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Pedagogy of Hope: Feminist Zines

Alison Piepmeier

But you can do everything.
That's what I think.
Our lives are long and full and if we love and work and
want, we can do it all.

everything
everything.

even more than we are able to imagine.
Cindy Crabb, *Doris #24* (2007)

Introduction: Feminist zines

In an essay called "Ohio" in *Doris #24*, feminist zine creator Cindy Crabb (USA) muses on a number of things – determining a turtle's age from the rings on its shell, change in her life over the years, how she has come to reconsider her own fears and assumptions, and the tools for social justice work that she's assembled from groups she's been involved with and from her own reading. It's not an essay with a linear trajectory; instead, it's a kind of rhizomatic collage of thoughts, with links that work in multiple directions. The essay consists of typewritten and handwritten text surrounded by and interspersed with small illustrations, comic strips, and hand-drawn graphics like hearts, stars, arrows, and text boxes. Grrrl zines are informal publications, often made by hand individually or in small groups, and "Ohio" is a representative grrrl zine piece – seemingly chaotic but ultimately thoughtful, rich, and multivalent. At the end of the essay, Crabb cites a friend of a friend who warns, "you can't do everything you dream of. At some point you need to narrow it down, prioritize." Crabb responds by breaking from prose into a poetic structure and offering a hopeful assertion, cited in the epigraph to this essay, about her own and the readers' ability to, in fact, do everything, "even more than we are able to imagine" (2007: 17). This typewritten statement, framed with two small, hand-drawn hearts, may not immediately seem to be making a political intervention. However, this emphatic declaration of possibility represents one kind of political work grrrl zines can do. When she suggests that "we can do it all," Crabb offers a pedagogy of hope.

In this essay, I consider the cultural and political work that zines like *Doris* do, the kinds of interventions they make into the world around them. These interventions are hopeful; indeed, they function as pedagogies of hope, showing the zines' readers ways to resist the culture of domination. This essay's case study is *Doris*, a zine that exhibits a new kind of activism emphasizing self-reflection and becoming fully human – changing the subject-position of the reader and thereby offering a model of intervention uniquely suited for this cultural moment. *Doris* models a hopeful, resistant subjectivity – what I term a “pedagogy of imagination” – and invites its readers to try it on. This pedagogy is doing political work.

Theoretical context

The political work that grrrl zines do may not be immediately obvious because this work doesn't fit with models of traditional political engagement. It doesn't fit for several reasons: because grrrl zines are generally acting at the level of the symbolic order rather than at the level of institutional change, because they operate out of personal modes of expression, and because they mobilize small-scale embodied communities rather than large-scale voting blocs. Zine creators have developed these modes of engagement in part because they see that zines are intervening in a deeply cynical culture.

The last twenty years have been a difficult time for activists and those concerned with social change. Girls' studies scholar Anita Harris describes the late twentieth century – a period starting with the Reagan era, and stretching through 9/11 and beyond – in terms of “the forces of fragmentation and decollectivization that characterize social and political life in late modernity” (2007: 1). Feminist scholar bell hooks describes this moment using the term “dominator culture,” meaning a culture in which the politics of hierarchy and power over others are prevalent. She argues, “A profound cynicism is at the core of dominator culture wherever it prevails in the world” (2003: 11). Indeed, this widespread cynicism – which scholars have called “the single most pressing challenge facing American democracy today” – has emerged at this particular historical juncture because of the convergence of a backlash against the social justice movements of the 1960s and 70s and a late-capitalist, neoliberal, consumption-oriented cultural climate (Goldfarb 1999: 1). This climate, explains hooks, assures us that things can't ever be substantially better than they are right now, that private sector industries will solve all our problems, and that if we buy the right product, we'll feel much better. She calls this phenomenon “the pedagogy of domination” (hooks 2003: 11). This pedagogy teaches that since the world of consumer capitalism will solve our problems, we have no action to take. We can either view ourselves as being in the best possible position or, as zine creator Sarah McCarry puts it in a 2004 issue of her zine *Glossolia*, we can see ourselves as being “completely, totally fucked and things are not going to get better” (2004: 30). Either viewpoint engenders apathy and resignation, leading to withdrawal from efforts at change.

Failure of imagination seems integral to this phenomenon: hope and a vision of a better future can come to seem almost pathetically naïve. In this way, cynicism forecloses social justice activism; it functions to make all forms of challenge to the status quo seem hopeless in the sense that many of us are unable to imagine something better, or to imagine that better thing actually coming into being. This translates into a cultural moment in which resistance seems limited or impossible. Feminist theory and efforts at social change, then, can appear completely outdated, irrelevant, or inadequate at the very time when they are most necessary. This is the world in which *grrrl* zines and third wave feminism emerged, and it's the world in which they're intervening. Because of this, *grrrl* zines like *Doris* are uniquely situated to awaken outrage and – perhaps more crucially – imagination, and in so doing enact what hooks and others have called for: public pedagogies of hope. hooks uses the term “pedagogy of hope” to describe the creation of hope and possibility within the realm of the classroom, but this is a concept with viability far beyond literal pedagogical spaces; indeed, I am adopting her term and broadening it to encompass the political work of *grrrl* zines. Pedagogies of hope – manifested in a variety of ways in *grrrl* zines – function as small-scale acts of resistance. By modeling process, active criticism, and imagination, *grrrl* zines make political interventions targeted to this late-capitalist cynical culture.

I've found a useful theoretical framework for assessing this new paradigm of activism in the work of communication scholar Clemencia Rodriguez. Rodriguez offers a formulation of the work done by what she calls “citizens' media” that identifies this work as explicitly political. Although she focuses on electronic media, particularly television and radio, zines do fit under the rubric of citizens' media, a term she uses because it “implies first that a collectivity is *enacting* its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape; second, that these media are contesting social codes, legitimized identities, and institutionalized social relations; and third, that these communication practices are empowering the community involved, to the point where these transformations and changes are possible” (2001: 20). As this description implies, she sees citizens' media as doing significant political work because “democratic struggles have to be understood as processes of change that also include practices of dissent in the realm of the symbolic” (2001: 20). She notes that some of the unique features of citizens' media are “blurred boundaries between sender and receiver, closeness to the audience's cultural codes, political idiosyncrasies, and noncommercial goals” (2001: 47) – all characteristics of zines.

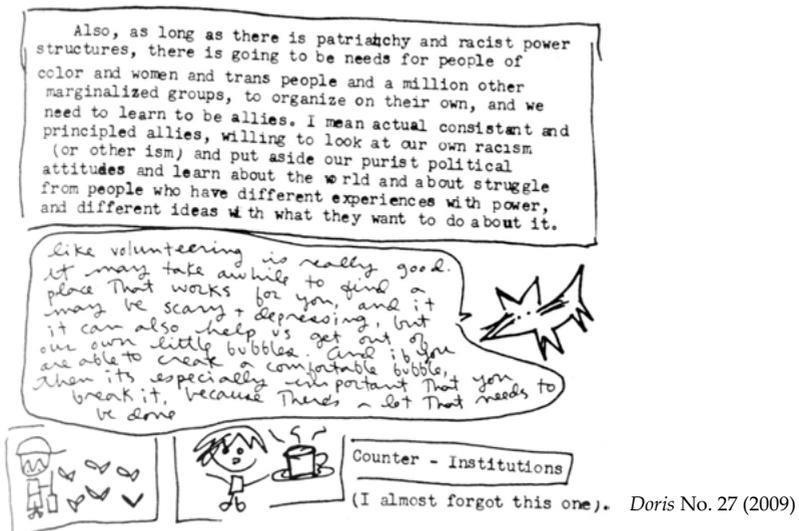
While a cynical culture – and one attuned to old-paradigm politics – would suggest that zines are not creating social change, Rodriguez presents an alternative model for assessment, one that emphasizes political intentions rather than political effects: “While traditional scholarship weighed alternative media by their capacity to alter the empire of media megaliths, I suggest redirecting our focus to understanding how citizens' media activate subtle processes of fracture in the social, cultural, and power spheres of everyday life” (2001: xiv). Indeed, she argues for a new way of under-

standing the work of these media – not expecting them to eradicate corporate culture, for instance, but, instead, recognizing the local, small-scale, ephemeral ways that they foster and propagate democracy. Rodriguez suggests viewing democracy not as an endpoint but as a process, something organic and in motion. She doesn't figure transience and limited reach as automatic weaknesses but, instead, as components of a new activist paradigm (2001: 22). Citizens' media does political work because it alters power structures by strengthening individual subjectivities.

This is the work that *grrrl* zines are doing. They break away from linear models, they offer tools for awakening outrage and engaging in protest, and they invite readers to step into their own citizenship through pedagogies of imagination. Because of the sorts of linear expectations scholars have had of alternative media and activist work more broadly, the resistance and political interventions of *grrrl* zines (and third wave feminists) have been hard for many scholars to recognize, but by recognizing the dominator culture and reframing what it means to be political, these interventions become visible.

The transformative potential of imagination: A case study of *Doris*

Doris is a long-running publication, in existence since 1991, and it's all zine, in terms of philosophy, aesthetic, and distribution. *Doris* is filled with cut-and-pasted typewritten and handwritten narratives, along with small, friendly stick-figure cartoons of Crabb and her dog, Anna. The zine isn't content-driven; as with many *grrrl* zines, her content varies depending on what she's thinking about. The zine addresses topics such as violence





What about your thoughts and your actions and who you love and why you love them, and your dreams and your goals, and what you've already given up, what about your desires and the things you talk about, the ways you feel about yourself, what fills your days, what permeates your nights: How much of it all is really your own?

Are you realizing your full potential? Your full humanity? Do you buy into the propaganda that you are to blame for your unhappiness? You just have to pull up your bootstraps, think positive? Do you feel meaningful? Do you feel fulfilled?

♥ *i want you to feel happy+full*

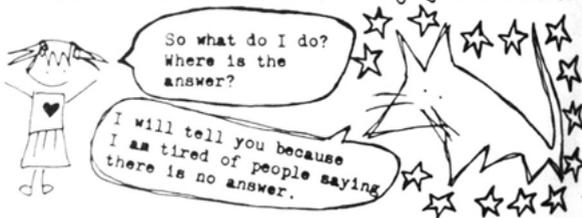
This is what that one book says:

For social change to happen, people need to come out of subjugations and see the oppression, and for that shift in thinking to occur, you need three things.

1. To have access to the tools that will allow you to envision a world that lies beyond subordination and imagine what you could become in that alternative space.
2. Analyze ways you have been caught up and thwarted by the relation of subordination
3. Grasp the possibility of collective struggle to overthrow the whole subordinating structure

I think a lot of us have a lot of privilege and a responsibility to use that privilege well, whether it's waking people up and changing the structures of our worlds, or confronting our own twisted up insides.

or both. we have to be engaged in both.



Doris No. 27 (2009), p. 2

against women, environmentalism, anarchism, bike riding, and reproductive rights, almost all of them presented in terms of personal stories and musings. But all of the zine is infused with Crabb's own theorizing about activism and resistance and what they might look like in the current cultural moment.

Although the zine started small, with only a few hundred printed in 1991, in the last several years Crabb estimates her circulation to be around 3,000 zines per issue, sold through online distros as well as through the traditional zine channels of independent book and music stores and direct mail order from Crabb herself. The emphasis in *Doris* is on the transformative potential of imagination. In some ways it reads like a twenty-one-year meditation on the possibility of individuals creating social change.

Even in the very early days of the zine, Crabb was grappling with what it meant to attempt social change in a deeply cynical culture. She identified



When I was 18, my ancient philosopher friend said that the problem with today's youth-movement was we were too transient. We were obsessed with creating community, but we wouldn't stay put. He said that real, fundamental social change had to be based

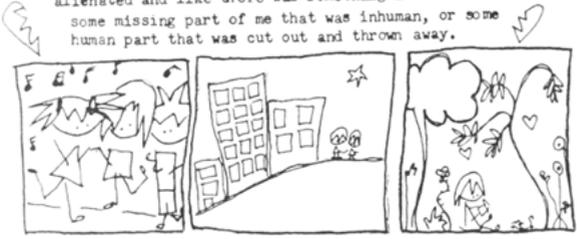
in real geographical community, and that we weren't going to be very effective if we didn't stop moving around.

But it was a small town and I was restless, and stuck inside my self and my fears, and my lack of experience and lack of the physical knowledge of the possibilities - both for myself and for the world.



I needed to find people like me. I needed to find people who would help me feel seen and real. I needed to be around people who were so effected by the insanity of capitalism that they couldn't function in this world, and I needed to experience a world created in the cracks and fissures and forgotten places.

I needed to figure out how to be present in my body and how to say no, how to be able to dance for the fun of it and not because I thought someone might be watching. I needed to learn to feel safe among friends and like I could say what I thought without being judged. I needed to learn my anger and stop turning it inward. I needed to learn to feel good in the woods and fields and among growing things, instead of feeling kind of scared and alienated and like there was something I didn't understand, some missing part of me that was inhuman, or some human part that was cut out and thrown away.



I had to learn to build a small fire out of moss and twigs, hot enough to boil water. I had to learn the difference between numbing myself and relaxing.

Doris No. 27 (2009)
p. 3

her zine as a space that would resist the cynical lure of the easy answer and would strive for complexity:

And what I love best is the writers who embrace complexity & try to make sense [sic] of it. It makes me feel like there's so many more possibilities for fundamental social change when I'm looking at how complex everything is, and trying to fit it all together. Because simplifying seems like a huge boring trap to me & I feel surrounded by it; by people trying to make struggle understandable by making it simple, like people suck and should all die, like men suck and they should all die, like rich people suck and they should all die. It is not that easy (2005: 19).

This seems to me to be a foundational assumption on which *Doris* operates, that making things simple isn't the answer to social change. Indeed, this effort at simplicity is cynical, in part because it is so firmly rooted in a conception of politics beginning and ending with the individual: if I can't

we met weekly, hashed out ideas together, planned protests and conferences, and were committed to becoming part of our city - forming coalitions with other groups and trying to work on becoming actual allies to groups that were run by people of color.

Different people in our group were involved in different things, and in our weekly meetings we kept each other updated on what was going on. we wrote flyers and gave workshops, and were involved in different campaigns - like working to stop a nuclear waste dump, and working to keep an anti-abortion conference from coming to our town.

of course there are a million different kinds of political collectives, but i would like to see more collectives like that one was.



Direct Action, Protest and Community Education.

Direct Action is an essential part of social movements, but it's often a demonized or glorified part. Property destruction, billboard alteration, sit-ins, walk outs, puke ins, occupations of schools and work-places, strikes and street theater. It is good to think about what the strategic role your direct action is going to play in the larger picture. whether your action is going to be symbolic or more than that. It is important not to get caught up in the ego-trip of doing illegal things, but it's also important that we have a militant resistance movement.

protest. I've seen protests come and go. times of lots of protesting and then people giving up because their protest didn't stop the war. protest is important, even in the shitty give up times. They don't have to always be huge protests, small ones are important to. We need visibility. We need to show that there is resistance. We need to celebrate our resistance.

AND WHEN WE PROTEST, WE NEED TO HAVE REALLY INFOMATIVE FLYERS AND PASS THEM OUT TO PEOPLE ON THE STREET SO THAT THEY KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON!!!

especially if there are ways they can become involved, let them know.

(12)

Doris No. 27 (2009), p. 12

change it, or imagine the change easily, then change is impossible. And of course, this sense that change is impossible is at the heart of a cynical, dominator culture. Crabb strives to capture the complexities of human life, and rather than finding these complexities daunting, she finds them hopeful, productive.

Although Crabb certainly suggests actions to her readers, as in *Doris* #15 where she offers an extensive guide on how to deal with depression, *Doris* is not a zine that is propelled by specific how-to tips for cultural change. Instead, Crabb creates the zine to be a space that invites her readers to think and feel deeply and carefully - and in complex ways - about the world and their place in it. She explained to me, "I think there is something about modeling a deep self-reflection, a strong desire for real emotion and real honest closeness, that helps people to do this in their lives - counterbalances the messages that tell them to stay shallow and safe" (2007, personal

correspondence). She is particularly critical of the consumer culture that encourages people to go for the quick fix, the easy answer, or to think only in terms of their individual needs.

In her zine, she consistently showcases her own emotional terrain, lets her readers see inside her own efforts at processing and making sense of the world. Reading the zine over a number of years lets you see Crabb's long-term emotional journey. The zine has both documented and been part of Crabb's own healing process. More than this, though, what Crabb is doing in *Doris* is inviting her readers to have their own emotional experience. She told me that she tries to make each issue of *Doris* contain a full range of human emotions so that the zine can provide a kind of emotional journey for the reader.

I'm intrigued with her idea of "modeling a deep self-reflection," because I do see this as both resistant and interventionist, and yet not in ways that we might recognize if we're looking for old-paradigm activism. Indeed, this might not fit many people's definition of "political" work at all. For Crabb, however, this is explicitly political, a point of view she has developed more fully in recent years. In her "Ohio" essay (2007), she writes, "I don't think our lifestyle choices are in and of themselves political. The political part is whether our lifestyle choices help us to become more human. If they help us feel a sense of personal integrity, and if that integrity gives us the power to fight further, to imagine deeper, to want more" (2007: 5).

For Crabb, then, the political is what encourages us to become more fully human. She is interested in calling her readers back to their own human integrity, a quality she believes is not nurtured in the culture at large, but which is necessary for the work of changing the world. And it's important to see that she figures this work of world change not only in terms of "fight[ing] further" but in terms of imagination and desire. Indeed, social justice activists like Paulo Freire have argued that imagination and the belief in change are crucial components of any social justice efforts. Freire argues, "In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (1970: 31). It's as if Crabb is taking the zine concept of emulation to a different level: not only does she invite her readers to emulate the production of the zine itself by creating a material object with "all its seams showing," but she also invites them to emulate her process of self-reflection, because she shows all the seams there, as well.

You could pick up almost any *Doris* zine and find this emphasis on becoming more fully human – an emphasis that Crabb conveys with words and imagery. For instance, in *Doris* #20 (2002), Crabb discusses the death of her mother and the friend who came to ease her through her numbness. Through these personal reminiscences, she outlines her process of healing. She describes the full human connection she feels with her friend, a connection that's manifested by them sharing stories with each other, beginning when the friend says, "tell me what you haven't told." At the bottom of this page, Crabb draws a box with a simplified, abstracted picture of a heart in

a ribcage with the caption, “It is a shock to my system that I have not felt this in so long, and I can’t believe all I have compromised and settled for” (2002: n. p.)

Further on in this story she explains, “This is what I think is the crazy thing. I can dream with her, and I can believe these dreams are real and not just delusion, and together we could probably make them happen” (2002: n. p.). Again, even in the context of discussing her own healing process, her emphasis is on dreaming, imagining. *Doris* invites readers to imagine more, to allow their sense of self to be transformed. The zine models an imaginative process and therefore offers what I am calling a pedagogy of imagination.

Pedagogy of imagination: political activism in *Doris*

It’s a fascinating form of activism, one that might be described in terms of micropolitics, a political approach that emphasizes individual actions and choices made within a feminist interpretive framework (Budgeon, 2001: 20). Certainly this is part of what’s going on in *Doris*: Crabb has developed an explicitly feminist framework, one which is broad-based and historically informed. She has studied the history of feminism along with the history of other social justice movements, and she’s been involved in a number of political organizations. She incorporates these ideas into her zine through her own personal narrative. Over the years that she’s produced *Doris*, Crabb has become increasingly conscious of the emotionally sensitive interventions she’s making through her zine. Her pedagogy of imagination is not an unconscious or accidental process.

Unlike some grrrl zinesters, Crabb is confident that her zine has made a difference in the world. Correspondence that Crabb receives from readers confirms for her that her zine has an effect. For instance, in one letter which Crabb characterizes as typical, a woman explains, “I think it’s so important for women to see that there is an empowered network of other amazing women out there. We just have to find and support each other. Please know you have my support” (2007, personal correspondence). *Doris* helped to facilitate a real human connection between Crabb and this reader, a connection that helped the reader to feel supported and inspired her to want to convey that same sense of support to Crabb in a letter. Crabb explained that this sort of response is common: “I get a lot of mail from people who I know personally it has affected . . . I feel like it’s helped some people not kill themselves. It’s helped me not to kill myself, and I think it does help. I’m sure other zines are like that, too. I know *Snarla* helped me. I think it helps people to not just go where they’re told to go. Zines help a lot of people to explore more options in their life, both emotionally and physically” (2007, personal interview).

In other words, Crabb sees *Doris* as a zine with a pedagogical effect, the effect of helping people “to explore more options in their life.” This is clearly an important issue for Crabb, one that serves as a kind of framework for her zine. She states this idea as well in an early issue of *Doris*:

I have this strong empathy for the way people struggle and the ways they get by in this fucked up world. I wonder all the time about what people would be doing if they were presented with options that they didn't normally see. How they would be living and relating to eachother [sic] and looking at the world and what they wanted, if there were alternatives that were real and strong (2005: 105).

She's fascinated with the options people "[don't] normally see," with real alternatives, and she sees her zine as space that can make those options visible and thereby teach people to hope. Zines like *Doris* can change power structures by giving individuals a sense of their own power, helping people "not just go where they're told to go." This is what it means to offer a pedagogy of imagination.

Zines often operate in the tiny spaces in mainstream culture, a notion which Crabb herself voices in *Doris* #24: "I needed to experience a world created in the cracks and fissures and forgotten places" (2007: 8). This level of political operation can have very tangible individual effects, such as encouraging someone not to commit suicide. And it can also have broader reaching effects that are harder to track but no less real and significant, effects such as promoting full humanity and citizenship and encouraging readers to feel that they belong in the world, that they have the right to be there and that they can make a difference. These effects are a necessary component of propagating democracy, which is why I argue that the pedagogy of imagination is, in fact, a new form of political engagement.

What does it mean to have cultural interventions that are made up of such things – of empathy, imagination, possibility, human connection? This is not what we're used to. This doesn't look like activism to many of us. And yet it's a kind of activism sensitively attuned to this cultural moment. In Stephen Duncombe's most recent book, *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* (2007), he calls for just this sort of thing, a set of activist interventions that not only rely on the rational and well-argued but that also tap into our human need for something more, which he encompasses in the umbrella term "spectacle." According to Duncombe, spectacle is "a way of making an argument. Not through appeals to reason, rationality, and self-evident truth, but instead through story and myth, fears and desire, imagination and fantasy. It realizes what reality cannot represent. It is the animation of an abstraction, a transformation from ideal to expression. *Spectacle is a dream on display*" (2007: 30).

This, then, is what I argue that Crabb achieves in each issue of *Doris*. *Doris* is, in some senses, a dream on display. She imagines a world in which people are allowed to achieve their full humanity, and she offers glimpses of that world. She invites her reader to imagine with her, to feel what she is feeling. And because she has the zine medium to work with, with her own handwriting and the little pictures of Anna the dog, because she enters the reader's home and hands, she taps into the potential of the embodied community. The zine medium invites the reader to let her guard down, and Crabb steps into that small space, that fissure, where she can offer a pedagogy of hope.

I don't mean to suggest that *Doris* is a zine that offers mindless uplift. Over the years Crabb has discussed horrible pain that she's suffered – and she makes that pain viscerally real. She discusses rape, abortion, sexual harassment, the death of people she couldn't bear to lose. And she discusses the larger cultural traumas of the first and second Gulf Wars, the state-sanctioned murders of indigenous people in South America, and the halted history of union organizing in the U. S. But rather than framing these issues by resorting to easy, familiar, cynical narratives, she frames them in terms of hope:

Do you believe in happy endings? Because sometimes they do happen. Something inside shifts, something outside comes together, and your fight becomes more purposeful, your rest becomes actually restful, your hurt becomes something you can bear, and your happiness becomes something that shines out with ease, not in lightning manic bursts that fill and then drain you, but something else, something steady, something you can almost trust to stay there (2005: 308).

In fact, Crabb's zine seems to operate within the kind of activist location bell hooks describes in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1990), a location of resistant marginality that allows for a new sort of subjectivity. hooks explains: "We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle. We know struggle to be that which pleasures, delights, and fulfills desire. We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world" (1990: 153). Crabb herself is a woman who's lived much of her adult life – the time that she's been producing *Doris* – on the margins of mainstream society. She has lived in small radical collectives in such places as Portland, Oregon, and Asheville, North Carolina. She's lived in transit and has spent time in jail. She's made money at various times through subsistence farming, public assistance, and working retail jobs. When I visited with her in July 2007 in Asheville, she was sewing funky skirts and contributing to an organic bread baking cooperative. These lifestyle choices of intentional marginality have perhaps helped her to sustain the kind of "radical creative space" hooks describes, a space that allows her – in the pages of *Doris* – to theorize social change and invite her readers to do the same.

In my book *Girl Zines* (2009) I discussed people's motivation for creating a zine. People often say they do their zine because it's fun – "tactilely" fun, fun to express themselves, and to become part of a community. Beyond this I suggest that grrrl zines are often tapping into the pleasures of social change efforts. Changing culture is hard; as hooks says, it's struggle. I've written elsewhere about the work involved: "In this era of instant gratification, we don't hear much about committing ourselves to a difficult struggle, and yet this must be the guiding philosophy of feminist consciousness in the twenty-first century" (2003: 19). Bernice Johnson Reagon (1983) articulates the visceral challenges of social justice work particularly clearly when she writes, "I feel as if I'm gonna keel over any minute and die. That is often what it feels like if you're really doing coalition work. Most of the time

you feel threatened to the core and if you don't, you're not really doing no coalescing" (n. p.) Committing ourselves to a difficult challenge, one that's potentially painful and almost certainly going to experience more setbacks than successes, is not the prevailing ethos of this cultural moment. Johnson Reagon's words seem daunting.

And yet these zinesters are expressing the joy of the struggle, what hooks describes as "that which pleasures, delights, and fulfills desire." Crabb says again and again, throughout the fifteen years of *Doris*, that not trying to change the world would be boring. Other zines describe the pleasures of struggle, as well. Issues of *Bitch* repeatedly couch the publication's efforts at social change in terms of enjoyment, as in a 2008 editors' letter that explained, "As always, we've got far more questions than answers in this issue, but putting it together was more about fun than frustration" (2008: 5). In *Greenzine* Cristy Road describes her heart as "a muscle that blossomed by way of movement rather than contentment" and voices the importance of community: "The realization that kindled my impulse is the one that said I wasn't alone in this lifelong quest. That quest about hope and an agenda that went beyond a radical cliché" (2004: n. p.). Similarly, zine creator Lauren Jade Martin writes, "There is a rush, a certain kind of euphoria (way better than drugs, I'm sure) that comes with political work and organizing . . . every time I hear a domestic violence survivor assert in a workshop or a support group or on the hotline that she has a right to be safe and free from violence, I get a shiver of hope down my back" (2002: 13).

This is yet another way that grrrl zines can enact a pedagogy of hope, by demonstrating the satisfaction of involvement. Crabb told me, "When I look at my friends' lives, who don't have any hope and who are cynical, they seem to have not very happy lives. Maybe they do fun stuff a lot, but they don't seem very fulfilled, and I feel like working for social change is really fulfilling. It can be not very fulfilling, but you can find ways to make it super fulfilling, and then that gives hope, even in a hopeless situation" (2007). Zine making is one of the fulfilling ways that some girls and women have found to "give hope, even in a hopeless situation." Grrrl zines provide hope not only to the maker but also to the reader. This is one component of zines' embodied community, their ability to transmit the corporeal experience of hopefulness and the pleasures of resisting the resignation of a cynical culture.

To turn to Cherríe Moraga's ideas from *This Bridge Called My Back*, a foundation for all social justice work must be the belief "that we have the power to actually transform our experience, change our lives, save our lives" (1981: xviii). This "faith of activists" underlies, to greater or lesser extents, all grrrl zines. No matter how pessimistic or cynical the subject matter of the zine is, the fact that the zine exists – that the creator felt motivated to take action, to produce this artifact and share it with others in what can become an embodied community – gives evidence of hope. Many grrrl zines, like *Doris*, have made it their business to propagate that hope and teach others to be hopeful, as well.

Conclusion: Change is possible

In my initial assessments of grrrl zines, I found myself wanting to make them fit existing political models, in order to prove their validity. I wanted to show that they affected zinesters' and readers' engagement in political protest, that they encouraged voting, or that they helped decrease the prevalence of eating disorders or helped spread awareness of emergency contraception. And while I still think it would be interesting to know to what extent these things are true, I've come to feel that the political work of grrrl zines is more subtle and differently resistant than my earlier line of questioning allowed me to see.

What I'm interested in now are these new modes of doing politics, these micropolitical pedagogies that operate in the fissures and forgotten places, that offer dreams on display, that provoke outrage, that invite all kinds of emulation. Viewing grrrl zines in this way not only makes their interventions more visible and valuable, but it also gives a framework for evaluating the larger world of third wave feminism (see *Not My Mother's Sister*, *Third Wave Agenda*, *Listen Up*, and *Catching a Wave* for further information about third wave feminism), as well. These zines become case studies that materialize the arguments that third wave scholars and girls' studies scholars have been making, arguments about girls' and women's agency, and about what it means to resist in the current cultural moment.

Grrrl zines demonstrate the interpenetration of complicity and resistance; they are spaces to try out mechanisms for doing things differently – while still making use of the ephemera of the mainstream culture. They demonstrate the process, the missed attempts as well as the successes. They aren't the magic solution to social change efforts; instead, they are small, incomplete attempts, micropolitical. They function in a different way than mainstream media and than previous social justice efforts. Indeed, my work with these zines has helped me to understand one of the central paradoxes of third wave feminism: the contradiction between the emphasis on the personal and intimate on the one hand, and the need for broader collective action on the other hand. In some ways grrrl zines merge the two: they are clearly intimate, personal artifacts, and they create embodied communities. But these aren't communities that become large protest groups or voting blocs. They are communities that operate in the cracks and fissures. They show that change is still possible – “even more than we are able to imagine.”

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