still others do not take up riot grrrl issues or feminist issues in any way. Thus, young women involved in the production of 'zines should not be understood as constituting a particular youth subculture or thought to be associated with one aspect of youth culture. Instead, young women involved in the production of 'zines seem to occupy various positions which cut across and through the boundaries of so-called youth cultures, subcultures, and popular cultures.

Thus, in contrast to many studies focusing on youth, this study does not attempt to identify a particular youth subculture and analyse its defining characteristics. I recognize that these young women's 'zines may be influenced by punk and riot grrrl but they are also rooted in and against feminist and queer discourses. Moreover, they are both influenced by, opposed to, and active participants in aspects of popular culture and consumerism. For example, on one hand, the 'zines tend to critique the portrayal of women in "mainstream" magazines, nevertheless, the 'zine producers' do appear to read these magazines and take a certain amount of pleasure in them. If there is a difference here it is that when the 'zine producers have finished reading their copy of *Elle* or *Vogue* they begin to cut them up - both figuratively and literally. Not only do many 'zines critique these "mainstream" women's magazines but they re-present the images from these magazines in ironic collages. However, the 'zine producers' ongoing relationship with popular culture is not necessarily contradictory. As Thornton suggests:

Contrary to youth discourses, then, subcultures do not germinate from a seed and grow by force of their own energy into mysterious movements to be belatedly digested by the media. Rather, media are there and effective right from the start. They are integral to the processes by which, in Bourdieu's terms, we "create groups with words." ³⁴

McRobbie has also drawn attention to the link between so-called

³⁴ Sarah Thornton, "Moral Panic, the Media and British Rave Culture," *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture*, eds. Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose (New York: Routledge, 1994) p. 176.

“mainstream” media and the cultural production associated with subcultures. She explains:

...the magazines produced by fans, the music produced by DJs, the clothes bought, sold and worn by subcultures `stylists`, do more than just publicize the subculture. They also provide the opportunity for learning and sharing skills, for practising them, for making a small amount of money; more importantly, they provide pathways for future `life-skills` in the form of work or self-employment. ³⁵

Thus, ironically, `zine production may lead these young women back to the mainstream publishing world and the consumer culture their `zines actively seek to contest.

Another aspect of this study which I feel distinguishes it from many studies of youth is the fact that this study is not defined by any geographic boundaries. Typically, studies of youth tend to focus on a particular group of young people living in a specific town or city, and on the “territory” they share in these geographic locations. In fact, in studies of youth culture carried out by Hall, Willis, and Hebdige in the early days of the CCCS (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies), territoriality was positioned as a defining characteristic of youth subcultures. ³⁶ As a result, when I initiated this study I did wonder whether or not I should focus on young women `zine producers living in a particular geographic area. However, as I discuss in greater detail throughout this study, one of the things that makes `zine

³⁵ Angela McRobbie, “Shut Up and Dance: Youth Culture and Changing Modes of Femininity,” *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) p.161.

³⁶ See Stuart Hall, et al. “Subcultures, Cultures and Class,” *Resistance through Rituals*, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Hutchison of London, 1977).

networks unique is the degree to which geographical boundaries are displaced. For example, the 'zines discussed in this thesis are produced by young women living in large urban centres, such as New York and Toronto, as well as small towns of only a few thousand people. Since youth living in rural areas are usually not accounted for in research and writing on youth cultures, subcultures, or pop culture I have paid particular attention to them in this study. As will become evident, 'zine networks - not to mention, electronic communications - are changing the conceptions of youth cultures or subcultures insofar that a shared territory (at least, a shared physical territory) is being displaced by a shared space that cuts across geographic boundaries.

Finally, I feel this study is a departure from many studies on youth culture because this study pays particular attention to the presence of young women who identify as "queer girls" and "bi-girls" (their names for themselves). While McRobbie and Roman's research examine the construction of heterosexual norms in youth subcultures I argue that their research still works to marginalize lesbianism as a possibility for young women. McRobbie's work rarely addresses issues of lesbo/homophobia in youth subcultures or makes any effort to examine how young women who do *not* identify as heterosexual may be affected by the flamboyantly heterosexual practices and rituals of the youth culture that much of McRobbie's

work examines.³⁷ Similarly, Roman's study, "Ideologies of Feminine Sexuality in the Punk Slam Dance", examines the effects of heterosexism on seemingly heterosexual participants. Although there is evidence in this study suggesting that at least two of the participants are lesbians, their experiences are never named or explored as potentially different from the experiences of the seemingly heterosexual participants.³⁸ In the course of my research I have found that a significant number of the 'zines I have collected are produced by young women who identify as queer. As a result, I feel it is important to keep issues of queer resistance at the centre of this study and to examine why the production and distribution of 'zines may be particularly important to queer youth.

"Cyborg Grrrls"

The term "cyborg grrrl" brings Haraway's cyborg imagery together with the defiant, oppositional politics and cultural production associated with the riot grrrl movement. I am not suggesting that the 'zine producers discussed here should be privileged as cyborgs any more than the rest of us. As Haraway suggests, in the late twentieth century we are all cyborgs. Instead, the use of the term cyborg is

³⁷ See Angela McRobbie's *Gender and Generation* (1984), *Feminism and Youth Culture* (1991), and *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (1994).

³⁸ See Leslie G. Roman's "Intimacy, Labor, and Class: Ideologies of Feminine Sexuality in the Punk Slam Dance," *Becoming Feminine* (1988).

meant to draw attention to the fact that these young women are re-inventing themselves and their social spaces or communities largely through their appropriation of new technologies. As Haraway explains, cyborg imagery points to the need to both build and destroy “machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories” - in many ways, this is precisely what happens in the context of these young women’s ‘zines. The use of the term “grrrl” links these ‘zine producers to the energy and politics of the riot grrrl movement which has inspired or at least, created a space for girls to become increasingly involved in ‘zine networks (among other aspects of cultural production). However, the use of this term also emphasizes that although these ‘zine producers tend to be committed to feminism’s goals they are not committed to the category “Woman” as it has been constructed in feminist *and* anti-feminist discourses. The respelling of girl as “grrrl” works both to parody femininity and to insert a element of defiance and rage into the category of “girl”, thus, further challenging normative assumptions about girls’ and women’s nature.

In the next chapter I discuss the notion of “new technologies” and examine how our changing notions and experiences of technologies have effected and continue to effect understandings of identity and community. Drawing on feminist theory, queer theory, and cultural studies writing about “technoculture” I attempt to show how technologies *and* postmodern theorizing unsettle the way

bodies, selves, and social spaces are conceptualized. In chapter three I discuss how I carried out this research while paying particular attention to the way 'zines seem to erode the boundaries between lived experiences, documentary realities, and fictions. I also discuss some of the "problems" this erosion of fixed categories or genres may pose for researchers. Chapter four focuses on what technologies these young women appropriate in the production of their 'zines and on the stories or narratives they chose to present in their 'zines. In the final chapter I discuss some of the implications this study may hold for educators.

Chapter Two

New Technologies and the Notions of Identity and Community

In this chapter I will examine how the concepts of identity and community are influenced and reconfigured in light of “new” technologies. I feel a more detailed discussion of what is meant by the term “new technology” as well as the concepts of identity and community is necessary before we can begin to further consider the use of new technologies in the production of young women’s ‘zines. I will begin by discussing why I have chosen to use the term “new technologies” and what it refers to in the context of this text. Next, I will examine how notions of identity are challenged and reconfigured in relation to new technologies. Finally, I will consider how the concept of community is called into question by postmodern theorizing and new technologies.

This chapter brings together feminist theory, queer theory, and cultural studies writing on technology and “technoculture.” I wanted to keep trash - both the trash of academe and the trash of culture - at the centre of this text. After all, this thesis is about ‘zines which, once again, “aren’t supposed to be catalogued and historicised and analysed to death...they’re supposed to be disposable.”¹ As a result,

¹ Bruce LaBruce, “The Wild, Wild World of Fanzines: Notes from a reluctant pornographer,” *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, gay men and popular culture*, eds. Paul Burston and Colin Richardson (New York: Routledge, 1995) p.193.

I urge the reader of this literature review to think about the text as something like a late night dumpster dive. You will discover that this text is full of unwanted intruders - for example, interruptions of pop culture that may seem displaced in a literature review. I ask you to question why these references to pop culture seem out of place or unnecessary. I also urge you to exercise caution throughout this chapter - the sort of caution that always needs to be exercised when one attempts to place any aspect of youth cultures, subcultures, or popular culture within an academic context.

Situating Technologies

Most people have no way of knowing what, where and even who the new technologies are in our society. After all, most of us are not among the privileged insiders who develop, study, and/or "live" new technologies (e.g. researchers at NASA or MIT). Thus, it is important to keep in mind that this thesis is not about "new" technologies but instead relatively new technologies, and only those technologies that have become accessible to people working outside of the science and technology fields. It is also important to note that my intention here is not to define "new technologies." In fact, given that our language is poorly suited to even describe many of our new

technologies or experiences of these technologies ² this would inevitably be an attempt doomed to failure. Instead, my hope is to pose some questions for beginning to think about these technologies.

Although I have admitted that this text is not really about *new* technologies I still think it is important to distinguish relatively new technologies, such as the personal computer and the Internet, from what Marvin refers to as "old technologies," such as telephones and telegraphs. In *When Old Technologies were New*, Marvin suggests that we - people living in the late twentieth century - often assume that our relation to technology is unique. She explains:

New technologies is a historically relative term. We are not the first generation to wonder at the rapid and extraordinary shifts in the dimension of the world and the human relationships it contains as a result of new forms of communication, or to be surprised by the changes those shifts occasion in the regular pattern of our lives. ³

Distinguishing between old and new technologies situates technologies as historically contingent. Moreover, Marvin's work suggests that by recognizing technologies as socially and historically contingent, it becomes possible to develop a more complex understanding of how past and current trends in electric and electronic communications work to uphold social stratifications and simultaneously are used to contest these structures. For example,

² For discussions concerning the limits of language in describing our relationship to new technologies see Donna Haraway (1991), Ursula Franklin (1990), Avital Ronell (1989), and Allucquere Rosanne Stone (1995).

³ Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) p.3.

she explains that in the late nineteenth century electricity was viewed as a “transformative agent of social possibility” and that electricians believed “Through their power over it, it would be a creator of social miracles.”⁴ However, they also feared the potential of “this natural force’s getting out of control, particularly their control.”⁵ In other words, they feared the potential for this technological development to be used in ways and for means it was not originally intended. Marvin’s study illustrates how the introduction of electricity did much more than allow people to read books easily at night or communicate over long distances. Her study reveals how this technological development created a new social hierarchy based on who controlled the technology, developed the technology, and had access to the technology and thus, forces us to reflect on how technologies continue to be disproportionately distributed and controlled.

In *The Real World of Technology*, Franklin emphasizes the need to understand technologies as both historically and socially contingent, and thus, emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between “holistic” and “prescriptive” technologies. She argues that holistic technologies can be understood as those technologies which “leave the doer in total control of the process”⁶ while with prescriptive technologies “Each step is carried out by a separate worker, or group

⁴ Ibid., p.63.

⁵ Ibid., p.64.

⁶ Ursula Franklin, *The Real World of Technology* (Toronto: Anansi, 1989) p.19.

of workers, who need to be familiar only with the skills of performing that one step.”⁷ In short, holistic technologies enable the people using technologies to also make decisions about how and when to use any given technology. On the other hand, prescriptive technologies work to limit such decision making. In fact, Franklin argues that with prescriptive technologies the less capable workers are of making decisions about when and how to use the technologies the more efficiently these technologies tend to work. Prescriptive technologies - and she argues that “Today’s real world of technology is characterized by the dominance of prescriptive technologies”⁸ - are largely dependent on a “culture of compliance.”⁹

Franklin’s discussion of holistic and prescriptive technologies provides a framework for identifying how technologies can both promote and limit reciprocity and justice. What I think is most important about her discussion is that it recognizes that even within prescriptive technologies the possibility still exists for technologies to be used in holistic ways or ways which “promote justice” and “restore reciprocity.” Franklin discusses technology not as a “force” that shapes our lives but as a complex set of relations in which power is both used and contested and where we are social actors with the agency to change how and why new technologies are developed and

⁷ Ibid. , p.20.

⁸ Ibid., p.24

⁹ Ibid., p.25.

for what means.

However, Franklin's division of technologies into only two categories still seems to set up a familiar binary relation between supposedly "good" and "bad" technologies and appears to leave little room to consider the exceptions and contradictions. Druckrey suggests that "the concept of a singular - one even might say modernist - ideological structure no longer serves to rationalize cultural change..."¹⁰ He argues "What is emerging is a discourse of ideologies forming within a distributed set of technologies."¹¹ In other words, "Rather than one technology, many..."¹² Thus, I would argue that it may be more useful to think about the *potential* for technologies to be used in ways which may or may not limit and/or promote reciprocity and justice rather than thinking about technologies as holistic or prescriptive by nature.

Like Druckrey, Green argues that the notion of one technology as opposed to many technologies as well as the dichotomy of "good" versus "bad" technologies are "best related to aspects of our life which might be called 'modern' (with a specific usage of that word) and industrial."¹³ Instead, Green suggests that "Postmodernism...

¹⁰ Timothy Druckrey, introduction, *Culture on the Brink: Ideologies of Technology*, eds. Gretchen Bender and Timothy Druckrey (Seattle: Bay Press, 1994) p.1.

¹¹ Ibid., p.1.

¹² Ibid., p.1.

¹³ Lelia Green, "Missing the post (modern): cores, peripheries and globalisation," *Framing Technology: Society, choice and change*, eds. Lelia Green and Roger Guinery (St. Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1994) p.161.

offers a valuable [perspective] for understanding the complex nature of the information society”¹⁴ and “a more appropriate starting point for investigating globally networked societies...”¹⁵ She explains:

Postmodern analysis lacks the political up-frontness of tortured core/periphery commentaries, yet the politics behind postmodern theories remain oppositional to the interests of those elites which benefit financially from the promotion of consumption.... Fragmentation and commodification are appropriate conceptual frameworks for examining the technological realities of mobile phones, global networks, transnational capitalism, and international markets. Fragments and surfaces in many respects characterize the technologies, and the lives, of people today.¹⁶

Thus, postmodern theories appear to be more appropriate because they enable us to understand technologies as not only socially and historically contingent but as potentially contradictory and plural.

Another reason I would argue that postmodern theories of technology may be useful for understanding the impact of technologies on people’s lives is because these theories tend to take “trash” seriously. Druckrey suggests “Our technologies and our fictions are converging.”¹⁷ Haraway suggests that the cyborg - “a matter of fiction and lived experience”¹⁸ - is changing how women’s experiences are perceived in the late twentieth century. Stone

¹⁴ Ibid., p.172.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.173.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.166.

¹⁷ Druckrey., p.2.

¹⁸ Donna Haraway, “A cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991) . p.149.

writes about “the adventure that is our future” where “we inexorably become creatures that we cannot even now imagine.”¹⁹ These postmodern writers stress the way in which popular fictions and the public imagination are important benchmarks in understanding both our present and future relationships to new technologies as well as the significance of today’s fictions shaping the world of the future.

The importance of fiction and imagination in understanding technologies is evident in Marvin’s study on the emergence of electrical technologies in the late nineteenth century. Marvin examines not only how people attempted to use and claim control over the “new” technologies but how people imagined the future world in light of these technological developments. Marvin explains that the stories that constitute evidence in her study describe real events, events that were treated as “real” and “unselfconsciously exaggerated media fantasies.”²⁰ For example, she recounts the story of a woman who feared she could contract scarlet fever by phoning someone in a household where a resident was infected with the disease.²¹ She also discusses a telephone company who dreamed of providing “music on tap at certain times every day,

¹⁹ Allucquere Rosanne Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995) p.183.

²⁰ Marvin, p.7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.81.

especially at meal times.”²² Marvin explains that she chose to include these fantasies in her study “...since fantasies and dreams are important human products that define limits for imagination. Fantasies help us determine what ‘consciousness’ was in a particular age, what thoughts were possible, and what thoughts could not be entertained yet or anymore.”²³ Marvin’s use of both “real” and imagined uses, fears, and possibilities of “new” technology recognizes that their emergence is not only capable of changing how we do things but how we perceive the world around us.

This is also evident when we consider our own cultural trash. Take for example, the following excerpt from a letter to Ann Landers:

DEAR ANN: Please warn your readers that there is an insidious monster about to pounce on the American people. It will destroy more marriages and lives than anything the world has ever known...Let this be a warning to all married couples who intend to buy a computer with a modem. OUT MANEUVERED IN ARIZONA.²⁴

Just as people feared the potential of early electric communications technologies, such as telephones, to radically unsettle the structure of the nuclear family²⁵ a new group of so-called “neo-Luddites” have started to articulate their fears of electronic communications. The man who wrote the above letter is reacting to the fact that his wife of seventeen years recently left him for another man she met on-line.

²² Ibid., p.80.

²³ Ibid., pp.7-8.

²⁴ Ann Landers, *Vancouver Sun*, November 14, 1995.

²⁵ See Marvin’s study, “When Old Technologies were New”.

However, what is significant about the above excerpt is the fact that trash of this kind tells us something about the fears and fantasies associated with new technologies, about who seems to have access to these technologies, and how they are being used. It is important to note that this account need not only be read as a warning about the dangers of computer modem. We can also speculate about the sort of account OUT MANEUVRED's ex-wife may construct - perhaps, a story emphasizing the liberating aspects of computer modems? Thus, this account may paradoxically reveal the seemingly destructive and/or liberating effects of new technologies in people's lives.

I have suggested here that in order to begin understanding technologies it may be useful to situate them as historically and socially contingent; to understand their potential to simultaneously limit and/or promote reciprocity and justice; and to think about the possibility for technologies to exist in multiple and contradictory ways. In short, this means abandoning those accounts or critiques of technology which focus on how technologies are either "good" or "bad" in nature for accounts which emphasize the significance of technologies in a larger social, historical, and cultural context. I have also attempted to illustrate how trash - popular fictions and the public imagination - can provide us with a framework for beginning to understand the significance of new technologies. However, as

Haraway warns, we can only examine technologies from within “the belly of the monster.”²⁶ In other words, regardless of the framework we use to look at new technologies our discussions are always influenced by the very technologies we are attempting to analyse and critique. Perhaps, this is why Franklin emphasizes the need to examine technologies “in limited settings where one puts technology in context.”²⁷ Similarly, Woodward warns:

...it is preferable to remain as concrete as possible when we think about technology, referring to particular technologies in specific contexts (solar energy for a home in a suburban setting, for instance, or laser brain surgery for a child in a high-tech medical complex) rather than to Technology as a monolithic demonic or liberating historical force...²⁸

As previously mentioned, in the remaining sections of this chapter I will examine the concepts of identity(s), community, and cultural production in relation to new technologies and postmodern theorizing. However, once again, I warn the reader of this text to remain cautious, even suspicious of those moments when - out of necessity - “technology” is still presented as a “monolithic, demonic or liberating historical force.”

²⁶ Haraway, p.4.

²⁷ Franklin, p.15.

²⁸ Kathleen Woodward, “From Virtual Cyborgs to Biological Time Bombs: Technocriticism and the Material Body,” *Culture on the Brink: Ideologies of Technology*, p.49.

Cyborg Identities

Who are those people walking around with artificial parts (e.g. heart, knee, hearing aid) under their skin? Who are those seemingly disembodied travellers found on-line? Are these on-line encounters meetings with people, machines, or a combination of people and machines - cyborgs? What does it mean to talk about identity(s) in the late twentieth century? Can we still talk about identity(s) or can we only talk about multiple subjectivities? What does it mean to talk about gender and race in the new social spaces created by chat lines? And, what do we do with the organic bodies (and not entirely organic bodies) that continue to desire food, affection, drugs and other bodily cravings? As Morse has suggested, "Travellers on the virtual highways of an information society have, in fact, at least one body too many - the one now largely sedentary carbon-based body at the control console that suffers corpulency, illness, old age, and ultimately death." ²⁹

Haraway suggests that the late twentieth century is populated by cyborgs. She describes these cyborgs as a "matter of fiction and lived experience" ³⁰ - border creatures who exist in the boundaries not only of fiction and lived experience but in the boundaries of human and animal, organism and machine. Haraway tells her readers that

²⁹ Margaret Morse, "What Do Cyborgs Eat? Oral Logic in an Information Society," *Culture on the Brink: Ideologies of Technology*, p.157.

³⁰ Haraway, p.149.

cyborgs are “a hybrid of machine and organism”³¹ who “populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted.”³² We also learn that these border creatures³³ have “no origin stories”³⁴ and that “they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism”³⁵ - in other words, these cyborgs are “trash.” The cyborg identity appears to be a fluid and partial identity which exists in a “post-gender world.”³⁶

However, Haraway’s cyborgs are wrought with contradictions. They are at once both post-gendered but seemingly female,³⁷ familiar but futuristic, and without origin stories but conceived through the ironic origin stories, such as those found in contemporary science fiction. Haraway has also been critiqued for claiming that in the late twentieth century “we are all cyborgs” but at the same time, suggesting that some people, such as Asian women working in the microelectronic industry, may be “truer” cyborgs. Moreover, in a response to the manifesto, Scott writes, “The essay centrally espouses post-modernism and the dissolution of oppositions and

³¹ Ibid., p.150.

³² Ibid., p.149.

³³ In this case “border” refers not to the line separating two things or places but to a boundary territory or space. Thus, Haraway’s “border creatures” can be understood as occupying a border world of sorts. For a more detailed discussion of the notions of “borders” see Celia Haig-Brown, “Choosing Border Work,” *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 19.1 (1992).

³⁴ Haraway., p.150.

³⁵ Ibid, p.151.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 150.

³⁷ For example, in an interview with Constance Penley and Andrew Ross in *Technoculture* (1991) Haraway explains that the cyborg “is a polychromatic girl...the cyborg is a bad girl, she is really not a boy” but also adds that “She is a girl who’s trying not to become Woman...” (p.20).

boundaries, on the one hand, but, on the other, retains traces of the philosophical and political languages of socialism. In the usages of the essay, what is socialist-feminist? What are “progressive” politics? Why aren’t those terms made more problematic?”³⁸

Perhaps it is because cyborgs are border creatures that they *must* embody these contradictions - do border creatures have any choice but to live with contradictions? Haraway claims that “Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves.”³⁹ Doane similarly concludes that Haraway’s myth of cyborgs “works toward the resolution of a contradiction even if that contradiction is not resolvable at the level of the real.”⁴⁰ I am also not convinced that cyborg imagery can “suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms” that Western thought has relied on to understand ourselves and our machines. On the other hand, as will become evident throughout this thesis, in my attempt to understand how new technologies are linked to bodies, selves, and social spaces I *have* repeatedly come back to Haraway’s cyborg imagery - her notion of boundary stories/creatures - as a starting point for my analysis. I would argue that there are some “real” contradictions in Haraway’s work that can not be easily theorized away or resolved. However, I also think it is important to

³⁸ Joan W. Scott, “Commentary: Cyborgian Socialists?” *Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Weed (New York: Routledge, 1989) p.216.

³⁹ Haraway, p.181.

⁴⁰ Mary Ann Doane, “Commentary: Cyborgs, Origins, and Subjectivity,” *Coming to Terms*, p.214.

note that the contradictions in Haraway's work are not unfamiliar - they are the sorts of contradictions which seem to haunt feminist writing and theory which seeks to find new ways of conceptualizing our bodies, selves, and technologies. As I discuss Stone, Ronell, Mann, Butler, Fuchs, and Cherniavsky's work I will revisit many of the contradictions that emerge in Haraway's work. As a result, I would argue that Haraway's cyborg imagery - with all its contradictions and tensions - continues to offer an important point of departure for feminist discussions of identity(s) and technologies in the late twentieth century. Cyborg imagery illustrates the profound ways in which new technologies work to destabilize identity(s) by blurring the boundaries between human and animal, organism and machine, male and female, fiction and lived experience and of course, all the unidentifiable and unnamed things and experiences which exist in between these binaries. At the same time, the contradictions apparent in "The Cyborg Manifesto" can help us recognize the dangers and difficulties associated with the postmodern feminist project Haraway has proposed.

...the ramifications of complex social systems in the alter space of communications technologies suggest a war between simplification and multiplicity....an explosion of actors and actants that includes the almost-living, the not-living, and the never-living, arising in the boundaries between technology, society, and "nature," in the architectures of multiple embodiments and multiple selves. 41

41 Stone, 1995, p.44.

Like Haraway, Stone suggests that in the late twentieth century we are all boundary creatures. However, Stone's work, which is largely influenced by Haraway's writing, appears to push the notion of cyborgs beyond the safety of familiar political ideologies, writing conventions, and so on. In *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*, Stone does what Haraway suggests is happening - she blurs the boundaries between fiction and lived experience, female and male, machine and organism, wakefulness and sleep, and life and death. Her text moves from theory to "actual" accounts of "real" events to fiction with few cues as to when the shifts are occurring. As a reader, one appears to have no choice but to stop worrying about where the "actual" accounts, speculation and fiction are separated and to move through these boundaries. Moreover, in Stone's writing it is often difficult to discern what or who you are actually reading about. However, when you consider that the author herself wonders "Who am I studying? A group of people? Their machines? A group of people and or in their machines? Or something else?"⁴² this is not altogether surprising.

Stone explains that the "stories" told in her essays are primarily concerned with the "relationships between bodies and personae/selves/subjects, and the multiplicities of connections between them."⁴³ Using a familiar analogy, Stone conflates the

⁴² Stone, "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up? Boundary Stories about Virtual Cultures," *Cyberspace: First Steps*, ed. Michael Benedikt (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991) p.81.

⁴³ Stone, 1995, p.86.

condition of cyborgs to that of people living with MPD (multiple personality disorder). She claims, "Their [MPDs] accustomed mode of existence, sharing a single body with several quasi-independent personalities, is emblematic of a fair percentage of everyday life in the world of virtual systems."⁴⁴ For example, she explains:

On the nets, where warranting, or grounding, a persona in a physical body, is meaningless, men routinely use female personae whenever they choose, and vice versa...A woman who has appropriated a male conversational style may be simply assumed to be male at the place and time, so that her/his on-line persona takes on a kind of quasi life of its own, separate from the person's embodied life in the "real" world.⁴⁵

Stone argues that "people" engaging with new technologies - particularly, those playing with/in MUDs,⁴⁶ MOOs,⁴⁷ and VR - experience multiple identities or personae or selves but like the MPD ultimately have only one physical body.

It is partly through her references to MPD that Stone links her writing to the "schizoanalytical" texts of Heidegger, Lacan, Deleuze, and Ronell. As previously mentioned, Stone argues that the condition of MPDs is "emblematic of fair percentage of everyday life in virtual systems." Similarly, Ronell writes:

The schizophrenic gives us exemplary access to the fundamental shifts in affectivity and corporeal organization

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.63.

⁴⁵ Stone, 1991, p.84.

⁴⁶ "MUD" stands for "multi-user dungeon" or more recently, "multi-user domain" and refers to the interactive games/spaces - based on the fantasy role playing game of Dungeons and Dragons - that can be accessed through the Internet (e.g. TrekMUSE and Lambda MOO).

⁴⁷ "MOO" also used to refer to multi-user dungeons or domains - MOO as well as MUSE or MUSH simply refer to the specific software used to create the MUD.

produced and commanded by technology, in part because the schizophrenic inhabits these other territorialities, "more artificial still and more lunar than that of Oedipus." ⁴⁸

Her work seems to suggest that the notion of identity is fractured by technologies in ways similar to that of schizophrenia. "Schizophrenia never had an easy access code. It (in the plural) could not be presented in its singularity - though that, in a sense, is what it's about." ⁴⁹ As Ronell points out, early psychologists, such as Laing, attempted to use the new technologies of the time (e.g. the telephone) to understand schizophrenia. However, in Ronell's work the inverse occurs. Here, schizophrenia becomes a model or framework - an attempt to find such a model or framework - for making sense of identity(s) which have no easy access codes. She writes: "...schizophrenia, like technology, needs to reinvent the very possibility of the autobiography." ⁵⁰ In other words, within schizophrenia, as in technology, there is a constant question as to whether or not the notion of "autobiography" - a concept dependent on a singular, fixed notion of identity and a linear understanding of time - can even exist. Thus, when Ronell asks, "What is the childhood of a schizophrenic answering machine like?" ⁵¹ she appears to be asking if the schizo-human/machine - the cyborg - can possibly have an autobiography or an origin and history.

⁴⁸ Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1989) p. 110.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

All your schizo-paranoiac fantasies.
Free rein. ⁵²

It is worth questioning why theorists continue to conflate the current state of language and identity, and in Stone and Ronell's case - technology and identity, with MPD or schizophrenia. In "Bodies without Organs: Schizoanalysis and Deconstruction," Doel suggests that the "deconstruction and schizoanalysis de-limit flows, short-circuit striations and scramble codes through a motionless voyaging which carries us from identity to multiplicity, from position to potential, from Being to Becoming, from arborescence to rhizomes, from constants to variables, from fragments to fractals, from OwBs to BwOs and from subjectification to schizophrenia." ⁵³ Thus, schizoanalytic writing seeks to understand who or what comes after the death of the subject. And, in Stone and Ronell's case also to ask what or who comes after the emergence of new communication technologies. Perhaps, this schizoanalytic writing is merely the result of a language poorly suited to describe the postmodern condition and the conditions created by electronic communications. On the other hand, this conflation between schizophrenia and identity(s) within deconstructive, poststructuralist, and technological discourses may also be viewed as a move to draw attention to the terroristic aspects

⁵² Advertisement for "Into the Void" - a PC CD-ROM game (*Scenarios: Special WIRED Edition*, 1995).

⁵³ Marcus Doel, "Bodies without Organs: Schizoanalysis and Deconstruction," *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation*, eds. Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (New York: Routledge, 1995) pp.232-233.

of life without structure/without conclusions/without fixed and singular subjects. ⁵⁴

You're born naked and everything you put on after that is drag.

- RuPaul, MAC Covergirl ⁵⁵

I now want to look specifically at the "problem" of gendered identities in order to examine how postmodern theorizing and new technologies both work to displace gendered identities. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler asserts that:

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood at the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constituted the illusion of an abiding gendered self. ⁵⁶

In arguing that gender is an identity constituted by "stylized repetition of acts" Butler puts forth the idea of gender as performance. She explains:

...gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative - that is, constituting the identity it is proposed to be. ⁵⁷

⁵⁴ It is important to recognize the degree to which these theoretical references to schizophrenia are inappropriate insofar as they tend to falsely romanticize the condition and may contribute to the lack of understanding people have about the "actual" condition.

⁵⁵ Catherine Chermayeff, Jonathan David, et al. *Drag Diaries* (_____: Chronicle Books, 1995) p. ____.

⁵⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) p.140.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.24-25.

In order to illustrate how “gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies....”⁵⁸ Butler draws attention to the “cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities.”⁵⁹ She argues that these “cultural practices” work to parody gender revealing “the imitative structure of gender itself.”⁶⁰ Butler further argues that the “replication of heterosexual constructs in on-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy.”⁶¹ Thus, for Butler, gender is performative or something learned through repetitive stylized acts and supported by what she calls a “heterosexual matrix” (or what Wittig refers to as a “heterosexual contract” and what Rich discusses as “compulsory heterosexuality”).⁶²

My question, however, is in what ways and to what degree are these “stylized repetitive acts” related to and effected by technologies? How do technologies converge with, slow down, accelerate, hide, and expose the repetitive acts which constitute these identities? Or how are these repetitive stylized acts technologies in and of themselves? Although Butler does not connect

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.136.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.137.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.137.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.31.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.151.

her notion of gender to Foucault's notion of "technologies of self" a similar connection is made by de Lauretis in "Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction." She suggests that gender is "the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, as well as institutional discourse, epistemologies, and critical practices."⁶³ However, Woodward cautions, "it is important to recognize when the term 'technology' is being used primarily metaphorically to refer to something other than itself (as when, for example, Foucault uses 'technology' to refer to the *discursive workings* of a particular cultural formation)."⁶⁴ For this reason, I have decided to examine the more tangible ways in which gender's performativity is effected by medical and communication technologies.

In "'Death Is Irrelevant': Cyborgs, Reproduction, and the Future of Male Hysteria," Fuchs suggests, "If, as Butler persuasively argues 'gender attributes are not expressive but performative,' cyborgs offer imaginative sites for more radical performativity: nothing in a cyborg body is essential."⁶⁵ Computer chat lines appear to be one place where the "radical performativity" of cyborgs becomes evident. As discussed in Stone's work, on computer networks the stylized repetitive acts which constitute gender, such as particular patterns of

⁶³ Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) p.2.

⁶⁴ Woodward, p.49.

⁶⁵ Cynthia J. Fuchs, "'Death is Irrelevant': Cyborgs, Reproduction, and the Future of Male Hysteria," *Genders* Number 18 (Winter 1993) p.115.

speaking or writing, remain “relatively stable, but who uses which of the two socially recognized modes has become more plastic.”⁶⁶ For example, in the mid 1980s in France - after failed attempts to use new interactive computer technologies to deliver daily newspapers online - people started exploring other uses for this new technology. Rheingold explains, “sex-chat services quickly became the most popular and most controversial of these new, unexpected uses...”⁶⁷ Apparently, at their peak the chat lines represented about 4 million hours a month but have since dropped to about 1.5 million hours a month. What is interesting about this case is the fact that executives at France Telecom (the company overseeing the networks) have blamed “false persons” on the decreased use of these networks. The “false persons” they are referring to are “the animateurs that the sex-chat services hired to keep conversations going. Almost all of the animateurs are young men whose job is to pretend they are young women.”⁶⁸ Sometimes these young men create and sustain up to five female personas at once.

I think the above “story” is significant for several reasons. On one hand, it seems to support the suspicion that these new technologies *do* provide increased opportunities for the “cultural practices” of drag and crossdressing to take place and

⁶⁶ Stone, 1991, p.84.

⁶⁷ Howard Rheingold, *Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electric Frontier* (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1993) p. 230.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

subsequently, work to reveal gender's performative nature. Moreover, in this case, it appears as if the ability of this new social space to allow for increased "gender fucking" actually worked to promote the technology. The fact that these young men were hired to be "women" also suggests that the people doing the recruiting and hiring for these positions had - on some level - assumed that gender *is* performative. On the other hand, the fact that the executives at France Telecom blamed the "false persons" on the decline in use of the chat lines gives one reason to question whether these gendered performances are as easily replicated as one might assume. Regardless of what conclusions one may reach, this account reads as an ironic origin story, in Haraway's sense, because in this case the "false persons" *were* among the first "women" to roam the new social space created by the chat lines. The question remains, however, as to who or what (if anything) constitutes an "original" or "authentic" "woman" in this particular social space. Perhaps, the only thing this account can affirm or confirm is Fuchs' speculation that cyborgs do offer "imaginative sites for more radical performativity."

If identity is performative, as Butler suggests, Fuchs also argues that "The performativity of cyborgs represents a future that collapses medical, technological, and political spheres of action."⁶⁹ In other words, the performativity of cyborgs - the cyborg's ability to 'transgress boundaries' - blurs the distinctions between medical,

⁶⁹ Fuchs, p.115.

technological and political realms. Undoubtedly, this blurring of boundaries will lead to a more explicit understanding of how the medical and technological spheres are caught up in political discourses and practices (e.g. the degree to which medical technologies may be developed, used, and distributed to promote or limit particular political agendas). Perhaps the most drastic examples of the way in which this collapse of medical, technological, and political spheres appears to be taking place can be found in the areas of new reproductive technologies and gender reassignment technologies.

Haraway argues that "Ideologies of sexual reproduction can no longer reasonably call on notions of sex and sex role as organic aspects in natural objects like organisms and families."⁷⁰ Subsequently, Fuchs argues that "...the human-historical narrative must betray its reproductive fiction. By challenging the heterosexual matrix with a body that is self-reproducing but not reproductive, the cyborg also threatens what Doane calls the 'guarantee of history.'"⁷¹ In *Micro-Politics*, Mann suggests that "Our cyborgian dependency upon technology as a normal condition for reproductive decisions has serious implications for how we think about the procreative process."⁷² Mann suggests that the maternal subject, which Butler and other

⁷⁰ Haraway, p.162.

⁷¹ Fuchs, p.115.

⁷² Patricia S. Mann, *Micro-Politics: Agency in a Postfeminist Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) p.111.

poststructuralists reject, is actually made increasingly problematic in light of new reproductive technologies. Mann writes:

It will no longer make sense to think about children in terms of their natural origins. A pregnant mother, for example, will no longer be seen as the natural origin of a child. Even if a particular child is the product of a pregnant mother, she or he will be the social offspring of a decision by this woman, and perhaps others, to produce a child in this fashion. ⁷³

For example, some births are determined almost entirely by technology: the success of artificial insemination techniques, prenatal testing, careful reduction of "bad" drugs and injection of "good" drugs and so on.

New reproductive technologies seriously challenge the biological essentialism which characterizes a great deal of feminist theory and in this way, challenges essentialized notions of "motherhood" and essentialized notions of "woman" as normative categories as well. As a result, Mann argues, like Haraway, that it may be more useful to talk about replication than reproduction because "replication...implies mechanical multiples of an initial prototype." ⁷⁴ This shift from discussing reproduction to replication is significant insofar that it reveals how technology is displacing biological motherhood as the only or primary means of reproduction. However, in contrast to Mann's argument, there are other theorists who claim that new reproductive technologies merely reaffirm the

⁷³ Mann, p.112.

⁷⁴ Mann, p.111.

maternal subject from

a slightly different angle. Cherniavsky, for example, suggests that:

A feminist analysis of this reproductive technology...needs to acknowledge that ectogenesis was developed specially to enhance the reproductive capacity of white, middle-class women; furthermore, whereas ectogenesis displaces reproduction from these women's bodies, the discourse of ectogenesis (conversely) serves to essentialize their relation to their culturally constructed reproductive function - to motherhood. ⁷⁵

In other words, new reproductive technologies may be understood as extending the possible ways of becoming mothers for *some* women but fail to unsettle the maternal subject and gendered identities.

A second way in which "The performativity of cyborgs" may be seen as collapsing "medical, technological, and political spheres of action" is in the area of gender reassignment. As Hausman suggests in *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology and the Idea of Gender*, the emergence of transsexualism in the twentieth century is "dependent on developments in endocrinology and plastic surgery as technological and discursive practices." ⁷⁶ The fact that Hausman chooses to discuss these medical technologies as both technological and discursive practices is significant. It clearly draws attention, once again, to the ways in which technologies are not only represented by practices or machines but by a complex set of rules and relations in

⁷⁵ Eva Cherniavsky, "(En)gendering cyberspace in *Neuromancer*: Postmodern Subjectivity and Virtual Motherhood," *Genders* Number 18 (Winter 1993) p.35.

⁷⁶ Bernice L. Hausman, *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) p. 2.

which they are developed and used. Hausman argues that medical technologies used in gender reassignments are intricately linked to the construction of sexological categories and more importantly, to the emergence of transsexual subjectivities. She writes, “developments in medical technology and practice were central to the establishment of the necessary conditions for the emergence of the sex change, which was understood as the most important indicator of transsexual subjectivity.”⁷⁷ And, further explains that “these technologies have affected the distinctions between sexological categories -transvestism, gender dysphoria, and transsexualism (as well as homosexuality) - and thus who can claim an identity under their signs.”⁷⁸ In this way, medical technologies *appear* to have resulted in a dramatic remapping of identity categories and subjectivities.

Drawing extensively on autobiographical accounts of gender reassignment, Hausman attempts to examine the contradictory ways in which transsexuals are both forced to “prove” their “real” or “authentic” gender and yet contest the very existence of “real” or “authentic” gender identity. She argues “The commonsense understanding of transsexualism as a ‘disorder of gender identity’ is a cover-up for the potentially more threatening idea that transsexuals

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

are subjects who choose to engineer themselves.”⁷⁹ For example, Bornstein has written, “I am a transsexual by choice, not by pathology.”⁸⁰ Thus, the need emerges for technological and feminist discourses that can account for “choice” where “biology as destiny” has been presumed. One may even argue that transgendered people are quintessentially cyborgian. After all, they are post-gendered (e.g. Bornstein identifies not as male or female/gay or straight but as something else - as if, in a “category” not quite yet named), they embody both human and machine (the “machine” in this case is represented by the medical interventions of hormone therapy and plastic surgery), and they rupture origin stories in drastic ways because for the transgendered person *biology cannot be destiny*. Stone suggests that this is particularly evident in the context of cyberspace:

In cyberspace the transgendered body is the natural body. The nets are spaces of transformation, identity factories in which bodies are meaning machines, and transgender - identity as performance, as play, as wrench in the smooth gears of the social apparatus of vision - is the ground state.⁸¹

It may be useful or interesting to consider how transgendered people live, like cyborgs, in the boundaries but I think it is important to remember that not all transgendered people may view their experiences in this way. As Stone points out, “...in physical space the

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.9.

⁸⁰ Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) p.118.

⁸¹ Stone, 1995, p.180.

transgendered body is the unnatural body.”⁸² She further notes that even in cyberspace, where the transgendered body appears to be natural, it is a mistake to believe a level playing field exists for all bodies/selves. Thus, while it may seem appropriate to privilege transgendered bodies/selves as somehow more “true” to the cyborg experience I think it is crucial to not overlook the lived experiences of discrimination that transgendered people continue to face in the physical and even virtual worlds.

In this section I have attempted to examine some of the ways in which new technologies affect or appear to affect notions of identity, particularly, gendered identities. Stone’s and Ronell’s writing expose the importance of situating the subject as multiple, as it were, schizophrenic or at least, without an “easy access code.” Butler’s theories on gender reveal the performative nature of gender - something that is perhaps, particularly important to consider when discussing gendered identities in the context of new communication technologies. However, the above discussion on reproductive technologies and gender reassignment technologies also reveals the contradictory ways in which new technologies may appear to destabilize notions of identity but still work to reinforce certain fixed notions of gender. Once again, my intention is not to draw conclusions about how the notions of identity and specifically, gendered identities, are altered by new technologies. However, I

⁸² Ibid., p.181.

would argue that any discussion of identity and technology must consider the possibility of identity existing in multiple, contradictory, and ironic ways. It is for this reason that Haraway's cyborg imagery, even with its contradictions, continues to offer a useful point of departure for discussions of identity, performativity, and technology.

Community

Haraway writes, "The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family..."⁸³ but she may also have written that cyborgs *cannot* dream of community on the model of the organic family. To dream of community based on the model of the organic family presupposes a fixed place of origin and, as already noted, cyborg origins are at the most, ironic ones. For cyborgs, the notion of community as stable - that one place/people from which one comes or to which one belongs - simply no longer works. Although Haraway tells us what sort of communities cyborgs do *not* dream of, this does not necessarily suggest that cyborgs have stopped dreaming of community altogether. Thus, my concern here is with the questions of whether or not cyborgs (and as Haraway suggests, this includes all people living in the late twentieth century) *can* continue to dream of community and *why* they may choose to do so.

It is important to note that I intend to discuss the way the

⁸³ Haraway, p. 151.

“notion” or “concept” or “idea(l)” of community has shifted and is shifting in relation to new technologies and postmodern theorizing. The difference between discussing “community” and the “notion” or “concept” or “idea(l)” of community is important to this discussion.

Drawing on Spivak, Godway and Finn note:

Like other words which seem to defeat themselves, community may have to be understood as a *catachresis* in the sense given to the term by Gayatri Spivak...Catachresis means that there is no literal referent for a particular word; that its definition comes apart, as it were, as soon as we begin to articulate it. ⁸⁴

In other words, community is not an identifiable “thing” as much as it is an idea(l) or desire. It is also important to note that for the purposes of this discussion I will focus primarily on communications technologies. This is not say that other types of technologies, such as transportation technologies, have not also affected perceptions of community.

In the previous section, I discussed how the notion of identity has been dramatically reconfigured due to the emergence of both new technologies and postmodernism. In this section I will build on the discussion of identity(s) presented in the previous section in order to ask, as it were, how and whether these fractured, multiple, border creatures live and dream of living together? I have decided to focus this discussion around three questions which I feel are crucial to any discussion of communities in relation to new technologies and/or

⁸⁴ Eleanor Godway and Geraldine Finn, eds. introduction, *Who Is this 'We'?: Absence of Community* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1995) pp.1-2.

postmodernism. *Can there be communities without bodies? Can there be communities without agendas, projects, or fusional desires, or can there be communities which recognize difference? And, can there be communities without centres?*

Can there be communities without bodies?

In "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?: Boundary Stories about Virtual Cultures," Stone argues that communication technologies force people to begin thinking about "presence in a different way" ⁸⁵ and thus, force them to reconfigure what might be meant by the notion of community. Stone describes "four epochs" in communication technologies which resulted in dramatic reconfigurations of community. She explains that in the first epoch occurred in the 1600s with the emergence of "literary technologies." Stone argues that in this epoch "texts became ways of creating, and later of controlling , new kinds of communities." ⁸⁶ For example, in this early stage of "virtual communities" the circulation of scientific texts enabled people to "witness" experiments without being physically present.

Similar arguments have been made by other theorists, such as Stock, who write about "textual communities." However, Stock

⁸⁵ Stone, 1991, p. 87.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 1991, p.86.

argues that these “textual communities” can be traced back to the beginning of the millennium when religious reformers used texts to “structure the internal behaviour of the groups’ members and to provide solidarity against the outside world.”⁸⁷ He further argues that “textual communities” were not dependent on wide-spread literacy. “What was essential to a textual community was not a written version of a text, although that was sometimes present, but an individual, who, having mastered it, then utilized it for reforming a group’s thought and action.”⁸⁸ However, both Stone and Stock emphasize the significance of texts in enabling people to “witness” events they were not present for and subsequently, to form communities based on shared experiences of a document or text as opposed to only on shared experiences of an event or place.

Stone suggests that the “second epoch” in virtual communities occurred at the turn of the century and is marked by the emergence of electronic communications, such as telephones, radio, and later television. Stone explains, for example, that “Because of radio and of the apparatus for the production of community that it implied and facilitated, it was now possible for millions of people to be ‘present’ in the same space ...”⁸⁹ As a result, in this period, people were forced to begin negotiating the separation of voices from bodies (a

⁸⁷ Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) p.90.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.90.

⁸⁹ Stone, 1991, p.87.

problematic which continues to trouble us in the present). And, like the textual communities of the first epoch, these new communication technologies resulted in new possibilities/experiences of community. For example, particular television programs (e.g. Star Trek) and movies (e.g. the Rocky Horror Picture Show) have led to the emergence of “communities.”

The “third epoch” Stone describes came with the introduction of information technologies, such as the on-line bulletin board services of the mid 1970s. Stone links these BBSs to other “virtual communities” explaining:

Cyberspace, without its high-tech glitz, is partially the idea of virtual community. The earliest cyberspaces may have been virtual communities, passage points for collections of common beliefs and practices that united people who were physically separated. Virtual communities sustain themselves by constantly circulating those practices. ⁹⁰

For example, “The idea of shareware” - software sold for little money or given away - “enunciated by the many programmers who wrote shareware programs , was that the computer was a passage point for circulating concepts of community...the important thing about shareware...was to nourish the community...” ⁹¹ In both “Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?” and in Stone’s more recent publication she describes particular BBSs as “communities.” For example, she

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.85.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.88.

discusses SIMMET as an “800-person virtual community.”⁹²

The fourth epoch in communication technologies, one that does not exist quite yet but is described in speculative fictions such as Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, is one focused on the possibilities of virtual realities. Stone argues that Gibson’s novel is significant because:

...it triggered a conceptual revolution among the scattered workers who had been doing virtual reality research for years: As task groups coalesced and dissolved, as the fortunes of campaigns and projects and laboratories rose and fell, the existence of Gibson’s novel and the technological and social imaginary that it articulated enabled the researchers in virtual realities - or, under the new dispensation, cyberspace - to recognize and organize themselves as a community.⁹³

Ironically, this fourth epoch of virtual communities is marked, like the first epoch she describes, by a “textual community.”

Stone’s work maintains the notion of community but suggests that it has shifted and continues to shift in relation to new communication technologies. And, according to Stone, the most significant change in the way community is understood is the shift from thinking about communities as a collection of “bodies” who are physically present to thinking about communities without “bodies.” However, this is not to suggest that these communities are entirely disembodied. She writes:

...much of the work of cyberspace researchers, reinforced and perhaps created by the soaring imagery of William Gibson’s novels, assumes that the human body is “meat” - obsolete, as soon as consciousness itself can be uploaded into the

⁹² Ibid., p. 92.

⁹³ Ibid., pp.98-99.

networks...Cyberspace developers foresee a time when they will be able to forget about the body. But it is important to remember that virtual community originates in, and must return to, the physical. No refigured virtual body, no matter how beautiful, will slow the death of a cyberpunk with AIDS. Even in the age of the technosocial subject, life is lived through bodies.

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In other words, even the activities of virtual communities (e.g. on-line conferencing) are ultimately grounded in bodies - bodies that do occasionally have to leave the computer terminal. For example, they are the bodies which experience tendonitis from over-typing. And, occasionally, these are the bodies "forced" to feel the physical effects their virtual counter-parts can not.

In Dibbell's essay, "A Rape in Cyberspace," she describes what was known on the net as the "Bungle Affair" - a "virtual rape" which took place in the LambdaMOO. Although there were no real "bodies" present, the incident sparked a great deal of debate in the MOO and eventually across the net as to whether or not a "rape" had occurred, how to address sexual harassment and sexual assault in the context of the MOO, and what to do with the assailant. In the case of the "Bungle Affair" the assailant was "toaded" - a sort of communal cyber-ousting ritual - from the MOO. However, as Dibbell notes, "What, some wondered, was the real-life legal status of the offence? Could Bungle's university administrators punish him for sexual harassment? Could he be prosecuted under California state laws against obscene

94 Ibid., p.113.

phone calls?" ⁹⁵ Dibbell also notes that the "real" woman who sat at her computer terminal while her MOO persona was experiencing the "rape" later confided that she cried as she typed her response to the incident - "a real-life fact that should suffice to prove that the words' emotional content was no mere playacting." ⁹⁶ Dibbell argues that the "Bungle Affair" is significant insofar that it "asks us to behold the new bodies awaiting us in virtual space undazzled by their phantom powers, and to get to the crucial work of sorting out the socially meaningful differences between those bodies and our physical ones."

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We may conclude that, at least, at this point in time, communities - even "virtual communities" - cannot exist without bodies. At the same time, Stone and Biddell's discussion suggests that perhaps what is most appealing and intriguing about these so-called "virtual communities" is the fact that they create the illusion of communities without bodies and thus, the illusion of communities without hunger and disease, without sexual harassment and rape, and ultimately, without death.

Can there be communities without agendas, projects, or fusional desires or can there be communities that recognize difference?

There's a whole history of communities: religious communities,

⁹⁵ Julian Dibbell, "A Rape in Cyberspace," *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994) p. 249.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 242.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 238.

patriotic communities, fascist communities. As different as they are from one another, they all “guarantee” their bonding by some sort of communion or promise of communion, or a project, or a goal. Sometimes “community” is established in reaction to a crisis: but once the crisis is resolved, the community disbands. I think this is a critical question: could there be “community” without an agenda, a project, a fusional desire. ⁹⁸

Ronell’s question as to whether or not there can be communities without “an agenda, a project, a fusional desire” is, in my opinion, a crucial question to ask here precisely because many accounts of “cyberspace” are based on the assumption that this is possible. In fact, even Ronell suggests that “...in terms of ‘community’...technology is on our side, because it charts new spatialities.” ⁹⁹ In this way, Ronell, as pessimistic as she is about the possibility for communities to exist outside of “an agenda, a project, a fusional desire”, seems to suggest that new communication technologies *may* hold the potential for this to occur.

However, before I examine specific accounts of “communities” in “cyberspace” I want to compare several postmodernist views on the notions of community, difference, and coalition politics. As previously mentioned, community has no “literal referent” but it does imply and connote a confusing mix of theories, examples, definitions and so on. I argue that most often the notion of community is understood as “something” we belong to based on our identity(s),

⁹⁸ Andrea Juno, interview with Avital Ronell, *RE/SEARCH - Angry Women*, p. 145.

⁹⁹ Ronell, *Angry Women*, p.143.

spatiality, or shared political or religious convictions. As Haber explains, "Community identification is motivated by the desire to get clear on one or some of my identities (and recognizing myself in the experience of another may help me to do this) or to get clear on the large social context in which that identity was formed (and community identification may also help me to do this)." ¹⁰⁰ However, as Malinowitz writes, "The lesbian and gay community, along with the women's community, communities of color, and other communities of affinity is torn between those who posit a sense of group coherence based on one shared characteristic and those who deconstruct the premise of 'communities' predicated on identification alone are illusory, and thus fragile and doomed to implosion." ¹⁰¹ Malinowitz suggests that "we happen to be living in a time and place where the very notion of community based on shared identity is being heavily interrogated." ¹⁰²

This "interrogation" of the notion of "community" is largely rooted in deconstructive, poststructuralist, and postmodernist attempts to recognize difference. For example, Young has argued that the ideal of community:

...presumes subjects that understand one another as they understand themselves. It thus denies difference between subjects. The desire for community relies on the same desire

¹⁰⁰ Honi Fern Haber, *Beyond Postmodern Politics: Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault* (New York: Routledge, 1994) p.127.

¹⁰¹ Harriet Malinowitz, *Textual Orientations: Lesbian and Gay Students and the Making of Discourse Communities* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1995) p.13.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.13.

for social wholeness and identification that underlies racism and ethnic chauvinisms on the one hand, and political sectarianism on the other... 103

Young suggests that the notion of community is particularly incompatible with the conditions that exist in "mass urban society." For example, she notes that community theorists have a tendency to privilege "face-to-face" interaction and argue that this interaction is essential to the realization of the ideal of community. Young discusses this desire for "face-to-face" interaction as a "metaphysical illusion" explaining that "The normative privileging of face-to-face relations in the ideal of community seeks to suppress difference in the sense of the time and space distancing of social process, which material media facilitate and enlarge." 104 As already noted, new communication and media technologies do appear to displace "face-to-face relations" significantly. Young further suggests that "Deconstruction...shows that a desire for unity of wholeness in discourse generates borders, dichotomies, and exclusions" 105 and thus, the notion of community, as rooted in the desire for unity, is incompatible with moves that recognize difference.

However, Haber argues that Young's analysis of the notion of community "accepts the totalizing effects of the law of difference." 106

103 Iris Marion Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990) p.302.

104 *Ibid.*, p.314.

105 *Ibid.*, p.301.

106 Haber, p.126.

She argues that Young's critique of community:

...assumes that members of a community see themselves as a non-conflicted, monadic unit, and that identification with others in the community can work only by erasing any differences between us. On Young's model, identification thus amounts to the demand "Be like me or disappear!"...But there is no reason to believe that community understanding or the recognition of similarity does foreclose on the recognition of genuine difference. So long as I recognize the many narratives I am I can also recognize that any story about another, or about myself, is necessarily incomplete. ¹⁰⁷

Haber describes the "law of difference" as a "framework for evaluating politics" which asserts the "inescapability of difference and the need for its recognition." ¹⁰⁸ However, she fears that the "law of difference" which works to recognize difference also has a totalizing agenda. While arguing that the "radical pluralism" articulated by poststructuralist and postmodernist theories is "essential to oppositional politics" ¹⁰⁹ she asserts that the assumption that all structure (including that of community) is necessarily "unjust and terroristic" ¹¹⁰ is problematic. She suggests that "when universalized, the law of difference can also be used to preclude the possibility of politics - oppositional or otherwise....We must be wary of difference becoming the grand narrative of the postmodern age." ¹¹¹ Thus, within Haber, we find some possibility

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp.126-127.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.113-114.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.114.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 117.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.123.

that the recognition of difference is not entirely in opposition to the possibility of community as well as political alliances or coalition politics. However, both Young and Habermas, even through their different perspectives, do reveal the presence of “an agenda, a project, or a fusional desire” in any understanding of community.

Accounts of “cyberspace” or “virtual communities” have a tendency to characterize these “spaces” as inherently liberatory and as distinctly postmodern or, at least, reflective of the postmodern condition. For the purposes of this discussion, I will examine two conflicting accounts of “cyberspace.” First, I will discuss Rheingold’s popular book, *Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electric Frontier* and secondly, I will discuss Bradley’s essay, “Situating Cyberspace.”

My direct observations of online behavior around the world over the past ten years have led me to conclude that whenever CMC technology becomes available to people anywhere, they inevitably build virtual communities with it, just as micro-organisms create colonies...I suspect that one of the explanations for this phenomenon is the hunger for community that grows in the breasts of people around the world as more and more informal public spaces disappear from our real lives...the future of the Net is connected to the future of community... 112

As is suggested above, Rheingold’s *Virtual Communities* optimistically embraces the possibility for cyberspace to yield new communities and new types of communities. In his opening chapter

112 Rheingold, p.6.

he suggests that "Some knowledge of how people in a small virtual community behave will help prevent vertigo and give you tools for comparison when we zoom out to the larger metropolitan areas of cyberspace." ¹¹³ In this way, Rheingold appears to suggest that specific chat-lines, which he often refers to as communities, are much like families or places where our "cyber-identities" originate and mature before venturing forth into the "subcultures of the MUDs and IRC channels..." ¹¹⁴ Rheingold also asks his readers to:

Think of cyberspace as a social petri dish, the Net as an agar medium, and virtual communities, in all their diversity, as the colonies or microorganisms, that grow in petri dishes. Each of the small colonies or microorganisms - the communities of the Net - is a social experiment that nobody planned but that is happening nevertheless. ¹¹⁵

What is most interesting about the above passage is the fact that Rheingold describes these "communities of the Net" as "a social experiment that nobody planned but that is happening nevertheless." In other words, Rheingold implies that communities in cyberspace occur spontaneously without any sort of agenda or project. Ironically, Rheingold's analogy to "microorganisms in petri dishes" as well as his arguments throughout the book paradoxically reveal many of these "communities" to be highly controlled and rooted in specific agendas. Perhaps he failed to recognize that most often anything

¹¹³ Ibid., p.16.

¹¹⁴ Rheingold, p. 16.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

growing in a petri dish is not only part of a highly controlled experiment but under continuous observation and monitoring.

While Rheingold's book does attempt to grapple with some of the contradictory uses of cyberspace (e.g. as a means for increased surveillance by the state and as a site for new corporate developments) the tenor of his book remains optimistic and fails to problematize the notion of community in any way. For example, he writes in conclusion:

If electronic democracy is to succeed, however, in the face of all the obstacles, activists must do more than avoid mistakes... Instead of falling under the spell of a sales pitch, or rejecting new technologies as instruments of illusion, we need to look closely at new technologies and ask how they can help build stronger, more humane communities - and ask how they might be obstacles to that goal. The late 1990s may eventually be seen in retrospect as a narrow window of historical opportunity, when people either acted or failed to act effectively to regain control over communications technologies. Armed with knowledge, guided by a clear, human-centred vision, governed by a commitment to civil discourse, we the citizens hold the key levers at a pivotal time. What happens next is largely up to us. ¹¹⁶

Rheingold's message or "prophecy," which is how I think he would like his readers to take the above passage, is flawed on several accounts. As previously mentioned, the notion of community is left stable presupposing a universal understanding of this concept. Secondly, for someone who argues that communities in cyberspace are unplanned but happen nevertheless he certainly appears to have

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 300.

some sort of “agenda” for what and how things *should* be carried out in this apparent space. Rheingold’s democratic agenda for “virtual communities”, however benevolent, contradicts his own assertion that the communities being formed in cyberspace somehow happen naturally. Instead, Rheingold’s vision appears to be reliant on liberal notions of meritocracy, democracy, and the “American dream,” all of which have proven to be part of a specific agenda or project which often has worked to promote a fusional desire through the erasure of difference (e.g. American imperialism). Finally, Rheingold suggests that if “the people” (he does not tell us exactly who the people are) merely seize the moment they will ‘stake their claim’ in this “previously unknown continent, teeming with unfamiliar forms of life.”¹¹⁷ The fact that the subtitle of his book is “homesteading on the electric frontier” seems to be an attempt to posit cyberspace as the new “last frontier” (replacing the failed American dream of space as the “last frontier”). His attempt to make this link is further evident in his comparison of electronic networking to “old American traditions” of networking. He writes, “If you look closely at the roots of the American Revolution, it becomes evident that a text-based, horseback-transported version of networking was an old American tradition.”¹¹⁸ As will become apparent in Bradley’s essay, however, the notion of cyberspace as a “new frontier” needs to be questioned.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.144.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.284.

Bradley writes that "Cyberspace, as it currently exists, is not just a space, but a discourse about a space - a name given to a certain desire for a social space whose contours are emerging from within late capitalism."¹¹⁹ As a result, he argues that "Cyberspace must be addressed...in terms of how it participates in established power relations and in terms of the degree to which these relations are altered, amplified, or transformed by their extension into a new space of social activity."¹²⁰ Bradley suggests that many accounts of cyberspace do, like Rheingold's account, portray "cyberspace as a new frontier, an empty and/or formless space 'discovered' in the interstices of information and communication technologies."¹²¹ However, he argues that Rheingold and others fail to see the contradiction at work in their portrayal of cyberspace as a new frontier. Bradley explains that:

...the linear development of space from 'nothing' to 'something' is impossible because space is not only produced, a product of manifold social relations, it is also a producer of these relations. As a figure, 'empty space' is a discursive strategy that deflects attention away from the actual conditions which have produced the space in question...¹²²

And, once again, according to Bradley, it is the conditions of late capitalism - which include the need for greater surveillance and increased networks for "managing" both information and people - that

¹¹⁹ Dale Bradley, "Situating Cyberspace," *Public 11 - Throughput* (1995) p. 9.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.10.

have produced this space (if indeed we can call it a space).

In this way, Bradley situates cyberspace in opposition to the account posited by Rheingold. As opposed to situating cyberspace as a territory awaiting discovery or a discovered territory awaiting colonization, Bradley argues that cyberspace is “continuous with the networks and institutions that comprise late capitalism...”¹²³ Rheingold would have us believe that the “citizens” or “people” who inhabit cyberspace are social agents with the freedom to build better and more democratic communities while Bradley suggests that in cyberspace “Localities and individuals are disciplined by first transforming them into information, and subsequently producing a space where this information can be visualized and controlled.”¹²⁴ Finally, Bradley points out that “The ideal of democracy is frequently claimed to be a defining characteristic of cyberspace” and that “The institutional form of cyberspace is most similar to that of the state itself.”¹²⁵ Thus, Bradley argues that “cyberspace” is not a just space

¹²³ Ibid., p. 13.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

but a discourse ¹²⁶ about a space as well as an extension of already existing institutions and information networks and thus, does not hold the potential for the creation of new communities. Moreover, in revealing cyberspace to be continuous with already existing institutions and political projects he questions whether or not cyberspace even holds the potential for a radical restructuring of power relations.

Both Rheingold and Bradley's accounts of "cyberspace" reveal that it is not without 'a project, an agenda, or fusional desire' as many people, including Rheingold, would have or would like to have us believe. Instead, the notion of "cyberspace" as a new frontier that is still uncontaminated by the social and political ills of industrialization, state capitalism, and colonialism is revealed to be merely another illusion. This discussion opened by positing Ronell's question of "could there be a 'community' without an agenda, a project or a fusional desire?" as well as Haber's similar question of "could there be a community which recognizes difference?" This discussion seems to suggest that the answer to both of these questions is "no."

¹²⁶ When Bradley refers to cyberspace as a "discourse" about a space he is, presumably, referring to the theories of cyberspace emerging from the fields of Communication Studies and Cultural Studies. However, there is also a discourse *of* this space that needs to be taken into account: the "computer language" used to create the programs and networks that have come to be known as cyberspace. While discourses about cyberspace tend to be influenced by postmodern theorizing the discourse *of* cyberspace is modern or structuralist. After all, the computer language used to create what we now call cyberspace is a language dependent on left-right sequential order. The fact that the language *of* cyberspace is dependent on dualistic thinking is perhaps, just another reason to be suspicious of claims, such as those made by Rheingold, that cyberspace is something new and original as opposed to something dependent on old institutions, structures, and theories.

At the same time, it is important to recognize, as Haber does, that “there is no ideal community or subject which is not subject to deconstruction”¹²⁷ but that this does not suggest these notions should be entirely abandoned. As Haber further argues “community identification...can recognize both that the ‘I’ is plural and that other ‘I’s’ in the community are equally plural.”¹²⁸ Thus, what seems to be important is an acute awareness of the presence of these agendas, projects, and desires even when they are not apparent on the surface and also a constant recognition of the various ways in which difference can come under erasure within an unproblematized notion of “community.”

Can there be communities without centres or cores?

Is it possible to identify the town square at the heart of the global village? In a networked world is there still a core and the periphery - or are all places equally enmeshed and interdependent?¹²⁹

The final question I want to ask here is: *can there be communities without centres?* In the previous discussion I examined how - according to Young, for example - the notion of community “generates a logic of hierarchical opposition” and “creates an inside/outside distinction...[and] seeks to keep those borders firmly

¹²⁷ Haber, p.131.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.127.

¹²⁹ Green, p.161.

drawn.”¹³⁰ In other words, the concept of community can be understood as a concept dependent on the existence of a centre or core and periphery. However, as Green suggests in the above passage, the centre may no longer hold in the “networked world” or the postmodern world. Moreover, as previously mentioned, Green argues that “core/periphery theories” are best suited to aspects of our life which can be best described as modern and industrial as opposed to postmodern and post-industrial. Once again, this seems to suggest that the idea of community is incompatible with postmodern theorizing and more specifically, with the structure of networked, electronic environments.

In “Liquid Architectures in Cyberspace,” Novak explores the structure of “cyberspace” and suggests, like Green, that the structure of this networked space is radically different than that of ‘pre-networked environments.’ Novak describes cyberspace in what would be recognizable postmodern terms. Take the following passage for example:

Cyberspace is liquid. Liquid cyberspace, liquid architecture, liquid cities...Liquid architecture is an architecture whose form is contingent on the interests of the beholder; it is an architecture that opens to welcome me and closes to defend me; it is an architecture without doors and hallways, where the next room is always where I need it to be and what I need it to be. Liquid architecture makes liquid cities, cities that change at the shift of a value where visitors with different backgrounds see different landmarks, where neighborhoods vary with ideas held

¹³⁰ Young, p.303.

in common, and evolve as the ideas mature or dissolve. ¹³¹

Thus, Novak posits cyberspace as a postmodern space where the centre or core as well as the periphery, if they even still exist, is constantly shifting. For example, the fact that this structure is one that accommodates “liquid cities, cities that change at the shift of a value...” implies that the core and periphery are contingent on the perspective of the viewer. In this way, it would be impossible to identify the “town square” at the centre of “cyberspace.” In fact, the very notion of a “town square” seems to be in contradiction to his notion of liquid architecture.

Similarly, Benedikt has noted that the “dimensions, axes, and coordinates of cyberspace are thus not necessarily the familiar ones of our natural, gravitational environment.” ¹³² He further argues that “In cyberspace, information-intensive institutions and business have a form, identity, and working reality...that is counterpart and different to the form, identity, and working reality they have in the physical world.” ¹³³ And, like Novak, Benedikt uses familiar postmodern terms, such as “fluid and multiple,” ¹³⁴ to describe the structure and interactions of cyberspaces. Novak and Benedikt reveal the structure of networked systems to be inconsistent with the notion of fixed centres or cores. Thus, one may argue that attempts

¹³¹ Marcos Novak, “Liquid Architectures in Cyberspace,” *Cyberspace: First Steps*, pp.250-251.

¹³² Michael Benedikt, “Cyberspace: Some Proposals,” *Cyberspace: First Steps* p.123.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p.123.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.123.

to identify communities within networked environments is at best a fleeting effort. Both Novak and Benedikt suggest that while one may identify what appears to be a community or centre within these new spaces, there is no guarantee that one could return to this specific community again - at least, not by the same route - since the architecture or spatiality of cyberspace is constantly in flux.

In this section I have attempted to examine some of the ways in which the concept of community has shifted and continues to shift in relation to new communication technologies. As is suggested by Stone and Stock, the notion of virtual communities or textual communities is not a new phenomenon but something people have been negotiating since the emergence of texts and text interpreters enabled people to "witness" events without being present. Rheingold and Bradley's texts may contradict each other in numerous ways but both affirm the idea that communities are largely dependent on some sort of agenda, project, or desire. Finally, Green, Novak, and Benedikt illustrate how the notion of community, dependent on "core/periphery" theories, seems inconsistent with the structure of networked environments. If there can't be communities without bodies, without totalizing agendas, and without centres is the notion of a postmodern virtual community not a paradox? However, if the concept of community is as contradictory as this discussion may lead us to believe than why do cyborgs continue to dream of community?

Moreover, why is the possibility of community increasingly being used as an effective means for promoting new communication technologies (e.g. advertisements which use the promise of a "global community" as an effective means for selling computer modems and CD ROM technologies)?

New communication technologies as well as postmodern theorizing have made the contradictions and impossibility of community increasingly apparent. However, even as these contradictions and complexities are exposed, cyborgs appear to continue dreaming of community albeit on slightly altered models. Thus, for the purposes of this text, I will suggest that instead of rejecting the notion of community altogether, that what is required is a more critical and careful use of the term "community." And, as this discussion reveals, what is important is to distinguish between the dream or ideal of community and actual "communities" or social spaces; to discuss communities in light of both the possibilities they represent and the limits they *inevitably* pose; and to actively work towards finding more suitable theories and/or language to describe what we have inappropriately described as "virtual communities."

In this chapter I have considered how understandings of bodies and selves as well as notions of community are called into question and reconfigured in and as a consequence of new technologies. On

one hand, these changes appear to be quite drastic but as Marvin reminds us, we are not the first generation to marvel at the degree and speed of technological innovations. As a result, while it is important to consider how postmodern theorizing and new technologies are shifting understandings and in some cases, the possibilities of identity and community, it is also essential to avoid viewing these apparent changes as all encompassing. In other words, it is essential to remember that these changes are not taking place in a vacuum - there are "real" bodies and "real" material circumstances that still must be accounted for.

In the remaining chapters of this thesis I will build on this chapter's discussion by examining how young women involved in the production of 'zines are using new technologies to contest fixed notions of identity and to reconfigure the notion of community. 'Zine networks appear to be situated somewhat ambiguously between "old" virtual communities (i.e. textual or discourse communities) and "new" virtual communities (i.e. electronic chat lines). While this ambiguity makes writing about 'zine producers and their shared social spaces extremely difficult, it also provides an interesting opportunity to consider how past, present, and future technologies and practices may be connected. In the next chapter I will discuss how I carried out my research about young women 'zine producers. It will become evident that attempts to examine

seemingly “virtual” subjects and spaces also demand a revised research methodology - one that can account for the existence of texts, subjects, and shared social spaces which can not be easily categorized.

Chapter Three

Methodology

When I initiated this study I hoped that by studying what I viewed as *texts* as opposed to *people* I could avoid the risks I associated with ethnographic research. Obviously, I was making several assumptions about ethnographic research, about texts and discursive practices, and about the nature of power and authority. I was assuming that ethnographic research runs a much higher risk of appropriation and exploitation than research based on texts alone. I was also assuming that texts and writers *can* be easily divided, and that interpretive and textual forms of authority are always and necessarily repressive. Even after I realized that the texts I was examining could not be easily separated from the people who created them, and that the people I was examining could only be understood in relation to their texts and my own discursive practices, I still continued to think about these issues as *problems*. For example, I framed the ambiguous nature of the 'zines - my inability to determine if they are supposedly "public" or "personal" documents - as an unwanted problem for me as a researcher. What I failed to recognize is the possibility that what I perceived as research problems may also be understood as tactics.

What follows is an account of how I carried out my research on

young women involved in the production of 'zines *and* how my understanding of who and what I was studying shifted throughout my research. I will begin by briefly describing how the research evolved and what methods I used to collect data. However, the focus in this chapter will be on how I came to question the assumptions I carried into this research.

Project Development and Methodology

Initially, I became interested in collecting 'zines produced by young women because I felt these self-published documents would be an ideal way to gain a better understanding of young women's involvement and feelings about feminism. I began by purchasing a few 'zines in local record and bookstores' but the majority of the 'zines that I collected were the ones I mailed away for based on reviews and advertisements that I found in other 'zines. These 'zines did take up "feminist issues" and, in many cases, appeared to be rooted both in and against feminist activism or academe. However, what I found most surprising about the 'zines is the fact that their production appeared to involve the use of various new technologies. I felt that the fact that these 'zine producers, who I assumed and continue to assume are "young women", were using new technologies as a way to take up feminist issues as well as various other political and

personal issues was something worth considering.

Initially, I intended only to examine the 'zines themselves but I soon realized that letter writing is often as important to 'zine writers and readers as the texts they share. As a result, I initiated a series of letter and e-mail exchanges with 'zine producers. Of the eight 'zine writers invited to participate in my research I heard back from six who agreed to participate. Only one of the writers opted to correspond through e-mail. The six participants live in various places across Canada and the United States ranging from large urban centres and suburbs to small towns and rural areas. As I will discuss in greater detail throughout this chapter I did not ask the participants any questions about their age, race, class location as so on. However, two of the participants did tell me how old they were - one of them was sixteen years old during the course of the study and the other was eighteen. Towards the end of my research I also carried out one interview. I decided to conduct an interview as opposed to carry out a series of letter exchanges with this participant because she happened to live in my own neighbourhood and was extensively involved in the production of 'zines.

Questions of Power and Authority

I initially felt that I could avoid, or at least limit, the risks of appropriation and exploitation in my research by choosing to examine what I viewed, at the time, simply as texts. I now realize what I hoped to avoid or limit in my research was the need to address issues of power and authority. While a researcher's power or authority are present in observation and interview situations, one may argue that much of a researcher's authority is connected to their writing (e.g. their ability to determine what "voices" will be included/excluded from their text). For example, Stacey writes, "As author, an ethnographer cannot (and, I believe should not) escape tasks of interpretation, evaluation, and judgment."¹ She further explains, "the research product is ultimately that of the researcher, however, modified or influenced by informants." Casey argues that "A fundamental example of the researcher's power is, of course, the establishment of criteria for inclusion and exclusion of subjects."² Similarly, as Wolf writes, "I see no way to avoid this exercise of power and at least some of the stylistic requirements used to legitimate that text if the practice of ethnography is to continue."³ Thus, my assumption that issues of

¹ Judith Stacey, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Berger Bluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991) p.114.

² Kathleen Casey, *I Answer with My Life: Life Histories of Women Teachers Working for Social Change* (New York: Routledge, 1993) p.13.

³ Margery Wolf, *A Thrice Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism & Ethnographic Responsibility* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992) p.11.

power and authority could be avoided by merely opting to not carry out research which involves direct contact with participants was extremely problematic - it entirely ignored the power and authority circulating through writing practices and texts.

Foucault suggests that we can *never* be entirely outside of systems of power. ⁴ He argues that power “is never localised here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth” ⁵ but instead, “Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization...individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.” ⁶ This distinction is important because it illustrates that the goal of radical discourses then should not be to eradicate power (this would be impossible) but to problematize the notions of power and authority. As a result, Foucault emphasizes the need to move away from a totalizing view of power and authority which assumes they are necessarily “bad” or destructive forces. He suggests:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative

⁴ See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) and *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

⁵ Foucault, 1980, p. 98.

⁶ *Ibid.*

instance whose function is repression.⁷

Complicating authority in terms of Foucault's notions of power opens up the possibility that a researcher's interpretative authority, for example, does not necessarily need to be equated with a desire to oppress or prohibit (even if this is often the case). And, it points to the ways in which power circulates through all discourses, mechanisms, and bodies. In this sense, power is not something that can be isolated and eradicated but only something that can possibly be identified, redirected, and reworked.

I now realize that my assumptions about power and authority may have placed me and the subjects of this thesis in a particularly dangerous situation. For example, my assumption that I *could* avoid or limit the need to examine issues related to the distribution of power made me less aware and less willing to address my own interpretative authority. On the other hand, since I was thinking about authority as a primarily repressive force I was also denying the power circulating in and through the 'zines and the potentially liberating or empowering effects of this power. These 'zines, after all, *are* sites of knowledge production and as Foucault argues, "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations." In other words, power circulates through knowledge or more precisely, through the discourses which produce and sustain

⁷ Ibid. p. 119.

it. In this sense, to not recognize the authority in the 'zines themselves would be to deny their own role in knowledge production and to ignore the possibly empowering effects they may have on their writers and readers.

I am not suggesting that these 'zines have been invested with the same degree of authority as most texts published by recognized publishing houses. I would argue, however, that insofar that power circulates through all texts it becomes possible to see how in their own contexts *some* of these 'zines *do* carry a great deal of authority. For example, 'zines associated with the emergence of riot grrrl in the early 1990s continue to be photocopied and distributed through Riot Girl Press in the United States and Canada. These 'zines, including ones written by band members of *Bikini Kill* and *Bratmobile* and originally distributed at their concerts, have taken on increased significance and value as the riot grrrl movement and these bands or at least their original members, have become recognized in the "mainstream" media and music scene. It has been over five years since *Bikini Kill* 'zine published their "Revolution Girl Style" manifesto but specific parts of the manifesto continue to be recirculated in 'zines produced by young women today. Thus, to suggest that this text is devoid of authority is to completely ignore its cultural and political significance even if people in other contexts may view this 'zine as nothing more than trash.

As suggested above, the possibility always exists for power to be redirected and reworked, at least, in particular contexts.

Foucault explains:

Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.... There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy. ⁸

For this reason, I would argue that it is necessary to look more closely at the ways in which language and power are linked and to examine how discursive practices may be used to transform power or how our writing practices may be understood as tactics. Foucault discusses the need to discover “spaces of freedom” - places where we can both identify and begin to rethink the systems of power and knowledge that we are caught up in. Foucault has been critiqued for failing to identify *how* to transform these power relations. However, he did state that “the intellectual is not the ‘bearer of universal values’. Rather, it’s the person occupying a specific position - but whose specificity is linked, in a society like ours, to the general functioning of an apparatus of truth.” ⁹ In other words, in order to undermine power - to use it against itself as it were - we must look to “real, material, everyday

⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978) p. 102.

⁹ Foucault, 1980, p.133.

struggles.”¹⁰

In the next sections I will examine two of the research *problems* I encountered during this study: 1) my problem of categorizing the ‘zines and 2) my problem of “proving” the identities of my participants. I decided to examine these particular research dilemmas because in each case the difficulties I was facing as a researcher appeared to be attributed to the ‘zine producer’s own “real, material, everyday struggles” or what de Certeau has referred to as “tactics.”

‘Zines: Public Documents or “Personal Disclosure Pamphlets”?

When I commenced my research on ‘zines I assumed that these “published” texts *were* public documents and thus, I did not feel that discussing their content or quoting them directly posed any ethical dilemmas. However, as I discovered in the course of my research, not all ‘zine producers feel that their publications are necessarily public documents. Moreover, my experience of collecting ‘zines revealed that the distribution of ‘zines often involves more than a mere monetary exchange.

During an interview with Zanna, a ‘zine writer and the coordinator of Riot Girl Press Canada, I asked if she felt ‘zines were produced to be read in a *particular context by certain people* as

¹⁰ Ibid. p.126.

opposed to the general public. She replied:

Maybe personal 'zines because [the 'zine writers] get to choose who it goes out to. For example, I know my roommate wrote a 'zine and he wrote two versions of it - one version was just for his friends and another version was for the general public because there was information he didn't want other people to know about but he did want his friends to know about and he wanted to do it in 'zine format. ¹¹

Similarly, Zanna stressed that one of the reasons she wanted to produce her own 'zine (originally she produced a 'zine collectively with Riot Girl D.C.) was to "[have] control over who got the 'zines." ¹² She explains:

Most of my 'zines are through the mail so they get mailed directly to the person or I hand them out personally. Sometimes I will give them to people I don't know or distribute them through stores but not usually - it is mostly to people I know or people who I think might benefit from reading them. ¹³

Her desire to maintain some control over who her 'zines are read by also has affected the way she feels about e-'zines. She explained, "...in terms of distribution...I would never want to go on [line], you have no idea who is on [the Internet or WWW]. For me to put my 'zine on there would mean that anyone could get it and I would have no idea who they were." ¹⁴ When asked to describe what a 'zine is, Zanna borrowed a phrase she had heard another 'zine producer use to

¹¹ Zanna, interview with the author, February 4, 1996.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

describe her 'zine - "personal disclosure pamphlet."¹⁵ I too felt this was a fitting description of a 'zine (or at least, the 'zines discussed in this research) since "personal disclosure pamphlet" implies that these publications are both intimately connected to the writer but in some sense, still intended for public distribution not unlike other pamphlets.

Pagan Kennedy's book, *Zine*, includes reprints of the author's 'zine produced over a six year period and her reflections on her years producing a 'zine. Kennedy explains that her 'zines were originally written as elaborate, extended letters intended for friends as opposed to the general public. She writes:

My friends couldn't understand why I didn't have my own publication... I kept trying to explain that I couldn't do a 'zine - no offence - I was a real writer... And then, I don't know, one day something in me snapped. Boredom, really, that's what I should attribute it to. I had to do something with myself, because God knows my fiction wasn't going too well; some days I found I couldn't write at all. So I started a 'zine, telling myself it would be just a little Xeroxed thing to send to friends far away, a kind of letter. Maybe, too, I'd hand out a few copies to acquaintances in Boston. But that was all.¹⁶

However, Kennedy discovered that 'zines - even if they are intended for friends and acquaintances - often are distributed in interesting ways. She explains:

Back to Pagan travelled through the world with a magical ease, flying from hand to hand and ending up in every group house in Allston.... One day a guy came up to me at a party and said, "I know you. You're Pagan. My roommate left your magazine in our bathroom. It's so great. I want to subscribe."... Though I'd

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Pagan Kennedy, *Zine* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) p.8.

been continually surprised by the way *Back to Pagan* got around, I had never expected this to happen - I never expected *people I didn't know* to read the 'zine and become *fans*.¹⁷

Now, six years later the author has had to reconcile the fact that her "personal disclosure pamphlet" has become a published book. "I still find it very strange that my 'zine, which I put together and copied myself, will someday be wedged into the shelves of bookstores..." writes Kennedy. "The idea elates and terrifies me...what I'm showing to the world isn't just the cleaned-up, mature, thirtysomething Pagan my friends know today..."¹⁸ Thus, Kennedy's reflections also seem to suggest that 'zines can not be easily categorized as "public" or "personal" documents and that the intention of the 'zine writer may vary and change over time.

At the same time, I think it is important to acknowledge that not all 'zine producers produce their 'zines with friends and acquaintances alone in mind. Tina, the editor of *femme flicke*, explains, "I'm not married to the idea of remaining small and unknown; i would like to pay my rent by publishing *femme flicke*." For Tina, whose 'zine already has a circulation of five hundred and is sold in several bookstores and record stores, knowing who her 'zine reaches is not as important as getting it out to as many potential readers as possible. However, the intentions of the 'zine producers are only part of what makes these texts and the people who produce

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.181.

them difficult to categorize. There are several shared practices among 'zine producers and readers (i.e. trading and bartering, reusing and recycling, and letter writing) that suggests these published, public documents may share more in common with personal letters than books or magazines. As a result, it becomes necessary to question whether or not it is ethical to approach 'zines as one would approach other published documents.

As discussed in chapter one, trading other 'zines as well as music and "neat, free stuff" for 'zines not only indicates how 'zine writers and readers work to subvert normative methods of production and distribution in a capitalist economy but draws attention to the personal nature of these exchanges. There are exceptions, of course, but for the most part 'zine producers tend to be committed to keeping their publications as accessible (in this case meaning inexpensive) as possible. For example, Helena who produces *MadWoman*, explains:

I don't know if anyone makes any money off zines. I don't think it should be the motivating factor, if it happens then more power to you. I also feel zines should be freely TRADED for christ sake, some people don't cos they want money . I can understand that, I like some money once in a while, but trading rules cos it subverts the monetary system and is a barter thing which is cool.¹⁹

Thus, money is not as important to many 'zine producers as the exchange of ideas, writing, music, art, and objects of "cultural"

¹⁹ Helena, letter to the author, November 11, 1995.

significance. These objects of cultural significance are usually absurd relics of popular culture, such as 1970s and 1980s kitsch ranging from Bay City Rollers buttons to Hello Kitty stationery. The fact that the 'zine producers often trade their 'zines for other people's writing and art or items with some sort of shared cultural significance is markedly different than a mere monetary exchange. In this case, both the producer and consumer are sharing their common interests and/or shared experiences.

Related to the trading and bartering aspect of 'zine culture is the importance of letter writing. All of the 'zine producers I talked to or exchanged letters or e-mails with emphasized the importance of letters and their inseparability from the production and trading of the 'zines themselves. For example, Kiki who writes a 'zine called *Catherine's Hair* explains:

I've gained some wonderful pen pals from CH. Some people will write and just ask politely to trade or send stamps and ask for the 'zine but a few people start to write really regularly, at first its small talk about the 'zine, music, etc. , then they become like friends and we share personal info. It's a very low pressure relationship as well. I never have to go to a party with them... ²⁰

Kiki, who distributes her 'zine both by direct mail and in stores, explains:

I stick my 'zine in unique bookstores or record shops for free, but I never get any response from those people. They just pick it up as a free read. I like to mail them directly to people who write to me or submit. Zines are alive, they are active. You have to provide some kind of input or pass it along, or you are just a parasite. A zine reading non-participating, idea sucking

²⁰ Kiki, letter to the author, November 26, 1995.

parasite.²¹

Her feeling about “zine reading, non-participating, idea sucking parasites” draws attention to the expectation that ‘zine readers give something other than money or stamps in return. I now realize that I may have “clued into this” significance too late.

The fact that I sent money (and often more than expected), my use of unused stamps and envelopes, *and* most notably, my formal and impersonal requests for ‘zines all seemed to make me “suspect” to ‘zine editors. My laser-printed requests for ‘zines typically read:

Please send me a copy of your ‘zine. I have enclosed \$2 and stamps - hope it covers your cost. Thanks!

It had not occurred to me that some ‘zine producers may find this unusually formal. One ‘zine I ordered arrived with a letter asking, “Do you order a lot of ‘zines - your letter looked like a form letter?”²² Another ‘zine arrived with a note reading: “OK form letter = stoopic note on post-it paper. Thanks for the \$ anyway...If you feel inclined to write back (and I honestly doubt you will) please tell me what sort of research you’re doing.”²³ Still other ‘zine writers - despite my “form letter” - sent me page long letters telling me about their ‘zine, their lives, and how much they love receiving mail. It is interesting to note that in ‘zine reviews the substance of the letter sent with the ‘zine is often reviewed in addition to the actual ‘zine. Most often,

²¹ *An Emotional Biscuit*, 12.

²² Note to the author.

²³ Note to the author.

'zineproducers who fail to send a personal letter or at least a hand written note are criticized for this in reviews.

As my research progressed I realized that the fact that many of the 'zines I requested never materialized may have *not* been connected to the frequency with which many 'zine editors move or stop producing their 'zine, but due to the fact that my requests failed to adhere to the shared practices of this "community." Once again this draws attention to the fact that 'zine producers and their readers share more than a producer/consumer relationship. There appears to be an expectation that the readers also share something about who they are, what they are interested in, and what is important to them. For 'zine writers attempting to maintain some control over who their 'zines are read by, these letters enable them to determine if the person requesting their 'zine will benefit from its content. I suspect that my form letters were read by many 'zine producers as the work of an "idea sucking parasite."

de Certeau's Notion of "Tactics"

The practices of trading and bartering, reusing and recycling, and letter writing do much more than enable the 'zine producers to finance their publications - these shared practices enable the 'zine producers to maintain some control over who their publications are

read by and how they are used. In short, these shared practices support the ambiguous nature of these texts which are paradoxically written and published for friends, acquaintances *and* strangers but not necessarily for the public at large. As a result, what I originally framed as research problems may also be understood as tactics. De Certeau distinguishes between strategies and tactics explaining that tactics may be understood as:

... a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. ²⁴

He further explains that tactics are about "making do." He writes, "People have to make do with what they have. In these combatants' stratagems, there is a certain art of placing one's blows, a pleasure in getting around the rules of a constraining space." ²⁵ In other words, tactics belong to people "that lack their own space" and thus, "must get along in a network of already established forces and representations." ²⁶ I understand tactics to be interventions - interventions which aim to use and perhaps, disrupt but not entirely break the rhythm of established systems of power. Tactics are all about finding ways to appropriate tools and mechanisms in order to

²⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice fo Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) p.xix.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.18

²⁶ *Ibid*.

use them in new ways - in ways which transform power relations, at least, in certain contexts.

The 'zine producer's practices of trading and bartering, reusing and recycling, and letter writing are consumer and discursive practices which enable them to make the most of the systems of power they are caught up in. These practices, or tactics, do not necessarily disrupt systems of power - in all likelihood, trading and bartering, reusing stamps, and recycling envelopes in 'zine networks go unnoticed outside of this context. However, these practices *do* enable the 'zine producers to create and share their writing with other people which is an opportunity traditional publishing avenues may not offer them. Moreover, the practice of letter writing among 'zine writers and readers may also be understood as a way "of getting around the rules of a constraining space." This practice is tactical insofar that it enables the writers to select who will gain access to their 'zine. De Certeau suggests that tactics "vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected." ²⁷ Researchers in the social sciences and humanities have grown dependent on categories in order to determine how to appropriately and ethically treat particular documents and "voices." However, 'zine writers "make use of the cracks" in these categories in order to afford themselves some

²⁷ de Certeau, p.37.

protection and control over who reads their writing, where it travels, and in what contexts it is appropriated. In this sense, the ambiguity of the 'zines - the fact that they cannot be understood according to fixed categories - may be understood as tactical.

The 'zine producers are not necessarily creating new spaces but discovering new ways to survive in the space - the systems of power - they already occupy. Their consumer and discursive practices may be understood as tactics because they work to "reappropriate the space organized by techniques of social cultural production."²⁸ As de Certeau argues, these tactics are both analogous and contrary to Foucault's questions about power. On one hand, these tactics of everyday life work to expose the "microbe-like operations proliferating within technocratic structures"²⁹ but on the contrary, "the goal is not to make clearer how the violence of order is transmuted into a disciplinary technology, but rather to bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make shift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline.'"³⁰ I would argue that this is not necessarily contradictory to Foucault's own writing on issues of power. After all, he does suggest that it is at the level of "real, material, everyday struggles" that power will be redistributed and reworked.

²⁸ De Certeau, p.xiv.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. xiv - xv

In order to recognize the ambiguity of the 'zines and the 'zine producers' consumer and discursive practices which support this ambiguity, I have had to become increasingly self-reflexive about my own research practices. Instead of thinking about every 'zine as either a public document or "personal disclosure pamphlet" - something that either can or cannot be used without the writer's informed consent - I have had to call, among other things, this public/personal distinction into question. I have attempted to treat each 'zine as unique. I have thought about the 'zine's content, the circumstances under which I purchased or received it, and when possible, the writer's own intentions for producing the publication when deciding if and how the 'zine should be discussed in this thesis. While my decisions about what to include and exclude still point back to my own interpretative authority as a researcher, I like to think that my decision to consider each 'zine on an individual basis may have at least limited the degree to which these 'zines have been used in ways the writers may not have intended.

Realities, Textual Realities, and Fictions

Research, including research that begins with 'actual' observations and interviews, is dependent on the researcher's memories and the documents produced based on these memories.

After all, it is the fieldnotes and interview transcripts - the interpretations of events as opposed to the `real' events - that researchers draw on when writing up their accounts.³¹ However, this is not to say that there are not some profound differences between an interview transcript, an exchange of letters, and texts. For example, my face-to-face meeting with Zanna was significantly different than my contact with the other participants whom I only "know" through letters or e-mail and those writers whom I only "know" through their 'zines. In my fieldnotes I noted:

As this thesis progresses I realize exactly how ludicrous it is to think I can just appropriate bits and pieces of these 'zines - which seem like other people's diaries (and maybe my own, the ones I've packed away in filing boxes now) into my text. What am I doing? These women didn't ask for this....meeting Zanna today made me realize that these 'zines aren't just words...³²

This meetings not only made me feel somewhat more responsible to her and her texts but enabled me to confirm her identity (or certain aspects of it). For all I know, the other "young women" in this study could be "old" and "male" since I have no way of "proving" their identities. Nevertheless, it is important to note that even my face-to-face meetings with Zanna and our recorded conversation have been reduced to my descriptions of these events: the fieldnotes, the

³¹ See James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture : The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), and Margery Wolf, *A Thrice Told Tale: Feminist, Postmodernism & Ethnographic Responsibility* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

³² Fieldnote, December 13, 1995.

interview transcript, and my selection of what was *most* significant about these written accounts.

As will become evident throughout this thesis, the need to “prove” identities may not be as important as one may assume. I am not suggesting that age, race, class location, sexual preference, for example, are not worth considering. On the contrary, I feel that these aspects of people’s identities and/or circumstances in their lives must continue to be pushed to the centre of our analysis. However, I would argue that in the context of what some may call “virtual environments” (e.g. ‘zine networks or electronic chat lines) it may be more important to question *why* people have constructed themselves or are being constructed by others in particular ways. We may want to further consider how these social spaces which are not dependent on face-to-face interaction expose the performativity of identity itself. And, we may question how these discursive constructions of identity or particular aspects of identities may be understood as practices or tactics which enable people to “make do with what they have” or do more than make do.

Documentary or Textual Realities

In Smith's 1974 essay, “The Social Construction of Documentary Reality,” she drew attention to how the process of writing, organizing, and analyzing documents is linked to the social

organization of knowledge itself. She explained:

Factual statements in documentary form, whether as news, data, information or the like, stand in for an actuality which is not directly accessible. Socially organized practices of reporting and recording work upon what actually happens or has happened to create a reality in documentary form, and though they are decisive to its character, their traces are not visible in it. ³³

In this way, her notion of documentary realities drew attention to the ways in which "categories, coding procedures, and conceptual order" ³⁴ work to "represent the world as it is for those who rule it, rather than as it is for those are ruled." ³⁵ In a more recent article Smith discusses the notion of "textual reality" explaining that:

Textual realities are the ground of our contemporary consciousness of the world beyond the immediately known. As such they are integral to the coordination of activities among different levels of organization, with organizations, and in the society at large... [However, these] textual surfaces presuppose an organization of power as the concerting of people's activities and the uses of organization to enforce processes producing a version of the world that is peculiarly one-sided, that is only known from within the modes of ruling, that defines the objects of its power. The subjects entered into these virtual realities are displaced as speakers both at the point of inscription, where lived actualities are entered "into the record," and as the characteristic hierarchies of organization set up a self-sealing division of labor in the making of objectified knowledge. ³⁶

I think that Smith's notions of documentary and textual realities are

³³ Dorothy Smith, "The Social Construction of Documentary Reality," *Sociological Inquiry* 44.4 (1974) p.257.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 267.

³⁶ Dorothy E. Smith, "Textual Realities as Relations of Ruling," *The Conceptual Practices of Power: a feminist sociology of knowledge* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990) pp.83-84.

useful insofar as they draw attention to the social construction of knowledge itself and the ways in which practices, many of which we take for granted, work to create particular versions of reality often at the cost of the individual or group being studied.

However, in the context of this study and other studies focused on so-called virtual subjects I question whether Smith's division between reality and documentary or textual realities is fluid enough to account for these situations and representations. Smith makes it clear that, "textual realities are not fictions or falsehoods; they are normal, integral, and indeed essential features of the relations and apparatuses of ruling..." ³⁷ I would argue that they are not necessarily "fictions or falsehoods" but *may be fictions or falsehoods in some cases or under certain circumstances*. For example, de Certeau argues that:

News reports, information, statistics and surveys are everywhere... Narrations about what's -going-on constitute our orthodoxy. Debates about figures are our theoretical wars. The combatants no longer bear the arms of any offensive or defensive idea. They move forward camouflaged as facts, data, and events. They present themselves as messengers from a "reality." Their uniform takes on the color of the economic and social ground they move into. ³⁸

However, de Certeau suggests that these news items, statistics and surveys - "messengers from `reality'" - may be better understood as fictions. He explains:

³⁷ Ibid., p.83.

³⁸ de Certeau, p.185.

To be sure, there was already fiction in earlier ages but it was in circumscribed, esthetic, and theatrical places... Today, fiction claims to make the real present, to speak in the name of facts and thus to cause the semblance it produces to be taken as a referential reality. ³⁹

On one hand, de Certeau, like Smith, calls written accounts of reality into question and attempts to show how these referential realities produce and sustain particular types of knowledge. However, in contrast to Smith, he suggests that these versions of reality *may* be understood as fictions.

As I will discuss in greater detail in chapter three and four, new technologies appear to be eroding the line between fiction and lived experiences. For example, Haraway argues that "The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century...the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion." ⁴⁰ In this sense, I think, as opposed to looking merely at reality versus documentary or textual realities, it may be useful to examine the various ways in which reality, documentary and textual forms of reality, *and* fictions converge and influence each other. I am interested not only in the degree to which the "young women" discussed here are discursive constructions but in the degree to which they *are* fictions, or perhaps, boundary creatures telling their

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.187.

⁴⁰ Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991) p.149.

stories.

Boundary Stories

Boundary stories, such as Haraway's cyborg myth, are situated in between fixed categories or in a place where these categories appear to dissolve. These stories are neither reality, written descriptions of reality nor fictions. Haraway argues that her cyborg imagery suggests the need for "both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories." 41

Stone writes:

The most troubling stories are precisely those that are difficult to analyze - stories that are situated in the boundaries between categories and that must be analyzed in multiple ways before their meanings can be understood. In the listener they frequently produce a sense of unease, a feeling that the way things are might shift unexpectedly or slip away. I find that frequently these are the most interesting stories, because their shape-shifting qualities make them powerful agents of transformation. 42

I also think that these boundary stories hold the potential to be agents of transformation and in this sense may be understood as tactics. Haraway argues that "Cyborg writing is about the power to survive...on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that

41 Haraway, 1991, p.181.

42 Allucquere Rosanne Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995) p.83.

marked them as other”⁴³ and that “The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities.”⁴⁴ These tools are boundary stories rooted in the desire to make the most of one’s circumstances - the desire to resist and transform systems of power through everyday practices or tactics, such as the practice of telling stories.

For this reason, I feel that the ‘zine writers and their texts in question here may be best understood as boundary creatures/boundary stories. I am hesitant to refer to this notion of boundary stories as a conceptual framework - it is far too fluid to be a framework per se. However, I would argue that it may be used as a tool for beginning to understand particular writers and texts who, like the ‘zine writers and their texts, appear to resist and slip through the cracks of approaches bound by fixed notions of identity and space. I also think that understanding the ‘zine writers’ accounts as boundary stories is useful insofar as it draws attention to the political significance of these stories - their potential to be “powerful agents of transformation.” I will now examine how some of the ways in which ‘zine writers and readers appear to write and read from the boundaries - the points where the lines between lived experience, documentary and textual forms of reality, and fiction have collapsed.

Many ‘zine producers acknowledge that in part it is the potential

⁴³ Haraway, 1991, p.175.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

to reinvent one's identity - the reality that in the context of 'zines and 'zine networks identity *is* all about performance - that makes the genre particular appealing. For example, Kennedy remembers that as a creative writing student she and her classmates "knew how to invent imaginary people, how to give them jobs and lovers and worries..." but now wonders "...did we know how to invent ourselves? Did we know how to transform our own lives? Could we go through the looking glass and enter our fictional worlds?" ⁴⁵ In her case it was her 'zine writing as opposed to her "serious writing" that enabled her to explore these questions. She writes:

BACK TO PAGAN wasn't really written by me, only by one part of me - a voice, a persona. This was Pagan, the cartoon character (from now on I'll refer to her as Pagan¹ to distinguish her from myself)...In the first issue, Pagan¹ was still a tentative presence. It was in the second and third issues that I began to understand her. Pagan¹ had none of my own vulnerabilities: She didn't worry about offending people, or making bad art, or deferring to others. I recognized her as the id girl, too churlish for the real world. ⁴⁶

Kennedy further confesses that, "...the 'zine started as an advertisement for myself, but became much more...the 'zine turned into a group project, an imaginary world I could live in with my friends...Where did I find all these friends and how did I build this community? I'm not quite sure but I know that *Pagan's Head* helped." ⁴⁷ On one hand the 'zine was a space where she could

⁴⁵ Kennedy, p.7.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.44.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.183-184.

explore a fictional or exaggerated part of her own identity but at the same time she describes the 'zine as an "advertisement for herself." In this sense, it becomes apparent that the 'zine writer, the written accounts of herself, and the fictitious personae presented in the 'zine became somewhat inseparable. For example, she explains that not only did she gain a community of friends through the production of her 'zine, but she also changed as a person partly due to producing her 'zine. She explains, "I began publishing it in an effort to procrastinate, to trick people into liking me, to get dates, to turn myself into a star, and to transform my boring life into an epic story. And the scary thing was, it worked." 48

In contrast to Kennedy, who is reflecting back on her years as a 'zine producer, the participants in this study are still experiencing and developing the ways in which their lives, accounts of their lives, and fictions converge in the context of their 'zines. For example, in my correspondence with Cleo (not her real name), I asked her about the ways in which the Cleo presented in her 'zine differs from the "person" or personae she presents in "real" life. She explained:

the more that I write for my zine & the more personal it becomes the realer cleo gets, you know? she's just not this in control, open, "sexual being" but she's more of a person, i dont' know. if you only read one issue of my zine then you don't per se know me...cleo and [real name] are coming together more & more in my next zine... and I am trying to put them together and make a consensus. right now, they're like the good twin and the bad twin. 49

48 Ibid., p.1.

49 Cleo, letter to the author, December 2, 1995.

In Cleo's case it isn't clear if her 'zine persona is any more or less "real" than the aspects of her identity she presents or performs in her daily life. Moreover, she explains that the people she has met under the name Cleo - thus, the people she knows only through 'zines and letters - seem more real than the people she has face-to-face interactions with. As she told me in one letter, "The only people i can connect with usually live miles away but that is okay. (They are so important to me) No one seems to be real around here and the only thing that is, is those letters I get." ⁵⁰ Cleo's feelings about what counts as "real" call into question the lines between lived experience, accounts of it, and fictions. Ironically, it appears to be her partly fictional persona that has enabled her to finally "meet" "real" people.

Like Kennedy and Cleo, my experience of 'zine culture has made me increasingly aware of the ways in which I construct my own identity under various circumstances. Although I used my own name and did not attempt to create a particular persona in my correspondence with 'zine editors I did find myself making strategic decisions about how to present myself to the participants. In the following field note I draw attention to some of the ways in which I constructed my own identity in my letters and e-mails:

Obviously, I too have been able to make specific decisions about how to construct my own identity in this research. I've made sure to change my language and references depending on who I am writing to. While with some participants I felt the need to write to in a personal way with others I have made

⁵⁰ Ibid.

efforts to be..."cooler"...whatever that means. I have come out to some participants in my initial letter and others I am not out to yet. I made sure they all knew how old I was but I've omitted and constructed my academic credentials accordingly. I want to have enough legitimacy for my research to be taken seriously but I didn't want to be too academic...too much like a "researcher". All of these decision have been important in eliciting meaningful responses.⁵¹

In reflection, I wonder exactly what I meant by "meaningful responses"? I appear to be implying that my decisions to perform my own identity or aspects of it in specific ways helped me solicit the responses I was hoping to get. In this sense, my partial fictions may have had "real" effects on my research. On one hand, this may seem unethical. By presenting myself differently to different participants was I not being deceitful? If one assumes that we have an original or natural, fixed, and singular identity - an essence as it were - then the way I constructed myself in my letters may be viewed as unethical and deceitful. However, if we assume that all aspects of our identities are performative then it becomes apparent that my decisions regarding how to present myself to the participants are not unlike the decisions we make every time we encounter someone face-to-face.

What I learned through my own experience of corresponding with 'zine writers is that 'zine networks appear to create a space where you *can* dare to reinvent yourself. In fact, since many 'zine writers and readers use pseudonyms, the performative and at times, fictional, aspects of the writers' identities seems to be taken for

⁵¹ Field note, November 1, 1995.

granted. As both Kennedy and Cleo suggest, the 'zine network is a place where one can transform one's boring or miserable life into something exciting, entertaining, and most importantly, something that other people will *want* to read about. However, as previously discussed, there is evidence that these fictions do transform the 'zine writers' lived experiences. In this way, I feel the only way to understand the 'zine writers and their constructions of themselves is as boundary stories - stories situated where lived experience, descriptions of lived experience, and fiction converge and begin to influence each other. Moreover, the notion of boundary stories may be useful for understanding the 'zine writers and their stories because it draws attention to the way in which the 'zine writers' story telling can be viewed as tactics. As de Certeau suggests, stories "mark out boundaries" or "carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places. They also organize the play or changing relationships between places and spaces."⁵² In other words, stories, such as the stories told by young women in their 'zines, reorganize space in order to create sites of resistance or what Foucault refers to as "freedom spaces" in and through existing systems of power.

As is suggested above, the lines between reality, documentary and textual forms of reality, and fiction are not always distinct as is

⁵² de Certeau, p.118.

evident in the case of 'zine networks. As a result, attempting to prove the "true" or original identities of the subjects of this thesis seemed doomed to failure. Instead, I have attempted to examine *why* I have constructed them in particular ways and how and why their constructions of themselves are significant *and* tactical. In order to carry this out I have had to abandon fixed notions of identity - to recognize the performativity of identity itself. And, as previously discussed, I have had to abandon my need to categorize the texts as well. This meant accepting the possibility that these texts are neither public documents nor personal correspondence but "boundary stories" - texts written from and perhaps, intended to be read within the boundaries. However, as Stone suggests, these boundary stories are often the most difficult stories to read. After all, in order to read/research boundary stories one must begin by abandoning research practices and conceptual frameworks which depend on the distinctions between lived experience, descriptions of it, and fiction. On the other hand, in recognizing these accounts as boundary stories it becomes possible to begin identifying how power relations can be contested and transformed in and through everyday practices, such as the practices or tactics of the 'zine producers discussed in this chapter.

It is important to note that the questions raised by my research on 'zines and 'zine producers are not unique. Researchers examining

the subjects and social spaces created by new communication technologies are faced with many of the same questions. After all, as in 'zine networks, these "virtual environments" are made up of people and social spaces that are ultimately partial, shifting, and contradictory. In the next chapter, I will examine how our notions of identity and "community" or social space are shifting in relation to new technologies. It will become apparent that in order to carry out research in or about these virtual environments it also becomes necessary to abandon research methods and conceptual frameworks that fail to account for the possibility that our fictions and our lived experiences are already converging.

Chapter Four

Boundary Stories/Boundary Spaces: Technologies as Tools of Resistance

In this chapter I examine how some young women involved in the production of 'zines are using new technologies in ways which enable them to make the most of their situations. I am interested not only in the types of technologies they are appropriating but in how their use of technologies holds the potential to transform themselves, their bodies, and their experiences of community or social space. In other words how are office and school computers, typewriters salvaged from dumpsters, Polaroid cameras purchased at thrift shops, and convenience store photocopiers being used tactically - as tools of survival?

On one hand, there is nothing remarkable about the fact that these 'zine producers are using new technologies. What makes their appropriation of these technologies significant is the fact that they are using them in order to tell and circulate particular types of stories - boundary stories. As discussed in chapter three, I have chosen to examine the accounts in these 'zines as well as my correspondence and conversations with 'zine producers as boundary stories for several reasons. Once again, this notion of boundary stories seems like an appropriate starting point for examining the 'zines because they appear to resist being understood in terms of existing categories

and genres - as it is, they seem to fall in between the cracks. For example, the 'zines continuously move across and through fiction, documentary and textual realities, and lived experience - the notion of boundary stories accommodates this ambiguity. However, the accounts found in the 'zines may also be understood as boundary stories because they describe the experiences of people whose appearance, practices, and/or attitudes fail to support normative notions of sex, gender, and desire. These are stories by and about people whose lived experiences can only be understood by looking at the points where categories (i.e. the categories of "girl" or "woman") start to collapse. I will argue that the 'zine producers' use of new technologies can be understood as tactics *because* they enable them to create and tell stories which have been silenced by both "mainstream" and feminist and queer presses and thus, to re-invent their identities, even when and where these identities seem like impossibilities.

However, it is also crucial to examine how these boundary stories are spatial practices. Once again, De Certeau suggests that 'the space of a tactic is the space of the other.' As I will discuss later in this chapter, many 'zine producers write about the sense of community they feel through the production, distribution, and trading of 'zines. As a result, I am also interested in how these boundary stories reorganize space in order to create so-called "liberated

zones.” In other words, how do these stories reorganize spaces in a way that enable silenced narratives to be told and heard, and enable the story tellers to connect with other people who share their experiences, opinions, and/or desires? How do the ‘zine producer’s specific uses of technologies create social spaces or communities that stretch out far beyond the boundaries of their own homes and geographic locations?

The Role of Technologies in the Production of ‘Zines

During my research i visited the current the location of Riot Girl Press Canada - an apartment in East Vancouver where Zanna, who coordinates Riot Girl Press Canada, ¹ and her two house-mates (also involved in the production of ‘zines) live and work. As I walked around their house, what I noticed first was the apparent lack of technologies: I didn’t see any televisions, VCRs, CD players, or computers. I asked them if they had a computer or even an electric typewriter in the house. They told me they had five typewriters - two electric and three manual. Both Zanna and her house-mate explained that in some ways they preferred their manual Smith Coronas since they enabled them to achieve interesting intensities of

¹ Riot Girl Press Canada was started in the summer of 1995 in order to help distribute ‘zines to girls living in Canada. Due to differences in currency and postage as well as the difficulty of sending some ‘zines across the border, it is often difficult for girls living in Canada to access materials from Riot Girl Press based in Chicago.

type - depending on how hard they banged on the keys. In addition to their collection of typewriters (several of which were salvaged from dumpsters), their refrigerator was covered with Polaroid photographs and beside their kitchen table was a layout desk with glue, tape, Exacto knives and other layout tools which have been abandoned by most publishers in this age of desktop publishing. Zanna said that these "retro techno" items - the typewriters, Polaroid camera, and layout tools - were the technologies that they could afford but also stressed their aesthetic virtues. For example, she explained, "The [Polaroid cameras] you get at Value Village are really crappy and old and you can't take pictures unless it is in the right sunlight...but you *can* experiment." She further explained that by shining photography lamps directly on the subject of the picture it is possible to create high contrast images which look almost like black and white photographs - these images can be and often are further manipulated with photocopiers.

Zanna's decision "to keep it as low tech as possible"² is not unusual among 'zine producers. Many 'zine producers, especially those connected to the punk scene, are particularly interested in preserving the use of "retro-techno" items in the 'zine production. For example, in his study of queer punk 'zines Viegner found that most were "unpaginated, type-written or handwritten instead of

² Zanna, interview with the author, February 4, 1996.

laser-printed.”³ He further notes that the two primary typographic models used in the ‘zines were “graffiti, seen in ‘magic marker’ script, and the ransom note, typefaces taped together to form an anonymous message...”⁴ The use of typewriters, photocopiers, Polaroid cameras and public photo booths in the production of ‘zines is, as previously mentioned, partly an economic decision - these are among the most inexpensive and accessible means of producing a ‘zine. However, the chosen typefaces in punk ‘zines, for example, may also be intentional. As Viegner notes, the chosen typefaces in punk ‘zines can be as significant as the meaning of the words themselves. He explains, “the ransom note suggests a connection to terrorism and crime as well as ‘documentary ‘intervention; graffiti functions as a kind of signature attached to a fictive creation, ironically grounded in the ‘real.”⁵ Similarly Hebdige explains that in punk fanzines “...typing errors and grammatical mistakes, misspellings and jumbled pagination were left uncorrected...Those corrections and crossings out that were made before publication were left to be deciphered by the reader.”⁶ While these errors may give the impression that the publication was made in great haste they also emphasize the “urgency and immediacy of the content” - the fact that

³ Matias Viegner, “Kinky Escapades, Bedroom Techniques, Unbridled Passion, and Secret Sex Codes,” *Camp Grounds: style and homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman (Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993) p.235.

⁴ Ibid. pp. 235-237.

⁵ Ibid. p. 237.

⁶ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: the meaning of style* (New York: Routledge, 1993) p. 111.

these were “memos from the front line.”⁷ I have found that even ‘zines largely produced using computer technologies often include hand written and/or type written materials. These conventions not only like the ‘zines to their punk roots but give off an impression that these texts are not fixed and final but open to ongoing revisions, retractions and so on. After all, as most ‘zine producers will tell you, ‘zines are all about creating dialogue as opposed to closing it.

‘Zine producers, including those like Zanna who may initially not appear to be using new technologies, make numerous decisions about what technologies to use, how to use them, and when and why to use them. In this sense, “low tech” as well as “high tech” are better understood as *ideologies* of technology than as *measures* of technology. I realize, however, that when I initiated this research I was attempting to identify a common ideology of technology among the ‘zine producers. What I discovered was that these ‘zine producers articulate a range of ideologies about technology. For example, Zanna expresses concerns about the use of computers in ‘zine production explaining, “...it is definitely a really big class issue...”⁸ - but she does not feel that computers should never be used in ‘zine production. Kiki, who does use a computer in the production of her ‘zine, feels that rejecting computer technologies altogether is a somewhat unusual practice among ‘zine producers. She explains:

One thing I find interesting about the ‘zine audience in general is

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Zanna, interview with the author, February 4, 1996.

that there is a large group of readers that believe going to neat, computerized graphics, layout, etc. is a sort of sell-out. They don't think it's "punk" to have type written on mainstream layout pages...I believe, however, that if the words, regardless of how they are put on the page, have heart, that it's o.k. - they're valuable. ⁹

Kiki, who started producing her 'zine with the help of a "1960s Smith-corona", feels her 'zine *has* changed as she has gained access to different technologies. She writes:

As access to higher technology increases for me, the 'zine definitely changes. In my opinion it's for the better. It looks neater, more clean. My ideas are conveyed more clearly (more legibly, certainly) so I don't have to worry about my opinion being missed or overlooked. ¹⁰

Thus, for Kiki, aesthetics and readability largely determine what technologies she uses in the production of her 'zine.

Like Kiki, Tina who produces *Femme Flicke*, has gained access to different and newer technologies since she started producing her 'zine. However, she continues to use a range of "old" and "new" technologies in the production of her 'zine. She writes:

I think of computers like I think of copy machines, scissors, and letreset: tools to make my magazine look the way i want. A lot of people who publish zines don't like the look of computer / digital-looking type and layouts. And some feel trapped by it. But I just use computers along with my typewriter, rubber stamps, scissors, etc. ¹¹

Tina's ideology about technology is also reflected in the content of her

⁹ Kiki, letter to the author, November 1, 1995.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Tina, letter to the author, November 14, 1995.

'zine and in her own short films and videos. Her 'zine contains articles about the film industry and reviews of women's films as well as tips, advertisements, and resource listings for women interested in making and distributing independent films on a limited budget with limited support. For example, one issue of *Femme Flicke* included an insert for the "Big Miss Moviola" project whose goal is to "connect-up women who could share each other's resources (scams, equipment, brilliant ideas, grant writing techniques, time etc...)." ¹² Tina also writes about ways to develop one's own film, places to purchase inexpensive film equipment, the virtues of Fisherprice video cameras, and how to gain access to quality video cameras and editing equipment through local cable stations. In 'zine production and in film and video production, Tina is interested in using "retro-techno" items (e.g. super-8 film, lettreset, and so on) *and* in discovering ways to gain access to new technologies (e.g. editing suites and computer scanners). Thus, her ideology about technology is not entirely an access issue or an aesthetic concern.

Katherine, the editor of *Spiffy*, has a slightly different view about the role of technology in 'zine production. Her nearly three-hundred page long 'zine includes desk-top published text and layout, computer generated graphics as well as information and interviews found and conducted on-line. Her attitude about new technologies is somewhat irreverent. In an article about the Internet, she writes:

¹² Insert in *Femme Flicke*, 2.

I am glad that the InfoS (if I hate that term, why am I using it?) is attracting more people, and maybe they realize that online networks/Internet are practically the most amazing thing EVER (my opinion). Of course, I still hold onto that uncontrollable feeling of irritation that they don't automatically know as much about this stuff as I do, and they ask too many questions, and some write clueless articles, or if they don't write clueless articles they write articles full of things I learned ages ago. ¹³

In terms of 'zine production, she admits "I guess it's that I'm not crazy about punkzine layouts - I'm fond of readability and correct spelling."

¹⁴ However, this is not to say that Katherine necessarily ignores handwritten 'zines with messy layout or that she entirely rejects punk 'zine inspired layout techniques in her own 'zine. Her own 'zine does include some familiar 'zine conventions, such as last minute inserts, handwritten comments, and a few hand drawn cartoons and sketches.

The fact that Katherine has a great deal of access to new technologies - probably more than most of the 'zine writers I encountered during this research - obviously influences her ideology of technology. For example, she tells her readers that her gift for Christmas was "...the color desk jet print the pages of *Spiffy* are now printed out with." ¹⁵ I think it also important to note that Katherine appears to have benefited from additional parental support. The fact that her 'zine includes pictures of and interviews with her parents

¹³ *Spiffy*, 5 (1994).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

seems to further indicate that both of her parents are aware of her 'zine and supportive of it. This, however, is not altogether surprising. Katherine's 'zine *does* challenge assumptions about girls and technology but unlike many of the 'zines discussed here, it does leave normative notions of sex, gender, and desire intact. Focusing primarily on music reviews and accounts of extra-curricular activities at school, *Spiffy* is the sort of 'zine most parents would actually *like* their daughter to produce.

In contrast, many of the other 'zines discussed in this thesis are clearly produced without parental support, knowledge, or approval. For example, Cleo's family, like Katherine's family, owns a computer and yet her 'zines are generally hand written or occasionally typed. As Cleo explained to me:

...the main reason i don't do slut magnet on the computer is because of the privacy thing. we do own a computer but like i'm gonna go downstairs to the living room and start typing out my badly written erotica or whatever...when i first started slut mag some of it was on the computer but then again-every sentence didn't contain the word DYKE... ¹⁶

Cleo's relationship to her family as well as the content and style of her 'zine limits her access to technology even within her home. Moreover, unlike some 'zine writers, Cleo is also unable to use the computer facilities in her school since a school computer lab, like a family living room, is hardly a safe environment in which to create

¹⁶ Cleo, letter to the author, September 29, 1995.

these sorts of stories. ¹⁷ In this way, it becomes possible to see how 'zine producer's situation as well as the focus of their 'zines may determine what technologies they have can access as well as their ideology of technology.

If there is one thing all of these 'zine producers share, it is the use of and in some cases, the reverence for photocopier technologies. Although 'zines existed before photocopiers became widely available there is no doubt that the number of 'zines in circulation today is largely connected to the increasing availability of this technology. The fact that photocopiers enable them to reproduce things quickly and cheaply is equally important. As the writers in *Bikini Kill* 'zine remind their reader "PHOTOCOPYING IS A CHEAP WAY TO SHARE INFORMATION." ¹⁸ The significance of the photocopier is largely connected to the way it seems almost "naturally" linked to the democratic principles of accessibility. The invention of the printing press may have enabled far more people to gain access to texts but it did not give readers or writers very much agency over what texts were printed and distributed. As Lovejoy notes, the introduction of copy machines had a significant effect on culture. She explains:

...every office, library, and banking establishment in the country began to feel the instant electronic pulse of copy machines.

¹⁷ Cleo's access to educational technologies is further limited by the fact that she stopped attending her high school on a regular basis. She has opted to do correspondence courses due to the degree of harassment she was experiencing at school.

¹⁸ *Bikini Kill* , 1.

Soon everyone was copying everything from their tax forms, college degrees, newspaper clippings, and drawings, to parts of the body. There was an unparalleled escalation of image and information flow which, like television, deeply affected the lives of everyone, in every walk of life. ¹⁹

Above all, the photocopier is the technology that has enabled writers to by-pass the authority invested in conventional printing processes and thus, it is not surprising that a largely non-commercial and subcultural publishing community would flourish as a result.

It is also interesting to note that the appearance of 'zines has shifted and continues to shift with improvements in photocopier technologies. Clearer reproductions, increased features for enlarging texts and images, copiers with different coloured ink cartridges, and colour photocopiers all create new ways for 'zine editors to express themselves. For example, Zanna explains:

In terms of art work...the type of art I find aesthetically pleasing for myself is low key and simple stuff, simple graphics and the photocopier...when I did *Redefining Value* I did the typing up here but I purposely went down to Olympia to do the layout because the Kinko's there is really nice and they have three different colours of toner but they are the same price and all the machines are self serve and the colour paper is really accessible...They have these brand new machines there that can do colour overlays and lightening options that make the pictures really faded. Like in *Redefining Value* the background is just all speckled - those were actually pictures of me that were blown up and lightened to the point where they were just speckly. ²⁰

¹⁹ Margot Lovejoy, *Postmodern Current: Art and Artists in the Age of Electronic Media* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989) p. 76.

²⁰ Zanna, interview with the author, February 4, 1996.

Zanna's detailed description of how she manipulates photocopiers in the production of 'zines suggests that 'zine producers (even those who don't use computer technologies in their 'zines) may possess a unique understanding of how *particular* technologies can be used. However, it is somewhat ironic that for Zanna, and other 'zine producers, the photocopier - an office technology designed to *duplicate* originals quickly and efficiently - is used to distort and reconfigure original texts and images. In this way, the technology's function appears to be playfully reversed by the 'zine producers' interventions.

As is evident in this discussion, the 'zine producers do not appear to have a common ideology about technologies. Their access to technologies, reasons for producing a 'zine, and the focus of the 'zine all seem to effect what technologies are used, how they are used, and how they are conceptualized. Nevertheless, I would argue that all of the 'zine producers discussed here are using technologies as tactics - as ways to, as de Certeau suggests, "...make do with what they have."²¹ Penley has also argued that the uses of new technologies in the production of 'zines may be understood as tactics. Drawing on de Certeau, Penley writes, "Tactics are not designed primarily to help users take over the system but to seize every opportunity to turn to their own ends forces that systematically

²¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: U of C Press, 1988) p.18.

exclude or marginalize them.”²² She explains:

Not only have they remade the *Star Trek* fictional universe to their own desiring ends, they have achieved it by enthusiastically mimicking the technologies of mass-market cultural production, and by constantly debating their own relation, as women, to those technologies, through both the way they make decisions about how to use the technological resources available to them and the way they rewrite bodies and technologies in their utopian romances.²³

As a result, Penley suggests that women involved in the production of K/S ‘zines “do more than ‘make do’: they make.”²⁴ In other words, they do more than tactically read the *Star Trek* narrative against the grain, they have discovered ways to use various media technologies in order to reimagine their world and create texts and images that reflect this reconstruction of their own bodies and desires.

The young women ‘zine producers discussed in this thesis share a great deal in common with the ‘zine producers discussed in Penley’s study. Like the women in Penley’s study, the ‘zine producers discussed here do “creatively reimagine their world through making a tactics of technology itself.”²⁵ As I will discuss in greater detail throughout this chapter, it is through the appropriation of technologies that these ‘zine producers reinvent themselves and their experiences of social space or community. Once again, their appropriation of technologies does not radically disrupt systems of

²² Penley, p.139.

²³ Ibid., p.140.

²⁴ Ibid., p.140.

²⁵ Ibid., p.159.

power but it does appear to enable them - in whatever a small way - to transform their own lives. However, I do not entirely agree with Penley's suggestion that the 'zine producers "do more than make do; they make." As de Certeau argues, tactics take "advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep." ²⁶ I think that this is an important distinction that Penley may have overlooked. On one hand, the 'zine producers do 'make' but if they can not keep what they win then is it possible for them to do more than make do? As I will discuss later in this chapter, the 'zine producers' appropriation of technologies in the production of their 'zines often does make a significant difference in their lives but it also has limits which should not be ignored.

The Re-invention of Bodies and Selves in Boundary Stories

The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalised identities.
²⁷

In "A Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway argues that for cyborgs "writing is about the power to survive..." ²⁸ and as suggested above, often the tools or tactics are stories which displace identities which are seen as natural and normal. Many of the 'zines I examined seem to

²⁶ De Certeau, p. 37.

²⁷ Haraway, 1991, p.175.

²⁸ Ibid.

use stories precisely in this way since these stories are all about “the power to survive.” After all, certain experiences, identities, and desires - those which are thought to be *impossibilities* or those which do not follow from normative notions of sex, gender, and desire - would appear not to exist at all if it weren't for the continual telling and retelling of boundary stories where these impossible experiences, identities, and desires are allowed to surface.

It is important to note that not all 'zine writers produce their 'zines in order to present a personal account. In many cases, the 'zine is an excuse to talk to interesting people or a way to gain access to free or discounted music, concert tickets, and other 'zines. In other cases, the 'zine may be an opportunity to promote oneself and their writing or band or art work. However, in many - if not most of the 'zines I examined - the focus was the telling of personal accounts. 'Zines have become sanctioned space in which to tell stories about coming out, struggles to overcome eating disorders and body image problems, and experiences of sexual abuse and rape. The fact that these accounts are being told is important on its own. However, what struck me most about the accounts in these 'zines was their presentation. As one of these 'zine writers explains on the opening page of her 'zine:

i use fanzines and writing to be confrontational about things that are difficult face to face. i think a lot of marginalized people use writing as a way to address privilege and domination because there's no interrupting a piece of paper. there's safety here in

my bedroom sitting in front of this typewriter that i can't find outside . i am not critical and confrontational to hurt individual people. i think what I have to say is really important, and i hope it pisses you off...fuck being comfortable if it means silencing others. it is a luxury to be comfortable while others suffer, are silenced, etc... ²⁹

This writer's 'zine did make me uncomfortable - to the point where I questioned whether or not I should continue reading her 'zine. Of course, this *is* the point. As discussed in chapter two, most 'zines are not written to be entertaining or to make money or even to educate readers. 'Zines are often written because they are one place where people might tell their stories on their own terms which is precisely what makes them boundary stories. Telling stories 'on their own terms' is all about abandoning expected categories, narratives, and conclusions - it is a story cut loose, a story that emerges from and vigilantly makes use of the cracks or ruptures in between set categories. As a result, sometimes it is only in these boundary stories that taboos, impossibilities, surprises, transformations can be made visible.

“Queer Girls” and “Bi-girls”

As Fuss has argued, “To be out is really to be in - to be in the realm of the visible, the speakable, the culturally intelligible.” ³⁰

²⁹ *Fantastic Fanzine*, 5.

³⁰ Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p.4.

Similarly, lesbian writer Nicole Brossard has suggested that it is, "Only through literally creating ourselves in the world do we declare our existence...When I say literally give birth to ourselves in the world, I really do mean literally. *Literal* means 'that which is represented by letters.'" ³¹ After all, speaking and writing about oneself as a dyke, fag, lesbian, gay man, queer, bisexual or whatever the chosen term may be, is all about inserting oneself into the social discourse from which they/we have been and are systematically excluded. Sedgwick and Malinowitz, among others, have written about coming out as a "speech act". For example, Malinowitz explains, "The forms that that act takes will vary. In some instances it will emerge as an 'expressionist' moment - a 'voicing' of an 'authentic' inner reality...For others, coming out may be conceived as a social-epistemic moment, one which not only heralds the entrance of the writer's message into the world of discourses but which in turn is examined for its roots and origins in discourse." ³² However, for many lesbians and gay men in the process of coming out finding a relatively safe space for this speech act (or *acts*, since coming out is all about repetition) is extremely difficult.

'Zines offer lesbians and gay men a space for the speech act of coming out to take place and be acknowledged with less risk of being 'outed' to their families, friends, teachers, or acquaintances than

³¹ Nicole Brossard, "Lesbians of Lore," *The Aerial Letter*, trans. Marlene Wildeman (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1988) p.134.

³² Harriet Malinowitz, *Textual Orientations*, (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1995) p. 266.

other potential spaces where this act may take place. For example, as Seanna, who writes a 'zine called *Gift Idea*, writes, "i got a PC at my desk at work yesterday, and here i am, 11:30 pm in an office building typing my life out so i don't have to explain myself to anyone anymore...damn, if anyone here knew... I'M QUEER!!!!!!!"³³ In some cases, 'zine readers also use 'zine networks as a way to declare and explore their new found identity through letter writing. For example, the following passage was part of a letter sent to the editors of *Girl Germs* where it was eventually reprinted:

I could go on... and on...about all the teachers who told me to spend less time studying and more time flirting. About how I used to throw up five times a day because I figured if I couldn't be straight I'd have to be perfect at everything else.³⁴

This particular 'zine reader further explained "I'm sending this letter to a couple of zines."³⁵ The fact that she sent this letter to several 'zines and the fact that her letter was reprinted by the editors of *Girl Germs* suggests that 'zine readers also are provided with a space in which to re-invent their identities in the context of 'zine networks. For obvious reasons, 'zines play a particularly important role for queer youth living with their parents, and queers living in smaller cities, towns, and rural areas. However, even lesbians and gay men who do have access to queer organizations or meeting places may prefer to come out through 'zines or other writing activities. Established

³³ *Gift Idea* (1993).

³⁴ Reader's letter to the editor reprinted in *Girl Germs*, 3 (1992).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

lesbian and gay meeting places have a tendency to suggest - particularly to newcomers - that identity *is* based on membership, appearance, or specific knowledge. In contrast, in 'zine networks queer identities have a tendency to be more fluid.

Take for example, the queer youth 'zines discussed in this thesis. In self-identifying as "queer girls" and "bi-girls" these young women discursively reposition two identity categories which force their readers or listeners to confront the fact that "queer" and "girl" are not - as many people would prefer to believe - necessarily mutually exclusive subject positions. Thus, queer girl and bi-girl are terms which both unsettle normative notions of the femininity as well as presuppositions about what it means to be "queer." As Butler explains:

The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of "identities" cannot "exist" - that is, those, in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not "follow" from either sex or gender. "Follow" in this context is a political relation of entailment instituted by the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality. Indeed, precisely because certain kinds of "gender identities" fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain. ³⁶

The categories of "girl" and "queer" have been invested with particular meanings which seem to come apart when they are brought together because "queer girl" is an identity that *cannot* exist

³⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990) p.17.

because it fails to follow from normative notions of gender, sex, and desire. Thinking about girls as queer and thinking about queers as girls is unsettling then because girls' desires and particularly, their same-sex desires and identities, have been effectively repressed by sexist and homophobic as well as feminist and queer discourses.

Butler further argues that just as gender categories have been constructed according to specific assumptions and practices, gay and lesbian identities have been constructed "through the same exclusionary means..."³⁷ For example, in the context of lesbian feminist and radical feminist discourses "lesbian" has been constructed according to essentialist notions about women's nature. Butler suggests that for lesbians and gay men:

The more insidious and effective a strategy it seems is a thoroughgoing appropriation and redeployment of the categories of identity themselves, not merely to contest "sex," but to articulate the convergence of multiple sexual discourses at the site of 'identity' in order to render that category, in whatever form, permanently problematic.³⁸

By bringing the terms "queer" and "girl" or "bi" and "girl" together these young women construct an identity category where multiple discourses about sex, gender, and desire converge, and as a result, render the categories of "girl" and "woman" as well as "queer", "lesbian", and "gay" permanently problematic. However, unlike Butler who would refer to this as a "strategy" I would argue that the

³⁷ Ibid., p.128.

³⁸ Ibid., p.128.

'zine producers' use of the terms "queer girl" or "bi girl" may be better understood as a tactic.

We are loving each other and ditching stupid ideas of competition. We are laughing screaming breaking down writing....playing dress up holding hands making our own rules and then breaking them...strapping on dildos and fucking boys with them sticking up for each other making a spectacle of ourselves working hard staying up all night having sex with each other jumping on the bed kicking the walls in....³⁹

As suggested above, these 'zine writers seem committed both to idealized notions of women's friendship and desire and to displacing fixed notions of gender through parodic performances and practices (e.g. girls fucking boys with dildos) which seem to bring the impossibilities of gender, sex and desire into view. One of the ways these impossibilities are manifested is through the production of "queer girl" and "bi girl" erotica or pornography (unlike the generation of feminists before them, these writers do not seem particularly concerned with semantics in this case). In a now infamous manifesto - "Revolution Girl Style Now" published in *Bikini Kill* 'zine - the authors write:

MAKE PORNOGRAPHY that includes more than just hetero sex. This can be queer girl sex or boy +boy sex or hetero sex where more than just dumb conversation and fucking take place. If video is your medium of choice, you could have the "actors" acknowledge the camera's presence and the fact that they are being watched. Portray women as people who're three dimensional have desires, ie...are not always the object of desire of fake sex crazed nymphos. Let the audience know the people are real by showing them doing other things together

³⁹ *Riot Grrrl D.C.*, 1.

besides fucking. You could also make porn real easy by masturbating in front of a camera on a tripod. Loving oneself is cool. ⁴⁰

Many girl 'zines continue to embrace the ideas expressed in the above manifesto arguing that making their own erotica or pornography ⁴¹ is an important part of taking control of their own bodies and sexuality. For example, Cleo explains, "...it bothers me like when i want to buy a book/magazine but i can't b/c im only 16. its like fr fuck sake i can do these things or write about it myself." ⁴² And, she does write about "these things." Cleo recognizes that ironically while she is unable to purchase porn, there is not much that can be done about her decision to write and distribute it herself even though some "community standards" may view her 'zines as "child pornography". She explains, " Personally I don't know that i am at risk b/c i am under 18 and I don't know exactly what they could do...I believe I'm being responsible, my writing is not displaying or promoting any violent portrayals of womyn, but b/c im under 18 and GAY (!) it means im not allowed to express myself in that way. It is like people [under] 18 aren't allowed to have a sexuality." ⁴³ However, in the context of 'zine networks, people under eighteen are "allowed" to have a sexuality even when their desire does not follow from and

⁴⁰ *Bikini Kill*, 1.

⁴¹ I use the terms "erotica or pornography" here because both of these terms are used - somewhat interchangeable - in the 'zines I examined. Interestingly, I did not come across any debates about the difference between these terms.

⁴² Cleo, letter to the author, September 29, 1995.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

support heterosexual norms.

I have argued here that coming out can be understood as a speech act and thus, 'zines may be particularly significant for queer youth - especially to those who live in areas or under circumstances where accessing lesbian and gay resources and social spaces is virtually impossible. (I will discuss this issue in greater detail later in this chapter). However, it is important to note that this speech act is not only carried out through the technology of writing which Haraway suggests, "...is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs..."⁴⁴ Coming out may also be understood as an act based on the appropriation of various other technologies - not just writing technologies but computers, cameras, video technologies, electronic communication devices and so on. Once again, as Fuss suggests, "Coming out is about being in..." - being in pictures, films, videos, texts, cyberspace and so on. Waugh writes that for queers "each new advance in imagemaking technology triggered an analogous flurry of nation formation."⁴⁵ McIntosh also suggests that gay male identity has emerged in the past few decades largely due to the increased accessibility of media technologies, particularly those which enable the producer to have full control over the image being produced (i.e. the Polaroid camera, video camera, and VCR).⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Haraway, 1991, p.176.

⁴⁵ Tom Waugh, "Cultivated Colonies: Notes on Queer Nationhood and the Erotic Image" *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 2.2-3 (1993) p.167.

⁴⁶ See David McIntosh, "Pornutopian Premises, Positive Practices: Michael Balsler's Video Art and Activism," *FUSE* 18.5 (1995).

On the other hand, Grover argues that lesbian visibility has been largely determined by “*absences and negativities*” - “absences of money for production and distribution, absences of wide audiences and sites for exhibition; negations of personal identity, security, and pride fosters by mainstream culture...”⁴⁷ For the queer girls and bi-girls discussed here, both the increasing accessibility of technologies and the “absences and negativities” discussed by Grover appear to effect their ongoing attempts to re-invent their identities, bodies, and desires in opposition to both sexist and homophobic discourses *and* feminist and queer discourses which keep normative notions of gender, sex, and desire in place.

“I’m so Fucking Beautiful”

Like the queer girl and bi-girl ‘zines, ‘zines focusing on body image and eating disorder issues actively work to subvert normative notions of gender, sex, and desire. Although many of the ‘zines I encountered during my research take up body image and eating disorder issues for the purposes of this discussion I will discuss two ‘zines focus primarily on these concerns.

In the introduction *The Adventures of Big Girl* Alison writes, “I’m Fat...I’m also a feminist, a musician, an artist, a bisexual and a

⁴⁷ Jan Zita Grover, “Dykes in Context: Some Problems in Minority Representation,” *The Contest of meaning : critical histories of photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989) p. 197.

scholar and I'm damn proud of all of those words...." ⁴⁸ In her "Big Girl Manifesto," she articulates an agenda for fighting stereotypes about fat girls and fat women. The following statements are among the points raised in her manifesto:

Let no one tell us what we can and cannot do with our own mouths, our own minds, and our own bodies.... We demand our right to express our sexuality.... We accept our fat and will not burn, vacuum or cut it out of our bodies... We reject all forms of censorship as detrimental to our need to express ourselves artistically, politically, literally, and erotically... ⁴⁹

These are only a few of the points Alison makes in her "Big Girl Manifesto" but they do draw attention to the way her 'zine challenges stereotypes about fat girls and fat women, questions the role of media and medical technologies in producing and perpetuating "fat hating propaganda", and calls notions of gender, sex, and desire into question. For example, in demanding a right to her sexuality, she challenges myths about fat girls and fat women's sexuality (or apparent lack of sexuality).

I think it is important to note that for Alison and for Nomy, (who edits *im so fucking beautiful*) their use of the terms "fat girl," "big girl" and "fat woman" are an attempt to reinvest the meaning of these terms or descriptions. Both Alison and Nomy emphasize the need to think about fat girls and fat women in terms of positives as opposed to negatives. For example, Alison writes, "MAYBE, SOMEHOW my

⁴⁸ *The Adventures of Big Girl* .

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

parents and doctors and teachers could have seen a positive thing in my BIGNESS!...But instead, i was `doomed' to become a fat adult, i.e., a failure in life.”⁵⁰ However, central to their “fat grrrl revolution” is the need to maintain some control over what women might claim the identity of “fat girl” or “fat woman.” Nomy writes, “the fat grrrl revolution does not belong to me, but at the same time, i don't think that it's fair for people who aren't fat to say that they are...isn't there something fucked up in the fact that these girls [girls who are five pounds over their `ideal weight'] can relate to what i'm saying?”⁵¹ Similarly, Alison asks, “Who is my audience?...I most want to speak to those like myself - not those that `have to lose that extra 10 pounds,' but people who are 60, 70, 80, 90, 100 pounds over their `ideal' weight prescribed by doctors, weight charts and, especially, disgusting fashion designers...”⁵²

Thus, on one hand, their `zines affirm their identities as fat girls or fat women and provide them with an opportunity to reinvent what these terms may mean. However, these `zines also call normative notions of gender, sex, and desire into question and draw attention to the ways in which certain women (i.e. women whose size or weight is considered “unacceptable”) may be rendered invisible. As Butler argues, “The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *im so fucking beautiful* , 2.

⁵² *The Adventures of Big Girl* .

the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.”⁵³ This ‘stylization of the body’ that produces gender includes certain norms about weight and size and appearance. Those bodies which fail to replicate these standards, thus, also are seen as failing to replicate the categories of “girl” and “woman”.

Alison and Nomy both write about the “ideal” that is reproduced by certain people, practices, discourses, and structures (e.g. the fashion industry, the weight loss industry, and the medical profession). The “ideal” these writers refer to is not described or defined - they assume, as they should, that their readers are already fully aware of what constitutes “ideal” or who constitutes this “ideal” woman. However, their repositioning of fat girls and fat women as lead singers of punk bands, as performance artists, as girl ‘zine sex symbols (and the list goes on) radically calls this “ideal” woman into question revealing gender, sex, and desire to be contingent on the viewer, context, and so on.

Once again, like the queer girls and bi-girls previously discussed, Alison and Nomy’s appropriation of technologies plays an important role in their struggle to re-invent and represent their selves and bodies in opposition to the images and attitudes presented to them in “mainstream” media. Their appropriation of computer and

⁵³ Butler, p. 140.

photocopier technologies, among other things, enables them to tell and circulate stories about their struggles as fat girls and fat women in a sizest society. For example, Nomy tells her readers:

okay, in case you're having trouble figuring it out - i'm fat and this zine is all about fat oppression. in the past year i have made a lot of progress with myself and my body image. when i first started doing zines i was too ashamed of my body to even say that i was fat. although i wanted my zines to be personal i couldn't bring myself to talk about my body because the only thing i could even think to say was "why can't i lose weight?" by the time i wrote isfb #1 i had realized that i didn't have to hate my body, that i could be proud of my body, that i could be sexy, beautiful, and fat (not a contradiction).⁵⁴

Thus, it seems that Nomy's 'zine writing may have played some role in her increased level of comfort with her body. However, it is also important to note that both of these 'zine writers appropriate technologies in part to critique the various technologies used to render fat girls and women invisible or to manipulate their bodies. For example, Alison's "Big Girl Manifesto" emphasizes the need "to fight against all forms of surgical weight loss, including but not limited to intestinal bypass, stomach stapling and liposuction; procedures that kill and maim us."⁵⁵ In these 'zines, the effects of technologies on bodies and subsequently, on identities, is both exposed and contested in part through tactics of technology.

⁵⁴ *im so fucking beautiful*, 2.

⁵⁵ *The Adventures of Big Girl*, 1.

Survivor's Stories

The 'zine accounts I found most difficult to read were the ones that contained accounts of incest, sexual abuse, and violence. In my work and research I have heard and read countless stories - more than I care to remember - about women's experiences of incest, abuse, and violence. Thus, what made these stories difficult for me to read, and at times shocking was not necessarily their subject matter. Instead, it was the presentation of these accounts. I now realize that my academic background, as well as my work in the violence against women movement, have provided me with particular theoretical frameworks for examining abuse and violence against women issues - I have certain expectations for what *should* be included in a survivor's story and how it *should* be presented. As a result, I had difficulty reading and discussing the accounts of incest, abuse, and violence presented in the 'zines because these accounts simply could not be understood according to my existing frameworks for analyzing the dynamics of male violence against women and children.

As discussed in chapter three, since many of the 'zines discussed in this study were never intended to be quoted in an academic text, I am hesitant to go into detail about these accounts or to quote portions of these texts. I do, however, think that the fact

that so many of the 'zines I examined during my research contained accounts of incest, childhood sexual assault, and acquaintance and date rape is something that should not be overlooked. Moreover, the fact that these 'zine writers are presenting their accounts of abuse and violence in ways which depart from typical feminist accounts is also significant. When I refer to "typical feminist accounts" of violence against women I am thinking here primarily about radical feminist discourses (e.g. the work of Andrea Dworkin) which have a tendency to examine incest, sexual assault, and violence against women issues based on specific assumptions about gender, sex, desire, and power. For example, these discourses tend to view power as always negative and to view the combination of power and sex as necessarily exploitative as opposed to exploring the exceptions and contradictions at work.

These 'zine writers do draw on feminist discourses of violence against women in order to both justify why it is important for their stories to be told, and begin making sense of the dynamics of male violence against women and children. On the other hand, the 'zine writers also call these discourses into question by exploring both the connection between violence and power, and the potential, for violence and power to be eroticized. For example, as one writer asks within the text of her account, "...is my real life pain and abuse good enough to be an article in a fucking fanzine for you to read WHO ARE

YOU? stop reading this. I said STOP RITE NOW. you're still reading. its okay you know i really want you to..."⁵⁶ In this case as in other accounts, the writer not only goes into graphic detail but continually asks her readers if they are enjoying her descriptions of abuse. Her questions seem to serve several purposes. In asking these questions the writer acknowledges the complex ways in which sex, power, and violence are linked and constructed. Moreover, the questions indicate that the writer has recognized that she has little control over who reads her account or how it is read once the text is in circulation. As a result, in contrast to feminist accounts where the survivor was/still is always a victim these accounts seem to turn the tables slightly, revealing that the possibility for pleasure may exist within these accounts.

Austin and Gregg suggest that "Zines have also become a sanctioned forum in which to broach taboo topics such as incest and childhood sexuality, leading to unconventional and sometimes unsettling presentations."⁵⁷ They argue:

While feminist work around the issue of child sexual abuse has been immensely important, it has often effectively precluded a complex discussion of childhood sexuality. A dialogue about childhood sexual abuse is evolving in the lesbian community, and there is now more space for women to discuss the complicated intersection of abuse and pleasure in some childhood sexual experiences. Notably, 'zines mark the shift of lesbian dialogue on child sexuality beyond an arena that is

⁵⁶ I have decided it would be best to not indicate the name of the writer or 'zine.

⁵⁷ S. Bryn Austin and Pam Gregg, "A Freak Among Freaks: The 'Zine Scene," *Sisters, Sexperts, and Queers: beyond the lesbian nation*, ed. Arlene Stein (New York: Plume, 1993) p.90.

“safely” segregated by the non-s/m community into the category of s/m literature. ⁵⁸

Gottlieb and Wald suggest that in the context of riot grrrl ‘zines these accounts - particularly those dealing with father-daughter incest - carry a symbolic value. They write:

Father-daughter incest recurs as a theme in riot grrrl songs and zines not only as a reflection of reality, but also because it carries particular symbolic resonance as the quintessential form of patriarchal violation/exploitation of girls within the domestic sphere. On this symbolic level, incest contracts several key issues: it exemplifies patriarchal control within the home as it is embodied in the father; the sexualization and objectification of girls (a theme taken up by female performers from Madonna to Courtney Love); and the subordination of girls and women to male power and authority. ⁵⁹

I also think it is essential to recognize that the reoccurring theme of incest in these ‘zines is a reflection of reality. At the same time, I think it is important to recognize that *some* of these accounts may be not be a reflection of reality - some may be fictional. The fact that some of these accounts may be fictional or partly fictional does not, however, make their reoccurring presence any less unsettling or significant. What is significant is the fact that - whether based on reality or not - these ‘zine writers have chosen to include the accounts in their ‘zines and to present the accounts in ways which complicate issues of incest, childhood sexual assault, and violence against women. For example, how do these graphic accounts of father-

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Gottlieb and Wald, *Microphone Fiends* (New York: Routledge, 1994) p.268.

daughter incest strip the category "girl" of its presumed innocence revealing a far less idealized and more complex reality? In what other ways do these accounts complicate issues of sex, desire, and power?

In this context, I do not feel it is necessary or appropriate to analyse the 'zine writers accounts of incest, abuse, and violence. I do, however, think it is important to recognize that these accounts are being told and being told in ways which bring the origins and nature of desire into question. I also think it is important to recognize that these 'zine writers are not only telling their stories or writing them down for their own purposes but that they are circulating them - in some cases, to people they have never met. Once again, the appropriation of various media technologies plays a central role in the story tellers' ability to create and circulate their stories or more precisely, to reorganize spaces where these stories might be told and heard. After all, while feminist organizing around the issues of incest, sexual abuse, and violence against women has stressed the importance of creating "safe", supportive, and open spaces where survivors can tell their stories they have not necessarily created any room for people to tell their stories in ways which challenge typical feminist frameworks about the dynamics of violence. The 'zine producers' use of technologies reorganizes spaces where in order for these stories - the ones that don't fit easily into feminist frameworks -

may be told and heard regardless of their presentation.

These accounts by survivors of incest, sexual abuse, and violence, as well as the accounts by women struggling with body image, and those by young women in the process of coming out, all in some way focus on re-inventing identities outside the realm of the possible. The queer girls' and bi-girls' accounts bring seemingly contradictory identity categories together, and as a result, call assumptions about gender, sex, and desire into question. Similarly, the 'zine writers struggling to deal with body image issues reinvest "fat girl" and "fat woman" with new meaning and thus, challenge what and who the "ideal" woman is. In the accounts of incest, sexual abuse, and violence described above, the category of "survivor" as constructed in feminist discourse on violence against women is also unsettled - these accounts reveal that "survivors" may not always and still be victims. Moreover, in each of these groups of accounts the writers expose how desires are produced and regulated through particular assumptions, discourses, and practices.

As discussed above, the appropriation of technologies enables these boundary stories to be created and circulated. Given that many of these stories and the identities and experiences they describe are systematically kept underground it may *only* be through the vigilant appropriation of media technologies that these identities and experiences are rendered visible in any context. In this way, it

becomes increasingly possible to see how the 'zine producers' use of technologies may be understood as tactics. The telling of these stories is not necessarily a choice - for all the young women described here the telling of their stories is a necessity, it is "...about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other." ⁶⁰ However, in order to fully understand the 'zine producers' appropriation of technologies as tactics it is also necessary to examine how their use of technologies works to reorganize spaces.

Boundary Spaces

De Certeau argues that tactics do not have a proper place. He writes, "...*tactics* do not obey the law of the place, for they are not defined or identified by it." ⁶¹ He further suggests that tactics - "Cut loose from the traditional communities that circumscribed their functioning, they have begun to wander everywhere in a space which is becoming at once more homogeneous and more extensive." ⁶² In this sense, tactics, according to de Certeau, do not have a proper place but they *are* capable of 'organizing places, selecting and linking them together.' ⁶³ Here, he is not suggesting that tactics

⁶⁰ Haraway, 1991, p.175.

⁶¹ De Certeau, p.29.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.40.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.115.

create new spaces, but instead suggesting that they “use, manipulate, and divert”⁶⁴ spaces in new or innovative ways. As previously mentioned, one of the ways they use, manipulate, and divert spaces is by ‘vigilantly making use of the cracks.’⁶⁵ And it is here in the cracks or ruptures that the boundary stories discussed appear to emerge.

As discussed in chapter two, the notion of community is highly problematic, and it is particularly challenged by the emergence of new technologies and postmodern theorizing. At the same time, people continue to hold on to the notion of community or at least the ideals associated with this notion. It is, therefore, important to continue questioning what these ‘zine writers mean when they use the term “community”. When they write about “community” are they thinking about a feeling, a network of people, a physical location, a shared practice or text, or is it something else that we may not have considered yet?

For example, Marie who produces *Rockcandy*, explains that ‘zines play an important role in what she considers to be her community. She writes:

If it wasn't for all the brilliant girls out there doing zines, I wouldn't exist. seriously. Zines are SO important to me, when I really think about it and step away from my slightly jaded and for sure non-objective position it is INCREDIBLE how many of us there are involved in zine networking, whether it be thru reading, distro, writing, etc. We're scattered all over but we are

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.30.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.37.

COMMUNITY, and it's fucken awesome. ⁶⁶

In the above passage, it becomes obvious that 'zines are not only extremely important to Marie but that her notion of community is not necessarily dependent on the physical presence of other people. After all, she acknowledges that her 'zine-related friends, acquaintances, allies, and readers are "scattered all over." She further explains:

To me, zines are SURVIVAL. They are absolute lifelines because I am silenced and cut off from so many aspects of myself & other women in this culture that want us all to be isolated from each other, alone just enough that we never really COMMUNICATE... ⁶⁷

In my examination of young women's 'zines, I found Marie's feelings about 'zines and community to be quite typical. All of the 'zine writers I encountered during my research stressed the importance of 'zines in connecting them with other people who share similar interests, experiences, identities, and desires. In *Spiffy*, Katherine writes about her network of 'zine-related friends and acquaintances all over North America. Similarly, Zanna has used 'zines to keep in touch with friends from other cities and to work on collaborative 'zines with young women living in other cities.

De Certeau suggests that "Every story is a travel story - a spatial practice." ⁶⁸ As will become evident, for both 'zine writers

⁶⁶ *Rockcandy*, 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ De Certeau, p. 115.

and readers, 'zines can be understood as travel stories insofar as they enable the 'zine writer and readers to travel far beyond their physical boundaries. For de Certeau, "travel" is used in a purely metaphorical sense. However, for the 'zine producers their ability to transgress their physical locations - to meet people in other locations, to carry out collaborative work over long distances, to gain access to information and resources not available to them in their own geographic regions - may have very "real" effects on the way they experience their bodies, selves, and sense of community. In the following discussion I will examine how these texts reorganize space, and as a result, reconfigure the possibilities of community as well as the potential sites of political resistance and cultural production. As previously discussed, this reorganization of space through the production and distribution of 'zines appears to be particularly significant for queer youth. However, I will also consider how young women who identify as feminists, and young women living in rural and remote areas use the spaces organized through the writing and distribution of 'zines as sites of social, cultural, and political organizing.

Queer Youth and the Need for "Liberated Zones"

Creating "safe spaces" or "liberated zones" has been viewed as

central to the emergence of queer culture and queer political power in recent decades. These so-called gay ghettos and gay neighbourhoods are usually situated in urban areas, such as Castro Street in San Francisco and Toronto's Church Street. Davis argues, "gay territories have played a profound role in increasing the power and visibility of gay and lesbian politics, and it is likely that the movement to a new form of 'Queer' politics could not have happened without the groundwork laid by the builders of these gay territories."⁶⁹ However, Davis also explains that the original goal and the present reality of these "liberated zones" is somewhat different. He writes:

American gay politics has historically depended upon the establishment and use of residential territories (known as gay territories, gay ghettos or liberated zones) as a survival tactic, as the centre for the creation of a common identity, as a base for electoral power and as a main focus gay politics...[but] the utopian idea implied by the term liberated zone has turned to a term of isolation and continued oppression - the gay ghetto.⁷⁰

Davis explains that these "liberated zones" intended to create safety have paradoxically become the focus of gay bashings precisely due to their visibility. They have also become sites of tension among queers since these neighbourhoods tend to reflect not the diversity of queer communities but which queers have the most economic power. However, this does not mean that gays and lesbians who lack the money, mobility, or desire to live in established gay neighbourhoods,

⁶⁹ Tim Davis, "The Diversity of Queer Politics and the Redefining of Sexual Identity and Community in Urban Spaces," *Mapping Desire*, eds. David Bell and Gill Valentine (New York: Routledge, 1995) p.285.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p.284.

do not also seek to establish "liberated zones" of sorts. In smaller cities and towns these zones make be centred around a particular gay or lesbian owned business or organization and particularly, in rural communities the zone may not be a physical location at all. As Kramer notes in her study of gays and lesbians living in a small town in North Dakota:

In rural areas the United States Postal Service also functions as an important, if unwitting, agency through which gays and lesbians are able to meet each other, obtain information and even discover some sense of community. Many will open post office boxes in towns far from their homes, and drive for several hours weekly (at least) just to check their mail. ⁷¹

Obviously, for the queer youth - particularly those living in smaller communities and rural areas - their lack of economic power and need for anonymity makes the creation of liberated zones bound by geographic areas next to impossible. Even for queer youth living in urban areas it can be difficult to connect with other gays and lesbians without coming out to their parents. As a result, the need to create a space which cuts through and across geographical boundaries - a space that can be easily accessed by queer youth but not necessarily identified and monitored by parents, teachers, or other authority figures - arises. 'Zine networks appear to have created such a space.

No one really *lives* in these 'zine communities, but many of the people who participate/build these communities can't live without

⁷¹ Jerry Lee Kramer, "Bachelor Farmers and Spinsters," *Mapping Desire*, p.207.

them. For example, Sara, who was seventeen years old and living with her parents in Boston when she wrote this, explains:

I live through the mail. Letters and zines are my primary way of connecting with people. Almost none of the people I call my friends live in my area code or even my state, suggesting to me that I must be a better person on paper than in real life. Well, at least there's something. If I didn't have the mail, if I didn't have pen pals and my glorious long-distance grrrl network, I don't know how I'd cope. ⁷²

The fact that Sara feels that she must be a "better person" on paper than in "real life" is interesting. At the very least, it seems to indicate that the sorts of people she can encounter through the production and distribution of her 'zine are different than the people she can encounter in her "real" physical life. Living in a larger city, Sara was out to some people in her "real" life including the friend she produced *Out of the Vortex* with while still in high school. However, through the production of her 'zine, she encountered many queer girls and bi-girls who, unlike herself, are *only* out in the context of their 'zines. Sara indicated that from her experience this situation is a "common phenomenon." ⁷³ As previously mentioned, this is the case for Cleo, who explains:

I don't know how you could make a theory about what is survival for some gurls (me included). Zines are sometimes the only way that gurls can communicate, there is no one to listen but paper. It is the only way to get their ideas out or fears or just to have someone say to you "I know what you are going through." For me, that is a lot of where my sanity comes from, just from

⁷² *Out of the Vortex*, 7 (1995).

⁷³ Sara, e-mail to the author, October 15, 1995.

reading a zine and thinking "I'm not alone" or [knowing] that someone else (even though they live miles of corn fields away) is going through the same thing. ⁷⁴

It is easy to idealize the role 'zines may play in creating liberated zones or a sense of community for queer youth. However, these networks do have their limits. As Cleo tells her readers, "...it seems like we are all lost within this vast mess of land and isolated from one another...but i would just like to know someone closer for once...someone not so far away physically, b/c as hard as i am trying i would really like to touch someone for once, id like to look into someones eyes when im saying something..." ⁷⁵ Thus, as much as her network of 'zine related friends may help her cope - make do - with her situation it is far from ideal. I was also reminded of the limits of 'zines when I came across a 'zine called *Home*. Like many of the 'zines I encountered, this 'zine focuses on the need and importance of establishing safe spaces where it is possible to be both out as a queer and to identify as a survivor. Jessica writes:

HOME. If I can create a home that is respectful and safe perhaps I can undo all the horrors that occurred in my supposed home of 16 years. I can say to them - HA! I don't need you and I never did, I can make my own home and it'll be better than home ever was. HOME. A community is a home. A circle of friends is a home. A lover is a home. A job is a home. Important familiarity. ⁷⁶

On one hand, her 'zine appears to be about a metaphorical search for

⁷⁴ Cleo, letter to the author, October 22, 1995.

⁷⁵ *I still don't like Frogs*, 1 (1996).

⁷⁶ *Home*.

home or the sense of safety sometimes associated with home. However, on the cover page of another issue she wrote - "HEY! I'm a 20 yr. old JEW PUNK GRRRL DYKE ARTIST GEEK! Looking FOR A PLACE TO LIVE under \$350 - (the further under the better) by December 1. Please Call..."⁷⁷ The fact that she turned the cover of her 'zine into a room wanted ad is significant - it draws attention to the fact that while her 'zine may help her create some sense of community that her physical need for a safe and affordable home takes precedence over everything else.

Thus, like the geographically defined "liberated zones" in urban centres, the seemingly safe spaces created by 'zine networks do have limits. They may help queer youth survive but they can't replace the need for physical affection or the need for an actual place to sleep and eat and so on. Like the seemingly disembodied subjects of electronic networks, these 'zine producers also have bodies and thus, physical needs and desires.

'Zines as Sites of Cultural and Political Organizing

As suggested above, on one hand, these safe or safer spaces created through the production and distribution of 'zines are about survival but they are also sites of social and political organizing. Erica, one of the founders of Riot Girl Press which distributes many

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

queer girl and bi-girl 'zines, ⁷⁸ explains that the press:

...is a distribution service for girl-made zines. there are a lot of zines really worth checking out, like slut utopia, lost ID, jaded, saturnine's smile, star gang #2, discharge, girl germs....buy me, fix me, fuck me blind....and i think it's so important that these zines get out right now because the backlash is NOT over, believe it or not. and plus the more women are given the resources to speak for ourselves, the less opportunity the media and the POWER THAT BE can perpetuate distorted, sexist images of us. ⁷⁹

The above passage suggests that there can be a strong link between the production and distribution of 'zines by young women and a larger political project - what many of these 'zine writers refer to as "Revolution Girl Style". Similarly, Marie writes, "Although many of us are isolated from one another as far as location goes, it's still possible for women [to] share spaces or work on projects together or whatever.." ⁸⁰ She further writes:

...by isolating our zines, the subjects we address in our zines, and the way we respond to zines, we are denying the ways that our words & experiences overlap AND differ. There are some real obvious divisions among punk rock girls and differences need to be fucken dealt with and NOT glazed over.... By paying attention to our words, stories, action etc. we are acknowledging each other in very real ways and helping a

⁷⁸ Riot Girl Press was originally started as a school project by Erica and May - at the time they were both students at Evergreen State College in Washington State. The founders of the press moved to Washington, DC for one semester (the centre of riot girl activity at the time). I think this is worth mentioning here because although many of the 'zines I have examined are extremely critical of formal education and particularly, of academic feminism I have found that these 'zines are largely rooted in academic feminist discourses. The fact that Riot Girl Press was initiated as a school project further reveals the degree to which many of these 'zines are rooted in and against academe.

⁷⁹ *Fantastic Fanzine*, 5.

⁸⁰ *Rockcandy*, 3.

community to further develop & be strengthened. ⁸¹

I came across several examples of 'zine producers attempting to do collective political and cultural work beyond their geographic boundaries. For example, during the course of my research, Cleo stopped producing her original 'zine, *Slut Magnet*, in order to work on several separate 'zines. One of the 'zines she is attempting to work on is a "queer youth 'zine for gerls and boys under 20...[which will] include comix, art, poetry, drawings, essays, photos, rants, etc...and a queer youth penpal exchange thing..." ⁸² Similarly, Michelle of *816* 'zine writes, "if you're queer, and straight-edge, write me. ive been thinking about doing this huge all-contributor zine that all written by queers about being queer and not involved in the bar scene because its important. definitely." ⁸³

However, it is important to note that 'zines are also a site of cultural and political organizing for young women who identify as feminists. Tina, of *Femme Flicke*, for example, has put out a call to her readers to collectively produce a film about the "growing 'zine scene." She writes, "Why do I have to work only with people in Boston? Couldn't it be just as cool, if not cooler if I got in touch with several people all over the country who'd want to make a video with me. Are you interested?" ⁸⁴ In other 'zines, I have come across

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *I Still don't Like Frogs*, 1 (1996).

⁸³ 861.

⁸⁴ *Femme Flicke*, 4.

similar requests by 'zine writers interested in connecting with other women who would like to start record labels or even musical projects with women living in other cities, provinces, states, or countries.

The 'zine writers' attempts to work collectively on cultural and political projects despite their isolation from one another is quite remarkable. It reveals their desire to resist the limits of geographic boundaries and for some of these young women, also the desire to resist the boundaries marked by domestic sphere.

Rural Youth and Youth Cultures

Finally, it is important to recognize the ways in which 'zine networks are particularly significant for youth living in small cities, towns, or rural and remote areas. At the risk of overgeneralizing, I would argue that youth living outside of urban centres have been largely ignored in studies of youth subcultures. And, as circumstances would have it, youth living in rural and remote areas generally *are not* the ones who define new youth movements and styles. Separated from the clothes, music, and activities available to young people living in larger cities, rural youth usually must wait for the mainstream media to "discover" a new youth movement or style before they can begin participating in the phenomenon, whatever it may be. Thus, young people living outside of urban areas are not entirely cut off from

participating in aspects of youth subcultures but their geographic locations *do* severely limit their ability to participate in the formation of new youth styles and movements.

In the context of 'zine networks, however, physical location is displaced, enabling youth to participate in the formation, critique, and evolution of new youth styles and movement to a fuller extent. For example, riot grrrl "...zines provide a forum, outside (though not detached from) the music, in which the members of riot grrrl subculture can engage in their own self-naming, self-definition and self-critique - can comment, in other words, upon the very shape and representation of the subculture itself." ⁸⁵ For Sara of *Out of the Vortex*, her 'zine helps her keep in touch with riot grrrls in other cities and states and to build a network of allies in her own region. For Cleo, riot grrrl 'zines, including as Sara and Zanna's 'zines, have enabled her to access information about women's bands and feminist literature, for example, which she may have not been able to access otherwise. Through the production of her own 'zines, she has also been able to take part in defining and representing this youth movement.

It is also notable that many 'zine writers provide space in their 'zines for their readers to connect with each other. For example, in *Plume*, a two-page spread entitled "Alien Kids Connection" is dedicated to requests for pen pals. *Plume* is published by Sheila who

⁸⁵ Gottlieb and Wald, p.265.

lives in New York City but the "Alien Kids Connection" contains requests for pen pals from young women and men living in smaller cities and rural communities around the United States (i.e. Simpsonville, South Carolina and Hoover, Illinois). The following request is fairly typical of the ones published in *Plume* :

I live in a very small town and love lots of mail. I adore Babes in Toyland, Sonic Youth, Dinosaur, L7, Huggy Bear, Bratmobile, Slant 6. and the Fastbacks. Please save me from this deadbeat town!⁸⁶

Thus, the 'zine is a forum not only for the writer to meet other people but for readers to connect with each other. Similarly, in *Rockcandy*, Marie emphasizes that for *her* 'zines should be places of dialogue and networking. In addition to her regular 'zine, she publishes a 'zine/booklet called *Juncture 99*. Marie explains:

Juncture 99 is a pen pal kinda thing & the first booklet is out BUT if you wanna be a part of the next one, send a 50 or so word statement about yourself, plus \$1.00 or 2 stamps to me (marie) and your description along with others will be compiled into a lovely zine which you will receive, and your ad will be circulated this way as well.⁸⁷

Like the "Alien Kid's Connection" in *Plume*, *Juncture 99* enables 'zine readers to create networks that extend far beyond their own physical locations.

In this way, 'zine networks (not to mention electronic networks) call into question the notion of territoriality, which has in the past been

⁸⁶ *Plume*, 2 (1995).

⁸⁷ *Rockcandy*, 3.

used to characterize youth subcultures. As discussed in the introduction, youth culture theorists have tended to define youth subcultures partly in terms of their shared physical space or territory. Ironically, for young women largely confined to the domestic sphere as well as queer youth and youth living in rural and remote communities, it appears to be the *lack* of a shared territory - the collapse of its significance - that enables them to actively participate in shaping and representing aspects of youth culture, subcultures, and popular cultures.

As Haraway explains, the “cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work.”⁸⁸ In this sense, the ‘zine writer’s ‘tactics of technology’ may be understood as a move to transgress boundaries - to re-invent the notion of community (or whatever is being created that appears to resemble community) based on new notions of social space. Once again, as de Certeau has argued, these tactics have no ‘proper place’ but instead organize spaces by using, diverting and manipulating them. As a result, the space of a tactic can not be revisited - it is never fixed but continually shifting, vanishing, changing form, and re-emerging in a new location. When Haraway refers to boundary creatures and their boundary spaces or boundary worlds this is what

⁸⁸ Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto.” p.154.

she is referring to - not newly created spaces but new arrangements of space in which people might not be "afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints."⁸⁹ And, I would add, that these are spaces which accommodate, as opposed to repress, 'permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.'

In this chapter I have examined which technologies the 'zine producers are using and how their appropriation of these technologies is connected to their desire and need to tell certain types of stories - namely, the sorts of stories that are often not 'allowed' to surface. I have argued here that these stories, which challenge normative notions of sex, gender, and desire, are boundary stories precisely because they cannot be easily understood according to existing genres, categories, and notions of identity. Instead, these young women's accounts about coming out as "queer girls" or "bi-girls", struggling to overcome eating disorders and body image problems, and experiences of sexual abuse, actively work to challenge both identity categories (i.e. woman and queer) as well as conventional and expected ways of telling particular stories (i.e. the survivor's stories which complicate issues of sex and power). I have also attempted to illustrate the ways in which these stories may be understood as spatial practices. As discussed above, the 'zines seem to reorganize spaces in ways which enable the writers to travel

⁸⁹ Haraway, 1991, p.145.

far beyond the limits of their own physical locations, and thus, to create social spaces and sites of political struggle and cultural production which cut through and across geographic boundaries. In the final chapter I will consider what these observations reveal about the nature of technologies and the nature of young women's relationships to these technologies, and speculate on their significance for educational researchers.

Chapter Five

Implications for Educators and Researchers

It is important to recognize that the 'zine producers discussed in this thesis are not unique in their ability to invert the functions of particular technologies to support their own social, cultural, and political projects. These 'zine producers share much in common with the ham radio enthusiasts, early cable television producers, video artists and activists, computer hackers, and community radio programmers whose appropriations of military, computer, and media technologies have shown and continue to show the redemptive possibilities of technologies. For this reason, it is essential to avoid thinking about this particular group of young women as exceptional *and* to avoid making generalizations about gender and technology based on the group of young women portrayed in this study. Instead, it is also important to consider other groups of young women - ones who may be even less visible to researchers and educators than the group discussed here - who *are* using new technologies in politically articulate ways.

In order for educators and educational researchers to recognize these innovative uses of new technologies, the notions of technology, identity, and community must first be called into

question. And, as became evident in this study, the place where we may want to begin examining these issues is precisely where these categories and conceptual frameworks begin to collapse.

As Franklin suggests, "Technology involves organization, procedures, symbols, new words, equations, and, most of all, a mindset."¹ Furthermore, Druckrey suggests that what is emerging is "a discourse of ideologies forming within a distributed set of technologies." In other words, "Rather than one technology, many; rather than one ideology, many."² Thus, in order to understand how some young women are engaging with new technologies it may be useful to examine not the degree to which they are engaging with new technologies (e.g. how many hours a week they spend using a computer) but how they are *thinking* about new technologies. As discussed in chapter four, even the 'zine writers who chose not to use computer technologies in the production of their 'zines were using technologies, and, more importantly, these 'zine writers often demonstrated an awareness of the ways in which technologies are linked to issues of access and power. However, educators and educational researchers may want to consider how these young women would be constructed in typical studies on gender and technology. Would their ideology of technology, which informs their decisions about which technologies to use and how to use them, be

¹ Ursula Franklin, *The Real World of Technology* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1990) p.12.

² Timothy Druckrey, introduction, *Culture on the Brink: Ideologies of Technology*, eds. Gretchen Bender and Timothy Druckrey (Seattle: Bay Press, 1994) p.1.

accounted for? Or would these young women who choose not to use computer technologies be seen as “victims” of technology?

In addition to reconsidering the ways in which we think about technologies, it also seems necessary to call normative notions of identity into question. For example, the so-called “young women” discussed in this thesis demonstrate the “partial, fluid, sometimes aspect of sex and sexual embodiment”³. These ‘zine writers seem to, like Haraway’s cyborgs, be both committed to girls’ and women’s rights but *not* to the category of Woman which has come to represent a certain set of gendered attributes. The ‘zine writers appropriation of various technologies is central to their ability to reinvent their identities in ways which challenge normative notions of sex, gender, and desire. However, as Butler explains, “The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’”.⁴ Educators and educational researchers may want to question whether or not the young women discussed in this study, whose stories and interactions with technologies appear to challenge presuppositions about “girls” and their relationship to technology, would be visible in their own classrooms or studies.

I suspect that the young women would not be visible in the majority of classrooms or educational studies on gender and

³ Haraway, 1991, p.180.

⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) p. 17.

technology. However, their invisibility would not be due to the fact that they are not students - many of the participants in this study are students (or *were* when they were produced their 'zines). Instead, their invisibility in classrooms and educational accounts would more likely be linked to the fact that the stories they are telling and the identities these accounts present are precisely the sorts of identities that "cannot exist" in schools. Bryson and de Castell call on educators to explore the possibility of a "postmodern pedagogy of salvage and recycling." They explain that this would be an educational approach which would encourage students to transform "received knowledge, texts, and images through ironic acts of mis/representation, mimicry, collage, montage, and re/degendering."

⁵ Some young women, such as these 'zine writers, are already transforming knowledge through their tactics of technology. However, their attempts to transform knowledge, texts, and images through ironic acts (i.e. the 'zine writer's use of photocopiers to distort and manipulate images) are not, and in many ways, *cannot* be organized, institutionalized practices. It seems that if a "postmodern pedagogy of salvage and recycling" exists it is not something that exists in a visible institutional space, nor is it something that educators can actively work toward. Instead, this is a pedagogy that belongs to students (both those in the school system and those who have been

⁵ Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell, "So We've Got a Chip on Our Shoulder! Sexing the Texts of 'Educational Technology,'" *Gender In/Forms Curriculum: From Enrichment to Transformation*, eds. Jane Gaskell and John Willinsky (United States: Teachers College Press, 1995) p.38.

pushed out of it) and one that emerges from the cracks in the system - from a place where it can remain largely undetected by those people it may threaten. As de Certeau explains, a tactic "must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers...It is a guileful ruse." ⁶

Educators and educational researchers may consider the possibility that their students have always and already discovered alternative sites of education within their classrooms and schools, even if these sites are not visible to educators. However, they may also think about the possible sites of education which exist outside of schools, such as the sites created by 'zine writers. As McRobbie explains, 'zines as well as other aspects of cultural production by youth often "provide pathways for future 'life-skills' in the form of work or self-employment" and may serve as "an alternative to higher education." ⁷ It is also important to recognize how the young women discussed in this study are engaged in a process of knowledge production. For many, 'zine networks are an alternative to their college and university women's studies seminars. The 'zine networks provide them with a space to respond to dominant feminist and queer discourses. For, other 'zine writers, particularly those who are high school students and those living in more rural or remote areas, the 'zine networks provide them with a space to gain access to ideas,

⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California, 1988) p.37

⁷ Angela McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) p.161.

literature, and news they would not be able to access in their communities, let alone in their schools. More importantly, 'zine networks provide these young women with a space in which to engage in dialogues about issues that are meaningful to them. As a result, what emerges here is a site of education created through the appropriation of technologies which cuts through and across physical and geographic boundaries including the boundaries of institutional education.

As Haraway suggests, "We can be responsible for machines; *they* do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they." ⁸ The 'zine writers discussed in this study stand as one example of the way people, even those with limited access to new technologies and positions of power, can discover ways to use technologies as tactics - tactics capable of radically remapping the boundaries of gender, sex, and desire as well as the boundaries of the spaces they inhabit.

⁸ Haraway, p. 180.

'Zineography

- Alice the Camel*, 4 (New York, NY).
- An Emotional Biscuit*, 12 (Marietta, GA) .
- Angry Young Woman*, 1, 1994 and 2, 1995 (Fort Wayne, IN).
- Bikini Kill*, 1 and 2 (Olympia, WA).
- Box Object* , 1, 1994 (Ottsville, PA).
- Catherine's Hair*, 9, 10, and 11, 1996 (Richmond, VA).
- cheese log*, 9, 1994 (New York, NY).
- Chickfactor*, 7, 1994 (Washington, DC).
- Cronicles of the Sub-Generation*, 4 (New Westminster, BC).
- dandelion exposed*, 2, 1995 (New Serepta, AB).
- effective repetition* (Vancouver, BC).
- Eightfold Path*, 3, 1995 (Saskatoon, SK).
- Esteria*, 1, 1995 (Vancouver, BC).
- fastastic fanzine*, 5 (Chicago, IL).
- Femme Flicke*, 2,3, and 4 (Cambridge, MA).
- Femzine*, 1 (Toronto, ON).
- Gift Idea*, 1993 (Chicago, IL).
- Girl Germs*, 3, 1992 (Olympia, WA).
- Gogglebox*, 4, 1995 (New York, NY).
- Great Day for Up* (Calgary, AB).
- Hey There, Barbie Girl!*, 3, 1994 (New York, NY).

home, 1 and 2, 1995 (San Francisco, CA).
i love you more.
im so fucking beautiful, 2 (Olympia, WA).
I Still don't Like Frogs, 1, 1996 (New Serepta, AB).
MadWoman, 3, 1992, 5, 1994, 6, 1994, and 7, 1995 (Champaign, IL).
Menstruatin Idealists, 1, 1993 (San Francisco, CA).
MOC, 3 (Vancouver, BC).
Mons of Venus, 6 (Memphis, TN).
Muffinbones, 9, 1995 (Stanford, CT).
Out of the Vortex, 7, 1995 (Gaithersburg, MD).
Pawholes, 5, 1994 (Pittsburgh, PA).
Plume, 2, 1995 (New York, NY).
Pussycat, 3 (Peoria, AZ).
Rancid Resistance, 5, 1995 (Coquitlam, BC).
Riot Grrrl DC, 7 (Washington, DC).
Riot Grrrl Vancouver, 3 (Vancouver, BC).
Ritalin, 5 and 6 (Yorktown Hts, NY).
Rockcandy, 3 (Grand Rapids, MI).
Sam's Date, 2, 1995 (New York, NY).
Sandbox, 5 and 8 (Vancouver, BC).
Slut Magnet, 8, 9, and 10, 1995 (New Serepta, AB).
Smile for Me, 3, 1994 (New York, NY).
Sometimes I'm a Pretty Girl, 1, 2, and 4 (Vancouver, BC).

Spiffy, 5, 1994 (Ames, IA).

Starbelly, 3, 1995 (Maple Ridge, BC).

Surrogate Brain (Hamilton, ON)

The Adventures of Big Girl (Seattle, WA).

the nerdy grrrl revolution, 2, 1994 (Olympia, WA).

Unified Conception, 7 (St. Catherines, ON).

Verboslammed, 7, 1995 (Portland, OR).

Wrecking Ball, 2 (Chicago, IL).

Writing for Beginning, 1995 (Vancouver, BC).

Your Head on a Platter, 1, 1994 (San Francisco, CA).

Yum (Kamloops, BC).

816 (Milwaukee, WI).

2¢, 4 (San Francisco, CA).

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