

The Bohemian Horizon:
21st-Century Little Magazines and the Limits of the Countercultural Artist-Activist

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the emergence of a cohort of independent literary, intellectual, and political publications—“little magazines”—in New York City over the past decade. Helmed by web-savvy young editors, these publications have cultivated formidable reputations by grasping and capitalizing on a constellation of economic, political, and technological developments. The little magazines understand themselves as a radical alternative both to a journalistic trend toward facile, easily digestible content and to the perceived insularity and exclusivity of academic discourse. However, the bohemian tradition in which they operate predisposes them toward an insularity of their own. Their particular web of allusions, codes, and prerequisite knowledge can render them esoteric beyond the borders of a specific subculture and, in so doing, curtail their political potency and reproduce systems of privilege. This dissertation explores the tensions and limitations of the bohemian artist-activist ideal, and locates instances in which little magazines were able to successfully transcend subcultural boundaries to productively engage in a broader politics.

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Among other topics, this dissertation addresses the tumultuous state of American higher education. Yet despite the challenging era in which we live, the academy is still populated by a surfeit of gems. These are brilliant people, engaged people, people who fight valiantly to preserve the life of the mind despite all the challenges that come with that decision. These people have my appreciation, and my gratitude.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Carol Mushett—I owe so much to your example and your encouragement. I love you, and I admire you.

INTRODUCTION

“It starts with just, you have these articles and no one else will publish them.”

~Jon Baskin, on founding the little magazine the *Point*¹

It was October 13, 2012 when the entity that would become *Blunderbuss Magazine* was first whispered into the world, ceasing to be just one daydream among many in my head. Well, I suppose I didn't so much whisper it as shout it so that it could be heard over the din at B-Side, an Alphabet City dive bar with a punk-heavy juke box. I was there to celebrate my 27th birthday, and my friends had bought me enough drinks to drown any embarrassment about proclaiming my intent to join the long line of young writers brazen enough to impose yet another magazine on the world. “Aren't you already pretty busy?” my friend Jonah asked after I screamed my nascent dream a few inches from his face. It wasn't the rousing affirmation of my project's historical necessity that I'd hoped for, but Jonah was right. I was busy. This was early in the third year of my PhD program, time to

¹ “Little Magazines & the Conversation of Culture in America: The Little Magazine Today,” New School, November 13, 2014, <http://livestream.com/TheNewSchool/little-magazines>.

begin serious work on my dissertation. At the time, a little magazine probably looked like a distraction, a project wholly unrelated to my academic work. It is only in retrospect that it becomes clear the extent to which the world of little magazines would colonize tracts of my life I never would have expected as I glowered at Jonah and his skepticism over a can of PBR. One of such tract is the dissertation that you hold in your hands.

My little magazine story started similarly to that of the *Point*'s Jon Baskin. My initial urge to start a magazine wasn't born of some preformulated aesthetic or political project. I had been writing essays that no one—not even the existing little magazines—seem to want, and I was lucky if a post on my personal blog garnered an audience in the double-digits. Further, in 2012 I was still riding a wave of energy initiated by the Occupy Wall Street protests that had started in September of 2011 and continued, albeit with declining enthusiasm, through the following year. During the peak of the movement, two friends and I crowdfunded enough money to print and distribute a few thousand copies of *The 99%'s Guide to the Current Clusterf#*k*, our pamphlet of activist information and movement analysis that we hoped could help explain Occupy to the uninitiated and serve as a resource for OWS' rank and file. My circumstances had aligned: I was tired of trying to convince publications that my writing was worth running, the wealth of free time I discovered after finishing coursework transformed my grad school stipend into something like a pauper's sinecure, and I'd been inspired by Occupy's DIY ethos to quit seeking the approval of editors and just build my own damn magazine.

In March 2013, five months after the night at B-Side, *Blunderbuss* went online. In the nearly three years since, we've published work from more than 180 writers and artists, entered into a partnership with the *Guardian* that's now bringing *Blunderbuss*

content to one of the most popular news sites in the world, and are planning the launch of a free newsprint publication as a complement to our web magazine. We've managed to grow and develop as quickly as I could have realistically hoped.

And we are not alone. *Blunderbuss* is a small player in a broader scene of new little magazines that has grown up in New York City over the past decade or so. Generally leftist in politics and helmed by tech-savvy young editors, these little magazines have formed something of a community. *N+I*, “a print and digital magazine of literature, culture, and politics,” is generally held to have inaugurated this cohort with its founding in 2004. Others followed. Some—like the high theory anarchists at the *New Inquiry* and *Jacobin*'s banner-waving Marxists—have flourished, growing their audiences, increasing their publishing volume, and hiring full-time staff. Others—like the more literary-focused *American Reader*, much ballyhooed at its launch—flamed out, closing up shop almost as suddenly as it appeared.

Together, though, they have rejuvenated a genre of publication that had long seemed past its prime. Before the new little magazines started their resurgence, there were, of course, left-wing magazines, literary magazines, and magazines of intellectual criticism. However, few mixed aspects of all three, fewer still were unattached to academic departments or larger publishing concerns, and the presiding spirits of the left-leaning intelligentsia on the mastheads of journals like *Dissent*, the *New Left Review*, and the *New York Review of Books* were, frankly, aging. Unlike institutions on the right, however, they had not succeeded at grooming young successors within their own publications. If there was going to be new life in the radical little magazine—a small but vigorous branch of American publishing that stretches back through the post-war

Partisan Review and on to Max Eastman's *Masses* in the 1910s—then young writers and editors would have to found magazines of their own, with all the frenetic entrepreneurial energy that requires.

Editors like *n+1*'s Keith Gessen, the *New Inquiry*'s Rachel Rosenfelt, *Jacobin*'s Bhaskar Sunkara, and the *American Reader*'s Uzoamaka Maduka certainly had that energy. Their venues very consciously provide a space for longer, more considered, and less timely work than in the broader media economy of the Internet. However, all the writing, editing, soliciting, planning, haranguing, and fundraising needed to grow a publication—especially an unknown publication helmed by industry novices—requires editors to stay in near constant motion, especially when these often unpaid editors have to resort to other gigs to support themselves. Though taxing, this motion is also invigorating for a certain sort of person. Spending as much time as I do dealing with the slow pace and measured tone of the academy, it is incredibly rewarding to build something *now*, to enter into an arena where political, intellectual, and literary conversations happen on a timeframe more in synch with Twitter than peer-review.

There are, of course, drawbacks to such a feverish pace. With so many day-to-day tasks, it is easy to lose sight of what social and political roles editors want their publications to play, what roles these publications are playing in actuality, and the potential discrepancy between the two. Are the new little magazines agents of political change? Harbingers of transformation? A new avant-garde? A farm league for larger media outlets to recruit new talent? Entitled youth, preening for each other? A gathering place for surplus intellectuals?

It's important to ask, in short, how do (or don't) these overtly politicized

publications participate in politics, and where do they fit into the shifting landscape of America's intellectual life? These are the questions that this dissertation seeks to answer.

The new little magazines have proven an object of fascination to observers. The *Guardian* has written of them as constituting “a new, post-digital dawn in which a web-literate and politically engaged generation is re-energising journalism with fierce-thinking in stylish print and online publications.”² Harvard University's Nieman Journalism Lab praised little magazines (including *Blunderbuss*) for “synthesizing the best of the classic liberal arts canon with a deliriously diverse range of literary, philosophical, and historic sources, all for the purpose of shining light on present-day political and intellectual problems.”³ Several of the little magazines (not including *Blunderbuss*) have garnered the attention of the *New York Times*, either in the form of interviews or extended profiles. The *Nation* has argued that publications like *Jacobin*, *n+1*, and *Dissent* (which, in the wake of the new little magazine's breakout success, revamped itself with an infusion of young writers and editors) represent the intellectual vanguard of a generational trend they dubbed “Millennial Marxism.”⁴

Even as professors and graduate students make up a significant portion of the writers for new little magazines, scholars have yet to show the same interest in writing *about* them. There are no academic monographs about new little magazines (nor, should

² Hermione Hoby, “New York literary magazines – start spreading the news,” *The Guardian*, January 5, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/jan/06/new-york-literary-magazines-publishing>.

³ C.W. Anderson, “Beyond Journalism in the Present Tense,” Nieman Journalism Lab, December 2014, <http://www.niemanlab.org/2014/12/beyond-journalism-in-the-present-tense/>.

⁴ Timothy Shenk, “Thomas Piketty and Millennial Marxists on the Scourge of Inequality,” *The Nation*, April 14, 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/article/thomas-piketty-and-millennial-marxists-scourge-inequality/>.

it be said, are there books for a general audience). Even refereed journal articles are basically non-existent. Their historical antecedents in the leftist independent publishing have, by contrast, been well covered by scholars. Earlier generations of American little magazines—including the 1910s heyday of the *Masses* and *Mother Earth*, and, later, the New York Intellectuals who spawned *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, and *Dissent*—have received their share of scholarly attention. So have the countercultural underground press of the 1960s and 70s and the zine scene of the 1980s and 90s.

This void—which my dissertation helps to fill—means that I will spend very little time engaging with the “scholarly conversation” around new little magazines. No such conversation exists. Rather, I engage extensively with writing produced by the little magazines themselves and with mainstream journalistic writing about them. Further context is provided through interviews with writers and editors involved in the new little magazine community, and scholarship on other generations of radical bohemian publishers—for instance, Christine Stansell on the Greenwich Village scene of the 1910s, Dale Peck on the underground press, and Stephen Duncombe on zines—is used to situate the new little magazines historically.

I have chosen to concentrate primarily on four publications: *n+1*, the *New Inquiry*, *Jacobin*, and the *American Reader*. When the mainstream media—and the editors themselves—discuss the contemporary little magazines, these four are typically represented as the community’s standard bearers (or, in the case of the *Reader*, were so represented until their journal’s demise in 2015). Each of these magazines has been the subject of either a profile or extended interview in the *New York Times*—perhaps the most significant imprimatur that legacy media can bestow on a new venue—and each

acknowledges lines of reciprocal influence running between one another. Further, these four magazines are all headquartered in New York City, providing a geographic concentration that has, as in Stansell's Greenwich Village, contributed to the creation of a coherent "scene." Each journal has engaged in explicit and implicit conversation with one another, frequently have writers and editors in common, and occupy an overlapping mindscape of values, influences, and insider language. That said, they are different enough in ideology, style, and practice to provide a range of empirical cases of how little magazines can engage with the world. They are not, however, the only new little magazines in operation, and not even the only ones operating in New York or engaging in the same conversations. These other magazines—including *Guernica*, *Adult Magazine*, and my own *Blunderbuss*—will be discussed when relevant.

As a participant in the world of new little magazines and an admirer of much of the work they publish, I must admit that my findings are not what I would have hoped they would be. The little magazines understand themselves as a radical alternative both to a journalistic trend toward facile, easily digestible content and to the perceived insularity and exclusivity of academic discourse. However, the bohemian tradition in which they operate predisposes them toward an insularity of their own. Their particular web of allusions, codes, and prerequisite knowledge can render them esoteric beyond the borders of a specific counterpublic and, in so doing, curtail their political potency and reproduce systems of privilege. In this dissertation, I explore the tensions and limitations of the bohemian artist-activist ideal, and locate instances in which little magazines were able to successfully transcend subcultural boundaries to productively engage in a broader politics.

In Chapter One, I chart the historical terrain that gave rise to this new generation of little magazines. Like all projects, they were shaped by the era into which they were born, spanning roughly from 2004 to the present. Economically, a difficult job market sent would-be writers and intellectuals looking for unorthodox publishing opportunities and predisposed them to broadly sympathize with critiques of free market capitalism. Politically, the views of Americans—especially young Americans—moved perceptibly to the left after the conservative apogee of the post-9/11 years. Technologically, new media platforms allowed novice publishers to cultivate audiences with little front-end investment. Further, the collapse of some of the most prominent independent intellectual and political journals in the early aughts created opened a niche for new publications to fill.

In search of a usable past, the new little magazines drew much inspiration from the bohemian tradition of the hybrid artist-activist. Chapter Two argues that in so doing, they acquired that tradition's political limitations. A perceived isolation from and pronounced opposition toward mainstream culture helped to create an inward-facing community of like-minded writers, and the community's distinct web of allusions, codes, and prerequisite knowledge often renders them esoteric across subcultural boundaries. This inadvertently replicates systems of privilege by effectively requiring readers to share the writers' high level of facility with the language of humanities criticism. However, through occasional close collaboration with activist communities, these magazines have sometimes used their discursive and publishing capacities to productively engage with on-the-ground politics.

For the new little magazines, the Occupy Wall Street movement represented a

high point of engagement with activist politics. This relationship is discussed at length in Chapter Three. The movement served as a whetstone against which the publications could sharpen their individual political identities by allying themselves with divergent factions within Occupy. A proxy war between these factions took place on the pages of the little magazines, providing insight into the tensions that ultimately limited Occupy Wall Street's political horizons. Simultaneously, the emergence of a conspicuous, if fleeting, left-wing social movement gave these publications new significance and visibility, securing their perceived generational relevance in the popular press and contributing to the media narrative of the "Millennial Marxist."

Finally, Chapter Four explores how the new little magazines fit into the changing political economy of America's intellectual life. Even as these journals consistently critique what they see as the failures of the mainstream media and the academy, they also benefit from their continued solvency. The little magazines are at once working against the norms of journalism and academia, and at the same time exploiting these sectors for their own purposes. Regarding mainstream journalism, little magazines have employed a strategy of pragmatic collaboration in order to garner funds, raise their public profiles, and reach a wider audience. The academy subsidizes little magazines both intellectually and financially; universities underwrite much of the noncommercial thought and research that most influences little magazines, and faculty salaries and graduate student stipends create a pool of writers capable of contributing to these journals for little or no pay. Should we see a continued decline in the capacity of mainstream publishing and academia to support serious intellectual work that is not confined within departmental silos, the new little magazines are not poised to take up the slack. They have thus far

demonstrated little ability to amass the financial resources to meaningfully support such work or the political will to credibly challenge the broader conditions. Rather, they serve as a coping mechanism for anxious young writers and intellectuals. Even if the world of little magazines has little to offer in terms of economic rewards, it can offer those who contribute to them validation, a community, and even a degree of microcelebrity.

CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORICAL SITUATION

It was the early aughts, and the prospect of a pre-professionalized future in a post-ideological America left four young would-be intellectuals “muttering discontentedly into [their] beers at various universities.”¹ Each had spent the mid-to-late ‘90s earning bachelor’s degrees in the Ivy League—Marco Roth, Keith Gessen, and Benjamin Kunkel at Harvard, and Mark Greif at Columbia. Now, they were scattered around the northeast, either enrolled in literary-minded graduate programs or testing out the writing life in New York City. Unhappy with the state of general audience intellectual magazines, the four each chipped in \$2,000 to start their own. They knew it was a crowded field. Who needed another magazine cluttering up bookstore shelves? But still, they decided to toss another publication on the pile. Hence the name: *n+1*.

Issue number 1 went to press in autumn 2004. In both content and form, the magazine harkened back the little magazines of the early-to-mid 20th century. Rather than

¹ Fred Rowland, et al., “n+1: The Temple University Libraries Interview,” *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* 2.1 (2013).

choosing to focus on either literature or politics, *n+1* chose to treat both seriously and thereby join the storied but out of fashion tradition of publications like the *Masses* and the *Partisan Review*, a tradition explicitly evoked in the first issue's Endnotes, which call the *PR* of the 1940s and 50s "the greatest of magazines."² This fusion of the literary and the political seemed natural for the editors, so natural that Gessen likens the attempt to sever one from the other to cutting off one's own hand. "We as reading, thinking humans and writers wanted to have both," he says. "Both were important to us. It didn't make sense to separate them. We thought it would be more interesting. We thought you'd be able to arrive and conclusions and approaches you couldn't otherwise have."³ The visual style was—and continues to be—bare bones and text-heavy, printed on sturdy, bookish matte paper rather than magazine gloss. Art was used sparingly, primarily in the form of a single image on the page opposite each new piece's beginning. Even then, it is always printed in black and white.

Appropriately titled "Negation," the issue set about staking out *n+1*'s turf by with a succession of fusillades against publications from whom the magazine sought to differentiate itself. In *n+1*'s estimation, the liberal *New Republic* had adopted "a bullying, inuendoish, dishonest tone" and critic Dale Peck "smeared the walls with shit and bankrupted [*TNR*'s literary] section for all time to come."⁴ The conservative *Weekly Standard* "allow[ed] those from elite backgrounds to pretend to speak like the philistine middle-class" and twisted the tools of critical theory into "a right-wing poststructuralism

² Keith Gessen, "Endnotes," *n+1* 1 (Summer 2004): 182.

³ Keith Gessen, interview by author, digital recording, New York City, February 23, 2015.

⁴ "Designated Haters," *n+1* 1 (Summer 2004): 6.

or postmodernism.”⁵ The literary journal *McSweeney’s* was only “briefly a significant magazine,” and it and the other publishing ventures of Dave Eggers were sentimental vehicles for “thoroughgoing, even prissy, moralists.”⁶ Just thirty pages later, Gessen spends a long essay titled “Eggers, Teen Idol” deconstructing that writer’s fame and “marketing genius”⁷ through a profile of an obsessed young fan.

Elsewhere in the inaugural installment, *n+1* performed its editorial mission through tactics other than slash-and-burn. It published fiction from writers foreign (Russia’s Vladimir Sorokin), young (editor Ben Kunkel, who had yet to conquer the cover of the *New York Times* Sunday Book Review), and underappreciated (Sam Lipsyte, whose struggle to get his novel *Home Land* published in America was dubbed “not one of our publishing industry’s prouder moments”⁸). It ran thoughtful, extended criticism on the writers Jean-Cristopher Rufin, David Foster Wallace, and James McCourt. Editor Mark Greif used the *Illiad* and the Homeric conception of the hero to illuminate the one-sidedness of the American invasion of Iraq. Not every piece is successful—Greif’s short take on the temperament of George W. Bush, for example, occasionally succumbs to a mean-spirited pettiness, and Dushko Petrovich’s “Art Chronicle” meanders through ideas and artworks without engaging satisfyingly with any of them—but they are unified by a seriousness of purpose, an unshowy erudition, and a careful attention to the craft of writing. After a generation in which American literature rarely brushed against politics

⁵ “PoMo NeoCons,” *n+1* 1 (Summer 2004): 10.

⁶ “A Regressive Avant-Garde,” *n+1* 1 (Summer 2004): 8.

⁷ Keith Gessen, “Eggers, Teen Idol,” *n+1* 1 (Summer 2004): 61.

⁸ Sam Lipsyte, “Fontana,” *n+1* 1 (Summer 2004): 107.

outside of the carefully cordoned off terrain of multiculturalism, and in which the intellectual left was enamored of the same tools of postmodernism and cultural studies that the *Weekly Standard* had nimbly put to use for right-wing ends, *n+1* embodied a different mentality. Earnest, sober, combative, engaged—just as the go-go consumerism of the ‘90s had corresponded with a hip, winking postmodern irony, serious times called for a serious magazine. Near the issue’s close Gessen distilled this generational sensibility: “Those jokes, wherein you tweak the Man by suggesting gay sex or quoting Lacan: those jokes are no longer funny. There are better ways to embarrass yourself. It is time to say what you mean.”⁹

This sensibility resonated. Within six months, the first issue of *n+1* had sold out. The editors made their \$8,000 back. The following year, they—along with their nemeses at the Eggers-affiliated monthly the *Believer*—were the subject of a 5,000-word profile in the *New York Times*.¹⁰ The New York gossip blog *Gawker* may have mocked *n+1* by sarcastically christening it “the most important literary journal of our time,” but they were paying attention. (So much attention, in fact, that top *Gawker* writer and periodic *n+1* mocker Emily Gould eventually married Keith Gessen.) Young would-be writers and editors were paying attention as well. In the years since *n+1*’s founding, a number of similarly-inclined publications took root in New York City, most notably *Jacobin*, the *New Inquiry*, and the *American Reader*. All run on a shoestring, all left-leaning, all theoretically informed but non-specialist, these publications have helped to reinvigorate the once-moribund form of the little magazine.

⁹ Gessen, “Endnotes,” 182.

¹⁰ A.O. Scott, “Among the Believers,” *New York Times*, September 11, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/11/magazine/among-the-believers.html>.

Before addressing the character of this revival, we need to locate the historical situation that brought it forth. The ground has remained especially fertile for independent critical, political, and literary publications in the ten years since *n+1* was founded, and the reasons for this can be broadly divided into three categories: the economic, the political, and the technological. Each of these categories shades into the others—economic challenges have encouraged people to pose certain political questions, and certain political inclinations have been emboldened by recent technological developments—and these interactions helped to shape the form the little magazine revival has taken.

1.1 The Economic Situation

“There are four ways to survive as a writer in the United States in 2006: the university; journalism; odd jobs; and independent wealth. I have tried the first three.”

~Keith Gessen¹¹

The 2000s and early 2010s were a tough time to be a young American in need of a job. Youth unemployment had been on the decline for the second half of the 1990s, reaching a low of below 9% in early 2000. Then came the bursting of the dot-com bubble, the crash of the NASDAQ market in March of 2000, and, finally, the 9/11 attacks and their attendant economic slump. Unemployment among people under 30 shot up to around 12% where it hovered for much of the middle part of the decade before skyrocketing to

¹¹ Keith Gessen, “Money (2006),” *MFA vs. NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction*, ed. Chad Harbach (New York: n+1/Faber and Faber, 2014): 176.

almost 20% in the wake of the 2007-2008 financial crisis.¹² Those who managed to find jobs saw less reward for their work. Wages stagnated through the aughts, and then actually declined for the bottom 70% of earners during and after the Great Recession (2007-2012) in spite of substantial growth in overall productivity.¹³ “Things feel different now,” an unsigned editorial in the Fall 2005 issue of *n+1* writes. “Our classmates in Silicon Alley lost their jobs and applied to graduate school. (Welcome.)”¹⁴

Those fresh recruits to the academy would, however, find the environment less than welcoming. It was (and is) a challenging period for those entering the workforce, no matter the field they hoped to enter. However, academia and journalism—two traditional meal tickets for writers and intellectuals—found themselves in especially flamboyant states of disarray. Stable employment opportunities in university teaching and newspaper & magazine writing grew increasingly scarce. But the absence of a secure space in which to do intellectual or literary work has not eliminated the impulse to create that work. It has, however, encouraged the creation of new outlets to transmit it to the public.

1.1.1 Academia

It’s been almost three decades since historian Russell Jacoby savaged America’s hyperprofessionalized, inward-facing academic culture in his 1987 polemic *The Last Intellectuals*. In Jacoby’s reading, the decline of affordable urban housing, a shrinking

¹² “United States Youth Unemployment Rate: 1955-2015,” *Trading Economics*, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/united-states/youth-unemployment-rate>.

¹³ Heidi Shierholz and Lawrence Mishel, “A Decade of Flat Wages: The Key Barrier to Shared Prosperity and a Rising Middle Class,” Economic Policy Institute, August 21, 2013, <http://www.epi.org/publication/a-decade-of-flat-wages-the-key-barrier-to-shared-prosperity-and-a-rising-middle-class/>.

¹⁴ “A Boom Deferred,” *n+1* 3 (Fall 2005): 3.

number of venues for general audience critical writing, and a boom in university enrollment in the decades following World War II conspired to flush politically engaged intellectuals out of bohemian enclaves like Greenwich Village and into comfortable university professorships. Even the New Left renegades who, as students in the 1960s and early 1970s, turned their campuses into hotbeds of radical protest, slid comfortably onto the tenure track. “Often without missing a beat,” Jacoby writes, “they moved from being undergraduate and graduate students to junior faculty positions and tenured appointments.”¹⁵

This migration had its perks, of course, as long as the getting was good. Writers who had, even in the heyday of bohemia, struggled to make a living had new options in a postwar society where “professors, traditionally ridiculed and underpaid, obtain new status and good salaries.”¹⁶ But it also had costs. The work that earned one the finest trappings of academia—prestigious appointments, publication in the toniest journals, and, most fundamentally & importantly, the security of tenure—generally had to hew to increasingly narrow and professionalized standards. In contrast to the accessible but erudite prose of little magazines like the *Partisan Review*, the writing in academic journals became frequently indecipherable across the boundaries of academic specialties, to say nothing of its legibility to the broader public.

Already in the late 1980s, though, this postwar boom was slowing, a trend that only accelerated intellectual homogenization inside the academy. Again, Jacoby: “The years of academic plenty were long enough to attract droves of would-be professors; they

¹⁵ Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 135.

¹⁶ Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals*, 75.

were brief enough to ensure that all saw the ‘No Vacancy’ sign. Professionalization proceeded under the threat of unemployment. The lessons of the near and far past, from McCarthyism to the first stone thrown at the first outsider, were clear to anyone: blend in; use the time allotted to establish scholarly credentials; hide in the mainstream.”¹⁷ Any graduate student—especially one studying the humanities or social sciences—can confirm that these pressures remain intense. The path between matriculation and professorship forms a long and treacherous gauntlet. First, a PhD aspirant needs to finish their program and earn their doctorate. Half don’t.¹⁸ Of the ones who survive the process, fewer than 50% of graduating humanities PhDs have a definite job commitment from an employer by graduation, down 10% from 20 years ago.¹⁹

Provided a student finds a job, fewer of the jobs that remain are good ones. In 1969, 78.3% of university faculty had tenure or were on the track to it. By 2009, that number was 33.5%. Of the 66.5% who are non-tenure track, seven-out-of-ten are part-time adjuncts. These adjuncts are generally paid dismal wages—a median of \$2,700 per course—and have little to no job security.²⁰ This trend toward a “flexible” (read: disposable) labor force shows no signs of abating; if anything, it is increasing in velocity.

¹⁷ Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals*, 135.

¹⁸ Leonard Cassuto, “Ph.D. Attrition: How Much Is Too Much?,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 1, 2013, <http://chronicle.com/article/PhD-Attrition-How-Much-Is/140045/>.

¹⁹ Jordan Weissman, “The Unending Horror of the Humanities Job Market, in One Chart,” *Slate*, July 14, 2014, http://www.slate.com/blogs/moneybox/2014/07/14/humanities_ph_d_employment_the_longstanding_horror_of_the_job_market_in.html.

²⁰ Adrianna Kezar and Daniel Maxey, “The Changing Academic Workforce,” Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, May/June 2013, <http://agb.org/trusteeship/2013/5/changing-academic-workforce>.

A 2013 survey found that 58% of public university provosts believe that future generations of faculty should not expect tenure to be a factor in their employment.²¹ These numbers demonstrate that for students entering PhD programs, *a tenure-track position is an aberrational outcome*. For myriad reasons, most budding academics will never even have the chance to stand before a tenure committee. Whether the student makes the decision veer off the traditional academic life path or is forced off it by intense competition for the few slots that remain, the intellectual interests that drove them to graduate school in the first place will often survive the death of dreams of tenure. However, the extra-institutional intellectual is going to require extra-institutional outlets to find a readership for her work.

Further, the culture and precarious employment situation ward off many young writers and intellectuals before they even apply for a graduate program. When asked, for example, if she would ever considered the academic track, Ayesha Siddiqi, editor-in-chief of the New York-based web magazine the *New Inquiry*, simply said, “Academia is where I would go to die.”²²

1.1.2 Journalism

The career prospects for young journalists were little better than their counterparts in the academy. Between 2007 and 2009 alone, the number of full-time newsroom jobs at American newspapers dropped by 20%. These numbers have failed to rebound, with the 38,000 existing in 2012, marking the lowest number since the American Society of

²¹ Daniel Luzer, “The Decline of Academic Tenure,” *Washington Monthly*, January 24, 2013, http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/college_guide/blog/the_decline_of_academic_tenure.php.

²² Ayesha Siddiqi, interview by author, digital recording, New York City, January 14, 2015.

Newspaper Editors started counting in 1978. The magazine industry is fairing badly as well, losing 35,000 jobs over the preceding five years and to bring the total down to a mere 100,000.²³

Jobs in digital media are on the rise, but the pace of growth is not nearly enough to offset the cratering employment numbers in legacy media. Though definitive numbers are perhaps impossible together, the Pew Research Center's survey of 30 major digital outlets and 438 smaller ones found that these organizations added only 5,000 editorial positions to the job market by 2013.²⁴ The expansion of outlets like *Vice*, *HuffingtonPost*, and *BuzzFeed* is certainly impressive, but as Pew puts it, "the growth in new digital full-time journalism jobs seems to have compensated for only a modest percentage of the lost legacy jobs in newspaper newsrooms alone in the past decade."²⁵

As in academia, the journalistic job opportunities that remain are often less attractive than in generations past. Between 2003 and 2013, the average salary for reporters grew at less than half the rate of both the average salary for all occupations and the consumer price index.²⁶ And while statistics are difficult to come by, it is widely recognized that both digital and legacy outlets have made increasing use of freelance

²³ Mark Jurkowitz, "The Losses in Legacy," Pew Research Center, March 26, 2014, <http://www.journalism.org/2014/03/26/the-losses-in-legacy/>.

²⁴ Mark Jurkowitz, "The Growth in Digital Reporting," Pew Research Center, March 26, 2014, <http://www.journalism.org/2014/03/26/the-growth-in-digital-reporting/>.

²⁵ Monica Anderson, "UGA: The job market tightens, but new journalism grads remain upbeat," Pew Research Center, August 6, 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/08/06/the-job-market-tightens-but-new-journalism-grads-remain-upbeat/>.

²⁶ Jim Bach, "Reporters' Pay Falls Below U.S. Average Wage," *American Journalism Review*, May 5, 2014, <http://ajr.org/2014/05/05/reporter-pay-falls-u-s-average-wage/>.

writers. These writers—the adjuncts of the journalism world—have to cope with limited pay, no job security, and no benefits.

1.1.3 Little Mags Take Note

These trends did not go unnoticed by the founders of little magazines. “I thought [*n+1*’s readership] was going to be, as we were, disgruntled grad students,” co-founder Keith Gessen says, “either people who were still stuck in academia or people who left academia in disgust.”²⁷ Rachel Rosenfelt, the co-founder and first editor-in-chief of the *New Inquiry*, expressed similar ideas when describing the talent pool her publication draws from: “The institutions that Russell Jacoby describes in his book *The Last Intellectuals* — mass media, mainstream publishing, the academy, all the places which had come to employ and therefore absorb a category we had once known as the public intellectual — had atrophied across the board. As a result, the would-be academicians, editors, copy writers and advertising cronies who would once have been absorbed into those institutions suddenly constituted a surplus population.”²⁸ As Rosenfelt implies, diminishing opportunities for criticism within existing institutions does not mean that the would-be critics who are squeezed out will accept the judgment of the market and cease their writing. Some will establish their own outlets, and many will seek to write for them. And as these writers—like a substantial portion of their generational fellows—have experienced a turbulent relationship with the marketplace, they are going to be inclined toward certain ideological predispositions.

²⁷ Gessen, interview by author.

²⁸ Evan Kindley, “An Interview with The New Inquiry’s Rachel Rosenfelt,” *Los Angeles Review of Books: Tumblr Edition*, February 7, 2012, <http://tumblr.lareviewofbooks.org/post/24379332024/an-interview-with-the-new-inquirys-rachel>.

1.2 The Political Situation

When *n+1* inaugurated the current era of New York-based little magazines in 2004, the political terrain in the US did not seem an especially fertile one for a resurgent left. The conservative George W. Bush would soon win a second term in the White House, and his Republican Party would maintain its control of Congress. The American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continued to rage. The country had yet to emerge from the haze of fear and jingoism that followed 9/11. And yet, the seeds of a renewed interest in leftist thought were germinating.

Throughout the 00s, the youth vote moved increasingly toward the Democratic Party. After young voters split nearly evenly between Bush and Gore in 2000,²⁹ John Kerry won the demographic by 9 percentage points in 2004.³⁰ By 2008, Barack Obama tallied an astonishing 35 percentage point victory over John McCain in the competition for young voters. Obama's 66% share of the youth vote was 13% greater than his share of all voters, the greatest disparity since exit polling began in 1972.³¹ Obama's popularity with the demographic shrunk in the 2012 election, but he still won the group handily, scoring 23 percentage points more than his opponent Mitt Romney.

Of course, some of this movement is attributable to the specific candidates and the campaigns they waged. Barack Obama proved to be an especially charismatic campaigner, and his relative youth provided a sharp contrast to the elderly John McCain.

²⁹ "How Groups Voted in 2000," Roper Center, <http://ropercenter.cornell.edu/polls/us-elections/how-groups-voted/how-groups-voted-2000/>.

³⁰ "US President / National / Exit Poll," CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/states/US/P/00/epolls.0.html>.

³¹ "Young Voters in the 2008 Election," Pew Research Center, November 13, 2008, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/11/13/young-voters-in-the-2008-election/>.

His candidacy also offered the opportunity for a historic election, and young people were rallied by the opportunity to sweep the first black president into the White House.

However, Obama's popularity amongst the young was due to more than his personal appeal. He had staked out positions that were at the time to the left of both the US public and his own party, but that the country—and especially its youth—moved toward as the Bush years wore on. US military involvement in Iraq—which Obama had vocally opposed from the beginning—had grown increasingly unpopular as the aughts progressed. On the eve of the 2003 invasion, 72% of Americans supported the action. By 2008, that figure had fallen to 38%.³² Young people were more hostile toward the conflict than their elders, with at least 15 points more of them disapproving of the war than the general population.³³

Part of the inspiration for the founding of *n+1* was the disgust its editors felt toward ostensibly left-leaning but pro-war writers like the editors of the *New Republic* (which *n+1* pilloried in the opening article of its first issue) and raconteur Christopher Hitchens (who one writer called an “egregious ass” at the end of their second). In their original 2004 editorial statement, *n+1*'s editors wrote that their era “will be seen as the time when some of the best people in our intellectual class gave their ‘critical support’ to a hubristic, suicidal adventure in Iraq.”³⁴ Within a few years, the country, and especially its youth, would come to agree.

³² “Public Attitudes Toward the War in Iraq: 2003-2008,” Pew Research Center, March 19, 2008, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/03/19/public-attitudes-toward-the-war-in-iraq-20032008/>.

³³ “Young Voters in the 2008 Election,” Pew Research Center.

³⁴ “Editorial Statement,” *n+1* 1 (Summer 2004): 3.

This ideological drift was hastened by the coming of the Great Recession. The near-collapse of the American financial system and the pervasive un- and underemployment that followed called into question the free market consensus that had governed national politics since at least the Reagan era. Young people, who were disproportionately impacted by a crisis that they played little part in creating and whose memories of Cold War animosities were faint or non-existent, were especially likely to question the legitimacy of the ideological order they had inherited. A 2011 poll found that more young people responded favorably to socialism (49%) than to capitalism (46%).³⁵

The *New Inquiry* and *Jacobin* launched as web publications in 2009 and 2010 respectively, though the latter quickly added a print magazine. Each represented a set of left politics that differed from *n+I*'s democratic socialist ethos. Though it lacks an avowed political orientation, the *New Inquiry*'s founder Rachel Rosenfelt says that she's attracted to "the manner of thinking of anarchist groups,"³⁶ and her publication tends toward a blend of radical high theory and what may be termed identity politics. *Jacobin*, on the other hand, is described by its founder and editor-in-chief Bhaskar Sunkara as "explicitly Marxist" and "programatically socialist."³⁷ With its focus on labor issues and

³⁵ "Little Change in Public's Response to 'Capitalism,' 'Socialism,'" Pew Research Center, December 28, 2011, <http://www.people-press.org/2011/12/28/little-change-in-publics-response-to-capitalism-socialism/?src=prc-headline>.

³⁶ Andrew Bartels, "The Monarch Drinks With Rachel Rosenfelt," *The Monarch Review*, July 30, 2013, <http://www.themonarchreview.org/the-monarch-drinks-with-rachel-rosenfelt/>.

³⁷ "Project Jacobin," *New Left Review* 90 (November-December 2014): <http://newleftreview.org/II/90/bhaskar-sunkara-project-jacobin>.

its interest in politics over culture, one critic aptly characterized the magazine as representing the “New Old Left.”³⁸

By 2011, the hopes for a transformatively progressive Obama presidency seemed naive. The economy had failed to recover from the financial crisis and the government had failed to strongly address the policies or punish the people and businesses responsible for it. The pent up frustration—especially on the part of young people—manifested itself in the Occupy Wall Street movement that launched in September of that year. Activists set up in camps in parks across the country and focused their energy on a constellation of concerns that included growing economic inequality, corporate crime, debt, and the role of money in politics. While people argue over the concrete accomplishments of the movement, there is little doubt at the very least it represented a convulsion of anger and frustration against capitalism as it was playing out in America. While the country clearly was not teetering on the edge of revolution, it was demonstrating a renewed openness to leftist criticism of politics and economics.

1.3 The Technological Situation

The production and distribution of a print magazine remains an expensive, cumbersome endeavor in the 21st century. Largely for this reason, publications like the *New Inquiry*, the art & politics magazine *Guernica*, and the avant-garde *Triple Canopy* have avoided print altogether, focusing instead on their websites and other means of digital distribution. While *n+1*, *Jacobin*, and the *American Reader* all have print runs—shortly before its demise, the *Reader* even moved to a print-only model, ceasing to put all but a negligible

³⁸ Zora Sanders, et al., “The future of magazines,” *Overland*, 2014, <https://overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-216/feature-various/>.

portion of its content online—all have been shaped by changes in communications technology. The Internet’s impact on the distribution of news and commentary has been outlined at length elsewhere, but it is worth noting some of the trends that were especially relevant to little magazines. These interlocking factors are 1) cheap web publishing, which led to 2) a hyper-abundance of content, distributed largely through 3) social media.

1.3.1 Cheap Web Publishing

As noted above, print remains expensive and, as such, it maintains an aura of eliteness and quality. When the *American Reader* launched as a monthly print publication in 2012, the sheer expense needed to maintain such a production schedule contributed to the magazine’s early buzz.³⁹ People assumed that they must have amassed a considerable war chest to print at a pace that well beyond the quarterly or triannual publication cycles of their peer publications.

Web publishing certainly lacks the instant credibility imbued by print. However, it also lacks the substantial expense. Through services like Blogger (which launched in 1999) and Tumblr (2007), anyone with an Internet connection can set up their own easy-to-use blog for free. Building an attractive website requires more time and technical skill, but aspiring editors can buy domain names and server space for a pittance, and free content management systems like WordPress make the posting of articles relatively simple.

For independent publications short on money and institutional support, these developments helped to circumvent barriers that might have otherwise kept some of them

³⁹ Jonathan Kyle Sturgeon, interview by author, digital recording, New York City, December 12, 2014.

from publishing in the first place. The *New Inquiry* started as Tumblr blog before upgrading to the still low-overhead website it uses now, and before it established a print magazine, *Jacobin* was web-only. Publications can therefore grow an audience online for very little front-end investment.

Even for journals that are primarily print, the web gives them the opportunity to publish much more content than they could in their dead-tree editions, and to do so at a much quicker pace. *Jacobin*, for example, posts one or two new articles a day (around 500 per year) to its website, focusing on time-sensitive commentary that helps the magazine stay relevant to events as they unfold.⁴⁰ And while *n+1* founding editor Marco Roth has said that he sees the web content as mainly a way to “get your fix between issues,” the more successful web-only posts find a readership many times the circulation of their print magazine.⁴¹

1.3.2 A Hyperabundance of Content

Cheap and easy web publishing made it simple for the founders of these little magazines to fire up a website. It also made it simple for everybody else. As of December 2015, there are 267 million blogs on Tumblr.⁴² The total number of websites on the Internet has skyrocketed from an estimated 3 million in 1999 to over a billion in 2014.⁴³ The web is a

⁴⁰ “Project Jacobin,” *New Left Review*.

⁴¹ Rowland, et al., “n+1: The Temple University Libraries Interview,” *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*.

⁴² “About,” Tumblr, <https://www.tumblr.com/about>.

⁴³ “Total number of Websites,” Internet Live Stats, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/total-number-of-websites/>.

very, very big place, and a whole lot of people are posting their work online, clamoring for attention.

This state of hyperabundance has several implications for new little magazines. One, of course, is that it can be difficult for any particular publication to garner a substantial audience in such a crowded field. *Jacobin* founder Bhaskar Sunkara admits that this reality was a prime motivation to start a print magazine: “I felt there was such a glut of stuff on the web that it would have more impact if it was also a print journal.”⁴⁴ The aforementioned prestige of print was important in garnering an audience even for *Jacobin*’s web content; print, and the money necessary to produce it, imbued *Jacobin* with a level of cache and seriousness.

Somewhat paradoxically, the absence of gatekeepers also heightens the importance of curators. This is a niche that little magazines can and do occupy. By implementing a selective editorial policy and seeking out writers they admire, they effectively relieve readers of some of the burden of sifting and sorting through the Internet’s tremendous cache of content. Rather than plunging into the sphere of personal blogs where interesting writers may be few and far between, a reader can rely on the editors of say, the *New Inquiry*, to do this for him. By collating the work of multiple talented contributors, even a small web publication can establish itself as at least more credible than the vast majority of blogs.

Finally, the hyperabundance of online writing drives down the price of an individual article. This might be bad for writers—and bad for little magazine editors who moonlight as freelancers—but it does give them an opportunity to compete for pieces.

⁴⁴ “Project Jacobin,” *New Left Review*.

Mainstream outlets like *Slate* pay only \$200-300 for a piece,⁴⁵ roughly the same as a piece published in a print issue of *n+1*.⁴⁶ The *New Inquiry* reportedly pays its writers a flat fee of \$50 per article, in the ballpark of post for a *Washington Post* blog⁴⁷ or an online article for *Paste* magazine.⁴⁸ The amount of money a writer loses in forgoing a larger media outlet is, then, quite limited, and what difference exists can be trumped by the freedom offered by little magazines to write on topics and in styles discouraged elsewhere.

1.3.3 Social Media

Social media platforms have substantially altered the ways that publications can distribute their content. They provide ways for a small journal to cultivate an audience other than either the traditional route of reaching out to bookstores or securing (and paying) a distributor to handle these duties for them, or the classic 1980s-90s DIY zine style of selling copies at music venues, radical infoshops, and through loosely connected postal networks. Editors can now set up a Facebook page (founded in 2004, fan pages in 2007) and a Twitter account (founded in 2006), and use these tools to network and build up a readership.

A large social media following is a convenient way to connect a publication's content to its fanbase, and it increases the chances of a piece going viral via its shares and

⁴⁵ "Who Pays Writers?: Slate," *Scratch*, <http://whopays.scratchmag.net/?s=slate>.

⁴⁶ "Who Pays Writers?: n+1," *Scratch*, <http://whopays.scratchmag.net/?s=n%2B1>.

⁴⁷ "Who Pays Writers?: Washington Post," *Scratch*, <http://whopays.scratchmag.net/?s=washington+post>.

⁴⁸ "Who Pays Writers?: Paste," *Scratch*, <http://whopays.scratchmag.net/?s=paste>.

retweets and thereby reaching an audience beyond its core readership. Some editors are social media mavens in their own right; *TNI*'s Ayesha Siddiqi, for example has more than 45,000 Twitter followers and was originally brought to New York by a BuzzFeed job offer won primarily due to her influence in Twitter's social justice circles and her success in using this platform to champion marginalized voices.⁴⁹

While this sort of Internet presence certainly helps publications to build brand awareness and to get their work in front of readers, the level to which this attention translates to financial support or a more longstanding loyalty is unclear. Keith Gessen says of those who discover their articles virally, "[W]hether those readers, become loyal *n+1* readers, uhm, probably, well, we have no idea."⁵⁰ This is the flip side of the social media coin; while Twitter or Facebook can enable an individual article to go viral, it also works to sever each article from its connection to the publication as a whole. Print magazines bundle articles together, whereas in social media, each piece of content is blown about independently like a dead leaf in the wind. Readers frequently click through to read one piece, and then click out, leading to huge page view discrepancies between a site's most and least read content.

1.4 The Situation in Independent Magazines

The publishing field that *n+1* entered was, in a way, crowded. Bookstore shelves in 2004 were, as ever, packed with small literary journals and big glossy magazines. But there was a niche to be occupied. The *Partisan Review*, which *n+1*'s editors self-consciously

⁴⁹ Siddiqi, interview by author.

⁵⁰ Rowland, et al., "n+1: The Temple University Libraries Interview," *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication*.

took as a model, folded in 2003. While *PR*'s vibrant early years as an important American vector of modernist literature and anti-Stalinist leftism had long since faded into an orthodox neoconservatism, its demise still contributed to a growing void in intellectual commentary geared toward a general audience. The other traditional bastions of left-liberalism that remained—publications like *Dissent*, the *New Left Review*, and the *New York Review of Books*—had generally done poor jobs of replenishing their ranks with young talent. Robert Silvers, for example, has helmed the *NYRB* continuously since its founding in 1963, and his publication, while consistently well-written and thought-provoking, has a reputation for recruiting only established writers rather than mentoring young ones, of “withdr[awing] from the cultural bank while making few deposits.”⁵¹ As a result, these venerable magazines had grown somewhat staid, and there was little room on the masthead for ambitious, up-and-coming young writers.

For the few young and vibrant little magazines putting out adventurous political and intellectual work, the turn of the millennium was a time of thinning ranks. A 2001 office fire crippled the *Baffler*, a punk-inspired, highly-literate anti-consumerist magazine headed by Thomas Frank. They published only sporadically from then until a relaunch in 2009 that coincided with the boomlet of new little magazines discussed in this dissertation. Also in 2001, financial troubles shuttered *Lingua Franca*, the New York purveyor of the “journalism of ideas.”⁵² Effectively covering the intellectual beat with prose that was consistently intelligent and accessible, *Lingua Franca* reported on the

⁵¹ Russell Jacoby, “The Graying of ‘The New York Review of Books,’” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 6, 2014, http://www.academia.edu/7600694/The_Graying_of_The_New_York_Review_of_Books.

⁵² Ron Rosenbaum, “When Intellectuals Had a Real Magazine: Viva Lingua Franca!,” *New York Observer*, April 26, 2006, <http://observer.com/2006/04/when-intellectuals-had-a-real-magazine-viva-ilingua-franca/>.

academic controversies of the 1990s while maintaining both a respect for the ideas at issue and a skepticism toward ideological pronouncements. Its closing was mourned at the front of *n+1*'s first issue, where the editors decried an age "when a magazine like *Lingua Franca* can't publish, but *Zagat* prospers."⁵³ Finally in 2003, the Boston-based zine *Hermeneut* ended its 11-year run of issues inspired by the work of thinkers who did their best work out of the orbit of the academy.⁵⁴ Appropriately characterized by *Wired* magazine as "a scholarly journal minus the university, a sounding board for thinking folk who operate outside the ivory tower,"⁵⁵ *Hermeneut* published several early pieces from *n+1*'s founders, and its skepticism toward the academy and desire to merge high criticism with low cultural preoccupations would rub off on the younger publication. Keith Gessen remembers that for his magazine's founders, this fading generation of little magazines was "very important to us and then they all died within a couple years of one another. We really felt like that space was not occupied. There was this moment between the death of those magazines and the Internet becoming more of a venue for that sort of thing."⁵⁶

By launching a serious-minded, sharp-elbowed intellectual magazine without any institutional backing, *n+1* separated itself from both the multitude of barely distinguishable literary journals ensconced in university MFA departments and from the live-and-let-live sweetness that characterized the umbrella of concerns presided over by that indie lit impresario over on the West Coast, of whom *n+1* founder Benjamin Kunkel

⁵³ "Editorial Statement," *n+1*.

⁵⁴ Joshua Glenn, "The Hermeneut Dilemma," Boston.com, March 25, 2008, http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/brainiac/2008/03/hermenauts_are.html.

⁵⁵ Michael Stutz, "Street Academy," *Wired*, http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/6.08/streetcred_pr.html.

⁵⁶ Gessen, interview by author.

said bluntly, “We’re angrier than Dave Eggers and his crowd.”⁵⁷ This intellectual pugnaciousness, and this desire to create new left and literary institutions rather than rise through ranks of preexisting ones, served to set the template for a new generation of New York little magazines.

⁵⁷ Stephanie Merritt, “Welcome to the political world,” *The Guardian*, November 20, 2005, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/nov/20/fiction.features>.

CHAPTER TWO:
A BOHEMIA OR A VANGUARD?

Greenwich Village is dead. Williamsburg passed away a few years ago, strangled by the rent increases that its very hipness made possible. By the time I defend this dissertation, Bushwick will surely have fallen as well. In his *Notes from Underground*—now 20 years old—Stephen Duncombe wrote of gentrification as forcing a bohemian diaspora. Where cheap rents once made it possible for artists, writers, eccentrics, and hangers-on to cluster in a handful of well-defined urban neighborhoods, the reversal of white flight and the attendant return of capital to American cities has disrupted bohemian enclaves almost before they can even establish themselves as such. Duncombe saw the zine culture of the 1980s and early 90s as, in part, an effort to tie together a bohemia that had become physically fragmented after being evicted from its physical plants within cities.

If anything, the speed of gentrification has only accelerated since the zine era, and the Internet has only multiplied the opportunities for American bohemians to find one another in digital—if not physical—space. The circulation of the new little magazines,

both online and through printed copies, is one way that a certain segment of bohemia organizes itself. Through what Michael Warner calls poetic world building,¹ these magazines simultaneously imagine and create a sub-public with a coherent set of interests and values.

Each of the new little magazines is a distinct operation. Each has an aesthetic, a voice, and an orientation toward politics that is distinguishable from the others. But there are also reasons commentators tend to speak of them as a cohort.² Together, they collaborate in imagining and creating a counterpublic that is young, organizes itself around literature and the arts, is made up largely of individuals with a specific (and specifically elite) humanities education, holds leftist political views outside of the American mainstream, and understands itself to be in an oppositional relationship to mainstream culture despite the cultural capital it possesses. Further, with the exception of *Jacobin*, each expresses its political tendencies through criticism that focuses primarily on culture rather than on economics, electoral politics, or activist organizing.

Like Duncombe's zines, the headier of the underground newspapers of the 1960s and 70s, and the avant-garde little magazines that proliferated from the post-Romantic era through the mid-twentieth century, the new little magazines are, broadly speaking, more of a project in bohemian imagination than a tool for political organizing. This is not to

¹ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2005), 114.

² For examples of this cohort formation, see the following articles:
Hermione Hoby, "New York literary magazines – start spreading the news," *The Guardian*, January 5, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/jan/06/new-york-literary-magazines-publishing>.

Caroline O'Donovan, "Little magazines gone digital: How the late-adapting literary press has made its way in the web age," Nieman Lab, September 15, 2014, <http://www.niemanlab.org/2014/09/little-magazines-gone-digital-how-the-late-adapting-literary-press-has-made-its-way-in-the-web-age/>.

Matthew Yglesias, "5 new magazines with small circulations and big ideas," *Vox*, December 9, 2014, <http://www.vox.com/2014/12/9/7344705/jacobin-baffler-new-inquiry-nplusone-national-affairs>.

say that bohemians cannot be brought into the service of politics—the next chapter will explore the points where little magazines intersected with the Occupy Wall Street movement—but that with valorization literature, identity, and otherness, they possess an implicit strain of bohemian libertarianism that situates them in a way that is distinct from a political vanguard. Rather than remaking the world, the focus is on cultivating the self.

In this chapter, I will seek to define a bohemian counterpublic and to explain why the new little magazines fit into this tradition. Then I will provide a brief history of the relative ease with which oppositional culture has been assimilated into the cultural mainstream and turned into grist for profit. I argue that this is less a matter of “co-optation”—a process by which corporations empty symbols of their radical content—and more a product of the compatibility of bohemian identity & cultural practice with the values of the market. This compatibility is demonstrated through an analysis of the commercially successful websites *BuzzFeed* and *Vice*, both of which have monetized the “radical” political critique common to little magazines. Finally, I look at the ways that *Jacobin*, more than any publication in its cohort, demonstrates a capacity for tangible political efficacy. This capacity stems from the publication’s desire to not only produce texts to circulate within a bohemian counterpublic, but to seek out existing activist networks, work in tandem with them, and organize its readership into a politicized force.

2.1 The Bohemian Counterpublic

The public within which the new little magazines circulate is a very specific one. Even *n+1*, the oldest and most established of these publications, is unknown to the vast majority of Americans. Between subscriptions and other sales, it has a circulation of only

10,000 as of 2014.³ The public that reads *n+1* is, clearly, a much smaller entity than The Public in the national sense of the word (or even in many local senses). Further, when compared to that of a polity, the public of the new little magazines is not so clearly defined—it is, indeed, an imagined public rather than one bounded by geography or official group membership. It includes subscribers, of course, but it also may be said to include people who visit the magazines’ websites, follow them on Twitter, or even just see the articles summarized on Facebook when a friend posts a link.

In his essay “Publics and Counterpublics,” Michael Warner lays out seven characteristics of a public:

- A public is self-organized;
- A public is a relation among strangers;
- The address of public speech is both personal and impersonal;
- A public is constituted through mere attention;
- A public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse;
- Publics act historically according to the temporality of their circulation; and,
- A public is poetic world making.

It is in the last trait—the poetic world making—where publics most clearly distinguish themselves from one another, and where counterpublics distinguish themselves from ordinary publics. Texts are not interchangeable with one another; they are not widgets that circulate independent of their content, as if by natural laws. “Public

³ Caroline O’Donovan, “n+1: Learning that print and digital can peacefully coexist,” Nieman Lab, September 15, 2014, <http://www.niemanlab.org/2014/09/n1-learning-that-print-and-digital-can-peacefully-coexist/>.

discourse says not only ‘Let a public exist,’” writes Warner, “but ‘Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way.’”⁴

In their rhetoric, their modes of address, and what they assume of their readership, the new little magazines poetically construct the world in which their work circulates (or at least a world they wish to exist), and the world they create is a bohemian one.

Bohemia, of course, offers itself up to any number of definitions. From Marigay Graña: “Bohemia has been variously defined as a mythical country, a state of mind, a “place of youth and disenchantment,” a “tavern by the wayside on the road of life.” Thomas Mann defined it as “nothing but social irregularity, a guilty conscience to be resolved in levity”; Shakespeare called it a desert country near the sea. A less poetic definition suggests it is a social mechanism for absorbing excess population until adequate status opportunities become available.”⁵ Each of these definitions contains its share of truth, but for the purposes of this dissertation, I have teased out several traits that I believe to be broadly characteristic of bohemian publics. A bohemian public is one that is young, organizes itself around literature and the arts, holds political views outside of the national mainstream, is made up largely of individuals with a specific (and specifically elite) humanities education, and understands and presents itself to be in an oppositional relationship to mainstream culture despite the cultural capital it possesses. This catechism of bohemian characteristics is not exhaustive—no list of qualities for such a hazy and ever-evolving cultural form could be—but it should serve as enough to demonstrate that

⁴ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 114.

⁵ Marigay Graña, “Preface,” *On Bohemia: The Code of the Self-Exiled*, ed. César Graña and Marigay Graña, (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990), xv.

the counterpublic formed by the new little magazines falls within a historical tradition of bohemian communities.

2.1.1 Youth

Not all bohemians are young—Beat poet Kenneth Rexroth once wrote of the “mature bohemians” of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance⁶—but it is safe to say that bohemia as an enterprise is particularly informed by youth. Its values of vigor, romance, risk, and novelty are strongly associated with the young, and for many of its young affiliates, bohemia is a transitory phase, after which they, as Malcolm Cowley once memorably put it, “forget this funny business about art and return to domesticity in South Bend, Indiana, and sell motorcars, and in the evenings sit with slippers on feet while their children romped about them in paper caps made from the advertising pages of the *Saturday Evening Post*.”⁷

The new little magazines certainly have a youthful aura around them. The *New Inquiry*, *n+1*, the *American Reader*, and *Jacobin* were all launched by twentysomethings. Bhaskar Sunkara was only 21 years old when he founded *Jacobin*.⁸ The *New Inquiry* touted its youth in a 2013 solicitation for donations, calling itself “an unparalleled collective of the most prominent young writers, artists, and editors of the millennial

⁶ Kenneth Rexroth, “San Francisco’s Mature Bohemians,” *On Bohemia*, 212.

⁷ Malcolm Cowley, “The Greenwich Village Idea,” *On Bohemia*, 130.

⁸ Jake Blumgart, “The Next Left: An Interview with Bhaskar Sunkara,” *Boston Review*, December 28, 2012, <http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/jake-blumgart-next-left-interview-bhaskar-sunkara>.

generation.”⁹ Even within the short lives these publications have thus far led, the editors have made decisions to relinquish control to younger colleagues as the founders grow older. Though *n+1*’s founders are still hold advisory roles on the masthead, by the Fall 2014 issue, they had passed editorial control of the magazine to younger colleagues. Rachel Rosenfelt, the *New Inquiry*’s co-founder and first editor-in-chief, was not yet 30 when she transitioned to the role of publisher and passed the title of editor-in-chief to the younger Ayesha Siddiqi. Such a model of continuous editorial renewal is very different from the decades-long stacticity commonly seen atop the mastheads of the *New York Review of Books*, the *Nation*, or the *Partisan Review*.

The audiences that these publications understand themselves to be writing for also skew young. As mentioned in the last chapter, Keith Gessen always imagined *n+1*’s readership as made up primarily of “disgruntled grad students.”¹⁰ The *New Inquiry* opened its first issue with a letter that articulated its generational perspective: “If there’s anything our generation holds in common, it’s being forced to adapt to constant change.”¹¹ The title of its second issue was simply “Youth.” The *American Reader* sounds a similar note in its mission statement, where it proclaims its commitment to “inspiring literary and critical conversation among a *new generation* of readers”¹² (emphasis added). Media mentions of the magazine frequently bolster this

⁹ “TNI Information Packet,” *The New Inquiry*, 2013, <http://thenewinquiry.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/TNI-Information-Packet-.pdf>.

¹⁰ Keith Gessen, interview by author, digital recording, New York City, February 23, 2015.

¹¹ “Dear Readers,” *The New Inquiry* 1 (February 2012): 3.

¹² “About Us,” *The American Reader*, <http://theamericanreader.com/about-us/>.

characterization: “Generation Y’s Literary World Has Found Its Leader,”¹³ “the New Yorker for millennials,”¹⁴ “a literary journal catered to millennials.”¹⁵ Bhaskar Sunkara characterizes *Jacobin* as “bold, young, easy to read,”¹⁶ and the magazine’s appeals to potential advertisers boast of attracting a “disproportionately young and engaged audience of book buyers.”¹⁷

2.1.2 Organized Around Literature and the Arts

People squabble over the precise relationship between bohemians and the arts. Are bohemians shabby-looking weirdoes who publicly perform the role of “Artist” while the real artists are busy creating in their studios? Or are they individuals who have committed their whole selves and lives to creative practice—breathing, painting counterpoints to creative people who allowed their talents to be domesticated into, say, advertising jobs and regular paychecks? However one chooses to define bohemians—whether as practicing artists, poseurs, acolytes, or a motley assembly of all of these—it is difficult to argue that they aren’t at the very least organized around literature and the arts.

¹³ Emma Greenberg, “Generation Y’s Literary World Has Found Its Leader,” *Mic*, July 15, 2013, <http://www.mic.com/articles/54075/generation-y-s-literary-world-has-found-its-leader#.isqEXlyuw>.

¹⁴ “The Most Innovative People Under 40: Uzoamaka Maduka and Jac Mullen,” *Business Insider*, <http://www.businessinsider.com/most-innovative-people-under-40-2013-10#uzoamaka-maduka-and-jac-mullen-22>.

¹⁵ Erin Williams, “Uzoamaka Maduka and The American Reader: A literary journal catered to millennials,” *Washington Post*, March 14, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/therootdc/post/uzoamaka-madukas-american-reader-a-literary-journal-catered-to-millennials/2013/03/14/68e9a026-8cee-11e2-9838-d62f083ba93f_blog.html.

¹⁶ “Project Jacobin,” *New Left Review* 90 (November-December 2014): <http://newleftreview.org/II/90/bhaskar-sunkara-project-jacobin>.

¹⁷ “Advertise,” *Jacobin*, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/advertise/>.

This is true for most of the new little magazines. Fiction and poetry make up a majority of the *American Reader*'s content, and though critical and non-fiction pieces claim the majority of *n+I*'s pages, each issue contains at least one short story or poem, often more. Further, the critical matter that both magazines publish tends toward the literary—book reviews, essays on literary topics, etc. Both define themselves in literary terms, the *American Reader* calling itself a “print literary journal”¹⁸ and *n+I* placing the designation front & center in its self-identification as a “magazine of literature, culture, and politics.”¹⁹ With the 2007 founding of a visual arts-focused sister publication in *Paper Monument*, *n+I* has also made an effort to extend its reach into other genres of creative practice and criticism. *Paper Monument* has been printed only sporadically—just five issues in eight years—but its existence does speak to the wide-ranging artistic interests of the *n+I* network.

The *New Inquiry*, by contrast, does not publish fiction and rarely runs poetry, but it is broadly interested in the artistic life. This interest, like that of the punks and situationists of bygone generations, seems more focused on art as locus of radical or even revolutionary potential than as *l'art pour l'art*. *TNI* regular runs reviews and essays that deal with art, film, music, and books, and this criticism tends to deal with a given work's political dimension, especially and increasingly with its approach to racial, gender, or sexual identity. For example, when the *New Inquiry* takes on literature, it will characteristically take the form of a multi-part series on “Post-Exotic Novels, Nôvelles,

¹⁸ “About Us,” *The American Reader*.

¹⁹ “About,” *n+I*, <https://nplusonemag.com/about/>.

and Novelists,”²⁰ an exploration of memory & preservation in African speculative fiction,²¹ or an indictment of the “micro-genre of ‘Islamophobic futurism.’”²² Its website runs a column called “This Week in Art Crime,”²³ which rounds up news stories that, as one might intuit, link the artistic and the criminal: vandalisms, forgeries, thefts, protests at museums. Even the *New Inquiry*’s editorial meetings seem designed to evoke a distinctly literary aesthetic. As the *New York Times* put it:

[Editor-in-chief Rachel] Rosenfelt and her collaborators envisioned a kind of literary salon reminiscent of the Lost Generation of the 1920s. So once a week, about 20 of The New Inquiry’s contributors and guests gather at an unmarked clandestine bookstore, a sort of literary speakeasy, in a second-floor, three-room apartment on the Upper East Side. [...] The door creaked open to reveal a disheveled space that looked like a used-book store in any college town, with shelves of yellowing volumes Dostoyevsky and Camus reaching to the ceiling and air thick with the musty smell of stale tobacco and old paperbacks.²⁴

Of course, such a description suggests as much as about what the *Times* wanted to see as about what *TNI* attempted to project, but by organizing an evening’s worth of readings on failed revolutions with selections from Edmund Wilson, Ezra Pound, Gustave Flaubert, and Guy Debord (twice!), the *New Inquiry* certainly played the part of literary *enfants terribles*.

²⁰ Antoine Volodine, “Post-Exotic Novels, Növelles, and Novelists: Part One,” *The New Inquiry*, April 1, 2015, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/post-exotic-novels-növelles-and-novelists-part-one/>. Antoine Volodine, “Post-Exotic Novels, Növelles, and Novelists: Part Two,” *The New Inquiry*, April 2, 2015, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/post-exotic-novels-növelles-and-novelists-part-two/>.

²¹ Beverly Akoyo Ochieng, “Memory and Preservation,” *The New Inquiry*, March 18, 2015, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/memory-and-preservation/>.

²² Grayson Clary, “Fear of a Muslim Planet,” *The New Inquiry*, March 10, 2015, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/fear-of-a-muslim-planet/>.

²³ “This Week in Art Crime,” *The New Inquiry*, <http://thenewinquiry.com/tag/this-week-in-art-crime/>.

²⁴ Alex Williams, “The Literary Cubs,” *New York Times*, November 30, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/01/fashion/new-yorks-literary-cubs.html?_r=0.

Even as its founding manifesto defines its contributors as “epicureans” and expresses a desire to “grapple with culture at both aesthetic and political levels,”²⁵ *Jacobin* is the only one of the four publications at the center of this study that shows a limited interest in art, literature, and culture. Its orientation is firmly political, and not in the primarily theoretical or cultural style that *n+1* or the *New Inquiry* tend to address politics. *Jacobin* spends the bulk of its ink on issues like labor organizing, left-wing activism in the US and abroad, and economic critique. And when it chooses to address the arts, it’s typically done with a polemical aim, often to unmask this work or that institution as reinforcing either conservative or liberal ideological norms at the expense of an emancipatory radical vision. The magazine’s founder pleads uninterest on anything too highbrow. “We generally try to avoid cultural content,” Sunkara told the *New Left Review*. “To the extent we do cover culture, it’s mass culture. So we’ll run something about the latest *Planet of the Apes* movie or the latest *Superman* movie [...]. Our cultural content is intentionally very directly political, very polemical. But we’d never cover an opera or a play, or avant-garde culture.”²⁶ This characterization is not entirely accurate, as *Jacobin* has covered topics like art exhibit on the Russian avant-garde,²⁷ the Frick Collection’s 75th anniversary,²⁸ and the Nobel Prize for Literature.²⁹ However, Sunkara’s

²⁵ Bhaskar Sunkara, “Introducing *Jacobin*,” *Jacobin*, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2011/01/introducing-jacobin/>.

²⁶ “Project Jacobin,” *New Left Review*.

²⁷ Jeffrey Kirkwood, “An Unauthenticated Avant-Garde,” *Jacobin*, August 2011, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2011/08/an-unauthenticated-avant-garde/>.

²⁸ Gabirel Hainer Evansohn, “The Frick Collection at 75,” *Jacobin*, July 2011, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2011/07/the-frick-collection-turns-75/>.

larger point stands—his magazine orders itself around radical politics rather than art and literature. In this way, it fits imperfectly into the bohemian rubric I have laid out.

That said, history has shown that artistic proclivities and radical politics have found common cover within bohemian communities. Individuals can be more strongly attracted to one or the other of these two poles and still stay within the orbit of bohemia. For example, historian Dale Peck found similar tendencies within the countercultural underground press of the 1960s and 70s. While in general agreement about issues if not style or emphasis, the heady, culturally-oriented papers like the *San Francisco Oracle* and the *East Village Other* were readily distinguishable from the primarily political ones like the *Berkeley Barb* and *Fifth Estate*. Both strands—the “heads” and the “fists”—could coexist, if occasionally uneasily, within the same milieu.³⁰ Any daylight between, say, *n+1* and *Jacobin* is certainly no greater than what was present in the ‘60s bohemian scene. In the same interview quoted above, Sunkara admits to operating in the same sphere as these other magazines, and describes *Jacobin*’s relationship toward them as “fraternal.”³¹

2.1.3 Radical Political Views

Bohemia is a natural haven for political radicalism. Just as bohemia is “a social milieu created *against* the dominant culture,”³² it also is frequently inclined to align itself against the dominant politics, at least in rhetoric and self-image, if not always in action and

²⁹ Sarah Brouillette, “Literature is Liberalism,” *Jacobin*, October 15, 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/10/literature-is-liberalism/>.

³⁰ Dale Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Citadel Press, 1991), 10.

³¹ “Project Jacobin,” *New Left Review*.

³² Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 2-3.

effect. While history has provided ample examples of right-wing bohemians—a disgust with bourgeois decadence and a passion for the modern aesthetics of warfare led some Italian Futurists, for example, to align with fascism—bohemian critique of whatever social and political order it finds itself under has long tended to be more informed by leftist thought.

Eric Hobsbawm, among others, has charted the links between socialism and artistic avant-gardes. While he rightly cautions against conflating the ways the adjective “revolutionary” is appended to art and politics, Hobsbawm notes how youth, economic insecurity, and opposition to and by bourgeois orthodoxy have pushed bohemia into various points of contact with the socialist movement.³³ Following in this tradition, *Jacobin* and *n+1* tend toward the socialist. In its founding statement, *Jacobin* states that its contributors are united as “asserters of the libertarian quality of the socialist ideal,”³⁴ and the publication is described by its founder as “explicitly Marxist” and “programmatically socialist.”³⁵ *N+1* is not as forthrightly ideological, but socialist ideas have been part of the project since the beginning. Early articles gripe about how the Democratic party begs leftists to obscure their true beliefs for the sake of appealing to swing voters,³⁶ fondly remember an Indian childhood spent reading Soviet books,³⁷ attack the “neoliberal imagination” in novels that preach respect for people of all

³³ Eric Hobsbawm, “Socialism and the Avant-Garde, 1880-1914,” libcom.org, <https://libcom.org/history/socialism-avant-garde-1880-1814-eric-hobsbawm>.

³⁴ Sunkara, “Introducing *Jacobin*,” *Jacobin*.

³⁵ “Project *Jacobin*,” *New Left Review*.

³⁶ Benjamin Kunkel, “Shhh... Swing Voters are Listening,” *n+1* 2 (Winter 2005): 20-21.

³⁷ Pankaj Mishra, “First Love,” *n+1* 3 (Fall 2005): 59-67.

economic classes rather than the need to abolish inequality,³⁸ and present a tongue-in-cheek scheme to cap annual income at \$100,000.³⁹ While the *American Reader* touches on explicitly political concerns less frequently than either *Jacobin* or *n+1*, the occasions on which it does tend to affirm a leftist sensibility. These moments include publishing an excerpt on politics & aesthetics from the heterodox French Marxist Jacques Rancière,⁴⁰ reprinting a James Baldwin essay on the divergent understandings of blackness in Europe and the US,⁴¹ and an essay on the FBI's surveillance of black writers under J. Edgar Hoover.⁴²

Anarchism, with its ideologically unrivaled hatred of social control and tolerance of unorthodox lifestyles, also holds a longstanding influence in bohemian circles. Hobsbawm notes: "After 1900 the anarchists in particular increasingly found their social base, outside some Latin countries, in a milieu composed of bohemians and some self-educated workers, shading over into the lumpenproletariat - in the various Montmartres of the Western world - and settled down into a general subculture of those who rejected, or were not assimilable by, 'bourgeois' lifestyles or organized mass movements."⁴³ In the US, such a tendency can be traced from Emma Goldman's tenure as the anarchist

³⁸ Waltern Benn Michaels, "The Neoliberal Imagination," *n+1* 3 (Fall 2005): 69-76.

³⁹ Mark Greif, "Gut-Level Legislation, or, Redistribution," *n+1* 4 (Spring 2006): 20-25.

⁴⁰ Jacques Rancière, "The Cruel Radiance of What Is," *The American Reader* 5/6 (May/June 2013): 96-109.

⁴¹ James Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village," *The American Reader*, <http://theamericanreader.com/stranger-in-the-village-editors-introduction/2/>.

⁴² William J. Maxwell, "Total Literary Awareness," *The American Reader*, <http://theamericanreader.com/total-literary-awareness-how-the-fbi-pre-read-african-american-writing/>.

⁴³ Hobsbawm, "Socialism and the Avant-Garde, 1880-1914," libcom.org.

Greenwich Village in the early-20th century through the counterculture of the 1960s and on through the punk movement of the 70s and 80s. The *New Inquiry* continues that tradition. Though the publication doesn't define itself as anarchist, the fingerprints are there. In an interview with the ironically titled *Monarch Review*, Rosenfelt explained, "Personally, I've always been drawn aesthetically, if not politically—although often politically—to the anarchist temperament. I think the *manner of thinking* in anarchist groups is more interesting than the *manner of thinking* in socialist groups, let's say."⁴⁴ Editor Malcolm Harris has been even more explicit about his affiliations, co-signing a "Letter from Anarchists" to the Occupy Wall Street movement,⁴⁵ and clearing up any lingering doubts with a tweet declaring "dude im an anarchist, i don't want any laws at all."⁴⁶ While the *New Inquiry* doesn't generally publish anarchist manifestos, it does have an orientation that could be described as anarch-ish. The aforementioned "This Week in Art Crime" column is as much a celebration of flouting the law as it is of art. And as I will discuss in more depth in the next chapter, *TNI* actively aligned itself with the anarchist faction within the Occupy movement, pushing OWS to focus on creating experiences of phenomenological intensity rather than on altering material economic conditions.

⁴⁴ Andrew Bartels, "The Monarch Drinks With Rachel Rosenfelt," *The Monarch Review*, July 30, 2013, <http://www.themonarchreview.org/the-monarch-drinks-with-rachel-rosenfelt/>.

⁴⁵ Malcolm Harris, "Baby, We're All Anarchists Now," *Jacobin*, October 12, 2011, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2011/10/baby-were-all-anarchists-now/>.

⁴⁶ "@BigMeanInternet," *Twitter*, February 28, 2015, <https://twitter.com/BigMeanInternet/status/571729272429268993>.

2.1.4 Elite Humanities Education

Bohemians may lack money, but as a rule, they don't come from impoverished backgrounds. Writing of the original Parisian bohemians, Elizabeth Wilson notes, "Few bohemians came from working-class or proletarian backgrounds. Bohemia was essentially an oppositional fraction of the bourgeois class."⁴⁷ While there certainly have been working-class bohemians—the rank-and-file of the punk movement in late 1970s Britain was largely formed by proletarian youth⁴⁸—the middle-class, collegiate backgrounds we associate with the counterculture of the 1960s are more typical. This trend continues in the new little magazines. Jonathon Kyle Sturgeon, former editor of both *n+1* and the *American Reader* and a child of the lower-middle class, says, "For years, I was one of the only people I knew working in little magazines who had no safety net. [...] It's a very safety-netted community in a lot of ways."⁴⁹

These middle- and upper-class backgrounds often translate to a high level of formal education. The four founding editors of *n+1* earned their bachelor's degrees from Harvard, Harvard, Harvard, and Columbia, and all attended prestigious graduate programs. The *American Reader* is the brainchild of Princeton alums. Over at the *New Inquiry*, Rachel Rosenfelt attended Barnard, Willie Osterweil graduated from Cornell, and Atossa Abrahamian & Sarah Leonard both went to Columbia. *Jacobin*'s Bhaskar Sunkara studied at George Washington University. Even the writers and editors without a hyper-elite pedigree tend to have at least an undergraduate degree from a reputable

⁴⁷ Wilson, *Bohemians*, 22.

⁴⁸ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979), Kindle edition, 83.

⁴⁹ Jonathan Kyle Sturgeon, interview by author, digital recording, New York City, December 12, 2014.

college—*TNP*'s Ayesha Siddiqi went to the private Transylvania University, and senior editor Malcolm Harris attended the University of Maryland. My own publication, *Blunderbuss Magazine*, is similarly composed—everyone on our masthead has at least one degree from Dartmouth, Columbia, the School of Visual Arts, or Bard. No wonder *n+1* has mused on a generation of “left-wing intellectuals or artists, who either came from privilege or acquired its trappings on the march through the institutions.”⁵⁰

This generation of bohemian writers and editors is, then, as educated as their predecessors. The hippies of the ‘60s sprang from universities across the country, with radical hotbeds at hallowed institutions like UC-Berkeley and Columbia University. The Beat Generation clustered around Columbia on the East Coast and Reed College on the West. The Lost Generation was lousy with Ivy Leaguers—F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, John Dos Passos, E.E. Cummings, Ezra Pound, and more.

Such tony credentials make sense when one considers the elitism implicit in bohemianism. The bohemian assumes his sensitivities and tastes to be superior to those of the bourgeois, the philistine, the square, or the straight. The cultivation of these tastes and sensitivities is, according to sociologist César Graña, central to what distinguishes bohemians as a social class. Graña believed that the 19th century bohemian hatred of the bourgeoisie was different than that of the non-bohemian proletarian Marxist. The Marxist doesn't want to burn down the factory; he wants to wrest control of it away from his exploiters and distribute the fruits of industrial production to everyone equally.

Bohemians, on the other hand, hate the factory and the social order that comes with it. They resent “the man of measurable ends, the undertaker of services (civil,

⁵⁰ “Cultural Revolution,” *n+1* 16 (Spring 2013): 10-17.

managerial, or economic), the careful and reliable personality, the job-performer, the producer.” They are at odds with both the proletariat that makes consumer goods and the bourgeoisie that manages their assembly. Unable to cleave themselves onto a social order that had little room for them, the original Parisian bohemians identified with a fast disappearing class that valued personal cultivation over productivity for productivity’s sake and whose patronage had once buffered artists and intellectuals from the demands of the markets.⁵¹ The bohemians became, according to Graña, a “peculiar aristocracy”:

Romantic intellectual pride is the pride that attaches to wholly individualized dexterity or to purely personal spiritual possessions, and which, consequently, must deny worth to all those who are bound to routine duties. [...] Freedom is glorious because it is “creative,” and it is “creative” because it constitutes a display of gratuitous personal originality. By contrast, labor is repressive and inglorious because it is spiritually unfree and condemns its servants to compulsive monotony. Freedom, which is the realm of spontaneity, generates and presumes peculiarity; work is the lot of the undifferentiated masses.⁵²

What is an education—I’m speaking of a humanistic, liberal arts education rather than job training—if not the kind of gratuitous self-development prized by the bohemian-cum-aristocrat? Such tastes can be developed autodidactically—bohemian icons as different as Ernest Hemingway, Frida Kahlo, and Jean Michel Basquiat were primarily self-taught—but time spent formally studying art & literature and developing a sophisticated vocabulary to analyze culture certainly accelerates the process. And an elite education also contributes a sense of exceptionalism—a “wholly individualized dexterity”—that causes a bohemian to feel out of step with, and frequently superior to, the mainstream. “That’s one reason historically why Ivy League people have been so good at it,” Sturgeon

⁵¹ A version of this passage first appeared in an essay I wrote for *Blunderbuss Magazine*: Travis Mushett, “Revolutionary Twee?,” *Blunderbuss Magazine*, August 7, 2014, <http://www.blunderbusmag.com/notes-on-twee/>.

⁵² César Graña, *Bohemian Versus Bourgeois: French Society and the French Man of Letters in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1964): 167-168.

said of starting little magazines, “because they have the safety net to do it, they know each other, they’re already elitist, and have no problem with [pushing their opinions on the world].”⁵³

Such an education is also presumed of the public in which the new little magazines circulate. As quoted above, Keith Gessen initially envisioned the audience for *n+1* as consisting of disaffected graduate students. You can hear the assumption of a certain level of education—and a certain sympathy toward critical theory—in the inclusive admonishment of the unsigned editorial that opens the magazine’s second issue, in which the editors write that the “big mistake right now would be to fail to keep faith with what theory once meant to us.”⁵⁴ Similarly, the *New Inquiry* takes its readership’s facility with academic jargon for granted. The language of the graduate school seminar appears even when a writer attempts to praise the vernacular: “Vernacular criticism inscribes bodies in public spaces that would otherwise erase them.”⁵⁵ Though the *American Reader* devotes more pages to poetry and fiction than to criticism, it is not afraid to reprint a dense, challenging excerpt from philosopher Jacques Rancière and to introduce that text with language that is not exactly welcoming to the uninitiated: “By most accounts, the life of the reader has become *vita passiva*. These days, the reader is projected as a sufferer, of markets and technology, of the image and its future.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Sturgeon, interview by author.

⁵⁴ “Death Is Not the End,” *n+1* 2 (Spring 2005): 9.

⁵⁵ Brian Droitcour, “Vernacular Criticism,” *The New Inquiry*, July 25, 2014, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/vernacular-criticism/>.

⁵⁶ Jonathan Kyle Sturgeon, “Scenes of Emancipation: On Jacques Rancière’s Aisthesis,” *The American Reader* 5/6 (May/June 2013): 92.

2.1.5 Oppositional Relationship to the Mainstream

Starting a little magazine is not a good bet if you're looking to access financial capital. The direct monetary rewards for editors and writers are meager, and often non-existent. Even after a first decade that—at least by the metrics of small independent publications—can appropriately be termed a smashing success, the founders of *n+1* still don't believe they've found a financially sustainable model for operation.⁵⁷ With concern to cultural capital, however, little magazines have a much better track record. Young people who have been imbued with cultural capital via their elite educations, literary connections, and talent have seen success in investing that capital into little magazines and then reaping the dividends.

These dividends can take the form of attention from legacy media. The *New Inquiry*,⁵⁸ *Jacobin*,⁵⁹ the *American Reader*,⁶⁰ and *n+1*⁶¹ have all been featured in the *New York Times*. They can manifest as mentions in popular entertainment. A character on the HBO series *Girls* was published in *n+1* (she'd written an essay “unpacking of ‘The Jersey Shore’ through an imperialist lens”⁶²), and Keith Gessen cameoed as himself on

⁵⁷ Gessen, interview by author.

⁵⁸ Alex Williams, “The Literary Cubs,” *New York Times*.

⁵⁹ Jennifer Schuessler, “A Young Publisher Takes Marx Into the Mainstream,” *New York Times*, January 20, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/21/books/bhaskar-sunkara-editor-of-jacobin-magazine.html>.

⁶⁰ Amy O’Leary, “Uzoamaka Maduka Leaves a Paper Trail With the American Reader,” *New York Times*, January 2, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/03/fashion/uzoamaka-maduka-leaves-a-paper-trail-with-the-american-reader.html>.

⁶¹ A.O. Scott, “Among the Believers,” *New York Times*, September 11, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/11/magazine/among-the-believers.html>.

⁶² Alyssa Rosenberg, “*Girls* Recap: Advertorial,” *Vulture*, February 9, 2014, <http://www.vulture.com/2014/02/girls-recap-season-3-gq-jenna-lyons-free-snacks.html>.

the show *Gossip Girl*.⁶³ Of more material importance, the attention and prestige generated by these magazines has aided their editors in securing book deals. Each of the founders of *n+1* has seen at least one book published, and editor Chad Harbach's debut novel *The Art of Fielding* sold for more than \$650,000, a huge figure for a literary work.⁶⁴ (The success snowball continued as Gessen then wrote a short e-book for *Vanity Fair* on the story behind Harbach's blockbuster deal.)

Now, as in the past, bohemia is “essentially an oppositional fraction of the bourgeois class”⁶⁵ rather than a milieu created by and for the disempowered. Yet in spite of this considerable cultural—and, more rarely, financial—capital, the new little magazines understand and present themselves as an embattled opposition against mainstream culture. This posture is not unsubstantiated. As explained above, the politics of bohemia—both generally, and in the specific case of the bohemia of new little magazines—fall well to the left of the median. Further, economic realities can make it difficult to seriously pursue the activities and values prized within this counterpublic, like literary writing, art, and activism.

The rhetoric of writing against society is present in all of the new little magazines. In the first issue of the *New Inquiry*, Laurie Penny rattled off a list of bourgeois chestnuts that she wishes to dispense with: “Fuck social mobility. Fuck security. Fuck money. Fuck rising above your class rather than with it. Fuck marriage, mortgage, monogamy, and

⁶³ June Thomas, “*Gossip Girl* Goes Highbrow,” *Slate*, December 5, 2011, http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2011/12/05/gossip_girl_s_highbrow_cameos_keith_gessen_jay_mcinerney_david_o_russell_and_more.html.

⁶⁴ Steven Zeitchik, “‘Art of Fielding’s’ Chad Harbach learns art of dealing with a hit,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/apr/21/entertainment/la-et-chad-harbach-20120421>.

⁶⁵ Wilson, *Bohemians*, 22.

every other small, ugly ambition we are bullied into pursuing.”⁶⁶ *N+I*’s founding editorial statement evoked the language of exile: “Perhaps you live in the city or the town, and in the safety of your own country. But you have known the exile, and are acquainted with the wilds.”⁶⁷ *Jacobin* was created towards the goal of “Voicing discontent with the trappings of late capitalism.”⁶⁸ Even the founder of the comparatively mild *American Reader* admonishes her audience to “Get mad! Get angry!”⁶⁹

2.2 Capitalizing on Counterculture and the Limits of Co-Optation Theory

When bohemia first coalesced into a recognized and acknowledged social grouping in mid-19th century Paris, it was clear about its enemy: bourgeois culture. Bohemian values were the inverse of bourgeois values. Elizabeth Wilson writes, “[Bohemia] was the ‘Other’ of bourgeois society, that is to say it expressed everything the bourgeois order buried and suppressed.”⁷⁰ By the middle of the 20th century, the predominant American bohemian articulation of anti-bourgeois sentiment came by way of a criticism of “mass society.” The post-war economic boom of the 1950s had done much to reduce poverty, but the proliferation of highly regimented work in both white-collar & blue-collar sectors and the aesthetic homogeneity of prefabricated suburban homes lead writers and intellectuals to fret that “the descendants of the pioneers were in danger of being reduced

⁶⁶ Laurie Penny, “Rootless & Ruthless,” *The New Inquiry* 1 (February 2012): 117.

⁶⁷ “Editorial Statement,” *n+I* 1 (Summer 2004): 3.

⁶⁸ Sunkara, “Introducing *Jacobin*,” *Jacobin*.

⁶⁹ “The American Reader Is the New Paris Review,” *Vice*, November 21, 2012, <http://www.vice.com/read/the-american-reader-is-the-new-paris-review-but-american>.

⁷⁰ Wilson, *Bohemians*, 240.

to faceless cogs in a great machine, automatons in an increasingly rationalized and computerized system of production.”⁷¹ Beat poet Allen Ginsberg admonished America with almost the same metaphor, telling the country, “Your machinery is too much for me.”⁷² Hip writer Norman Mailer bemoaned the era as “the years of conformity and depression.”⁷³ Saddled with recent memories of Nazism and the Holocaust, during which the citizenry of an ostensibly advanced country was mobilized for diabolic ends, the perils of conformity seem especially dire, and mass media—which had been used quite successfully for fascist propaganda purposes—seemed a particularly insidious tool of social control.⁷⁴

The “mass society theory” was sometimes expressed through highbrow venues, as in David Riesman’s 1950 scholarly tome *The Lonely Crowd* or in a 1952 symposium in the *Partisan Review*, but similarly minded books like Sloan Wilson’s 1955 novel *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* and *The Organization Man*, William H. Whyte’s analysis of management theory, were bestsellers.⁷⁵ Increasingly, portions of the general public began to share the bohemian’s skepticism of a conformist culture and the rigid roles it imposed on people. In fact, the perception of the 1950s as a smiling dystopia of crushing,

⁷¹ Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1998), Kindle edition, 9.

⁷² Allen Ginsberg, “America,” University of Pennsylvania Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing, <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88/america.html>.

⁷³ Norman Mailer, “The White Negro: Superficial Reflection on the Hipster,” *Dissent Magazine*, 1957, https://www.dissentmagazine.org/wp-content/files_mf/1353950503Mailer_WhiteNegro.pdf.

⁷⁴ Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *Nation of Rebels: Why Counterculture Became Consumer Culture* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004): 23-25.

⁷⁵ Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 11, 38.

consumerist conformity became so widespread that it persists to this day. For many, the image conjured by the word “conformity” looks a lot like *Leave It to Beaver*.

During the 1960s, the fear of a mass society reached a boiling point. For millions of Americans, resistance to cultural conformity was perceived as something much more profound than mere eccentricity or personal disposition—it was an ethical imperative with political dimensions. It was in this decade, Thomas Frank observes, that “bohemia itself would be democratized, the mass society critique adopted by millions of Organization Men, and the eternal conflict of artist and bourgeoisie expanded into a cultural civil war.”⁷⁶ The ‘60s marked a transition from an archipelago of urban bohemians to a nationwide bohemian “counterculture,” a term that itself only gained currency with the rise of the New Left and hippie movements it was applied to. As with earlier bohemias, aesthetics and style were used to express resistance to the mainstream. If the culture of mass society was characterized neckties, sobriety (and martinis), and saccharine pop songs, the counterculture would remake itself with tie dye, drugs, and rock & roll. But as the counterculture itself grew large enough to qualify as a mass phenomenon, it was also large enough to provide massive profits.

American capitalism not only survived the 1960s counterculture, it thrived from it. Hip entrepreneurs transformed their access to cultural cachet into actual cash—Bill Graham, for example, went from managing the radical anti-capitalist San Francisco Mime Troupe to opening (and profiting from) the famed rock venues Fillmore East and Fillmore West. Bohemian capitalists, profit-minded but operating in the orbit of counterculture, weren’t the only ones to make a buck off of a movement that often

⁷⁶ Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 13.

understood itself as radically anti-consumerist. Writers like Norman Mailer and Allen Ginsberg and musicians like Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix turned their countercultural art into handsome incomes for themselves and for their agents, publishers, and record labels. Even Coca-Cola—a brand so synonymous with the imperialism of American capitalist culture that the term “Coca-Colonization” has been in use since at least the late-1940s⁷⁷—was able to get in on the action with its famous 1971 TV ad “Hilltop,” in which a multi-ethnic brigade of young people in counterculture garb mix warm hippie messages with paeans to their favorite soft drink. They sing about how they’d both “like to buy the world a home and furnish it with love” and also “buy the world a Coke.” A recorded version of the jingle even reached the top ten on the American charts.⁷⁸ Radical imagery for radical profits.

The ease with which capitalism could assimilate such imagery in spite of its ostensibly subversive origins was a reality that countercultural theorists had to reckon with. The most favored hypothesis is the so-called “co-optation theory.” As Thomas Frank recites it, this theory is defined by “faith in the revolutionary potential of ‘authentic’ counterculture combined with the notion that business mimics and mass-produces fake counterculture in order to cash in on a particular demographic and to subvert the great threat that the ‘real’ counterculture represents.”⁷⁹ This hypothesis suggests that, at least at the beginning, countercultural symbols possess revolutionary potential. Nervous capitalists are then compelled to eliminate this potential so that 1)

⁷⁷ “Foreign News: The Pause That Arouses,” *Time*, March 13, 1950, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,812138-1,00.html>.

⁷⁸ Ted Ryan, “The Making of ‘I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke,’” *Coca-Cola Journey*, January 1, 2012, <http://www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/coke-lore-hilltop-story/>.

⁷⁹ Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 7.

threat it poses to consumer capitalism is effectively neutralized, and 2) these symbols can be made palatable to the buying public and profitable for corporations. What Frank, Heath and Potter, and others have argued is that countercultural symbols never possessed much radical potential in the first place. Quite to the contrary: the bohemian pursuit of “gratuitous personal originality” described by Graña is an engine of, not an anathema to, capitalist profits. By elevating individuality and hedonism as both ethical & political virtues and as paths to “coolness,” countercultural bohemians abetted corporations as they sought to persuade consumers to buy an ever-expanding array of products. Then, as their former favored symbols became widely popular and therefore “uncool,” countercultural types sought out new vistas of rebellion by reinventing themselves as punks, new wavers, grunge rockers, etc., and in so doing, created the “next big thing” for capitalists to profit from. It’s not that corporations emptied punk rock music or bondage pants of their radical, anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist content. It’s that rebel culture was always actually compatible with profit seeking, and in fact serves as the unwitting research division of culture industries. This isn’t to say that co-optation never happens—it’s no coincidence for example that *Rolling Stone*, which diverged from its peer publications in the late 1960s and 1970s by largely eschewing political coverage in favor of rock & roll, is the only alternative publication of the era to earn its founder a half-billion dollar net worth⁸⁰—but that an orientation toward counterculture rather than organized politics does not threaten capitalism. To again quote Frank, “The basic impulses of the countercultural idea, as descended from the holy Beats, are about as

⁸⁰ Daniel Bates, “Rolling Stone founder Jann Wenner finally divorces wife of 43 years... two decades after they split and he moved on with gay lover,” *Daily Mail*, October 26, 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2053746/Rolling-Stone-founder-Jann-Wenner-finally-divorces-wife-Jane.html>.

threatening to the new breed of antinomian businessmen as [self-help author] Anthony Robbins, selling success & how to achieve it on a late-night infomercial.”⁸¹

Though music and fashion provide perhaps the archetypal cultural examples of the popularization of radical aesthetics, literary and publishing forms have been subject to similar processes. Zines, “noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish and distribute themselves,”⁸² were assimilated into the mainstream fold as grunge culture gained momentum in the early-to-mid 1990s. Though underground zines were occasionally explicit in their ideological convictions, “their politics reside less in what they say and more in what they are: repositories of nonalienated creation and media for nonalienating communication.”⁸³ A zine’s credibility was located in its lo-fi style, and since the quality of a zine resided primarily in an aesthetic and an attitude rather than a politics, links between zines and activist organizations were limited. So when corporations took to making their own zines, like Warner Records’ *Dirt* or Urban Outfitters’ *Slant*, their products were basically indistinguishable from the genre they borrowed from.⁸⁴ Zines didn’t have to be laboriously stripped of their radical potential; they were compatible with profits to begin with.

Despite its dubiousness, little magazine writers—like many cultural commentators—often take the co-optation theory as gospel. It looms large over *n+1*’s

⁸¹ Thomas Frank, “Dark Age: Why Johnny can’t dissent,” *The Baffler*, 1994, <http://thebaffler.com/salvos/dark-age>.

⁸² Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (Portland, OR: Microcosm, 2008), Kindle edition, loc. 202.

⁸³ Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, loc. 3348.

⁸⁴ Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, loc. 2714.

What Was the Hipster pamphlet for example, where hipsters are described as agents who appropriate “the new cultural capital forms” while stripping the groups that created these forms “of the power and the glory, the unification and the mode of resistance.”⁸⁵ While discussing an ad for video game in which the “A” in “RAGE” is circled to evoke anarchist symbolism, Max Fox of the *New Inquiry* muses on living in “a society where resistance is co-opted before it ever comes into existence.”⁸⁶ The trope is so well-worn that Rachel Rosenfelt glibly evokes it in her introduction to *TNI*’s “Art” issue: “Since nothing means anything anymore and art only serves to co-opt or further hegemonic capitalist interests, it would be easy to forget that art was ever subversive.”⁸⁷

If the co-optation theory held up, and if some of the most profitable enterprises of the new media era were to adopt the favored form of leftist little magazines (in the words of Rachel Rosenfelt, “longform essays with radical undertones”⁸⁸), one might expect that the commercial form would be greatly watered-down, weak-tea ideology when compared to the unadulterated stuff served up by tiny outlets who hold no dreams of commercial success and have no shareholders to answer to. But if, by contrast, huge media conglomerates were making profits off of content that, in terms of politics, is almost indistinguishable from that of little magazines, it might suggest that this content lacked the dangerous radical potential it claims for itself.

⁸⁵ Rob Horning, *What Was The Hipster: A Sociological Investigation* (Brooklyn: n+1 Foundations, 2010), Kindle edition, loc. 1096.

⁸⁶ Max Fox, “True Beliebers,” *The New Inquiry* 2 (March 2012): 66.

⁸⁷ Rachel Rosenfelt, “Editorial Note,” *The New Inquiry* 19 (August 2013): 6.

⁸⁸ Kristin Iversen, “‘Don’t Wait for Permission’: Talking with Rachel Rosenfelt, Founder and Publisher of The New Inquiry,” *Brooklyn Magazine*, January 14, 2015, <http://www.bkmag.com/2015/01/14/dont-wait-for-permission-talking-with-rachel-rosenfelt-founder-and-publisher-of-the-new-inquiry/>.

2.3 *BuzzFeed. Vice. The New Inquiry?*: Cultural Radicalism’s Compatibility with Capitalism

“I was interested in the whole problem of doing something hostile to capital like, for instance, publishing quasi-academic, longform essays with radical undertones and no start up funding.”

~Rachel Rosenfelt on her motivation for founding the *New Inquiry*⁸⁹

Rosenfelt’s quote raises the question of what exactly it means to be “hostile to capital.” If it means only an attitude—a hostile audience—a disposition of unfriendliness toward the capitalist economic system, it’s fair to say that the *New Inquiry* lives up to her vision. However, if we take “hostile” to mean an active threat—as in hostile forces, a hostile aircraft, a hostile act—then the appellation starts to seem less applicable, maybe even grandiose.

As with the cultural radicalism in generations past, the rebellious stances presented in new little magazines do not *on their own* present any significant impediment to capital, or to capitalism. Capitalism, as an economic system with attendant cultural formations, is extremely flexible because it possesses no values but profitability. Unmoored from a commitment to activist organizing, cultural rebellion—even in the form of radically-minded cultural critique—has proven as easily assimilable into capitalism as it was when Coca-Cola turned hippie values into booming sales. In this section, I will examine how *BuzzFeed* and Vice Media—two of the most successful and fastest growing outlets on the Internet—have managed to maintain both an

⁸⁹ Iversen, “Don’t Wait for Permission,” *Brooklyn Magazine*.

unembarrassed drive for profit and a body of content that is often as “radical” as that of new little magazines. This is not because “longform essays with radical undertones” have, as a form, been co-opted and drained of political content by cunning corporate media; it is because in the contemporary context, they are about as inimical to capitalism as a Sex Pistols t-shirt.

Before I continue, I would like to clarify my position with regards to cultural radicalism. While I am arguing that these tendencies do not pose any significant threat to capitalism, neoliberalism, or economic inequality, I do affirm that they can have progressive political consequences. Just because a given ideology or cultural tendency does not hasten utopia does not necessarily mean it’s a failure. Culturally-oriented politics have affirmed the worth of marginalized. They have provided empowering ways for women, racial minorities, sexual minorities, and other outsiders to recast and embrace their own lives. And it is impossible to fully separate the politics of culture from the politics of capital. The women’s liberation movement, for example, was among other things a project in redistribution—feminist activists fought for (and still fight for) increased access to the job market and equal pay for equal work. Anti-racism, gender equality, and the acceptance of LGBT people are *good things in their own right* even if they are perfectly compatible with outrageous economic inequality and the consolidation of corporate control. Though these groups are still very much under-represented, women and people of color are now present in boardrooms and trading floors that were once the near-exclusive domain of white men. However, this progress has done nothing to prevent the trends toward yawning inequality that occurred over the same interval. My point, finally, is not that little magazines or their strain of often culturally inclined radicalism

are without any political merits, but that in most cases, the grand claims they make for themselves of being “hostile to capital” are essentially unfounded.

2.3.1 *BuzzFeed* and *Vice*: Monetizing Left Criticism

A decade before Jonah Peretti founded *BuzzFeed*, he wrote a paper that was published in the academic journal *Negations: an interdisciplinary journal of social thought*. The piece—which drew heavily on Lacan, Jameson, Deleuze, and Guattari—was titled “Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Contemporary Visual Culture and the Acceleration of Identity Formation/Dissolution.” In it, Peretti writes: “My central contention is that late capitalism not only accelerates the flow of capital, but also accelerates the rate at which subjects assume identities. Identity formation is inextricably linked to the urge to consume, and therefore the acceleration of capitalism necessitates an increase in the rate at which individuals assume and shed identities. The internet is one of many late capitalist phenomena that allow for more flexible, rapid, and profitable mechanisms of identity formation.”⁹⁰

Though relayed in abstruse academic language that would be more at home on the virtual pages of the *New Inquiry* than on *BuzzFeed*, this could passage could serve as a mission statement for the company Peretti would go on to found. The viral lists and quizzes that make up *BuzzFeed*'s wheelhouse are predicated on convincing an audience to identify with the content. Facebook shares and Twitter retweets become mechanisms by which people express an identity, and with that identity come certain consumer choices that can be advertised and capitalized on. This is not to suggest that all aspects of

⁹⁰ Jonah Peretti, “Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Contemporary Visual Culture and the Acceleration of Identity Formation/Dissolution,” *Negations* 1 (Winter 1996): http://www.datawranglers.com/negations/issues/96w/96w_peretti.html.

one's identity are worn as lightly as a shared link to *BuzzFeed*; however, *BuzzFeed* has been successful in monetizing its readers' identification with subjects both shallow—favorite childhood TV shows, cute animal videos—and deep—politics, religion, race, class.

Despite an incredibly difficult economic climate facing journalistic enterprises (see Chapter One), neither *BuzzFeed* nor *Vice* have experienced much hardship in recent years. Both, in fact, have grown at a tremendous rate. According to Pew, *BuzzFeed* went from about half-a-dozen full-time editorial staff members in 2011 to 170 just two years later, and in 2013, *Vice Media* added 40 new American staffers to its global empire that includes 35 bureaus and an incredible 1,100 employees in total.⁹¹ A summer 2014 valuation put *BuzzFeed's* worth at \$850 million,⁹² and an injection of a half-billion dollars at around the same time pushed *Vice's* estimated value up to \$2.5 billion.⁹³ *BuzzFeed* received more than 77,000,000 unique visitors in January 2015, and *Vice.com* received more than 15,000,000, making them numbers two and eight respectively on Pew's traffic ranking of American digital native news sites.⁹⁴ In terms of employees, money, and traffic, these are operations make the little magazines look very little indeed.

⁹¹ Mark Jurkowitz, "The Growth in Digital Reporting," Pew Research Center, March 26, 2014, <http://www.journalism.org/2014/03/26/the-growth-in-digital-reporting/>.

⁹² Mike Isaac, "Buzzfeed valued at about \$850 million," CNBC, August 11, 2014, <http://www.cnbc.com/id/101909515>.

⁹³ Christopher Williams, "Vice Media valued at more than \$2.5bn after \$500m cash injection," *The Telegraph*, September 4, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/mediatechnologyandtelecoms/digital-media/11074572/Vice-Media-valued-at-more-than-2.5bn-after-500m-cash-injection.html>.

⁹⁴ "Digital: Top 50 Digital Native News Sites (2015)," Pew Research Center, <http://www.journalism.org/media-indicators/digital-top-50-digital-native-news-sites-2015/>.

This growth has been driven, at least in part, by each outlet’s attunedness to the same technological and ideological changes that, as I described in the previous chapter, helped to set the stage for the new little magazines. Each has seized on the low cost of web publishing, and exploits it to produce enormous amounts of content. The *BuzzFeed* website has 28 separate sections, plus a “Community” section, in which users are able to submit their own content. (Some of these posts garner hundreds of thousands of views, but the writers go uncompensated.) The company has also ventured into video production—as of December 2015, its YouTube channel has over 8.4 million subscribers and has tallied more than 5.2 billion views.⁹⁵ *Vice*’s content is spread across 11 different “channels”—these include the tech-focused Motherboard, the music-centered Noisey, and even TV news show aired on HBO—and the flagship *Vice.com* has, on its own, 16 sections. This doesn’t even include the sites targeted at non-American audiences; in addition to its US site, *Vice* has 24 other nation-specific websites.

Further, both *BuzzFeed* and *Vice* produce content that is highly shareable on social media, though their tactics for promoting shareability have differed. *BuzzFeed*’s content is often tailored relatively narrowly to a variety of identities held by members of its audience. Their lists, for example, rely heavily on images—both animated GIFs and still photos—and a small amount of text to provoke a sense of fond self-recognition in readers. This recognition can be generational (“17 Reasons ‘Never Been Kissed’ Was A Masterpiece Of The ‘90s”⁹⁶), regional (“18 GIFs from ‘The Office’ That Perfectly Sum

⁹⁵ “BuzzFeed Video,” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/user/BuzzFeedVideo/about>.

⁹⁶ Ryan Bautista, “17 Reasons ‘Never Been Kissed’ Was A Masterpiece Of The ‘90s,” *BuzzFeed*, June 28, 2015, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/ryanbautista/18-reasons-never-been-kissed-was-a-masterpiece-o-15ms2#.pc5L89AO15>.

Up Australian High School”⁹⁷), or of some other kind, and piqued by nostalgia or the desire to display group affiliation, readers spread this cheap, easy-to-make content through Facebook and Twitter. By 2014, *BuzzFeed* began putting so much effort into producing quizzes that the Nieman Journalism Lab wrote an article about the outlet’s “quiz initiative,” headed by managing editorial director Summer Anne Burton. “The quiz is kind of like the broken-down-to-its-core of what BuzzFeed is—it gives someone something that they can relate to well enough that they can share it with others,” Burton told Nieman. “When people share things, it’s partially because of what it says about them. Quizzes are like the literal version of all that.”⁹⁸ A quiz lets me find out which “Friday Night Lights” character I am⁹⁹ (Coach Eric Taylor). If the identification pleases me, I might share it (“Clear eyes, full hearts!”). If it aggravates me, I still might share it, if only to express how wrong they got me (“C’mon *BuzzFeed*—don’t you know I’m a handsome loner like Tim Riggins?”). Upon seeing my post, you might then be curious as to which character you are, and the cycle starts over.

Where *BuzzFeed* seeks to incorporate as many identities as possible into its content, *Vice* is more focused on cultivating a specific edgy brand identity. A high proportion of the content focuses luridly on sex—“Dating a Porn Star Is as Awesome as

⁹⁷ Harrison Cartwright, “18 GIFs from ‘The Office’ That Perfectly Sum Up Australian High School,” *BuzzFeed*, June 29, 2015, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/harrisonc4d7b252c7/18-the-office-gifs-that-perfectly-sum-up-high-sc-tvaw#.goYL2mMNYG>.

⁹⁸ Caroline O’Donovan, “Are quizzes the new lists? What BuzzFeed’s latest viral success means for publishing,” Nieman Journalism Lab, February 19, 2014, <http://www.niemanlab.org/2014/02/are-quizzes-the-new-lists-what-buzzfeeds-latest-viral-success-means-for-publishing/>.

⁹⁹ Aaron Calvin, “Which ‘Friday Night Lights’ Character Are You?,” *BuzzFeed*, February 10, 2014, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/aaronc13/which-friday-night-lights-character-are-you#.hqMJIGnqXD>.

It Sounds,”¹⁰⁰ “Inside the Thriving Online Market for Women’s Dirty Underwear,”¹⁰¹ “The World’s Best Male Escort Is More Than His Ten-Inch Penis”¹⁰²—and drugs—“This Is What One of Colombia’s DIY Cocaine Making Classes Is Actually Like,”¹⁰³ “In Defense of Poppers,”¹⁰⁴ “Behold, the World’s First Opera About LSD.”¹⁰⁵ As *n+1*’s Mark Greif once wrote of *Vice Magazine*—the publication that launched the media empire—and of the hipster subculture it represented: “It credentialed itself as resistant because its pleasures were supposedly violent and transgressive.”¹⁰⁶ The sexy, the druggy, the profane—provocations are a tried and true method for grabbing attention, and *Vice* employs them even when addressing more staid topics. Recent articles that have attempted a spice up the prosaic with a dash of the profane include “A Psychologist

¹⁰⁰ Sophie Saint Thomas, “Dating a Porn Star Is as Awesome as It Sounds,” *Vice*, April 26, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/what-its-like-to-date-a-porn-star-235>.

¹⁰¹ Samantha Rea, “Inside the Thriving Online Market for Women’s Dirty Underwear,” *Vice*, May 19, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/used-underwear-trade-uk-341>.

¹⁰² Marke Bieschke, “The World’s Best Male Escort Is More Than His Ten-Inch Penis,” *Vice*, April 12, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/the-worlds-best-male-escort-is-more-than-his-10-inch-penis-100>.

¹⁰³ Georgina Lawton, “This Is What One of Colombia’s DIY Cocaine Making Classes Is Actually Like,” *Vice*, June 2, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/cocaine-making-classes-in-colombia-303>.

¹⁰⁴ Amelia Abraham, “In Defense of Poppers,” *Vice*, May 29, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/in-defence-of-poppers>.

¹⁰⁵ Arielle Pardes, “Behold, the World’s First Opera About LSD,” *Vice*, June 24, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/behold-the-worlds-first-opera-about-bsd-624>.

¹⁰⁶ Mark Greif, “Epitaph for the White Hipster,” *What Was the Hipster?: A Sociological Investigation*, ed. Mark Greif, Kathleen Ross, and Dayna Tortorici, (Brooklyn: n+1, 2010), Kindle edition, loc. 1747.

Explains Why People Don't Give a Shit About Climate Change"¹⁰⁷ and "Who the Fuck Is Lincoln Chafee, and Why Is He Running for President?"¹⁰⁸.

BuzzFeed and *Vice* have also been attuned to the ideological situation I outlined in Chapter One. During the duration of the new little magazine renaissance—roughly from *n+1*'s founding in 2004 to the present—the country, and especially its young people, have moved politically to the left. Though *BuzzFeed* has made somewhat awkward attempts to attract conservative readers (like hiring right-leaning Benny Johnson as their "viral politics editor," then firing him for plagiarism¹⁰⁹), its base readership tends liberal. A Pew study confirms that *BuzzFeed*'s readers are consistently more liberal than the national average—its audience is a bit to the left of MSNBC, a bit to the right of NPR, and about even with PBS or the *Huffington Post*.¹¹⁰ The brand of liberal politics *BuzzFeed* presents is one particularly interested in issues of identity. The organization brought in the politically strident poet Saeed Jones to head its LGBT section (he has since become *BuzzFeed*'s literary editor, and his 2014 collection *Prelude to Bruise* won the PEN/Joyce Osterweil Award for poetry and was honored as a finalist for the National

¹⁰⁷ Bill Kirby, "A Psychologist Explains Why People Don't Give a Shit About Climate Change," *Vice*, June 9, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/a-psychologist-explains-why-people-dont-really-give-a-shit-about-climate-change-608>.

¹⁰⁸ Kevin Lincoln, "Who the Fuck Is Lincoln Chafee, and Why Is He Running for President?," *Vice*, June 3, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/who-the-fuck-is-lincoln-chafee-and-why-is-he-running-for-president-603>.

¹⁰⁹ Ben Terris, "Benny Johnson got fired at BuzzFeed. You will believe what happened next.," *Washington Post*, June 9, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/benny-johnson-got-fired-at-buzzfeed-you-will-believe-what-happened-next/2015/06/09/da9fe3f8-e37f-11e4-b510-962fcfab310_story.html.

¹¹⁰ Amy Mitchell, Jeffrey Gottfried, Jocelyn Kiley, and Katerina Eva Matsa, "Political Polarization & Media Habits," Pew Research Center, October 21, 2014, <http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/>.

Book Critics Circle Award¹¹¹). In 2014, the organization hired then-23-year-old Ayesha Siddiqi—known primarily for her outspoken Twitter feed—to launch their *BuzzFeed Ideas* section and pursue an editorial vision that Siddiqi believed distinguished itself because it “doesn’t treat race and gender as special interests. We take them for granted as governing social structures that affect every story.”¹¹² Siddiqi was fired after only two months following an incident where she publicly criticized *BuzzFeed* colleagues on Twitter¹¹³ and now believes that “what that space could have been and what my vision for it was was not sustainable under the type of company that BuzzFeed is.”¹¹⁴ The section, however, continues to publish critical articles on issues of race and gender (“The Black Experience Isn’t Just About Men,”¹¹⁵ “What is Privilege?,”¹¹⁶ “‘Fun Home’ Is Bringing Butch Lesbians Into The Mainstream”¹¹⁷), albeit typically in a more accessible style than the quasi-academic tone favored by the *New Inquiry*, where Siddiqi succeeded Rachel Rosenfelt as editor-in-chief.

While *BuzzFeed* content has always leaned more liberal than conservative, *Vice* has made an clear tack to the left in recent years. It seems to be trying to leave behind a

¹¹¹ “Prelude to Bruise,” Coffee House Press, <http://coffeehousepress.org/shop/prelude-to-bruise/>.

¹¹² “The 60-second interview: Ayesha Siddiqi, BuzzFeed Ideas editor,” *Capital New York*, April 22, 2014, <http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/media/2014/04/8544035/60-second-interview-ayesha-siddiqi-buzzfeed-ideas-editor>.

¹¹³ Rusty Foster, “Today in Tabs: Not Awl Writers,” *Time*, June 3, 2014, <http://www.newsweek.com/today-tabs-not-awl-writers-253349>.

¹¹⁴ Siddiqi, interview by author.

¹¹⁵ Shani O. Hilton, “The Black Experience Isn’t Just About Men,” *BuzzFeed*, July 10, 2015, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/shani/between-the-world-and-she#.ybWZe90Low>.

¹¹⁶ Daysha Edewi, “What Is Privilege?,” *BuzzFeed*, July 4, 2015, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/dayshavedewi/what-is-privilege#.wfQ0LXRY1Q>.

¹¹⁷ Shannon Keating, “‘Fun Home’ Is Bringing Butch Lesbians Into The Main stream,” *BuzzFeed*, June 29, 2015, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/shannonkeating/fun-home-beyond-queerness#.xqD4DKjedJ>.

reputation for “politically incorrect” reactionary politics it earned under the stewardship of co-founder Gavin McInnes, who freely used epithets like “fag” and “nigger,” wrote an article for Pat Buchanan’s *American Conservative* that claimed *Vice* was an attempt to lure young people away from liberalism, and once opined that America should “close the borders now and let everyone assimilate to a Western, white, English-speaking way of life.”¹¹⁸ McInnes and *Vice* severed ties in 2008,¹¹⁹ and the organization’s subsequent leftward move reflects that of its millennial audience. On a representative day, *Vice.com*’s opinion section front page displayed the articles “Why Juneteenth Needs to be a National Holiday,”¹²⁰ “I’m Proud of Being Trans, and I Don’t Care About Passing,”¹²¹ and “Is It Time for London to Go on a Rent Strike?”¹²² Natasha Lennard, special projects director for the *New Inquiry*, was even a full-time columnist there in 2014-15.¹²³

In responding to the same historical situations that opened the door for little magazines, *BuzzFeed* and *Vice* made a mint off of political viewpoints that are nearly indistinguishable from those expressed in the *New Inquiry*. In terms of politics, what separates the little magazines from these two megacorporations is not primarily the ideas they put forward, but the modes they use to express them. The *New Inquiry* frequently

¹¹⁸ Greif, “Epitaph for the White Hipster,” loc. 1876.

¹¹⁹ Alex Pareene, “Co-Founder Gavin McInnes Finally Leaves ‘Vice,’” *Gawker*, January 23, 2008, <http://gawker.com/348019/co-founder-gavin-mcinnnes-finally-leaves-vice/>.

¹²⁰ Chase Madar, “Why Juneteenth Needs to be a National Holiday,” *Vice*, June 19, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/why-juneteenth-needs-to-be-a-national-holiday-619>.

¹²¹ Simona Kapitolina, “I’m Proud of Being Trans, and I Don’t Care About Passing,” *Vice*, June 15, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/im-proud-of-being-trans-and-i-dont-care-about-passing>.

¹²² Ben Beach, “Is It Time for London to Go on a Rent Strike?,” *Vice*, June 16, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/rent-strike-ben-beach-839>.

¹²³ Peter Sterne, “Fusion hires Vice News’ Natasha Lennard,” *Capital New York*, January 29, 2015, <http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/media/2015/01/8561036/fusion-hires-vice-news-natasha-lennard>.

relies on academic jargon, as do the critical essays in the *American Reader*. Though its writing is less jargon-riddled, *n+1* also assumes an erudite readership—to repurpose founder Mark Greif’s observation about the *Partisan Review*, *n+1* essays tend to be “addressed just slightly above the head of an imagined public.”¹²⁴ *Vice* and *BuzzFeed*, on the other hand, rarely aim higher than the middle of the middlebrow (and very often lower than that). When the *New Inquiry* writes about the political import of rapper Kanye West, it does so with sentences like: “The coincidence of this performative particularity and historical connotation differentiates swagger from other, similar concepts (militancy, for instance, or hedonistic consumerism) and allows for its redeployment in new contexts.”¹²⁵ The *BuzzFeed* essay “In Defense Of Kanye’s Vanity: The Politics Of Black Self-Love,” is by contrast accessibly written, even as it quotes radical theorists like Audre Lorde.¹²⁶ It’s not that *BuzzFeed* presented a more tempered version of the kind of criticism you read in the *New Inquiry*; rather, it has just made this sort of left-wing cultural criticism legible to a broader a public, and it did so because such critique can live quite happily within a profitable corporation as long as its something the audience will read and share.

2.3.2 What Role the Critic?

Some of the more incisive writers at the new little magazines are aware of the limitations of a criticism disconnected from day-to-day politics, or at least see the perceived

¹²⁴ Mark Greif, “What’s Wrong With Public Intellectuals?,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 13, 2015, <http://chronicle.com/article/Whats-Wrong-With-Public/189921/>.

¹²⁵ Ben Gabriel, “Toward a Reading of Post-Kanye Hip-Hop,” *The New Inquiry*, September 29, 2011, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/toward-a-reading-of-post-kanye-hip-hop/>.

¹²⁶ Heben Nigatu, “In Defense Of Kanye’s Vanity: The Politics Of Black Self-Love,” *BuzzFeed*, June 20, 2013, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/hnigatu/in-defense-of-kanyes-variety-the-politics-of-black-self-love#.kmRjzmaEdX>.

limitations as an issue worthy of addressing. In *n+I*'s Spring 2013 issue, an unsigned *n+I* editorial on the state of young intellectuals writes:

And how to reply to the familiar reproach: *If you want to change and not just interpret the world, why not give up writing and become an organizer or activist?* Part of the answer, at least, is that learning to organize, like learning to write, takes years, and you can't just substitute one job for the other—we will have to be amateur activists. Another part is that if activists are indispensable, so are intellectuals. The words of Adorno in “Sociology and Empirical Research” (1957), arguing for the Frankfurt School's own version of critical sociology, come to mind: “Not only theory but also its absence becomes a material force when it seizes the masses.” Just this—for theorists and the masses alike—has been our problem.¹²⁷

Though there is truth in these reflections—certainly the skill sets of writers and activists are not interchangeable—there is also elision. Even if we accept, as *n+I* does, that theory is a necessary component of political action, the precise nature—or even the vague outlines—of the desired relationship between intellectual and activist are left unaddressed. Does the literary-minded, theoretically-informed criticism in *n+I* fill a need in activist communities? And does the critic have a responsibility to fill such a need?

At the *New Inquiry*, executive editor Rob Horning engaged with these matters at some length in his review of *9.5 Theses on Art and Class* by Marxist art critic Ben Davis. Horning basically agrees with Davis' claim that artists are not engines of political change. Quite to the contrary—the values of artists are essentially at odds with those of social movements. “Though art has often made a mission of shocking middlebrow taste and artists have often congregated in urban Bohemian enclaves in working-class neighborhoods,” Horning writes, “they are less vanguard proletarians than petit bourgeois.” He continues:

This makes artists inescapably individualistic, concerned chiefly about differentiating their product. As Davis notes, “an overemphasis on the creation of

¹²⁷ “Cultural Revolution,” *n+I* 16 (Spring 2013): 16.

individual, signature forms—a professional requirement—can as often make it a distraction from the needs of an actual movement, which are after all collective, welding together tastes of all kinds.” Artists must produce their reputation as a singular commodity on the market, which makes their chief obstacle other would-be artists rather than capitalism as a system, regardless of whatever critical content might inhere in their work. When artists patronize the working class with declarations of solidarity, their vows are motivated less by a desire for social change than by the imperative that they enhance the distinctive value of their personal brand.¹²⁸

These contradictions are just as applicable to the little magazine writer, a reality that does not escape Horning:

The same could be said of the world of literary journals, creative writing, and the “intellectual milieu” in general; each serves as a catch basin for those eager to transcend the ordinary economic relations that largely determine the lives of ordinary people. Often fueled by inherited privilege and a nurtured sense of entitlement, the up-and-coming cadres of the “creative class” seek ways to transform their yearning to be extraordinary into a career, and if that fails, into a politics based mainly on the demand for lucrative self-expression. All the while they imagine themselves exemplars of unsullied, disinterested aesthetic aspiration.

With these words, the executive editor of the *New Inquiry* appears to doubt that the mission laid out by the magazine’s founder—to create “something hostile to capital”—is a feasible one. Whether at *BuzzFeed*, *Vice*, or *TNI*, the economy of content production—even if that content has radical undertones—is dependent on the displays of “gratuitous personal originality” that Graña found to be characteristic of the bohemian. Despite countercultural assertions to the contrary, it is not the aim of capitalism to stomp out the creative imagination. Again, Horning: “[C]onsumer capitalism is eager to harness the creative impulses of everyone. It virtually compels self-expression by allowing even the most mundane acts of consumption to become signifying lifestyle choices.” Even an essay like Horning’s, then—one that questions the political efficacy of creating “radical art or writing”—cannot escape the closed circuit of consumer capitalism. If I share a link

¹²⁸ Rob Horning, “Creative Tyranny,” *The New Inquiry*, August 8, 2013, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/creative-tyranny/>.

to his essay on Facebook, I'm not just cluing in my friends to a thoughtful review; I am, in a small way, adding to the overall value of Facebook's social network, and simultaneously signaling to my peers that I'm the sort of person who reads essays about art & politics in little magazines.

There is perhaps no ready way for a little magazine—or any magazine—to operate fully outside of this economy. Writers need to distinguish themselves in order to have a career, and the sharing of content will always have a performative element. However, by cultivating real relationships with activist organizations and by using writing, editing, and publication skills to help these organizations achieve their aims, small radical publications can differentiate themselves from their for-profit counterparts, and can establish a political project more tangible than the diffuse impact of circulating texts.

2.4 The *Jacobin* Exception

Jacobin certainly hasn't cornered the market for Marxist analysis. Little mag comrade the *New Inquiry* has trained a Marxist lens of everything from the *Hunger Games*¹²⁹ to Facebook¹³⁰ to Mary Kay cosmetics,¹³¹ and the mega-profitable Vice is publishing anti-austerity essays that call for a “luxury communism” in which “the fruits of the most

¹²⁹ Autumn Whitefield-Madrano, “Power, Public Life, and The Hunger Games,” *The New Inquiry*, March 29, 2012, <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/the-beheld/power-public-life-and-the-hunger-games/>.

¹³⁰ Rob Horning, “Facebook and living labor,” *The New Inquiry*, May 17, 2012, <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/marginal-utility/facebook-and-living-labor/>.

¹³¹ Autumn Whitefield-Madrano, “The Alienation of Mary Kay,” *The New Inquiry*, July 24, 2012, <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/the-beheld/the-alienation-of-mary-kay/>.

powerful technologies humans have invented are shared more equally among us.”¹³²

While its content shares some similarities with these venues, *Jacobin* distinguishes itself by its relationship to organized politics. All of the little magazines discussed in this dissertation circulate radical ideas and help their readership to imagine new worlds, but the readership is generally left to its own devices if and when it seeks to translate theory into action. *N+I* does not connect like-minded readers with others in their community to build up activist networks. The *New Inquiry*'s coverage of concrete political action—labor organizing, electioneering, protest politics—is spotty at best. By contrast, founder & editor Bhaskar Sunkara says, “Fundamentally *Jacobin* is a publication that’s nothing without its politics. We’re a publication where it’s not about style or technique or ideas for the sake of ideas—not that I have anything ideologically opposed to those pursuits or the arts—but *Jacobin* is a propaganda outfit.”¹³³ While still a primarily discursive enterprise, *Jacobin* has proven itself willing directly with activism and activists, and through such tangible connections, has proven itself as more legitimately “hostile to capital” than any of its peer publications.

Jacobin's activist orientation is reflected in the background of its founders. *N+I*'s founders met through a tangle of networks that sprawled across outlets for opinion journalism and the Ivy League.¹³⁴ The *American Reader* was dreamed up by Princeton alums. The founding editors of the *New Inquiry* all graduated from Barnard.¹³⁵ By way of

¹³² Aaron Bastani, “Britain Doesn’t Need More Austerity, It Needs Luxury Communism,” *Vice*, June 12, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/luxury-communism-933>.

¹³³ Sunkara, interview by author.

¹³⁴ Keith Gessen, “On *n+I*,” *The Little Magazine in Contemporary America*, ed. Ian Morris and Joanne Diaz, (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2015), Kindle edition, loc. 947.

¹³⁵ Hoby, “New York literary magazines – start spreading the news.”

contrast, Bhaskar Sunkara met future *Jacobin* editorial board member Peter Frase and contributing editor Chris Maisano through his involvement in the Democratic Socialists of America, where he edited the DSA's youth blog *The Activist*, and built up other connections in the socialist corners of the Internet. "A lot of it was just debates and exchanges that happened on the Internet on email lists and chains and so on, and kind of cohering from there," Sunkara says. "It was very much the strong bonds that are formed through having political debates and a shared political perspective as opposed to the softer bonds formed by friendship or kinship." While the editors of *Jacobin* often have educational backgrounds that are similarly elite to those of peer publications—Sunkara attended George Washington,¹³⁶ Frase went to the University of Chicago,¹³⁷ and ed board member and frequent contributor Seth Ackerman is a graduate student at Cornell¹³⁸—ideology and activism played more central and explicit roles in bringing together *Jacobin*'s key players than undergraduate friendships.

The centrality of politics to *Jacobin*'s mission is manifest in the content it runs. For an illustrative example, we need only to look at the divergent coverage of teachers unions in the *New Inquiry* and *Jacobin*. When *TNI* editor Malcolm Harris considers teachers' unions at length in his review of Dana Goldstein's *The Teacher Wars*, he doesn't only attempt to cast doubt on the worth of organized labor, but of public education and of teachers. Harris asks rhetorically, "Is it possible that the American public education system is *a really bad idea*?" and "[W]ouldn't kids today rather have Neil deGrasse Tyson backed by million-dollar graphics than a local 25-year-old with a degree in

¹³⁶ Sunkara, "Project Jacobin."

¹³⁷ "Peter Frase," LinkedIn, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/peterfrase>.

¹³⁸ Schuessler, "A Young Publisher Takes Marx Into the Mainstream."

political science?” Adopting a radically anti-authoritarian anarchist stance, Harris has little sympathy for a system that he sees as turning students over “to a structure of civil servants that was originally designed to teach them to obey the King of Prussia” and asserts that “it’s time to imagine what comes after the teachers finally lose the war” against anti-union forces.¹³⁹ Both in tone and substance, this is not an essay designed to build bridges between *TNI* and organized labor; it is not meant to serve as fraternal criticism on how unions could be more effective, but is instead a scathing indictment of a segment of organized labor that Harris sees as destined to fail, and an explanation of why that failure is nothing to mourn. Harris took to Twitter to elaborate on his utopian vision of a post-schooling world, contending that children should “just run the streets, go bug adults they wanna learn from.”¹⁴⁰ This sort of critique might appeal to adherents of the unschooling movement and other radical approaches to education, but I have found no evidence that Harris or the *New Inquiry* has sought out unschooling activists with whom to collaborate. *TNI* is a literary enterprise, not an activist one; after the critique is published, any practical action outside the realm of discourse is left up to the counterpublic in which the text circulate.

Jacobin replied directly to Harris with “Too Cool for School,” an article by teacher & activist Kenzo Shibata. Though Shibata assumes that Harris’ “intent is not to be ‘a tool in an anti-worker corporate agenda,’” he still comes out swinging: “If Harris’s goal is a leftist critique of public education, he falls flat. He comes off sounding more like Michelle Rhee than a radical. In some ways, he’s even worse than that neoliberal

¹³⁹ Malcolm Harris, “Not for Teacher,” *The New Inquiry*, September 12, 2014, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/not-for-teacher/>.

¹⁴⁰ “@BigMeanInternet,” Twitter, September 12, 2014, <https://twitter.com/BigMeanInternet/status/510495319009001472>.

reformer par excellence. Both say that the system is not worth saving, that it should be dismantled. But at least the ‘edupreneurs’ know what they want — a system where private interests, often with political clout, Hoover up public funds with little-to-no democratic oversight. Harris’s alternative is effectively a question mark.”¹⁴¹ Shibata proceeds to politely chastise Harris, asserting that he makes claims with “no evidence,” that he is an unwitting accomplice of neoliberal reformers who favor slash-and-burn techniques, and that it “is the very teachers unions Harris lambasts that are leading the charge for a more equitable, racially just education system.” The piece ends with Shibata painting his opponent as not only wrong, but insignificant: “Those of us who are doing the work and organizing for better public schools just have to write off people like Harris as another roadblock — and a small one compared to the powerful interests that really wish to destroy us.” Where *TNI* characteristically addresses the politics of teachers’ unions from a radically utopian libertarian perspective, *Jacobin*, equally characteristically, lines up in solidarity with labor unions.

Crucially, *Jacobin*’s support of teachers’ union does not end with a rebuttal to the *TNI* review. When the Shibata’s own Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) went on strike in 2012 to protest free market education reforms that included school closures, mass firings, and the proliferation of charter schools, *Jacobin* got directly involved. “Initially we found that our articles like [teacher Will Johnson’s essay] ‘Lean Production’ were being circulated at CTU congresses and other events, so we reached out to our contacts there,” Sunkara says.¹⁴² *Jacobin* went on to extensively and supportively cover the strike and its

¹⁴¹ Kenzo Shibata, “Too Cool for School,” *Jacobin*, September 13, 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/09/too-cool-for-school/>.

¹⁴² Sunkara, interview by author.

aftermath through its magazine and website, and then went a step further, collaborating with the CTU's radical Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE) to produce a lavishly designed 118-page supplement called *Class Action: An Activist Teacher's Handbook* that featured contributions from *Jacobin* editors, economist Dean Baker, and CTU president Karen Lewis. *Class Action* was posted for free download on the *Jacobin* website and distributed in hard copy among educators and support staff in seven major American cities "to help support rank-and-file activity."¹⁴³ "We had a trade union base connected to us because of the ideas," Sunkara says. "We had a request or demand that we were able to service because our particular skill set made us the best people in a position to produce something like this."¹⁴⁴ Finally, *Jacobin* partnered with Verso to put out a book-length journalistic account of the event, *Strike For America: Chicago Teachers Against Austerity* by *Jacobin* assistant editor and former labor organizer Micah Uetricht. *Strike For America* is predictably sympathetic to the striking teachers, casting their actions as "the most important domestic labor struggle so far this century" and "a new model for school reform led by teachers themselves, rather than by billionaires."¹⁴⁵

Jacobin also spends less effort on cultivating relationships within the publishing world, and more on relationships with activist organizations and even political parties. As the tension between Greece and the European Union mounted in 2015, *Jacobin* became "kind of the English language place for debates within [Greek left-wing coalition] Syriza

¹⁴³ Bhaskar Sunkara, "Class Action: An Activist Teacher's Handbook," *Jacobin*, February 13, 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/02/class-action-an-activist-teachers-handbook/>.

¹⁴⁴ Sunkara, interview by author.

¹⁴⁵ "Strike for America: Chicago Teachers Against Austerity (Jacobin)," Amazon, http://www.amazon.com/Strike-America-Chicago-Teachers-Austerity/dp/1781683255/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1435685691&sr=8-1&keywords=jacobin+teacher+strike.

and in particular the perspectives of Left Platform within Syriza.”¹⁴⁶ It has published essays by Syriza central committee member Stathis Kouvelakis,¹⁴⁷ official statements from the Left Platform bloc,¹⁴⁸ and even pieces by Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipiras.¹⁴⁹ During a time of tumult, *Jacobin* became a crucial source for English speakers seeking to understand the furthest left ruling coalition in Europe on its own terms rather than through an often-hostile news media. The magazine’s Twitter feed even broke the news that Tsipiras would call for the July 5th referendum on the Greek bailout. People responded with tweets demanding a source, surprised that, as Sunkara puts it, “this is the fucking source.”¹⁵⁰

Jacobin’s role here is still a discursive one—it is producing and facilitating the creation of texts that it then seeks to circulate. However, it differs sharply from other little magazines in that it is creating and distributing these texts in active collaboration with pre-existing activist networks. This constitutes something different from criticism for the sake of criticism, or even from criticism with a nebulous political mission “to advance the radical imagination,” as Rosenfelt has defined the *New Inquiry*’s role in discourse.¹⁵¹ The advance of the radical imagination is certainly part of *Jacobin*’s project—essays like

¹⁴⁶ Sunkara, interview by author.

¹⁴⁷ Sebastian Budgen and Stathis Kouvelakis, “Greece: The Struggle Continues,” *Jacobin*, July 14, 2015, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/author/sebastian-budgen-and-stathis-kouvelakis/>.

¹⁴⁸ The Left Platform of Syriza, “The Alternative to Austerity,” *Jacobin*, July 10, 2015, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/07/tsipras-euro-debt-default-grexit/>.

¹⁴⁹ Alexis Tsipiras, “An End to the Blackmail,” *Jacobin*, June 27, 2015, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/06/tsipras-speech-referendum-bailout-troika/>.

¹⁵⁰ Sunkara, interview by author.

¹⁵¹ “Woman On The Edge: Rachel Rosenfelt,” *The L Magazine*, January 14, 2015, <http://www.thelmagazine.com/2015/01/woman-edge-rachel-rosenfelt/>.

“The Novel as Dictator: Why socialist realism loses out to avant-garde aesthetics”¹⁵² and “John Locke Against Freedom” (subheaded “John Locke’s classical liberalism isn’t a doctrine of freedom. It’s a defense of expropriation and enslavement.”¹⁵³) are primarily intellectual in nature, with only a diffuse relationship to activism. However, in its reportage of undercover political stories, its advocacy of specific stances on specific issues, and its willingness and ability to work with on-the-ground activists, *Jacobin* distinguishes itself among little magazines, and is able to extend its reach beyond the counterpublic of young intellectuals in which these texts tend to circulate. Outreach efforts, like the distribution of *Class Action* among teachers, help the publication reach the hands of people are similarly-minded, but who were previously unaware of the sometimes insular world of little magazines. *Jacobin*’s purposeful accessibility—Sunkara claims that “any reasonably intelligent ninth grader should be able to decipher and get through everything in *Jacobin*”¹⁵⁴—has also helped its web reach grow to as many as 900,000 unique visitors per month,¹⁵⁵ about 100,000 more than the *Awl* and six times the traffic of *ProPublica*.¹⁵⁶

This audience is one that *Jacobin* is not content to keep atomized. Under the slogan “Don’t study collective action alone,” *Jacobin* has organized monthly reading groups to connect activists, students, and anyone else who cares to join. As of July 2015,

¹⁵² Toral Gajjarawala, “The Novel as Dictator,” *Jacobin*, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2012/12/the-novel-as-dictator/>.

¹⁵³ John Quiggin, “John Locke Against Freedom,” *Jacobin*, June 28, 2015, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/06/locke-treatise-slavery-private-property/>.

¹⁵⁴ Sunkara, interview by author.

¹⁵⁵ “Advertise,” *Jacobin*, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/advertise/>.

¹⁵⁶ “Digital: Top 50 Digital Native News Sites,” Pew Research Center.

there are 37 reading groups in the US, seven in Canada, and 13 in other countries.¹⁵⁷ The magazine is especially proud of the groups in places like the American South and Midwest, areas that lack socialist organizations and where “*Jacobin* is the only game in town, the only ones trying to get people together as open socialists.”¹⁵⁸

Much of the work that *Jacobin* does is less sexy—indeed, less bohemian—than the work of *n+1*, the *New Inquiry*, or the *American Reader*. They hold few glamorous parties, and commit themselves to the drudgery of organizing and to covering unfashionable topics like union activism. However, in so doing, they more successfully overcome the political limitations of the artist—as Horning put it, a “politics based mainly on the demand for lucrative self-expression.”¹⁵⁹ The organization’s skills are pressed into service of a collective goal. *Jacobin*’s articles may lack the literary merit of an *n+1* essay—Sunkara openly says that, unlike his more literary peers, he is happy to publish work that is “80% good”¹⁶⁰—but as the history of counterculture demonstrates, even radical aesthetics can smoothly be appropriated. The acquisition and leveraging of political power, however, is much harder to assimilate.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I linked new little magazines to a tradition of American bohemianism. The writers & editors responsible for these publications and the counterpublic that they

¹⁵⁷ “Jacobin Reading Groups,” *Jacobin*, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/reading-groups/>.

¹⁵⁸ Sunkara, “Project Jacobin,” *Jacobin*.

¹⁵⁹ Horning, “Creative Tyranny,” *The New Inquiry*.

¹⁶⁰ Sunkara, interview by author.

call into being are, as in other bohémias, disproportionately young, artsy, politically radical, well-educated, and possessing of an oppositional attitude toward what they perceive as mainstream culture. Despite this oppositional attitude and often-belligerent anti-establishment politics, the cultural inclination—rather than activist or economic one—of little magazines tends to limit their ability to pose a credible threat to the political status quo. Like the antecedent bohémias of past generations, the styles and postures of little magazines are not difficult to assimilate into profit-seeking ventures. Essays published by corporate media outfits like *BuzzFeed* and *Vice* frequently possess political content as radical as anything in the *New Inquiry* or *n+1*. This is less a matter of co-optation than of cultural rebellion and oppositional identities as being not just compatible with, but useful in the pursuit of profit. However, in its participation in and coverage of organized politics, *Jacobin* provides a model by which little magazines can meaningfully intervene in the political world outside of bohémian counterpublics.

In the next chapter, I will explore the limitations and potential political possibilities of little magazines by examining their participation in the Occupy Wall Street movement. Rather than magazines shaping the movement, I believe that the movement helped to shape the magazines.

CHAPTER THREE: OCCUPY LITTLE MAGAZINES

It was Friday, October 14, 2011. The Occupy Wall Street movement was reaching its high-water mark of enthusiasm and public attention. Early that morning, thousands of supporters had filled and surrounded Zuccotti Park—rechristened Liberty Square by activists—and forced New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg to call off a cleaning that many within the movement saw as pretext for eviction. The next day, at least 10,000 would march on Time Square as part of a series of globally coordinated protests against austerity and inequality.¹

That night, though, *Jacobin*—at the time an obscure socialist journal with fewer than 1,000 subscribers—hosted a panel at Bluestockings, a radical bookstore on Manhattan’s Lower East Side. Moderated by *Jacobin* editor-at-large Seth Ackerman and billed as “A Debate on Left Politics and Strategy,” the panel would be best remembered for costing freelance reporter Natasha Lennard her gig at the *New York Times*. She, like

¹ Adam Gabbatt, Mark Townsend, and Lisa O’Carroll, “‘Occupy’ anti-capitalism protests spread around the world,” *The Guardian*, October 15, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/16/occupy-protests-europe-london-assange>.

all the panelists, spoke with a strong and obvious sympathy for the protests, but as the only speaker who also covered OWS for the ostensibly objective Paper of Record, much of the news coverage of the event centered on Lennard. Conservative outlets cried foul and seized the opportunity to pounce on the *Times*. At *Breitbart*, an incensed Lee Stranahan wrote that Lennard spoke not as an unbiased reporter, but rather “a ‘comrade’ of the panelists and the audience—one actively part of the far-left intellectual theorizing and organizing behind Occupy, and also as someone with deep knowledge of its plans.”² An understated but suggestive Fox News item reported that she “may have been less than perfectly objective.”³ Rush Limbaugh called her “beyond biased” and an anarchist working “under cover of darkness.”⁴ While the *Times* stood behind Lennard’s reporting, it quickly announced that it had “no plans” to use her for future coverage.⁵ Soon outlets outside of the right-wing media ecosystem, including *Politico*,⁶ were reporting on the fracas.

² Lee Stranahan, “New Video Reveals: New York Times Reporter Natasha Lennard is #OccupyWallStreet Activist, Supporter,” *Breitbart*, October 24, 2011, <http://www.breitbart.com/big-journalism/2011/10/24/new-video-reveals-new-york-times-reporter-natasha-lennard-is-occupywallstreet-activist-supporter/>.

³ “Grapevine: Occupy Hygiene?,” Fox News, April 5, 2012, <http://www.foxnews.com/transcript/2011/10/24/grapevine-occupy-hygiene/>.

⁴ Rush Limbaugh, “NYT Reporter Outed as Protester; Occupy Wall Street Caught Putting Its Money in an Evil, Corporate Bank,” *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, October 24, 2011, http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2011/10/24/nyt_reporter_outed_as_protester_occupy_wall_street_caught_putting_its_money_in_an_evil_corporate_bank.

⁵ Summer Harlow, “New York Times distances self from freelancer accused of supporting Occupy Wall Street protesters,” Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, October 25, 2011, <https://knightcenter.utexas.edu/blog/new-york-times-distances-self-freelancer-accused-supporting-occupy-wall-street-protesters/>.

⁶ Keach Hagey, “New target for OWS critics: Media,” *Politico*, October 25, 2011, <http://www.politico.com/story/2011/10/new-target-for-ows-critics-media-066764>.

However, the panel was notable for reasons other than ending Lennard's tenure with the Gray Lady. It was also the first time that *Jacobin* garnered attention from the mainstream media, and, perhaps more interestingly, the discussion revealed ideological fissures both within the Occupy movement and between different little magazines. On one side of this divide was Lennard, who would later join the masthead of the *New Inquiry*, and *TNI* senior editor (and occasional *Jacobin* and *n+1* contributor) Malcolm Harris. The pair was seated side-by-side to the right of Ackerman (he joked about the political implications of their onstage positioning), and they quickly established themselves as anarchists, defending the movement's lack of demands, praising its amorphous structure, and making high theory allusions to Foucault and post-structuralism. On the other side, the remaining three panelists—scholar Jodi Dean, *Left Business Observer* editor Doug Henwood, and *Jacobin* contributor Chris Maisano—along with Ackerman himself expressed their hopes that Occupy would coalesce into a more focused movement with clear goals and a coherent strategy for amassing and exercising political power. The debate got heated. Lennard dismissed the idea that the movement should actively recruit participants as “fascistic.” Henwood made a hand gesture that mimed masturbation. According to *Jacobin*, Henwood later called the panel “the most contentious left-wing gathering he'd ever participated in.”⁷ Then-*TNI* editor Sarah Leonard noted in *n+1*'s *Occupy! Gazette* that the discussion was simultaneously

⁷ Seth Ackerman, “VIDEO: #OWS, a Debate on Left Politics and Strategy,” *Jacobin*, October 19, 2011, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2011/10/video-ows-a-debate-on-left-politics-and-strategy-oct-14-in-nyc/>.

“rife with condescension in both directions” and “a throwback to a time when politics mattered.”⁸

With the sudden emergence of a left-wing social movement—even a fleeting one—the new little magazines found a defining moment, a testing ground where their theories could meet practice, and fuel that propelled them to increased relevance. The different magazines reacted to Occupy differently, and in these reactions they sharpened their own political identities and gave voice to tendencies within the movement and to critiques from without.

First, this chapter will trace the involvement of the *New Inquiry* and *Jacobin* in Occupy Wall Street, and examine how their divergent understandings of what the movement was and should be help to illuminate the unresolved tension within OWS between the factions that sought autonomist anarchist rebellion and those interested in organizing a more traditional leftist movement for specific tangible aims. *TNI* and *Jacobin* were not instrumental to the movement’s day-to-day functioning, but they did serve as the vehicles for a discursive proxy war between opposing tendencies within the movement. Neither tendency successfully marshaled the energies that surged Occupy to prominence in its first few months, nor were the tendencies successfully synthesized into a new coherent vision, and this inability to form a well-defined, widely shared identity and mission helped to limit the capacity of Occupy to fulfill the ambitions of either camp.

Next, I will turn to *n+1*. Unlike the *New Inquiry* or *Jacobin*, *n+1* was well established by the time OWS emerged. It had been publishing for seven years and already

⁸ Sarah Leonard, “Park to Park,” *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 18.

had a strong reputation in literary and media circles. For this journal, the movement represented a moment of transition, a move away from its initial preoccupations with literary theory and the internal dynamics of the literary scene, and toward an increased focus on economics, labor issues, and the world outside of New York bohemia. On the pages of *n+1* proper and especially through its five-issue tabloid the *Occupy! Gazette*, the magazine formulated an ideal of how intellectuals should can and should engage with social movements. While retaining more critical distance from day-to-day politics than the openly propagandistic *Jacobin*, Occupy occasioned an institutional pivot toward activist concerns.

Finally, I will examine the emergence of a mainstream media narrative that places the new little magazines near the intellectual center of what is perceived to be a broader trend toward left radicalism, portraying them as lodestars for the Occupy generation. While these outlets certainly benefitted from increased interest in leftist politics during and immediately after Occupy, it took roughly two years, the fortuitous scheduling of book releases, and a 9,500-word article in the *Nation* for the media to consense on the idea that little magazines were central players in a burgeoning “millennial Marxism.”

3.1 The *New Inquiry* & *Jacobin*: Giving Voice to “Ninjas” and “Recidivists”

“Behind the scenes, a growing rift was also developing within OWS’s ‘coordinator class.’ The leading affinity group—in the words of one participant, made up of ‘all the people who are making all the things happen’—had already fractured days before the raid. [...] The split left two rival factions in its wake, known as the ‘Ninjas’ and the ‘Recidivists.’ The Ninjas were avowedly anarchist and anti-capitalist, opposed to the making of demands, and oriented toward the reoccupation of urban space. The Recidivists touted a

more pragmatist, populist politics, centered on coalition-building and community organizing for political and economic reform.”

~Michael Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers*⁹

The initial explosion of Occupy Wall Street was made possible in part by its vagueness. With the absence of demands and nebulous, big tent slogans like “We are the 99 Percent,” it was easy for people with a wide range of political beliefs to see themselves and their grievances in the movement. In the first, heady days in occupied Zuccotti, anarchists, socialists, and liberals all managed to work side by side to organize against the common enemies of unbridled capitalism, corporatized politics, and yawning inequality. But as the movement wore on, the ideological fissures became increasingly difficult to smooth over. As Gould-Wartofsky observes, a rift emerged even before the police evicted New York’s Occupy encampment, and that rift would only grow once the different factions no longer shared the project of maintaining and defending a tent city in Lower Manhattan.

Though supportive of the movement, the editors of *Jacobin* and the *New Inquiry* were not central to organizing Occupy Wall Street. “Almost all of us were involved in various ways individually, like going to the camp if not going to solidarity marches and so on,” editor-in-chief Bhaskar Sunkara said of the participation of *Jacobin*’s masthead. “As far as I know only maybe one or two were heavily, heavily involved, like there every day.”¹⁰ The direct participation of *TNI* staffers was similarly limited, although editor Malcolm Harris did garner headlines both for coordinating a prank that fooled activists

⁹ Michael Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers: The Making of the 99 Percent Movement* (New York: Oxford UP, 2015), Kindle edition, loc 3173.

¹⁰ Bhaskar Sunkara, interview by author, digital recording, Brooklyn, July 14, 2015.

and journalists into believing the band Radiohead was going to play at Zuccotti Park¹¹ and for fighting a subpoena that would eventually force Twitter to turn over the self-incriminating tweets that he posted during OWS' Brooklyn Bridge action on October 1, 2011.¹²

However, the publications' diverging understandings of and visions for the movement mirror the rifts within Occupy's coordinator class. The *New Inquiry's* tendencies toward autonomy and self-expression showed a strong family resemblance to the militant Ninja camp, while *Jacobin*, despite (or perhaps because of) its principled socialism, shared a pragmatic orientation toward coalition building with the more flexible Recidivists. Within the movement, the differences in these programs proved irreconcilable. The Ninjas and Recidivists ceased to work together, with the former generally maintaining the banner of Occupy while the latter went on to forge various "99 Percent" coalitions.¹³

As *TNI* and *Jacobin* were separate magazines with separate editorial boards, their ideological differences did not necessitate a messy breakup. Indeed, the two publications not only share writers, but their editors have been known to appear in each other's pages arguing for their own particular points of view. A month before OWS launched, Sunkara used his *New Inquiry* review of a new Emma Goldman biography to (characteristically) critique the ubiquity of the frame of "personal is political," a mantra that he believes

¹¹ Malcolm Harris, "I'm the Jerk Who Pranked Occupy Wall Street," *Gawker*, December 14, 2011, <http://gawker.com/5868073/im-the-jerk-who-pranked-occupy-wall-street>.

¹² Russ Buetner, "A Brooklyn Protester Pleads Guilty After His Twitter Posts Sink His Case," *New York Times*, December 12, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/13/nyregion/malcolm-harris-pleads-guilty-over-2011-march.html?_r=0.

¹³ Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers*, loc 4184.

“finds its inheritors in those who think drinking ‘fair trade’ lattes from Starbucks or following G20 protests like groupies represents real political action.”¹⁴ Equally in character, Harris blogged for *Jacobin* during OWS about his disdain for representative politics and how he believes a “permitted sidewalk march is cowardly, boring, and harms the sequence’s revolutionary potential.”¹⁵ But as these quotes suggest, a willingness to run each other’s work does not signal a full congruence of politics.

Activists are primarily in the business of organizing actions, not producing words. Writers on the other hand—they, well, write. It is the job of the *New Inquiry* and *Jacobin* to articulate things, and these articulations of two very different sensibilities within Occupy can help us to understand why the movement struggled to form a coherent identity and mission. For the magazines, however, this was a chance to publicly define the specific flavor of their respective radicalisms, using the things that they did and did not like about the movement to define themselves vis-à-vis real world events.

3.1.1 The *New Inquiry*’s Occupy: Anarchism, Art, Discourse, and Tactics

“The realization was creeping up on me, or in some cases creeping me out, that this political movement I’d been mixed up in for months was really, truly, and above all best understood as a gigantic art project, which unwittingly I had been helping to carry out.”

~Nathan Schneider, *Thank You, Anarchy*¹⁶

¹⁴ Bhaskar Sunkara, “Dances With Anarchists,” *The New Inquiry*, August 10, 2011, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/dances-with-anarchists/>.

¹⁵ Malcolm Harris, “Baby, We’re All Anarchists Now,” *Jacobin*, October 12, 2011, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2011/10/baby-were-all-anarchists-now/>.

¹⁶ Nathan Schneider, *Thank You, Anarchy: Notes from the Occupy Apocalypse* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), Kindle edition, 145.

To mangle an old proverb, when all you've got is a bohemian, everything looks like an art project. Or, when all you've got is a liberal arts degree, everything looks like a seminar. It is unsurprising, then, that the *New Inquiry* approached Occupy Wall Street in these terms—an aesthetic project and space of discourse—rather than as a political movement in the traditional sense, one that sought to win material gains for itself and concessions from its opponents.

To be fair, the movement certainly leant itself to such readings. Occupy Wall Street was, among other things, a high-profile piece of political art. Some of OWS' manifestations were art in the obvious sense—the occupied parks were full of people painting signs, reading poetry, and beating drums. But there was also the immersive theater of the camps themselves. The Occupy encampments were often described as a form of “prefigurative politics,” a style of political engagement that organizes itself in accordance with the values of the world it seeks to create. Thus, Occupy did not assemble a hierarchical political party to win elections and impose a more thoroughly participatory democracy on a mass scale at some point in the future; it organized itself around local, consensus-based general assemblies to perform those values in the present and to “prefigure” the world that it hoped to usher in.

The impulse toward prefiguration is, in a way, an aesthetic one. Even as the General Assembly functioned as the central decision-making body of Occupy Wall Street, it was also a performance, a representation of what a more radically democratic society might look like. It was a piece of theater co-constructed by whoever chose to show up on a given evening. As journalist Liza Eliano noted five days into the occupation, “The vibe of the [General] Assembly is just as much political as it is poetic

and performative.”¹⁷ Activist and writer Nathan Schneider reversed her formulation, but agreed on the prominence of both art and activism: “[T]he urge to leaderlessness was aesthetic as much as it was political. At stake was not simply a model of governance, but a culture, a recognizable mode of being and acting. Leaderlessness was simply more beautiful.”¹⁸ It is not completely absurd, then, that when some people—especially bohemian writers whose elite liberal arts educations have armed them with an extensive vocabulary for discussing art—interpreted the movement through a lens that was more artistic than strategic.

And so it was with the *New Inquiry*. For instance, in the summer of 2012, the website published a two-part series from Maryam Monalisa Gharavi titled “Field Notes on Fashion and Occupy.”¹⁹ Fashion and clothing, Gharavi argues, “have played a primary or at least highly accomplice role in the dynamics of Occupy as a moment and mobilization within the wider political frontiers of the past year.” She writes that her 20 numbered observations are presented “in a not-so-particular order, or one that is more intuitive than analytical. I hope they can generate more observations and discursive ideas toward what I like to affix my hat to: the indivisible unit of politics and aesthetics.” If one conceives of politics and aesthetics to be indivisible, then it stands to reason that artistic action is also political action. The bohemian writing for a little magazine becomes as deserving of the title of “activist” as an organizer of street protests.

¹⁷ Liza Eliano, “A Report from #OccupyWallStreet: Signs & Inspirations,” *Hyperallergic*, September 22, 2011, <http://hyperallergic.com/36170/a-report-from-occupywallstreet-signs-inspirations/>.

¹⁸ Schneider, *Thank You Anarchy*, 95.

¹⁹ Maryam Monalisa Gharavi, “Field Notes on Fashion and Occupy (Part One),” *The New Inquiry*, June 12, 2012, <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/southsouth/field-notes-on-fashion-and-occupy/>.

Maryam Monalisa Gharavi, “Field Notes on Fashion and Occupy (Part Two),” *The New Inquiry*, July 9, 2012, <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/southsouth/field-notes-on-fashion-and-occupy-part-two/>.

This attempted merger of art, life, and revolution has a specific historical lineage. It was the project of the Situationist International (SI), an avant-garde group active primarily in France during the mid-20th century and recognized by anarchist anthropologist and Occupy activist David Graeber as “probably the most important theoretical influence on contemporary anarchism in America.”²⁰ Perhaps most famous for its involvement in and influence over the unrest, protests, and strikes that convulsed Paris during May 1968, the group sought to radically re-imagine urban space and to erase any meaningful distinction between aesthetic practice and everyday life. It is for good reason that a 2010 biography of SI ringleader Guy Debord is subtitled “Revolution in the Service of Poetry”²¹—the act of revolt was not primarily meant to capture control of the state apparatus, to institute an equitable distribution of capital, or to enact legislative reforms. Compared to the ultimate goals of unmediated experience and aesthetic transcendence, such prosaic aims seemed shortsighted, even base.

When Natasha Lennard reflected on her involvement with Occupy for *Salon*, she did so in terms that were strikingly similar to those favored by the Situationists: “But above all for me, Occupy was about rupture: In the bold and basic act of taking space in New York’s overdetermined grid, we found ourselves, each other and our streets anew.”²² A similar inclination runs through a dialogue *TNI* published between editors Max Fox and Malcolm Harris about “pop music’s prefiguration of the Occupy protests.” Fox comments on lyrics from Justin Bieber, Britney Spears, and Ke\$ha: “And yeah, a lot

²⁰ David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Oakland: AK Press, 2009), Kindle edition, 258.

²¹ Vincent Kaufmann, *Guy Debord: Revolution in the Service of Poetry*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2010).

²² Natasha Lennard, “Why I’m not returning to Zuccotti Park today,” *Salon*, September 17, 2013, http://www.salon.com/2013/09/17/why_im_not_returning_to_zuccotti_park_today/.

of those fragments happen to be nominally about dancing, but it's pretty startling how much they sound like they're singing about smashing shit up and taking over the streets, as joyfully as if it were a night at the clubs. This seems to be way closer to Occupy Everything's aesthetic. Because it's still beside or behind the point to talk about this or that thing that Occupy Everything says — the movement's political content is still far more the affective experience of being together *and* taking over parks and bridges and streets."²³ The desire to party and dance as expressed by pop music is interpreted here as a sublimated longing for the higher pleasure of revolution. The "political content" of the OWS isn't understood as a demand for an equitable distribution of wealth; it's "the affective experience of being together *and* taking over parks and bridges and streets." The beautiful moment of rebellion takes precedence over the banality of economics.

As primed as the *New Inquiry* might have been to see Occupy as a long dreamed for synthesis forming an "indivisible unit of politics and aesthetics," this interpretation was not only imposed on the movement by hopeful writers. A faction within OWS' inner circle—Gould-Wartofsky's Ninjas—was deeply committed to the idea of movement-as-artwork. One of Occupy's primary organizational spaces was 16 Beaver, a radical art collective in the Financial District. Some of its most important coordinators and many of its rank-and-file identified as artists of one stripe or another. Three of the activists who would become the core of *Tidal*, an Occupy-affiliated theory journal, first met at a program at the Whitney Museum of American Art. As Schneider observes, "Insurrectionist and anarchist books circulating in art schools had prepared a critical mass in the movement to demand only the impossible and become the basis for its theoretical

²³ "Don't Stop Believing," *The New Inquiry*, November 21, 2011, <http://thenewinquiry.com/features/dont-stop-believing/>.

leading edge. [...] The paradigm vocation of the civil rights movement was the pastor; for the Occupy movement, it was the artist.”²⁴ A Situationist brand of artistic anarchism was as much a presence in Zuccotti Park as drum circles and pot smoke. It was a tendency that the *New Inquiry* both articulated and celebrated.

Even when *TNI* wasn't explicitly promoting a vision of aestheticized revolution, its entry points into the movement were often artistic. In “The Slow Politics of Occupied Filmmaking,” Adam Rothstein discusses Occupy's use of streaming video livefeeds by way of comparison to the Hungarian film *Werckmeister Harmonies*, a masterpiece of “Slow Cinema.” “A movement without leaders creates cinema without directors,” Rothstein writes. “It is lingering, always on, mired with boredom, with the certain sorts of observations that only happen when the lens is allowed to linger.”²⁵ The *New Inquiry* ran a series of artist Molly Crabapple's ink and watercolor renderings of scenes from OWS' anti-NATO protests in Chicago (see Figure 1).²⁶ James Graham's “X Marks the Spot: Occupy's Architecture” explicitly uses the tools of art criticism to analyze the movement. The essay delves into the architecture around Zuccotti Park, noting that the tower on the park's northern border was formerly the U.S. Steel building. Graham writes: “The site of U.S. Steel was a subtle but oddly perfect scene on which to stage a conversation about the architecture of finance and the city. It was also an impossible one, framed by an architecture that resists translation into images from the level of the street. The corporate architecture in question intentionally projects an air of taciturn inevitability, a gridded

²⁴ Schneider, *Thank You, Anarchy*, 146.

²⁵ Adam Rothstein, “The Slow Politics of Occupied Filmmaking,” *The New Inquiry*, February 27, 2012, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/the-slow-politics-of-occupied-filmmaking/>.

²⁶ Molly Crabapple, “Not NATO,” *The New Inquiry*, May 21, 2012, <http://thenewinquiry.com/features/not-nato/>.

form that revels in its own silence, like the grids of avant-garde painters who purposefully offered no symbolic content to relate to or oppose.”²⁷ Here, Occupy is not represented as a political movement in the pedestrian sense. It is not a power struggle among groups with competing interests, a contest in which strategies are deployed to gain advantage over an adversary. Instead, it is a tableau described in terms of the symbolism of its stage set. The movement is an aesthetic or a semiotic project—a set of signs to be decoded—and it is a discourse—“a conversation.”

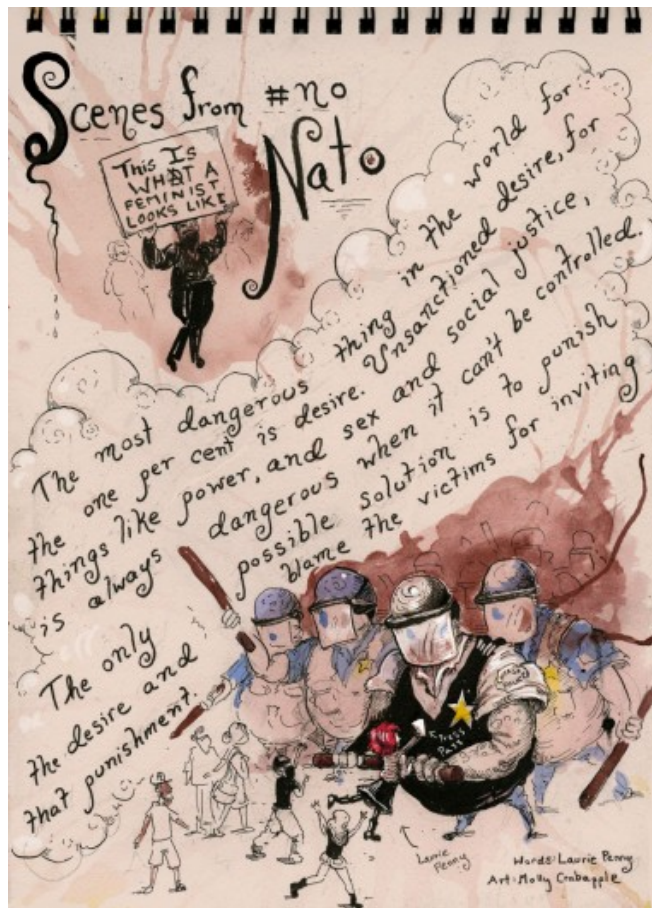


Figure 1: An ink and watercolor illustration by Molly Crabapple.

²⁷ James Graham, “X Marks the Spot: Occupy’s Architecture,” *The New Inquiry*, February 20, 2012, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/x-marks-the-spot-occupys-architecture/>.

A rhetoric that implies an indistinguishability of—or at least a massive overlap between—discourse and protest action is as prevalent in *TNI* as the theoretical merger between art and politics. Erwin Montgomery goes further than the boilerplate commendations of Occupy for having “changed the conversation” by arguing “any change in conversation suggests a change in those engaged in the conversation.”²⁸ Jasper Bernes believes that “Occupy is really about political discourse, decision, and the formation of a new hegemonic majority, the 99%, through consensus procedure.”²⁹ Editor Aaron Bady used the Occupy-affiliated protests at the University of California as an opportunity for “thinking about ‘critique’ as disobedience—or disobedience as ‘critique’—and what that would mean.”³⁰ Gharavi approvingly quotes an excerpt about protests in Brazil that, while not Occupy-related, fuses the concepts with a slash: a “conversation/demonstration.”³¹

Conversation is, of course, part of any political movement. It is the process by which objectives are determined, tactics planned, and strategy formulated. Protests are themselves acts of communication between the protester and the protested, and the protester and the public at large. But such conversations have historically been framed as means rather than ends. Activists involved in the Civil Rights Movement, the struggle against the Vietnam War, and the push to divest from Apartheid-era South Africa had

²⁸ Erwin Montgomery, “Sleepwalking through the Ruins,” *The New Inquiry*, September 16, 2014, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/sleepwalking-through-the-ruins/>.

²⁹ Jasper Bernes, “Square and Circle: The Logic of Occupy,” *The New Inquiry*, September 17, 2012, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/square-and-circle-the-logic-of-occupy/>.

³⁰ Aaron Bady, “Bartleby in the University of California: The Social Life of Disobedience,” *The New Inquiry*, May 3, 2013, <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/zunguzungu/bartleby-in-the-university-of-california-the-social-life-of-disobedience/>.

³¹ Maryam Monalisa Gharavi, “Meanwhile, in Brazil,” *The New Inquiry*, July 3, 2013, <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/southsouth/meanwhile-in-brazil/>.

many conversations—they spoke to each other, to the media, to public officials, and so forth. However, they did not understand their respective movements as first and foremost attempts to “stage a conversation”—rather, they sought to provoke a desired outcomes like legislation, military withdrawal, or divestment. In Occupy, however, conversation held an elevated position, as it did in feminist and LGBT consciousness-raising groups in the 1960s and 70s.³² This orientation—which frequently frustrated the movement’s ends-driven Recidivist faction—gave precedence to the expressive decisions of each individual over discrete political objectives, or rather saw the individual’s participation in conversation as a political objective in itself.

In conceiving of Occupy as a conversation, the *New Inquiry* also cast the movement in terms that foreground discourse, and therefore accentuate the importance of word-producing enterprises like magazines. It also conveniently inflated the importance of skills forged in the seminar rooms of elite colleges. As Mark Greif observes in an essay on 21st-century hipsters, the recent liberal arts grad may lack money, but she retains “the training of the university for learning tiny distinctions and histories, for the discovery and navigation of cultural codes”³³—she retains, in other words, a facility with discourse, specifically the abstruse discourse of the academy. The register of the *New Inquiry*’s quotations and allusions provided thus far should leave little doubt to the esteem in which it holds this kind of language and argumentation. In its tendencies

³² Heather Gautney, “What is Occupy Wall Street? The history of leaderless movements,” *Washington Post*, October 10, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-leadership/what-is-occupy-wall-street-the-history-of-leaderless-movements/2011/10/10/gIQAwkFjaL_story.html.

³³ Mark Greif, “Epitaph for the White Hipster,” in *What Was the Hipster?: A Sociological Investigation*, ed. Mark Greif et al. (Brooklyn: n+1 Foundation, 2010), Kindle edition, loc1950.

toward the valorization of theoretical discourse, *TNI* reflects what Thomas Frank of the *Baffler* criticized as “high-powered academic disputation as a model for social protest.”³⁴

This academicized approach to activism is perhaps a product (and cause) of the Left’s retreat into ivory tower strongholds since the 1970s. As Peter Frase observes in *Jacobin*: “Aside from a few isolated corners of the Internet, the only place [young Occupy activists] are likely to have encountered ideas to the left of liberalism is the classroom, where New Left exiles continued to teach radical thought through the lean years. Post-structuralism and related bodies of theory are therefore bound to make up much of the vocabulary for young activists attempting to develop their political analysis beyond gut-level rage.”³⁵ But whatever its provenance, this academic turn represents an approach to politics that understands words and their arrangement as being of preeminent political importance. It is “poststructuralist thought leading through anarchism,” as Lennard put it at the *Jacobin* panel during her defense of Occupiers’ refusal to speak for a collectivity.

Indeed, the brand of radical politics represented by the *New Inquiry*—one heavily informed by poststructuralism, as well as identity politics—is deeply suspicious of collectivities, and apprehensive on behalf of the voices that such collectivities can erase. When Lennard speaks about Occupy, she could as easily be speaking on behalf of the magazine whose masthead she would later join and the concerns that it stands for: “Who gets to count when we create policies and programs based on notions of a majority or a commonality? I don’t know what I have in commonality with you. Yes, we probably all

³⁴ Thomas Frank, “To the Precinct Station,” *The Baffler*, 2012, <http://thebaffler.com/salvos/to-the-precinct-station/>.

³⁵ Peter Frase, “Modify Your Dissent,” *Jacobin*, 2012, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2012/12/modify-your-dissent/>.

eat, but am I looked at the same way as some of you are? No. And have I had to deal with same the things some of you have because of what's coded and what's assumed?

Absolutely not. And if we start assuming commonalities are certain things that we can definitely unite upon, that's only by definition going to exclude those that don't either fall in line or fall outside."³⁶ For *TNI*, speaking for oneself (and only oneself) is informed by anti-authoritarian, Occupy Ninja-style politics, and by a corresponding commitment to issues of identity and alterity. "We get described as radical, or having radical politics," current editor-in-chief Ayesha Siddiqi said. "The bar for radicalism is still quite low unfortunately. All that's really saying is that we take quote-unquote 'Others' seriously."³⁷

The term "identity politics" is a fraught one, often used pejoratively by unsympathetic commentators. (One *New Inquiry* writer memorably calls it a "conceptual trash bin."³⁸) However, the various strains of thought concerning race, gender, and sexuality that are grouped under this banner do often share a concern with framing society not as a homogenous body politic, but as a patchwork of overlapping and intersecting positions on a multi-dimensional matrix of identity. Just as Occupiers—especially anarchist Occupiers—were much more comfortable speaking only "for themselves" rather than for the collective, those guided by identity politics (including *TNI*) question the right of anyone who attempts to speak on behalf of others. Heavy metal star Ronnie James Dio earned the magazine's stamp of feminist approval because of a "peculiar absence of women from much of his lyrical universe [that] speaks volumes of

³⁶ Ackerman, "VIDEO: #OWS, a Debate on Left Politics and Strategy," *Jacobin*.

³⁷ Ayesha Siddiqi, interview by author, digital recording, New York City, January 14, 2015.

³⁸ Leonard Horne, "Real Human Being," *The New Inquiry*, March 12, 2015, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/real-human-being/>.

his refusal to speak for them.”³⁹ *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, on the other hand, is criticized for a journalistic style that “serves as a way of silencing” the voices the people whose lives he documents.⁴⁰ Even in defining the mission of the publication she founded and at the time helmed, Rachel Rosenfelt claimed, “*I speak for only myself* when I say I like to think *The New Inquiry*’s role in discourse is to advance the radical imagination.”⁴¹ (Emphasis added.)

The decision to emphasize autonomy over collectivity almost necessitates an emphasis on a particular brand of tactics at the expense of strategy. Short of a complete consensus on movement goals—a practical impossibility in groups beyond a certain size and a certain level of ideological homogeneity—enforced adherence to any overarching strategy, however arrived at, will impinge upon the autonomy of someone. It follows, then, that Occupy’s Ninja anarchists sought to leave decisions about protest action to the discretion of individuals and to make room for a “diversity of tactics,” activist jargon for a stance that accepts the validity of both violent and nonviolent tactics within a given movement or protest. Anarchists generally favor a diversity of tactics, while less militant and more moderate activists often prefer strict adherence to nonviolence.

The moral and pragmatic value of diversity of tactics was hotly debated within the Occupy movement, with much of the argument centering on “black blocs”—groups of protestors, usually anarchist, who dress in all black and sometimes engage in property

³⁹ “Come Down With Fire,” *The New Inquiry*, October 30, 2013, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/come-down-with-fire/>.

⁴⁰ Elliott Prasse-Freeman, “Be Aware: Nick Kristof’s Anti-Politics,” *The New Inquiry*, December 31, 2011, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/be-aware-nick-kristofs-anti-politics/>.

⁴¹ Kristin Iversen, “‘Don’t Wait for Permission’: Talking with Rachel Rosenfelt, Founder and Publisher of The New Inquiry,” *Brooklyn Magazine*, January 14, 2015, <http://www.bkmag.com/2015/01/14/dont-wait-for-permission-talking-with-rachel-rosenfelt-founder-and-publisher-of-the-new-inquiry/>.

damage and physical confrontations with police. Though not unheard of in Occupy protests held in New York and elsewhere, black blocs were especially visible at Occupy Oakland, where the dramatic images of masked protestors hurling bottles and smashing windows often dominated news coverage.⁴² Some activists worried that these groups undercut the efforts of more rigorously non-violent branches of OWS by associating the movement with actions that many Americans found contemptible, even frightening. Others argued that any attempt to isolate and renounce black bloc-style actions amounted to acting as “self-appointed ‘Peace Police’”⁴³ and splintering the movement. The *New Inquiry* sided with the latter camp. When socialist writer Chris Hedges wrote an essay calling black blocs “the cancer in Occupy,”⁴⁴ *TNI* republished anarchist David Graeber’s forceful response:

If the moral question is “is it defensible to threaten physical harm against those who do no direct harm to others,” one might say the pragmatic, tactical question is, “even if it were somehow possible to create a Peace Police capable of preventing any act that could even be interpreted as ‘violent’ by the corporate media, by anyone at or near a protest, no matter what the provocation, would it have any meaningful effect?” That is, would it create a situation where the police would feel they couldn’t use arbitrary force against non-violent protestors? The example of Zuccotti Park, where we achieved pretty consistent non-violence, suggests this is profoundly unlikely. And perhaps most importantly at all, even if it *were* somehow possible to create some kind of Peace Police that would prevent anyone under gas attack from so much as tossing a bottle, so that we could justly claim that no one had done anything to warrant the sort of attack that police have routinely brought, would the marginally better media coverage we would thus

⁴² Jason Montlagh, “Occupy Oakland Embraces Nonviolence, but Debates ‘Black Bloc’ Tactics,” *Time*, November 8, 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2098891,00.html>.

⁴³ David Graeber, “Concerning the Violent Peace-Police: An Open Letter to Chris Hedges,” *The New Inquiry*, February 9, 2012, <http://thenewinquiry.com/features/concerning-the-violent-peace-police-an-open-letter-to-chris-hedges/>.

⁴⁴ Chris Hedges, “The Cancer in Occupy,” *Truthdig*, February 6, 2012, http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_cancer_of_occupy_20120206.

obtain really be worth the cost in freedom and democracy that would inevitably follow from creating such an internal police force to begin with?⁴⁵

In the second part of her “Field Notes on Fashion and Occupy,” Gharavi approvingly quotes Graeber and chides Hedges, implying that, among other things, the latter is a hypocrite: “Other groups (in this case predominantly or totally male, unlike the many women involved in the bloc as a tactic) who dress alike and seemingly carry the same ideology escaped Hedges’ rhetoric of disease and bestiality: clergy and Veterans for Peace.”

This wasn’t the *New Inquiry*’s only show of solidarity with the more militant, illegalist edges of the Occupy movement. Editor Malcolm Harris cosigned “A Letter from Anarchists,” a communiqué issued by the CrimethInc collective.⁴⁶ This statement unambiguously defends a diversity of tactics, calling those who want the movement to adopt a code of nonviolence “controlling and self-important,” and insisting that violent actions are legitimate because “A lot of people have good reason to be angry. Not everyone is resigned to legalistic pacifism; some people still remember how to stand up for themselves.”⁴⁷ The desire to “stand up” for oneself is framed here as an individualist—even existential—act rather than a strategic maneuver to attain a political

⁴⁵ Graeber, “Concerning the Violent Peace-Police: An Open Letter to Chris Hedges.” This piece was run in other outlets as well, including *n+I*. However, as we shall see, the valence of its publication there is different because *n+I* acted primarily as a forum during the Occupy protests, whereas *TNI* had a more coherent editorial viewpoint.

⁴⁶ Harris, “Baby, We’re All Anarchists Now.”

⁴⁷ “Dear Occupiers: A Letter from Anarchists,” CrimethInc. Ex-Workers’ Collective, October 7, 2011, <http://www.crimethinc.com/blog/2011/10/07/dear-occupiers-a-letter-from-anarchists/>.

goal, and bears a resemblance to the kind of nebulous, go-your-own-way rhetoric you might see in a sneaker ad.⁴⁸

For many, the tendencies epitomized by the Ninjas and articulated by the *New Inquiry* are emblematic of the Occupy movement as a whole. The intransigent aversion to formal hierarchy and concrete demands, the sanctity placed on the right of every individual to speak for himself, and the at times brilliantly creative & carnivalesque occupations that were by turns playful and militant—these helped to define the movement, and to aid its explosive growth in the fall of 2011. But they don't represent the whole of OWS, or represent the views of every participant in it or supporter of it. There were many for whom art, self-expression, and prefiguration were less important than reform, targeted campaigns, and winning hearts & minds.

3.1.2 *Jacobin's* Occupy: Socialism, Unity, and Strategy

“The older and more experienced folks in OWS, by and large, didn't want a viral meme; they wanted a ‘mass movement,’ full of middle-class Americans taking peaceably to the streets and knocking on doors for a new batch of candidates. They wanted the 99 percent, not so much the Occupy. They wanted to see winnable political goals concerning banks and taxes, and they wanted to meet those goals, with success leading to success. They wanted mailing lists and buttons and matching T-shirts.”

~Nathan Schneider, *Thank You, Anarchy*⁴⁹

The leadership of *Jacobin* was no older than that of the *New Inquiry* when Occupy erupted—Bhaskar Sunkara was only 22 years old at the time—but as the last chapter

⁴⁸ See, for example: Jennifer Chan, “Converse celebrates individualism with ‘Made By You’ Campaign,” *Marketing*, March 19, 2015, <http://www.marketing-interactive.com/converse-celebrates-individualism-with-made-by-you-campaign/>.

⁴⁹ Schneider, *Thank You, Anarchy*, 147.

details, they were probably more seasoned activists. They were also less in the thrall of the idea of movement-as-artwork or movement-as-conversation. *Jacobin*'s hopes for Occupy were more traditional—the magazine generally argued for using the movement as a means to accumulate and exercise political power, to accrue pragmatic victories that lead to concrete changes. Their vision, then, was very similar to that of the Recidivist faction of OWS.

As committed and avowed Marxists, the editors of *Jacobin* were out of step with the anarchism and the often-uncompromising anti-statism of the *New Inquiry* and the Ninjas. “My own view of the anarchist ideology is similar to Trotsky’s,” Sunkara said, “who described it as a very good looking raincoat [...] but then when you put it on one day when it’s raining you find out that there’s holes in it.” Indeed, Sunkara believes that despite the presence of fervent and vocal anarchists, Occupy was not characterized so much by genuine anarchism (which, despite his misgivings, he calls “a respectable tradition”) as by what he terms “anarcho-liberalism,” or the implementation of theatrical, anarchist-inspired militancy in ways that are ultimately compatible with mainstream liberalism.⁵⁰

Sunkara first explained his conception of anarcho-liberalism in a post on the *Dissent* magazine blog in 2011,⁵¹ and two years later in *Jacobin*'s 14th issue, the magazine took up the idea as it analyzed Occupy with the benefit of some historical distance. By this point, with OWS having more or less run its course, *Jacobin* assembled a collection of essays centering on the question of socialist strategy in the post-Occupy

⁵⁰ Sunkara, interview by author.

⁵¹ Bhaskar Sunkara, “The ‘Anarcho-Liberal,’” *Dissent*, September 27, 2011, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/the-anarcho-liberal>.

era. Collectively signed by the *Jacobin* masthead, the issue's opening editorial took stock of Occupy and the tendency toward anarcho-liberalism that the editors believe first propelled the movement and then ultimately limited it. "[Anarcho-liberalism] is process-oriented, distrustful of formal organizational structures and hierarchies, and dedicated to direct action as both a tactic and an all-encompassing worldview," the editorial asserts. "Its boundaries are capacious enough to accommodate the most partisan of Democrats alongside the most hardcore of Occupiers."⁵² In this view, the true believers in the anarchist faction of Occupy had not succeeded in creating a legitimately anarchist movement—OWS was too ideologically incoherent for that. Instead, the Ninjas had merely succeeded in establishing an anarchist *style* of activism as Occupy's prevailing mode of engagement. Many of the Occupiers who participated in anarchist-tinted activities like direct actions or the general assembly had no desire to smash the state, and if there had been any reason to believe that such activities would lead to the demise of the American government, it is safe to say that many of these participants would want no part in them.

Though the *Jacobin* editors concede that "anarcho-liberalism deserves credit for most of the left's political victories in the United States over the last twenty-five years," their feelings toward it are, on the whole, skeptical:

But the anarcho-liberal mood on its own appears incapable of generating effective long-term opposition to global capitalism. While Occupy Wall Street succeeded brilliantly in drawing international attention to the scourge of inequality, it failed to sustain itself for more than a few months and crumbled in the face of state repression.

Occupy did inspire a number of offshoots doing important disaster-relief work, anti-foreclosure activism, and campaigns against police brutality. But on the whole, the relentlessly centrifugal and dissociative logic of anarcho-liberalism is a

⁵² "Power Play," *Jacobin*, 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/issue/a-world-to-win/>.

profound liability, not a source of strength. We need a unifying political project that can articulate a compelling vision of a new society, bring together disparate campaigns and organizations on an ongoing and coordinated basis, and mount a general political offensive against the system in its totality.⁵³

In contrast to the *New Inquiry* and Ninja inclination toward difference and autonomy, *Jacobin* expresses a vision of unity and centralization. Just look at the editorial's language: "a unifying political project," "bring together," "coordinated." As the editors saw it, the great weakness of Occupy was the same preoccupation with spontaneity and individuality that anarchists (and anarcho-liberals) found so compelling. The affective experience of "rupture" that had defined the movement for Natasha Lennard was not enough for the *Jacobin* masthead. For Occupy to succeed, it would have required the translation of that initial rupture into something more sustained, coherent, even institutional. Rather than linger on the emotional power of street rebellion, *Jacobin* hoped that this energy could be harnessed and put to work for the less glamorous tasks they believed necessary to alter society's economic base.

It is telling, then, that the panel discussion detailed at this chapter's opening was hosted by *Jacobin*, not *TNI*. It was, after all, titled "#OWS, a Debate on Left Politics and Strategy" (emphasis added). For the Ninja faction of Occupy and their ideological cousins at the *New Inquiry*, strategy was largely subordinated to the visceral immediacy of tactics. The panel, on the other hand, provided a venue for activists with different political inclinations to put forward and debate possible strategic visions. "We have lamented the absence of *political debate within the movement*," (emphasis in original) Seth Ackerman wrote in the text that accompanies the video of the panel on the *Jacobin* website. "Preoccupied (ha ha) with the day-to-day tactic of running an occupation,

⁵³ "Power Play," *Jacobin*.

stymied by an increasingly unwieldy General Assembly process, its participants have so far allowed the movement to drift along not just without a program but without even a sustained discussion of whether to have one, what it would mean to have one, and what a program would look like if they decided to adopt one.”⁵⁴

The panel was an attempt to make room for this discussion, but despite this effort and others like it, the question of strategy—most often formulated around whether the movement should issue concrete demands and, if so, what those demands should be and how they should be pursued—would never be definitively resolved. This is partly because Occupiers of all stripes sought to avoid a question that was so potentially divisive. Gould-Wartofsky writes, “Thus, the would-be occupiers came to a decision, early on, to eschew any and all demands, not because they knew better, but because they could not come to a consensus on what demands to make.”⁵⁵

It is also, however, partly attributable to a schism within Occupy regarding the importance of strategic planning. Like the Recidivists within the movement, writers at *Jacobin* tended to be friendly to a clear strategic vision. “The OWS reluctance to formulate demands might have been beneficial initially in that it might have created a more welcoming atmosphere to newly radicalized people,” Samuel Farber wrote. “But as movements develop and mature, they need to state more clearly what they stands [sic] for and not only what they stand against.”⁵⁶ Michael Hirsch characterized anti-demand

⁵⁴ Ackerman, “VIDEO: #OWS, a Debate on Left Politics and Strategy,” *Jacobin*.

⁵⁵ Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers*, loc 1037.

⁵⁶ Samuel Farber, “The Art of Demanding,” *Jacobin*, September 7, 2012, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2012/09/the-art-of-demanding/>.

sentiment within Occupy as “wrong on its face.”⁵⁷ Other writers and publications on the non-anarchist left tended to agree. In *Dissent*, for example, Ross Perlin favorably compared 2014 protests in Hong Kong to OWS for, among other things, “its clear and trenchant demands” and “its willingness to allow accountable coalition-style leadership.”⁵⁸ And even while David Marcus believed OWS-style horizontalism served as “an important break from the static strategies and categories of analysis that have slowed an aging and vertically inclined Left,” he also held that “horizontalists such as Graeber and [Marina] Sitrin will struggle to establish spaces of freedom if they cannot formulate a larger vision for a society.”⁵⁹

For most anarchists, by contrast, strategy was at best a low priority, at worst a betrayal of the movement’s values. Graeber, who allegedly invented the “We are the 99%” slogan and who the *New York Times* asserts “has a strong claim to being the house theorist of Occupy Wall Street,”⁶⁰ was as well poised as anyone to put forward an anarchist-compatible strategy for OWS, but in his voluminous commentary on the movement, he declines to get specific. Like many anarchists and their sympathizers, he felt that that “issuing demands means recognising the legitimacy - or at least, the power -

⁵⁷ Michael Hirsch, “Occupy and Labor: The Closest of Strangers,” *Jacobin*, February 13, 2012, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2012/02/occupy-and-labor-the-closest-of-strangers/>.

⁵⁸ Ross Perlin, “Two Occupys, and the New Global Language of Protest,” *Dissent*, March 30, 2015, https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/occupy-hong-kong-wall-street-new-global-language-of-protest.

⁵⁹ David Marcus, “The Horizontalists,” *Dissent*, Fall 2012, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-horizontalists>.

⁶⁰ Thomas Meaney, “Anarchist Anthropology,” *New York Times*, December 8, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/11/books/review/anarchist-anthropology.html?_r=0.

of those of whom the demands are made.”⁶¹ (Graeber himself recognizes the power of the state in *The Democracy Project*, his book on Occupy Wall Street, when he fingers suppression by the police and local governments as the main reason for the movement’s dissipation.⁶²) But in the place of demands, he seemed to only offer a strategy of tactics—of “acting as if the existing structure of power does not even exist” and creating “the institutions of a new society in the shell of the old.”⁶³ With Graeber, as with many anarchist critics, the question of how Occupy could get from precarious urban encampments to a radically transformed America—a strategy, if you will—is largely eschewed. But at least where demands were concerned, the anarchist tendency to avoid strategic discussion worked out for them. As long as the question was still open, they’d won: “the warring parties could not come to a consensus on just what demands to make, leading to the de facto decision to not make any demands at all.”⁶⁴

Jacobin writers expressed their concern about Occupy’s astrategic tendencies during the height of the movement. In a two-part analysis of anarcho-liberalism in relation to OWS published in September and October of 2011, contributing editor Cyrus Lewis worried about the residual influence that the Tactical Media (TM) movement and anti-globalization protests of the 1990s had on OWS. He writes: “The problem is that tacticality recasts what should be means into ends. In retrospect, it seems like what happened was that the least effective part of the sixties American variant of the New Left,

⁶¹ David Graeber, “Occupy Wall Street’s anarchist roots,” Al Jazeera, November 30, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/2011112872835904508.html>.

⁶² David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, A Crisis, A Movement* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013), 164-190.

⁶³ Graeber, “Occupy Wall Street’s anarchist roots,” Al Jazeera.

⁶⁴ Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers*, loc 4054.

i.e., its lifestyle-as-politics, get-your-freak-on individualism, was reanimated and divorced from its more effective elements, i.e., galvanizing vast swaths of the population to engage with, and activate on behalf of, goals set by the likes of the Civil Rights Movement and the feminist movement.”⁶⁵

While the Situationists and the 1968 rebellions in France serve as historical antecedents and guiding spirits for *TNI* and the Ninjas, Lewis sees them as a warning. He quotes the journal of theater critic Kenneth Tynan who, during the fervor of '68, attended a London party with a guest list heavy on protesters and their sympathizers. Tynan writes: “I made myself immediately unpopular by asking: ‘What’s your strategy? What is the next step the students will take?’ [Paris student leader Daniel] Cohn-Bendit said impatiently ‘the whole point of our revolution is that we do not follow plans. It is a spontaneous permanent revolution. We improvise it. It is like jazz.’ Everyone applauded and reproved my carping.”⁶⁶ “That we are hearing similar sentiments today is undeniable” Lewis appends. “That there are an intervening forty-four years is cause for concern.”⁶⁷ Later in the piece, Lewis considers the reverberations that May 1968 caused in the international left. He quotes political scientist David Chandler: “The resulted [sic], by default, in either a reduction of emancipatory claims to the ‘self-realization’ of the individual . . . or in the search for subaltern subjects on the margins of society. Instead of the construction of new collectivities, radical consciousness was dominated by a critical approach to organization, a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion,’ which derided mass politics and

⁶⁵ Cyrus Lewis, “The ‘Anarcho-Liberal’ Considered,” *Jacobin*, September 29, 2011, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2011/09/the-anarcho-liberal-considered/>.

⁶⁶ Cyrus Lewis, “The ‘Anarcho-Liberal’ Considered, Pt. II,” *Jacobin*, November 3, 2011, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2011/11/the-anarcho-liberal-considered-pt-ii/>.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

inevitably reduced political aspirations.”⁶⁸ Though the Chandler quote is from a paper published in 2004, well before either Occupy’s Ninjas or the *New Inquiry* existed, it targets tendencies that are central to each. For these two groups, “self-realization” is a key mission of Occupy. As Lennard put it in the *Jacobin* panel, “If you in the past two weeks have interacted in an uncoded way or a way that you didn’t expect or a way that was totally surprising to you, not based on how you assumed you could relate to the people around you, that is a challenge to the powers that be. That might make you think differently about how you live, eat, work, fuck, spend.”⁶⁹ And rather than seeing politicians, trade unions, or NGOs as potential allies, the Ninjas were seized with concerns about co-optation—a “hermeneutics of suspicion”—which limited the movement’s organizational horizons.

Despite his concerns, Lewis attempted to remain optimistic, hoping that through Occupy, the “plodding organizational predilections of the Old [Left] may well help to ground the New’s speedy virtuosity and provisional acrobatics.”⁷⁰ Writing a year later when OWS had all but withered on the vine, *Jacobin* associate editor Shawn Gude covered similar terrain with markedly less optimism. In his essay “Occupy Anti-Politics,” Gude lambasts “not a few occupiers” for their naïveté: “The world they sought would have no politics, no debased struggles for power. They didn’t just want to democratize power, but eradicate it. In their minds, the encampments were harmonious, experimental

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ackerman, “VIDEO: #OWS, a Debate on Left Politics and Strategy,” *Jacobin*.

⁷⁰ Lewis, “The ‘Anarcho-Liberal’ Considered, Pt. II,” *Jacobin*.

sites of prefiguration, a glimpse into the politics-free future. Transforming a stodgy corporate park into a liveable space, they would provide the model.”⁷¹

Like the Ninjas, Gude recognizes that the emotional rewards of spontaneous radical action are very real. In language that recalls Lennard’s rhapsodizing over rupture, Gude remembers an Occupy-affiliated anti-NATO protest in Chicago: “There was a street dance party, and then a group hug. A feeling of deep, visceral cohesiveness with my fellow occupiers overcame me. I felt fulfilled. This was, in many ways, Occupy encapsulated.” He differs, however, on the ultimate political value of this sense of connection: “It was marvelous. And, in retrospect, meaningless.”⁷²

Gude, like *Jacobin* generally, understands Occupy’s unwillingness to make demands as a quixotic desire to transcend politics rather than to practice them. Despite its avowed radicality, the emotive viscerality praised by the Ninjas and the *New Inquiry* proves to fit as easily within the workings of capitalism as the cultural rebellion of the 1960s:

The one percent is content with the fetishization of feelings, because it poses little threat to their plutocratic power: Build your small, mutual aid communities. We’ll continue our rapacious behavior, unmolested and untouched. We’ll continue to brandish the coercive power of the state, a state that, if so pressured, could pose an existential threat to capitalist power.

Politically, Occupy accomplished little because we were often too wary of *acting politically*, of making demands on the political system, of acknowledging conflict and structuring our movement accordingly. Many in the movement thought structure carried the patina of the establishment, that demand making would simply serve to legitimize the malevolent state. So we got an amorphous, highly

⁷¹ Shawn Gude, “Occupy Anti-Politics,” *Jacobin*, November 13, 2012, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2012/11/occupy-anti-politics/>.

⁷² *Ibid.*

decentralized movement that, after a miraculous flourish in its embryonic stages, tapered off.⁷³

The criticisms that *Jacobin* was making publicly were being made within the movement by its Recidivist faction. These activists shared a desire for a movement that was unified, pragmatic, and organized around material victories rather than artistic phenomenologies. In a note to other organizers Shen Tong, who had also participated in China's 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, urged, "If OWS does not have effective interfaces to the outside world of the equivalent set of faces and leaders, the outside world will choose for OWS."⁷⁴ There was a robust Demands Working Group that, while recognized by the New York City General Assembly, had its ideas shot down time after time by that same body.⁷⁵ While the Ninjas unsuccessfully attempted a dramatic seizure Duarte Square in Manhattan's Tribeca neighborhood and establish a new camp, the Recidivists more quietly organized the Occupy Our Homes campaign that fought foreclosures and installed homeless people in vacant houses.⁷⁶

"We don't counterpose our actions to reforms," Sunkara said of *Jacobin*,⁷⁷ and the Recidivists didn't either. During and after Occupy, *TNI* provided a home for writers who shared the Ninjas predilection for a tactical, artistic anarchism, and allowed them to spread their vision for an autonomist, almost spiritual social movement. *Jacobin* offered space to more strategically, socialistically inclined young writers. The same tensions that

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Schneider, *Thank You, Anarchy*, 95.

⁷⁵ Todd Gitlin, *Occupy Nation: The Roots, The Spirit, and the Promise of Occupy Wall Street* (New York: It Books, 2012), 97-99.

⁷⁶ Gould-Wartofsky, *The Occupiers*, loc 3330.

⁷⁷ Sunkara, interview by author.

activists within the movement struggled to navigate were illuminated by the ideological differences exhibited in these two little magazines. With these tensions unresolved, Occupy faded away. Yet both *Jacobin* and the *New Inquiry* remained, stronger and more prominent than before the movement. Indeed, as we'll see later in this chapter, the renewed visibility of a left beyond the Democratic Party helped to lift these young publications to a new level of notoriety.

3.2 *n+I*: A Political Turn

N+I always had a politics. Its very first issue included an excoriation of then-President George W. Bush,⁷⁸ an analysis of nude protests against the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib,⁷⁹ and musings about political paranoia in Russian culture.⁸⁰ This politics, however, was generally filtered through and secondary to literary and cultural concerns. “We weren’t a political movement,” co-founder Keith Gessen remembers. “We had politics, but they were a little bit all over the place.”⁸¹ Politics tended to be engaged with the eye of *littérateur* rather than that the fist of an activist. The writing was interpretative rather than prescriptive, and it addressed politics with a theoretical distance rather than a proximate, nuts-and-bolts pragmatism. Tellingly, the article that Gessen considers the “prototypical *n+I* piece”⁸² is Mark Greif’s “Mogadishu, Baghdad, Troy: or, Heroes Without War,” which uses *The Iliad* to illuminate the dynamics contemporary combat.

⁷⁸ Mark Greif, “W.,” *n+I* 1 (Fall 2004): 14-16.

⁷⁹ Mark Greif, “A Bunch of Nobodies,” *n+I* 1 (Fall 2004): 16-17.

⁸⁰ Masha Gessen, “Paranoiastan,” *n+I* 2 (Fall 2004): 125-130.

⁸¹ Keith Gessen, interview by author, digital recording, New York City, February 23, 2015.

⁸² Gessen, interview by author.

Greif's essay is keen and erudite, drawing revealing parallels between technologically-enhanced American soldiers and Homeric heroes, while contrasting current conflicts—in which America's adversaries lack such heroic capabilities—with the relative parity of Greece and Troy, Achilles and Hector. The subject is political, but the approach is literary. Similarly, *n+1*'s early publishing forays beyond its triannual journal tended to be cultural projects rather than explicitly political ones. The first pamphlets it issued—*A Practical Avant-Garde* (2007), *What We Should Have Known* (2008), *What Was The Hipster* (2010)—were analyses of contemporary art, the reading regimens of the young, and bohemia, respectively.

However, as the effects of the financial crisis deepened, the magazine's politics became more central and it began to approach them in a more direct, less literary way. On the first page of the fall 2009 issue—appropriately titled “Recessional”—the magazine pointed to what it saw as a renewed need for Marxist economic analysis in the wake of the mortgage crisis.⁸³ By summer 2010, *n+1* was collaborating with Harper Perennial to publish *The Diary of a Very Bad Year: Confessions of an Anonymous Hedge Fund Manager*. This series of interviews between Gessen and a remarkably candid Wall Street insider told the story of what had caused the crisis, how the financial sector responded, and how by 2009, the industry was already back to business as usual. The shift in focus was matched by one in self-identity; while promoting *The Diary of a Very Bad Year*, Gessen told the *Paris Review* that *n+1* was “increasingly turning into a group of autodidact economists.”⁸⁴

⁸³ “On Your Marx,” *n+1* 8 (Fall 2009): 1-6.

⁸⁴ Sofia Groopman, “Keith Gessen and Diary of a Very Bad Year,” *The Paris Review*, August 3, 2010, <http://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2010/08/03/keith-gessen-and-diary-of-a-very-bad-year/>.

The economic conditions, then, that precipitated Occupy Wall Street were also precipitating a shift on the pages of *n+1*. However, it was the movement itself that provoked the magazine's most direct involvement in organized politics. With the help of writer & documentarian Astra Taylor and Sarah Leonard of *Dissent* and *TNI*, *n+1* published a tabloid newspaper called the *Occupy! Gazette*. The first issue was 40 pages, beautifully illustrated, and full of movement reportage and analysis (see Figure 2). A crowdfunding campaign to cover printing costs reached its \$2,000 goal within an hour of launch, and would in the end bring in more than three times that amount.⁸⁵ By April 2012, *n+1* would run three more issues of the *Occupy! Gazette*, followed by a special issue dedicated to the trial of OWS activist Cecily McMillan published spring 2014. Selected articles from the *Gazette* were anthologized in *Occupy!: Scenes from Occupied America*, published by Verso.



Figure 2: Detail from Issue 1 of the *Occupy! Gazette*.

⁸⁵ "Occupy! The n+1 OWS Inspired Gazette," Kickstarter, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1206310680/occupy-the-n-1-ows-inspired-gazette/updates>.

Through the *Occupy! Gazette*, *n+1* took a more immediate and provisional tack than in its thrice-yearly journal, following along and making tentative judgments about a movement in progress. It also provided an approach distinct from that of either the *New Inquiry* or *Jacobin*. While the two younger publications had distinct visions for the movement that corresponded with opposing tendencies within OWS, the *Gazette* served as a forum for different, even contradictory perspectives that were united only by an underlying sympathy for the Occupy. Further, though the *Gazette* did publish the work of core organizers from within OWS, the contributions of its editors both there and in *n+1* proper affirm a certain outsidership in relation to the movement. Through their individual work, *n+1*'s masthead embodied a conception of the politicized intellectual as an engaged observer, one that is in touch with and supportive of mass movements but not truly of them. And while its involvement with OWS represents the apotheosis of *n+1*'s political engagement, the residue of this experience remains; in the years since Occupy, the magazine has proven consistently more interested in activist politics, even if literary and cultural matters remain its wheelhouse.

3.2.1 Following the Movement in Real Time

The *Gazette* made an effort to capture the rise of Occupy as it happened. For the editors of *n+1*, part of the draw of the little magazine form had been the prerogative to write slowly, and not to chase the news cycle. "We could write out of time in a way," Gessen said, "where we didn't have to necessarily comment on the latest thing that was happening."⁸⁶ The *Gazette* is a decisive break from this style. Rather than wait for the Occupy movement to run its course and weigh in with editorials in the next regularly

⁸⁶ Gessen, interview by author.

scheduled issue of $n+1$, the editors could engage with the movement as it unfolded, documenting events and making provisional analyses.

The first issue follows a loose thread of chronology, with accounts of events through the 36th day of the Occupation arranged in the order that they transpired and labeled with both their calendar date and their distance from the movement's birth on September 17th (e.g. Day 9, September 25; Day 29, October 15). These dates are joined to specific articles, the style of which varies. There are two sets of "Scenes" and one "Diary," in which Astra Taylor, Mark Greif, and Onnesha Roychoudhuri mix anecdotes ("I had a Zipcar tonight and was going into Manhattan, so I dropped off some provisions/supplies with the protestors."⁸⁷), images ("She is young, beautiful, her face rigid with conviction. But pan out and you'll see what illuminates her: the lights of Times Square."⁸⁸), and musings ("Our society, and the left especially, has this strange idea that young people are the revolutionary vanguard."⁸⁹). Other dates are adjoined to accounts of specific protest actions, like "Day 28, October 14" when the appearance of several thousand protesters prevented Mayor Bloomberg's effort to clear the park, ostensibly for cleaning.⁹⁰ Sometimes, the association between date and content is tenuous—under the banner of "Day 19, October 5," Penny Lewis discusses labor union involvement in OWS without a clear temporal peg.

This Day/Date conceit does not recur in subsequent issues, but the second issue still has diaries from Taylor and Gessen, and all issues contain reports from individual

⁸⁷ Astra Taylor and Mark Greif, "Scenes from an Occupation," *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 2.

⁸⁸ Onnesha Roychoudhuri, "Scenes From an Occupied New York," *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 19.

⁸⁹ Taylor and Greif, "Scenes from an Occupation," *Occupy! Gazette*.

⁹⁰ Michael Smith, "Bloomie Blinks," *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 17-18.

events that mark the Occupy's movement through real time. In style, these pieces bear little resemblance to traditional newspaper articles—there is no pretense of objectivity, the first-person viewpoint is liberally (almost universally) employed, and conventions like the “inverted pyramid” are routinely disregarded. However, in addition to borrowing the physical tabloid form, the *Gazette* also borrows the immediacy of the newspaper. The reflective nature of the archetypal *n+1* essay is supplanted with something more visceral. After the Zuccotti was raided by the NYPD, for example, the characteristically donnish Greif addresses the police with a raw and palpable anger: “What last night’s wastefulness reminded me is that I need to stop defending you, or worrying about your humanity and underlying goodness, or your possibility of recognizing your places as citizens, too.”⁹¹

3.2.2 A Forum, Not a Program

With the *New Inquiry*'s inclination toward artistic anarchy and *Jacobin*'s toward strategic & pragmatic socialism, each publication effectively took a side in the split between the movement's Ninjas and Recidivists. They advocated for opposing ideas of what the movement should be and how it should organize itself. In its *Occupy! Gazette*, by contrast, *n+1* chose to remain neutral. It was not, however, the all-inclusive, mostly substance-free cheerful neutrality found in the New York encampment's quasi-official broadside, the *Occupied Wall Street Journal*. The *Occupy! Gazette* featured economic and historical analyses, reports from Occupy-affiliated protests across the country and around the world, and well-defined, sometimes passionate, visions concerning movement tactics and strategy.

⁹¹ Mark Greif, “Open Letter,” *Occupy! Gazette* 3 (December 2011): 2.

TWO TAKES ON CO-OPTION

Jonathan Matthew Smucker

A Practical Guide to Co-Option

Almost immediately after a small band of activists first occupied Zuccotti Park in September of last year, many in the movement started expressing concern about potential co-option by more established and moderate forces. These concerns have become more central in 2012, an election year. Wariness is certainly warranted. But angst about an over-generalized sense of co-option may be an even bigger problem. We cannot build a large-scale social movement capable of achieving big changes without the involvement

Very few of the committed folks sacrificing time, safety, and comfort to make the occupations and street protests happen are going to switch uncritically into re-elect Obama mode.

And yet, something important is missing in many movement conversations about the threat of Democratic Party co-option: namely that this is a good problem to have. This is what *political leverage* looks like. Grassroots social justice movements haven't had much leverage for a very long time, and over the past months we've finally gotten a taste of it. Having leverage allows us to frame the national discussion and to pull things in a social justice direction. In a very short time span, Occupy Wall Street dramatically shifted the dominant national conversation from a conservative deficit framework to a critique of economic inequality and the political disenfranchisement of most Americans.

How often is a genuinely grassroots social justice movement in a position where it's framing the national narrative, and where the major political parties are reacting to us? Having this kind of leverage is perhaps the most important thing in politics. Without

Figure 3: Framing a debate in Issue 4.

Several times during its run, the *Gazette* counterposes different perspectives on the same topic, framing two articles as part of one debate. Under the bolded and underlined heading “THE POLICE,” the first issue contained back-to-back articles about the relationship between Occupy Wall Street and law enforcement. In the first, originally published on the *n+1* website, Jeremy Kessler argues that the movement should court the police and persuade them to join the movement.⁹² In a strongly worded rebuttal, Jasper Bernes, Joshua Clover, and Annie McClanahan call Kessler’s piece “a virtual compendium of the fallacies, apologetics, wishful thinking, and historical misprisions assembled to defend the strategy of police compliance.”⁹³ This dialogic framing was repeated in the fourth issue under the banner “TWO TAKES ON CO-OPTION” (see Figure 3). In “A Practical Guide to Co-Option,” Jonathan Matthew Smucker argues for a Recidivist-style pragmatism, writing, “We have to muster the courage and smarts to be

⁹² Jeremy Kessler, “The Police and the 99 Percent,” *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 25-26.

⁹³ Jasper Bernes, Joshua Clover, and Annie McClanahan, “Percentages, Politics, and the Police,” *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 27.

able to help forge and maintain alliances that we can influence but not fully control.”⁹⁴ Marisa Holmes, on the other hand, takes a stand for a Ninja-inflected ideological purity, and warns against working with NGOs, labor unions, or liberal lobbying groups. “The Occupy movement is not a shiny object to be sold to the highest bidder,” she writes. “It is an authentic expression of anger and frustration at the existing system and a dream of a better tomorrow.”⁹⁵

Even when they weren’t explicitly juxtaposed as two sides of a debate, the *Gazette* housed a range of perspectives. Left leaning economic wonks like Mike Konczal and Doug Henwood appear on its pages, as do on-the-ground movement organizers like Holmes, Yotam Moram, and Zoltan Gluck. Autonomist squatter punk Heather Gautney shares space with *n+1* founding editor Marco Roth, who describes himself as “the good liberal I stubbornly remain,”⁹⁶ and with former Wall Street analyst Alexis Goldstein. The paper doesn’t align itself with the Recidivist or the Ninja tendencies within Occupy, and instead makes room for both, running articles on reforming the Federal Reserve⁹⁷ and seizing abandoned buildings for use as extralegal communes.⁹⁸ As long as a piece is broadly in sympathy with Occupy, few restrictions seem to be placed on its ideological charge.

⁹⁴ Jonathan Matthew Smucker, “A Practical Guide to Co-Option,” *Occupy! Gazette* 4 (April 2012): 6.

⁹⁵ Marisa Holmes, “The New Shiny Object: Money in the Occupy Movement,” *Occupy! Gazette* 4 (April 2012): 9.

⁹⁶ Marco Roth, “Letters of Resignation from the American Dream,” *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 28.

⁹⁷ Doug Henwood, “Mend It, Don’t End It: Some Facts on the Fed,” *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 12-13.

⁹⁸ Heather Gautney, “Occupy The Commons,” *Occupy! Gazette* 2 (2011): 34-37.

The *Gazette*'s breadth is also geographic. *N+1* is headquartered in New York City, the same city, of course, as the first Occupy encampment. A preponderance of its first person accounts, then, is centered on the events that transpired there. However, each issue includes reports from Occupy activists stationed elsewhere. Correspondents from Oakland, Atlanta, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Minneapolis, and Cincinnati write about Occupy activities in their towns and locate them within local histories of activism. The *Gazette* even looks abroad. Italian economist Emiliano Brancaccio is interviewed about youth movements active in his country,⁹⁹ and two separate articles explore the example of Italian autonomism.¹⁰⁰ Greenham Common, the feminist anti-nuclear encampment in England, is discussed as a historical antecedent to Occupy,¹⁰¹ as is occupation of London's Church of the Holy Cross by sex workers in the 1982.¹⁰²

Individual *Gazette* editors do express specific opinions about the direction they believe the movement should go. In the first issue, for example, Astra Taylor shares her hopes that the movement would grow in a direction that would later become associated with the Recidivists: "Assumptions about organization—namely the obsession with process and the allergy to institution building—will have to be reconsidered if we want to harness this outburst of political enthusiasm and become an actual force to be reckoned with. The general assembly model, which already masks underlying divisions, should be a tool and not a fetish. Leadership, discipline, and coalition building are necessary if we

⁹⁹ Emilio Carnevali, "The 'demolishers' of October 15 and the future of the movement," trans. Nikil Saval, *Occupy! Gazette* 2 (2011): 31-33.

¹⁰⁰ Gautney, "Occupy the Commons," *Occupy! Gazette*.
Stephen Squibb, "Neo Autonomia," *Occupy! Gazette* 3 (December 2011): 25-27.

¹⁰¹ Ann Snitow, "Greenham Common," *Occupy! Gazette* 3 (December 2011): 20-24.

¹⁰² Selma James, "Hookers in the House of Lords (1983)," *Occupy! Gazette* 4 (April 2012): 24-26.

want to create more than an inspirational counterculture.”¹⁰³ However, this perspective is presented as just one among many; indeed, on the page following this call for institutions and collaboration with possible allies, Beka Economopolous advocates a more militant approach, even if it alienates outsiders: “We must draw a line, disavow the Democrats explicitly, make our messaging a little uncomfortable. Yes, perhaps split the support, lest we not be co-opted.”¹⁰⁴

Only once do the editors weigh in as editors (as opposed to as individual writers) and endorse a specific set of opinions, and even there they do so gently, almost with hat in hand. Near the end of the first issue, a piece attributed to “The Editors” offers up a list of possible actions and goals. Rather than adopt forceful language and headlining this section “Demands” or “The Way Forward,” it is humbly titled “Suggestions,”¹⁰⁵ as if *n+1* is trying to defuse accusations that it is just another outside entity looking to commandeer the movement. And in their varied tone and ideological register, the suggestions don’t cohere into a single vision that could be seen as prodding OWS in a definitive direction. The suggestions run the gamut of militancy, from the reformist (“Enforce the Volcker Rule!”) to radical (“Nationalize the Banks”) to tactically aggressive (“Occupy everything”). Some suggestions are clearly jokes (“No more break-ups.”) and some operate in a gray area between jokiness and seriousness (“No corporate money in elections, ever. And a ban, for two generations, on all candidates with a degree from the Ivy League.”).

¹⁰³ Astra Taylor, “Occupation Breakdown,” *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 34.

¹⁰⁴ Beka Economopolous, “Internal Memos,” *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 35.

¹⁰⁵ The Editors, “Suggestions,” *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 37.

That last line might be a bit of self-deprecation—*n+1*, as we learned in the last chapter, was forged in the posh foundries of the Ivy League—but it’s also part of a pattern that recurs in the *Gazette*. While the paper gives voice to a wide range of perspectives within the Occupy movement, it shows a particular interest in running stories on the presence of OWS on university campuses, and in giving voice to the concerns of students. There are dispatches from UC-Davis¹⁰⁶ and UC-Berkeley.¹⁰⁷ Rachel Singer writes on the 2008 occupation of the New School.¹⁰⁸ A 2001 sit-in that pushed Harvard to guarantee all of its campus workers a living wage is held up as an example of how occupations can succeed even when they don’t shut anything down.¹⁰⁹ Rebecca Nathanson discusses New York’s all-city student assembly, and how Occupy led to new cross-campus collaboration between activists at different universities.¹¹⁰ There is an article about connecting student activism with broader movements against austerity and neoliberalism,¹¹¹ and a reprint of a galvanizing email that circulated amongst Berkeley grad students urging them to support the Oakland general strike.¹¹² The issue of student debt is revisited multiple times.¹¹³ Eli Schmitt sees the whole movement as the translation

¹⁰⁶ Geoffrey Wildanger, “Occupy UC Davis,” *Occupy! Gazette* 3 (December 2011): 14-15.

¹⁰⁷ Kathryn Crim, “Bulldozers of the Mind,” *Occupy! Gazette* 3 (December 2011): 11-13.

¹⁰⁸ Rachel Singer, “The New School in Exile, Revisited,” *Occupy! Gazette* 3 (December 2011): 4-8.

¹⁰⁹ Amy C. Offner, “What Can You Do When You Can’t Shut It Down?,” *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 5-6.

¹¹⁰ Rebecca Nathanson, “Student Power,” *Occupy! Gazette* 3 (December 2011): 8-10.

¹¹¹ Christopher Herring and Zoltan Gluck, “Re-Articulating the Struggle for Education: From Berkeley to New York,” *Occupy! Gazette* 3 (December 2011): 16-18.

¹¹² Michelle Ty, *Occupy! Gazette* 2 (2011): 7-9.

¹¹³ Mike Konczal, “Student Debt History and Some Solutions,” *Occupy! Gazette* 2 (2011): 24-26. Robert Oxford, “Occupy Student Debt Report-back,” *Occupy! Gazette* 4 (April 2012): 17.

of collegiate norms into activism, arguing that the “traces of the contemporary college experience are all over the current rhetoric and tactics of OWS.”¹¹⁴ This special interest in the academy and student voices makes sense given the wide involvement of students and recent graduates in the movement. It also reflects *n+I*'s target audience of, as Gessen puts it, by “disgruntled grad students.”¹¹⁵

It is difficult, however, to discern the specific proportion of *Gazette* contributors that are students, or, for that matter, that belong to any other demographic group. In a choice that differentiates *n+I*'s *Occupy! Gazette* from its journal, no space is set aside for author bios. The only information the reader gets about a given writer is what she chooses to divulge in her article. In addition to adhering to the conventions of newspapers rather than those of little magazines, this choice also reflects the radically democratic ethos of Occupy Wall Street. The established and the accredited are not marked as such; their articles are thrown into the mix with writers who are basically unknown, and unless a reader recognizes their names, they enter the fray with nothing but the power of their writing and their ideas. As in the horizontally organized Occupy movement itself, this can be an opportunity for the unheralded to stand on something close to equal footing with the renowned. However, as with Occupy, the pageant of equality also serves to obscure important information. Readers are not informed of the authors' backgrounds, and therefore can't judge what stake these authors may hold in a given argument. They are unaware of the demographic makeup of the writers *n+I* has chosen to represent the movement. And, while the personal connections that drive much opportunity in the publishing world are almost always obscured to the outsider, the complete absence of

¹¹⁴ Eli Schmitt, “Best Years of Our Lives,” *Occupy! Gazette* 3 (December 2011): 18-20.

¹¹⁵ Gessen, interview by author.

bios further conceals the industry's interlocking pieces. It makes it more difficult to tell who edits or writes for what magazine, which publications are strongly represented on the *Gazette's* pages, and how what proportion of the articles are by genuinely fresh voices as opposed to the already well-published.

3.2.3 Intellectuals as Engaged Observers

Even as the *Gazette* contains many firsthand accounts of protests, meetings, and anecdotes gleaned from Occupy encampments, there is a distance between *n+I* and the movement proper. *N+I* supports Occupy Wall Street, but it is not *of* Occupy Wall Street. Rather than throw themselves into day-to-day organizing, or even to make the decision to self-identify as members of it, they positioned themselves on the sidelines, choosing the role of engaged observer. Like Gramsci's traditional intellectuals, they act as a class apart, even as they serve as a vehicle for discourse about and around Occupy.

Despite its fascination with and enthusiasm for Occupy, the *Gazette's* editors litter the paper with examples of rhetorical distancing. In her October 9 Diary entry, editor Astra Taylor mentions "a few conversations with people involved far more involved [sic] than I am,"¹¹⁶ and in an entry marked October 21, Sarah Resnick is amused that a woman had "mistaken us [Resnick and Taylor] as figures of import, radicals of influence, though we were not."¹¹⁷ *N+I* co-founder Marco Roth discusses what he "wanted from OWS, too, as an outsider."¹¹⁸ Even when Keith Gessen participates in a function officially within the orbit of the movement—the first meeting of the "writers and artists affinity

¹¹⁶ Astra Taylor, "Diary," *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 14.

¹¹⁷ Astra Taylor and Sarah Resnick, "Rumors," *Occupy! Gazette* 2 (2011): 3.

¹¹⁸ Roth, "Letters of Resignation from the American Dream," *Occupy! Gazette*, 28.

group”—he describes it in terms that suggest a distance from Occupy and its styles of organizing, expressing wonder that they’re meeting “in the atrium of 60 Wall Street, like a real live working group.”¹¹⁹ Similarly, Mark Greif’s participation in a protest action in the Financial District left him feeling fraudulent: “I felt fake, because, in class and privileges, I have plenty in common with those people standing in line to go to their jobs in the bank.”¹²⁰

Some of this rhetorical separation is just an acknowledgement of facts. While they often printed essays by core OWS organizers, the editors of *n+1* and the *Occupy! Gazette* were not themselves sleeping in the park or coordinating protest actions. And though *n+1* was supportive of the movement, it was not an organ of the movement. The *Gazette* was not sanctioned by the New York City General Assembly, or by any other “official” Occupy body. However, the underground papers of the 1960s and 70s—papers like the *Los Angeles Free Press*, the *Berkeley Barb*, and the *East Village Other*—did not need to be endorsed by the Vietnam Day Committee to consider themselves affiliated with the anti-war movement. Even within the sphere of Occupy, publications like the *Occupied Wall Street Journal*, a boosterish broadside, and *Tidal*, a theoretical journal, were the products of small cliques rather than open, officially recognized working groups,¹²¹ yet neither had any issue using an expansive “we” when talking about the movement.

Indeed, the conscious distancing of *n+1* from the movement it sought to serve and support reflects an orientation of how the magazine believes intellectuals should relate to social movements. This is an issue that the editors have addressed explicitly, in

¹¹⁹ Keith Gessen, “Zuccotti Diary,” *Occupy! Gazette* 2 (2011): 20.

¹²⁰ Mark Greif, “Occupy the Boardroom,” *Occupy! Gazette* 2 (2011): 29.

¹²¹ Schneider, *Thank You, Anarchy*, 94-95.

interviews, the *Gazette*, and *n+1* proper. When reflecting on the role of *n+1* vis-à-vis Occupy, Keith Gessen told me: “It was an intervention in the sense of when it first started, I feel like the reaction people had was “Oh, these are kind of scruffy, unwashed idiots, unemployed people,” whereas for us, it was this thing that we’d been waiting for. [...] The things that these people are saying—whether or not they are employed or washed—are true. It was an attempt to get those people, those ideas into a more respectable framework. [...] In that sense, I thought we were lending what legitimacy we could, and that seemed important.”¹²² In the early days, when the movement’s reputation was especially malleable, Gessen saw his magazine as offering its imprimatur to Occupy Wall Street. And unlike *Jacobin* or the *New Inquiry*, *n+1* had at the time a large enough reputation that such an imprimatur held some value. The publication was seven years old, and had accrued a respect in literary, media, and academic circles out of proportion with its small circulation. *N+1*’s early and fervent endorsement of Occupy likely shaped how the movement was seen by its readership—a readership that contains a disproportionate number of writers, editors, and other opinion shapers. Gessen’s articulation of his magazine’s role in OWS reveals something about the way *n+1* believes that intellectuals should interact with social movements. In this model, intellectuals endorse movements much like politicians endorse candidates. They use the credibility that they have acquired and bestow somewhere that they think it is deserved, or could do some good. *N+1* readers who had previously thought of OWS as naive and foolish may reassess their opinions when a magazine that they respect is pouring its effort into the movement.

A distinct but related role *n+1* played was that of translator, or what Gessen calls getting “those ideas in a respectable framework.” The ideas that were expressed in

¹²² Gessen, interview by author.

Zuccotti Park were often inchoate. The anger was a response to legitimate grievances and the financial sector was a reasonable target, but the manner in which protestors expressed their opinions—marches, urban encampments, broad slogans like “We are the 99 Percent!”—could be perceived as unsophisticated or inarticulate. (See, for example, the *New York Times* headline “In Private, Wall St. Bankers Dismiss Protestors as Unsophisticated,”¹²³ or, in the *Independent*, “These protests are inarticulate, weak, and self-righteous.”¹²⁴) However, sophistication and articulateness are qualities that *n+I* has in spades. By employing their ample talents in rhetoric and polemic—and by bringing in similarly skilled writers to do the same—they reframed the sometimes imprecise or ham-fisted analyses made through street protest, and argued in a language that is more persuasive to a highly educated audience. This role—intermediary between the movement and the cultural elite—is somewhat at odds with the radically horizontalist impulse that helped drive Occupy. It is, however, pragmatic. Thus, in its mission, if not its content, *n+I* was acting in accordance with values closer to the Recidivist than the Ninja end of the OWS continuum.

But *n+I* may have had other reasons for maintaining some distance from the movement proper. In a moment of self-reflection in the *Gazette*, Astra Taylor discussed her belief that social movements can be threatening to people whose self-worth is tied up in their intelligence, and that this can hinder full engagement:

Movements, I realized, are scary for people who like to feel smart. It’s hard to feel clever when you’re trying to rally people to come participate in something;

¹²³ Nelson D. Schwartz, “In Private, Wall St. Bankers Dismiss Protestors as Unsophisticated,” *New York Times*, October 14, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/15/business/in-private-conversation-wall-street-is-more-critical-of-protesters.html?_r=0.

¹²⁴ James Harkin, “These protests are inarticulate, weak, and self-righteous,” *Independent*, October 18, 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/james-harkin-these-protests-are-inarticulate-weak-and-selfrighteous-2372026.html>.

instead, you're more likely to feel like a nervous party host or a cheerleader or a nag, silly instead of superior. This goes for attending political actions as well as organizing them. As a friend wrote a few weeks ago, "There is something about the anonymity of being a body in a mass protest that grates on the nerves of those who like their names placed next to things."

While it's true, as a good number of my interlocutors pointed out, that protests have to be more than just symbolic, lest they be nothing more than a positive experience for the participants—a kind of primal scream therapy for the already privileged—the same could be said of critique. Critique can be as pointless as hanging out in a square playing bongos, just as self-affirming and self-satisfied. Let those of us who tend towards words on the page remember that.¹²⁵

This argument is similar to Ben Davis' theories about the artist's incompatibility with social movements, glossed in the last chapter. In allowing oneself to join a unified mass, the artist or writer is forced to sacrifice the bourgeois qualities required to win him professional esteem: individuality, difference, a singular personal brand. By publishing the *Occupy! Gazette* under the *n+1* banner and articles under their own names, the editors and writers still manage to showcase their cleverness and style, and to keep their labor from being anonymously subsumed into the movement.

3.2.4 A High Point, and a Pivot Point

This distance notwithstanding, *n+1* was clear in its support of Occupy Wall Street and engaged with the movement's concerns. In its first post-occupation issue, the magazine was almost breathless in its endorsement of OWS:

No demands have yet been issued to a political system that couldn't accommodate the in any case, but the principles of the new society are clear enough: nonviolence; genuine democracy, including the right of assembly; and economic justice. At the moment, the movement to build that society looks like the country's last best hope. It's also the first serious political hope—not less serious for its fragility—that many of us have been able to entertain about our country in our few years or decades of adult life.

¹²⁵ Taylor, "Occupation Breakdown," *Occupy! Gazette*, 33.

*Occupy the Future!*¹²⁶

It also defended the need for intellectuals to get behind the movement, despite the perils of populism:

To some ears it will sound paradoxical and even dangerous for intellectuals to champion populism. Can there really be such a thing as an intellectual populism, an internationalist populism? The record of some historical populisms would cast doubt on these possibilities. But the same possibilities are the era's necessities, and already they are being embodied by a movement that recognizes its kinship with popular uprisings from Cairo and Tel Aviv to Athens and Madrid and Santiago de Chile, one whose chief slogan was inspired by the work of a progressive economist—Joseph Stiglitz—and reportedly first proposed by a radical anthropologist, David Graeber.¹²⁷

Indeed, as Francis Mulhern noted in the *New Left Review*, “Occupy marked a high point of direct political engagement for *n+I*.”¹²⁸ This enthusiasm makes sense when one considers the ways in which OWS lends itself to an interpretation as a discursive project. Like the *New Inquiry* and unlike *Jacobin*, the literary-minded *n+I* was disposed to emphasizing the aspects of the movement that resemble discourse. For example Manissa Maharawal wrote in the *Gazette* that she thinks Occupy Wall Street is “less of a movement and more of a space. It is a space in which people who feel a similar frustration with the world as it is and as it has been are coming together and thinking about ways to recreate this world.” Maharawal also uses language that precisely echoes Rachel Rosenfelt’s vision of *TNI*, seeing occupied Zuccotti as “a space of possibility, a space of radical imagination.”¹²⁹ On the very same page, Amy Offner writes that the “occupation’s greatest achievement, though, has been its transformation of public

¹²⁶ “A Left Populism,” *n+I* 13 (Winter 2012): 10.

¹²⁷ “A Left Populism,” *n+I*, 10.

¹²⁸ Francis Mulhern, “A Party of Latecomers,” *New Left Review* 93 (May-June 2015), <http://newleftreview.org/II/93/francis-mulhern-a-party-of-latecomers>.

¹²⁹ Manissa Maharawal, “Standing Up,” *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 6.

discussion. Those who denigrate the crowd at Zuccotti Park as incoherent fail to recognize the protest's constructive role in fostering discussion of social and economic issues."¹³⁰ Sarah Leonard quotes a speech that George Washington gave to the Continental Congress, an event she compares to Occupy as "another discursive assembly of sorts, albeit with a considerably less progressive stack and no anarchists."¹³¹ In suggesting that the Occupiers don't have a responsibility to engage in the mechanics of reform, Liza Featherstone adopts another metaphor favored by the *New Inquiry*: "If OWS does lead to any sort of change—whether reforms, like a millionaire tax, or more serious rearrangement of society—such change most likely won't be led by the residents of Zuccotti Park, many of whom would not even welcome such a role. To them, occupation is enough, at least for now. They are best understood as artists. A person who makes a stunning installation that makes us see the world in a new way doesn't have a responsibility to then run for city council."¹³² Some writers do call for practical politics (Mark Rudd: "Part of the strategy has to be coalition-building."¹³³), but these directives are seldom elucidated in any detail. Discourse, art, the subjective experience of occupying public space—these are things that *n+1* is more equipped and willing to discuss than the intricacies of activism. Therefore, it makes sense that the magazine's most direct engagement with politics would be through a movement that places such a high value on these things.

¹³⁰ Offner, "What Can You Do When You Can't Shut It Down," *Occupy! Gazette*, 6.

¹³¹ Leonard, "Park to Park," *Occupy! Gazette*, 19.

¹³² Liza Featherstone, "What's Next?," *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 36.

¹³³ Mark Rudd, "Dear OWSers," *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 8.

Even if *n+I* has not engaged as aggressively in politics since OWS, the magazine has proven *more* political in the wake of the movement than it was before its advent. As Michelle Goldberg noted in *Tablet* in 2013, “*n+I*, the journal [Benjamin] Kunkel cofounded in 2004, has morphed from a hipster downtown cultural-literary publication feted by *The New York Times Magazine* to a far more explicitly political one.”¹³⁴ Around the same time, the *New Statesman* also observed this trend, writing, “The hip literary magazine *n+I* has also taken a decidedly political turn in recent years.”¹³⁵ While the founding editors always held interest in politics, their identities were primarily literary or academic. The leadership torch has since been passed to Nikil Saval and Dayna Tortorici. Saval is a former union organizer, who covered labor issues in the *Gazette*,¹³⁶ and has written a history of the white-collar workplace.¹³⁷ Tortorici co-edited the *n+I* book *The Trouble is the Banks*, and her writing is deeply informed by feminist criticism. Together, their tenure at *n+I* has answered critiques that the magazine was too white and too male, and it has continued to the turn toward direct politics. Issue 21, for example, contains a “Labor & Letters” symposium made up of five essays from editors of left magazines that, according to Saval, “reveal the challenges publishing workers face in fighting for conditions that match the high ideals for which their workplaces claim to stand.”¹³⁸ Both of the previous occasions when the magazine devoted so many pieces to a single issue

¹³⁴ Michelle Goldberg, “A Generation of Intellectuals Shaped by 2008 Crash Rescues Marx From History’s Dustbin,” *Tablet*, October 14, 2013, <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/148162/young-intellectuals-find-marx>.

¹³⁵ Max Strasser, “Who are the new socialist wunderkinds of America?,” *New Statesman*, November 9, 2013, <http://www.newstatesman.com/international-politics/2013/11/who-are-new-socialist-wunderkinds-america>.

¹³⁶ Nikil Saval, “Occupy Philadelphia,” *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 23-24.
Nikil Saval, “Labor, Again,” *Occupy! Gazette* 2 (2011): 30-31.

¹³⁷ Nikil Saval, *Cubed: A Secret History of the Workplace* (New York: Doubleday, 2014).

¹³⁸ Nikil Saval, “Introduction,” *n+I*, 2015, <https://nplusonemag.com/issue-21/labor-letters/introduction/>.

occurred pre-Occupy, and each time the subject was literary. In 2006, *n+1* responded to criticism from James Wood by printing a nine-essay symposium on “American Writing Today,”¹³⁹ and in 2010, Gessen, Greif, Kunkel, and Roth all wrote responses to the Jonathan Franzen novel *Freedom*.¹⁴⁰ This shift toward politics is also reflected in the magazine’s dedication of space to a roundtable on police brutality,¹⁴¹ explanations of net neutrality,¹⁴² meditations on the journalistic ethics of covering the desperately poor,¹⁴³ and, in the Fall 2015 issue, two essays grouped together under the heading “The Annals of Activism.”¹⁴⁴ It is a transition that is also reflected in the career trajectory of founding editor Benjamin Kunkel. Kunkel’s debut novel *Indecision* was released to great acclaim in 2005; in 2014, he released a book of essays billed as “a tour through the world of Marxist thought”¹⁴⁵ on *Jacobin*’s imprint, transitioning from novelist to leftist public intellectual.

N+1 is still very much a literary endeavor, regularly publishing fiction and poetry, and producing critical takes on the literary world like the 2014 book *MFA vs. NYC*. However, Occupy and the financial crisis that precipitated it have left their mark on the

¹³⁹ Elif Batuman et al., “American Writing Today: A Symposium,” *n+1* 4 (Spring 2006): 63-116.

¹⁴⁰ Marco Roth et al., “Four Responses to *Freedom*,” *n+1* 10 (Fall 2010): 121-137.

¹⁴¹ Cosme Del Rosario-Bell et al., “Hands Up,” *n+1*, November 26, 2014, <http://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/hands-up/>.

¹⁴² Andrew Jacobs, “Net Neutrality,” *n+1* 19 (Spring 2014): 161-173.

¹⁴³ Anand Vaidya, “The Journalist and the Poor,” *n+1* 15 (Winter 2013): 173-180.

¹⁴⁴ George Blaustein, “Screw Us and We Multiply,” *n+1* 23 (Fall 2015): 107-133.

Emily Bass, “How to Survive a Footnote,” *n+1* 23 (Fall 2015): 135-157.

¹⁴⁵ “*Utopia or Bust: A Guide to the Present Crisis*,” Verso Books, <http://www.versobooks.com/books/1567-utopia-or-bust>.

magazine; a clear and direct critical engagement with politics has become more central to the magazine's content and identity.

3.3 The Rise of the Millennial Marxist

In the years after Occupy faded from sight, the mainstream media would set about assessing the legacy of the movement and searching for the traces that it left behind. Conveniently, there was a trace that journalists could find without even leaving their Twitter feeds: the new little magazines. In a sense, it was natural that they would turn to outlets like the *New Inquiry*, *Jacobin*, and *n+1*. These publications share a lot in common with the movement—they're young, radical, pugnacious, and independent of institutional affiliation. In varying styles and to varying degrees, they each participated in Occupy Wall Street and helped to shape its discourse. And, meaningfully, they were composed of the *kind* of people journalists are comfortable talking to. The mastheads of little magazines aren't made up of the angry homeless youth who populated the Occupy encampments. Rather, they look a lot like media professionals, and indeed they *are* media practitioners, if with less money and a more pronounced left-wing bent than their mainstream peers. They are, as we've seen, well educated, articulate, and accessible via the same social media platforms that reporters also frequent. They've produced a massive amount of writing to sift through, draw conclusions about, and quote from, much of it freely available online. They are also disproportionately located in New York, the heart of American media, and therefore easy to track down and interview.

Despite the apparent ease of framing the little magazine renaissance as a byproduct of the Occupy generation, it was a narrative that took some time to establish

itself. During the height of the Occupy protests, the mainstream media paid relatively little attention to the new little magazines. The Bluestockings panel earned *Jacobin* and, to a lesser extent, the *New Inquiry* a few mentions, but the stories were more about the purported lack of objectivity of *New York Times* freelancer Natasha Lennard than about the magazines themselves. Malcolm Harris' Radiohead prank and, later, his fight against a subpoena for his Twitter account were both well covered, but the magazine he wrote for was mentioned as an aside, if at all. The *Village Voice* noted the release of *n+1*'s *Occupy! Gazette* ("A 36-page glossy is a pretty weighty way to tell a story that's in constant flux, but hey. Why not."¹⁴⁶), and Gawker found occasion to run the headline "Keith Gessen Arrested Doing Admirable Thing," reporting, with characteristic verve, that "N+1 founder, sad young literary man, frequent New Yorker contributor, and onetime top-tier Gawker character Keith Gessen was arrested today at the Occupy Wall Street protests."¹⁴⁷ But the little magazines weren't often portrayed as the theorists of apparently resurgent left.

Even as New York's little magazine scene started to garner wider attention near the end of 2011 and through 2012, it was rarely linked to the Occupy movement that was occurring concurrently. When the *New York Times* ran a profile of the *New Inquiry* just two weeks after Zuccotti Park was raided, OWS was only mentioned in passing as a way to add some rebellious color to its portrait of a *TNI* gathering ("At the most recent salon two weeks ago, Will Canine, the operations director, showed up with 5 o'clock shadow

¹⁴⁶ Rosie Gray, "Occupy! Gazette Flooding the Occupy Wall Street Print Media Zone," *Village Voice*, October 20, 2011, <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/occupy-gazette-flooding-the-occupy-wall-street-print-media-zone-6682949>.

¹⁴⁷ Hamilton Nolan, "Keith Gessen Arrested Doing Admirable Thing," *Gawker*, November 17, 2011, <http://gawker.com/5860576/keith-gessen-arrested-doing-admirable-thing>.

after spending 35 hours in jail following his arrest at the Occupy Wall Street protests.”¹⁴⁸). When MSNBC’s Chris Hayes was invited by *Rolling Stone* to list his picks for “What Should Be Big” in June 2012, one of his four choices was *Jacobin*, which he called “almost preternaturally good” and “very explicitly on the radical left,” but did not link to OWS.¹⁴⁹ And as late as January 2013, it was still possible for the *Guardian* to publish a lengthy primer on New York’s “new, post-digital dawn in which a web-literate and politically engaged generation is re-energising journalism with fierce-thinking in stylish print and online publications” with only one off-hand mention of Occupy, coming when *TNI*’s Rachel Rosenfelt cites the movement as evidence of young people’s “simmering need to congregate.”¹⁵⁰

Around that time, however, some journalists were making the intuitive link between emerging little magazines and OWS. In a *Times* profile with Bhaskar Sunkara, released just weeks after the *Guardian* piece, Jennifer Schuessler was willing to see something like causality in *Jacobin*’s growth after Occupy, saying that the magazine “has certainly been an improbable hit, buoyed by the radical stirrings of the Occupy movement and a biting satirical but serious-minded style.”¹⁵¹ That November, Britain’s left-leaning *New Statesman* ran a story titled “Who are the new socialist wunderkinds of America?” In the estimation of writer Max Strasser, the answer to this question was to be

¹⁴⁸ Alex Williams, “The Literary Cubs,” *New York Times*, November 30, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/01/fashion/new-yorks-literary-cubs.html>.

¹⁴⁹ “Chris Hayes on ‘What Should Be Big,’” MSNBC, June 13, 2012, http://info.msnbc.com/_news/2012/06/13/12206267-chris-hayes-on-what-should-be-big?lite.

¹⁵⁰ Hermione Hoby, “New York literary magazines – start spreading the news,” *The Guardian*, January 5, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/jan/06/new-york-literary-magazines-publishing>.

¹⁵¹ Jennifer Schuessler, “A Young Publisher Takes Marx Into the Mainstream,” *New York Times*, January 20, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/21/books/bhaskar-sunkara-editor-of-jacobin-magazine.html?_r=0.

found on the mastheads of *Jacobin* and the *New Inquiry*. Strasser paints these magazines as the vanguard of a generation he believes has transcended the “stereotype of the apathetic hipster” and evolved into “a new kind of well-educated, middle-class twentysomething who rails against the prison-industrial complex, who talks about wages for housework, who throws around words like ‘imperialism’ and ‘exploitation’ with a growing sense of comfort.” He is circumspect as to hazarding a guess at what’s driving this perceived transformation, but he tepidly asserts, “Occupy Wall Street may have something to do with it.”¹⁵²

The stronger case—that the growth of little magazines is fundamentally tied to OWS, or at least that they are products of the same historical circumstances—would require a stronger news hook, one that tied together Occupy Wall Street, little magazines, and the perceived leftward intellectual drift of a generation. This hook came in the spring of 2014 with the publication of three books: Benjamin Kunkel’s *Utopia or Bust: A Guide to the Present Crisis*, Nikil Saval’s *Cubed: A Secret History of the Workplace*, and the English translation of Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. The first two of these books were written by little magazine veterans—Kunkel and Saval are editors at *n+1*—and *Utopia or Bust* was published under the *Jacobin* imprint at Verso Books. Both are firmly leftist in orientation—Kunkel wrote on the luminaries of Marxist thought, and Saval critiqued the conditions of white-collar labor. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* was a dense book of leftist economics which argued that absent a calamity like war or depression, the return on capital in a capitalist society is greater than overall economic growth, meaning it is a system predisposed to exacerbate already existing inequalities.

¹⁵² Strasser, “Who are the new socialist wunderkinds of America?,” *New Statesman*.

Piketty's book became a surprise bestseller, reaching the number one spot on Amazon and selling out at many bookstores.¹⁵³ For many commentators, *Capital* served to resuscitate Occupy's reputation. Its rigor showed that the critiques lodged by OWS were valid, and its popularity suggested that the movement had substantially altered American attitudes toward inequality. In its review of the book, the *Guardian* headline declared "Occupy was right: capitalism has failed the world."¹⁵⁴ The story at the *New Yorker*—"Occupy the Best-Seller List"—quotes Janet Gorlick, the director of CUNY's Luxembourg Study Center, as saying, "Now [Piketty] can thank the Occupy people for the book sales!"¹⁵⁵ The Roosevelt Institute greeted news of the book's climb to the top of the charts by declaring "We are at a unique moment, thanks to Piketty, [Roosevelt's Chief Economist Joseph] Stiglitz, the Occupy Wall Street organizers, and many others."¹⁵⁶ "The Year of Piketty," a piece at *Counterpunch*, argued that "If one manifestation of concern over inequality, the OWS (Occupy Wall Street) movement in the United States, faded out after its Warholian fifteen minutes of fame, a concept it popularized — 'the one percent' — is alive and well."¹⁵⁷ Economist Stephanie Kelton believed the book was a smash because the "Occupy movement laid the groundwork for a

¹⁵³ Heidi Moore, "Why is Thomas Piketty's 700-page book a best seller?," *The Guardian*, September 21, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/money/2014/sep/21/-sp-thomas-piketty-bestseller-why>.

¹⁵⁴ Andrew Hussey, "Occupy was right: capitalism has failed the world," *The Guardian*, April 13, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/apr/13/occupy-right-capitalism-failed-world-french-economist-thomas-piketty>.

¹⁵⁵ Jonathan Blitzer, "Occupy the Best-Seller List," *New Yorker*, May 5, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/05/05/occupy-the-best-seller-list>.

¹⁵⁶ Felicia Wong, "Good News for Progressive Economics: Big Thinkers Like Piketty Are Back in Vogue," Roosevelt Institute, <http://www.rooseveltinstitute.org/new-roosevelt/good-news-progressive-economics-big-thinkers-piketty-are-back-vogue>.

¹⁵⁷ Peter A. Coclanis, "The Year of Piketty," *Counterpunch*, December 26, 2014, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/12/26/the-year-of-piketty/>.

great debate.”¹⁵⁸ The book’s acclaim was so deliriously widespread that *Bloomberg Businessweek* lampooned it with a *Tiger Beat*-style cover bearing a picture of its author with cartoon lips planted on his cheek and headlines like “Pikettymania: Why America Has Wealth Inequality Fever” and “Ooh La La! Somber French Economist Pics Inside!”¹⁵⁹



Figure 4: Leftist economist as pop star.

Suffice it to say that Thomas Piketty was the belle of the media’s ball for a few months, and on his arm was Occupy Wall Street, looking fresher and more becoming than anyone remembered it. The fortuitous release of *Utopia or Bust* and *Cubed* in the midst of Pikettymania made it easy to integrate little magazines into the narrative that OWS laid the groundwork for a resurgent intellectual left, and, over at the *Nation*,

¹⁵⁸ Moore, “Why is Thomas Piketty’s 700-page book a best seller?,” *The Guardian*.

¹⁵⁹ Megan McArdle, “Piketty’s *Capital*: An Economist’s Inequality Ideas Are All the Rage,” *Bloomberg*, May 29, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-05-29/pikettys-capital-economists-inequality-ideas-are-all-the-rage>.

integrate is exactly what Timothy Shenk did and did at length. His 9,500-word essay “Thomas Piketty and Millennial Marxists on the Scourge of Inequality” weaves all these strands together, and before launching into some strong criticisms of this new generation of radicals, he provides the little magazine scene with an origin story:

The crowds that gathered in Zuccotti Park were not marching to advance the careers of young, ambitious, radical writers, but there were more than a few who fit that description in their number. Cloaked in the moral authority of Occupy and connected by networks stitched together during those hectic days in 2011, a contingent of young journalists speaking through venues both new and old, all of them based in New York City—*Jacobin*, *n+1*, *Dissent* and occasionally this magazine, among others—have begun to make careers as Marxist intellectuals. Since 2008, mainstream journals ranging from *Time* to *Foreign Affairs* had been speculating that Marx might have his vengeance (the latter with an article from Fukuyama publicizing the latest revelation bestowed on him after consultation with History’s oracles). Now, it seemed, Marx’s heirs had arrived, and they were naturals with social media.¹⁶⁰

It’s a pat story, and one that portrays its subjects in a somewhat devious, or at least careerist, light. As we have seen, the core social networks that produced *n+1*, *Jacobin*, and the *New Inquiry* were all forged well before Occupy Wall Street. And to suggest that these writers and editors “have begun to make careers as Marxist intellectuals” is to bend the word “career” near its definitional breaking point. As we have also seen, money is scant in the world of little magazines. Bhaskar Sunkara wasn’t drawing a full-time salary from *Jacobin* until 2015.¹⁶¹ The *New Inquiry* only employs three full-time staffers.¹⁶² *N+1* has only two.¹⁶³ This isn’t to say that there aren’t real

¹⁶⁰ Timothy Shenk, “Thomas Piketty and Millennial Marxists on the Scourge of Inequality,” *The Nation*, April 14, 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/article/thomas-piketty-and-millennial-marxists-scourge-inequality/>.

¹⁶¹ Sunkara, interview by author.

¹⁶² Caroline O’Donovan, “The New Inquiry: Not another New York literary magazine,” Nieman Journalism Lab, September 18, 2014, <http://www.niemanlab.org/2014/09/the-new-inquiry-not-another-new-york-literary-magazine/>.

rewards to be gained by work in little magazines (more on that in the next chapter), only that “career” implies the attainment of a certain level of comfort and security that hardly anyone hopes to gain through this kind of labor.

However, what can be said of Occupy Wall Street is that it occasioned these different little magazines to come together *as a coherent community*. It was a period of fertile cross-collaboration on the part of writers and editors. The *New Inquiry*’s Malcolm Harris covered the movement for *Jacobin*. The back cover of *n+1*’s *Occupy!* anthology reveals that the volume was assembled by “editors from New York radical journals *n+1*, *Dissent*, *Triple Canopy*, and *The New Inquiry*.”¹⁶⁴ Staffers for *TNI* and *Jacobin* appear on the *Gazette*’s pages. And, of course, representatives from *Jacobin* and *TNI* slugged it out during the fateful Bluestockings panel. “Around the time of Occupy in particular, a lot of different kinds of lefties, working at mainstream or literary publications, sort of found each other, started talking to each other, and found out who was most interested in class politics,” Sarah Leonard told *Tablet* in 2013. “We have essentially found an old politics that makes sense now.”¹⁶⁵ A scene was forming, and that scene was explicit in its politics.

¹⁶³ Caroline O’Donovan, “n+1: Learning that print and digital can peacefully coexist,” Nieman Journalism Lab, September 15, 2014, <http://www.niemanlab.org/2014/09/n1-learning-that-print-and-digital-can-peacefully-coexist/>.

¹⁶⁴ Astra Taylor and Keith Gessen, eds., *Occupy! Scenes From Occupied America* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2011).

¹⁶⁵ Goldberg, “A Generation of Intellectuals Shaped by 2008 Crash Rescues Marx From History’s Dustbin.”

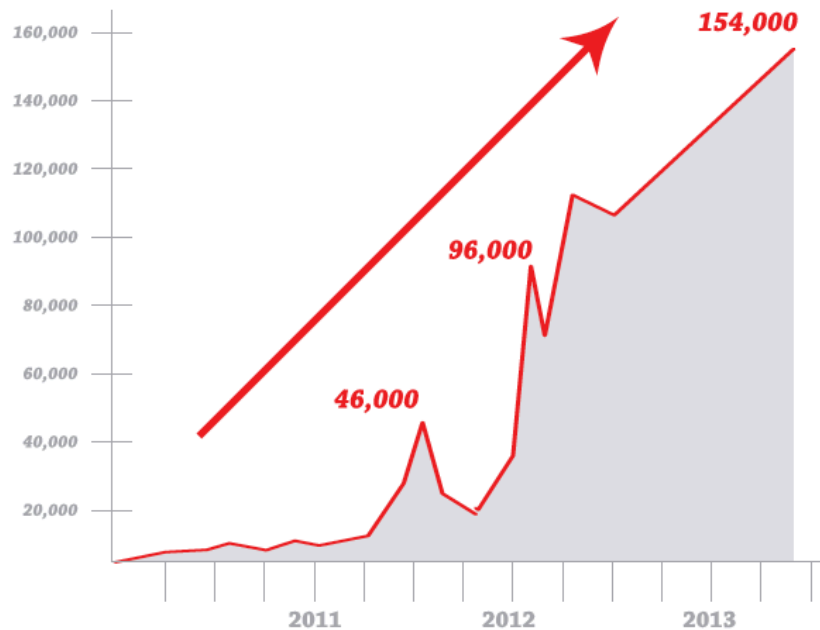


Figure 5. The New Inquiry web traffic numbers.

It would be difficult to argue that the little magazines did not benefit from Occupy. For the *New Inquiry* and *Jacobin*, it was a chance for two new and unproven publications to hone and clarify their identities against the whetstone of a real-world social movement. For *n+1*, it was an impetus to shift focus and renew its commitment to politics. These developments proved popular with newly politicized readership. In a 2013 plea for donations, *TNI* included a graph of its traffic numbers from 2010 on. The graph (see Figure 5) is difficult to read precisely, but numbers that had been flagging for a quarter turn on a dime right around September 17, 2011, and continue to rise meteorically into early 2012, the period roughly corresponding with Occupy’s greatest activity and public prominence.¹⁶⁶ *Jacobin* had fewer than 1,000 subscribers when OWS kicked

¹⁶⁶ “TNI Information Packet,” *The New Inquiry*, 2013, <http://thenewinquiry.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/TNI-Information-Packet-.pdf>.

off,¹⁶⁷ and it had reached nearly 2,000 by the dawn of 2013, plus a web presence that garnered around 250,000 hits a month.¹⁶⁸ Such growth can't be definitively attributed to Occupy and Occupy only—*TNI's* aforementioned profile in the *New York Times*, for example, provided a burst of exposure not attributable to OWS—but being a youthful leftist magazine during a series of spectacular, show-stopping street protests is like being the Weather Channel during a hurricane. People who once blithely ignored you are now intensely interested in what you have to say.

And so when Pikkety dragged Occupy back into the limelight—or rather when he revived the movement's standing by providing a rigorous and stunningly popular empirical analysis that largely corresponded with the movement's tenets—and when the *Nation* introduced the little magazines into the conversation, putting them at the vanguard of a historical trend that has a name as pithy as “millennial Marxism,” a new round of publicity ensued, and one that framed the new little magazines as more than just fresh-faced bohemian strivers—“Literary Cubs” as the *Times* had initially called *TNI*. They were the new, boldly political voices of their generation.

Shenk's article provoked a torrent of responses. Conservative commentator Ross Douthat glossed the piece for the *New York Times*, mentioning the little magazines by name—“The M.M.'s [Millennial Marxists] have Occupy Wall Street as a failed-but-interesting political example; they have new-ish journals (Jacobin, The New Inquiry, n + 1) where they can experiment and argue; they are beginning to produce books, two of which Shenk reviews and praises.”—before speculating that the true problem of the age might be the evaporation of “cultural identity — family and faith, sovereignty and

¹⁶⁷ Sunkara, interview by author.

¹⁶⁸ Schuessler, “A Young Publisher Takes Marx Into the Mainstream,” *New York Times*.

community — much more than economic security.”¹⁶⁹ A mention in the *Times* is no small thing, but further attention poured in from all corners of the media landscape, from the literary (the *Rumpus*¹⁷⁰) to the legalistic (the *Harvard Law Review*¹⁷¹), the liberal (*Daily Kos*¹⁷²) to the conservative (the *National Review*¹⁷³), a publication helmed by Francis Fukuyama (the *American Interest*¹⁷⁴) to, well, one helmed by Bhaskar Sunkara. Nivedita Majumdar’s rebuttal in *Jacobin* saw little to applaud in Shenk’s article, calling it “tortuous” and a “tired critique,” and asserting that “Shenk never dismounts his ironic high horse to illuminate *why* Marxism (or the internet) is a problem.”¹⁷⁵

Even if they disagreed with the thrust of the article, though, *Jacobin* is pragmatic. When I asked Sunkara what he thought of articles (and dissertations) that group *Jacobin* in together with other little magazines, he responded, “I’d much rather us be included just for the sake of the publicity.”¹⁷⁶ This interest in and facility with self-promotion—part of

¹⁶⁹ Ross Douthat, “Marx Rises Again,” *New York Times*, April 19, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/20/opinion/sunday/douthat-marx-rises-again.html?_r=0.

¹⁷⁰ Ian MacAllen, “The Rise Of A New Socialist Literary Scene,” *The Rumpus*, April 23, 2014, <http://therumpus.net/2014/04/the-rise-of-a-new-socialist-literary-scene/>.

¹⁷¹ Samuel Moyn, “Thomas Piketty and the Future of Legal Scholarship,” *Harvard Law Review*, December 10, 2014, <http://harvardlawreview.org/2014/12/thomas-piketty-and-the-future-of-legal-scholarship/>.

¹⁷² Dante Atkins, “Ross Douthat’s millennial marxists,” *Daily Kos*, April 27, 2014, <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2014/04/28/1294439/-Ross-Douthat-s-millennial-marxists#>.

¹⁷³ Tim Cavanaugh, “On Top of Piketty,” *National Review*, May 15, 2014, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/378069/top-piketty-tim-cavanaugh>.

¹⁷⁴ Roger Berkowitz, “Marx’s Heirs,” *The American Interest*, April 19, 2014, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2014/04/19/marxs-heirs/>.

¹⁷⁵ Nivedita Majumdar, “Why We’re Marxists,” *Jacobin*, July 2, 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/07/why-were-marxists/>.

¹⁷⁶ Sunkara, interview by author.

what he calls “petty-bourgeois hustling”¹⁷⁷—has helped the reach of *Jacobin* grow to 15,000 print & digital subscribers and 2 million web hits per month. “I suspect that we would be able to reach a similar audience that we’re reaching now if there wasn’t an Occupy Wall Street,” Sunkara said, before quickly adding, “I certainly think it helps that there was.”¹⁷⁸

The counterfactual is impossible to prove. But the narrative of Occupy Wall Street and the new little magazines being related components of the same historical moment has gained traction, so much so that little magazine editors have felt the need to address the idea of the “millennial Marxist,” and to some degree affirm it. In CUNY’s *New Labor Forum*, Nikil Saval recently considered how his once unfashionable Marxist leanings were validated:

In 2015 these (at the time) private-feeling thoughts are much more public—thanks not only to Occupy Wall Street, but also to a remarkably combative and more vigorous Marxist public sphere that arose before and alongside it. A host of new journals regularly and unembarrassedly make recourse to Marxist language and arguments. Trend pieces marking the rise of a “new Marxism” or “millennial Marxism” have proliferated and are themselves sure to be the subject of a trend piece. The US having been a society, as the novelist and critic (and co-founder of my magazine) Benjamin Kunkel has written, “in which Marxism can be advocated only a little more respectably than pederasty,” it has now become comparatively normal to see Marxist arguments even in the mainstream press—such that Thomas Piketty has had to distance himself from Marxism, while the title of his own book lays claim to the most famous work of Marxian political economy. Marxism feels to be once again a current discourse on the left, and it enjoys its revival in no small part thanks to the commerce between the academy and a host of “little” magazines outside it.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Caroline O’Donovan, “Jacobin: A Marxist rag run on a lot of petty-bourgeois hustle,” Nieman Journalism Lab, September 16, 2014, <http://www.niemanlab.org/2014/09/jacobin-a-marxist-rag-run-on-a-lot-of-petty-bourgeois-hustle/>.

¹⁷⁸ Sunkara, interview by author.

¹⁷⁹ Nikil Saval, “Marxism and Little Magazines: Gathering in the Newest Left,” *New Labor Forum*, June 8, 2015, <http://newlaborforum.cuny.edu/2015/06/08/marxism-and-little-magazines/>.

Saval's is, in the end, an optimistic vision. Even as Occupy Wall Street melted into air, the millennial Marxists remain.

3.4 Conclusion

In the first issue of the *Occupy! Gazette*, Mark Greif proposed a change to the landscape of Manhattan's Financial District. He argued that Arturo Di Modica's *Charging Bull* sculpture—"Idol of motion without cause, momentum that will not stop against good sense or human fences"—should be replaced with a simple speaker's platform "where everyone can stand, for fifteen minutes at a time, measured by an indestructible hour glass, inverted when the speaker steps up, and speak of new ideas or old." This platform's symbolism could be elaborate: "The boards might be timbers from each of the fifty states; or benches of disused pews from the country's old meetinghouses, chataquas, churches, and state assemblies." Or it could be modest: "the stage might just be a soapbox." Its moral, however, remains the same: "Let it be clear that there will always be a place for a free man or woman to stand, and speak, and others to assemble to listen and speak in turn, on that street, and, by extension, in the country defined by the Constitution and not cowardice or convenience."¹⁸⁰

It is a stirring image, and one close to the heart of the leftist intellectuals who fill the ranks of the new little magazines. The sacred calf of Wall Street capitalism—"an embarrassment," Greif calls it, and "a not very distinguished statue"—is felled by discourse. Rhetoric, argumentation, *words* echo through the caverns of Lower Manhattan, and, like the walls of Jericho, the halls of capital crumble and fall.

But, of course, the halls of capital still stand, and so does the *Charging Bull*.

¹⁸⁰ Mark Greif, "Cut the Bull," *Occupy! Gazette* 1 (2011): 36.

This is not to say that Occupy Wall Street accomplished nothing. The much repeated justification that the movement “changed the conversation” is true. In the summer of 2011, it would have been difficult to imagine Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* could become a number one bestseller on Amazon.¹⁸¹ It would be difficult to imagine conservative Republicans attacking one of their own for his record of “vulture” and “crony” capitalism.¹⁸² When Mitt Romney put the nail in the coffin of his own presidential hopes by saying that 47% of Americans would vote against him because they “believe that they are victims,”¹⁸³ it’s hard not to wonder if, in its 99% rhetoric, Occupy had primed the country to think in terms of percentages and of an out-of-touch elite, contributing to the traction this gaffe gathered. And even if they began to write essays and launch magazines before activists laid siege to Zuccotti Park, the movement helped to sharpen the minds and embolden the spirits of the cohort that would eventually be christened “millennial Marxists.”

The greater goals, however, were left unaccomplished. The *New Inquiry* was left hoping “that an antagonist movement capable of combining the dynamism of the blockade with the mutual aid of the camps (perhaps in some decentralized, distributed form) might succeed where Occupy failed.”¹⁸⁴ A disappointed *Jacobin* opined that “occupiers aversion to politics [...] was, along with police repression, one of the key

¹⁸¹ Aimee Picchi, “How a 700-page economics book surged to No. 1 on Amazon,” CBS News, April 23, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-a-700-page-economics-book-surged-to-no-1-on-amazon/>.

¹⁸² William Greider, “The Nation: Why Attack ‘Vulture Capitalism’?,” NPR, January 24, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/2012/01/24/145697030/the-nation-why-attack-vulture-capitalism>.

¹⁸³ David Corn, “SECRET VIDEO: Romney Tells Millionaire Donors What He REALLY Thinks of Obama Voters,” *Mother Jones*, September 17, 2012, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/09/secret-video-romney-private-fundraiser>.

¹⁸⁴ Bernes, “Square and Circle,” *The New Inquiry*.

reasons Occupy failed,”¹⁸⁵ and that “perhaps next time around [protestors] will find ways to transcend the limits of radical horizontalism, building new movements that can frontally challenge inequality and injustice.”¹⁸⁶

Discourse is one field on which ideological battles play out. Definitions, stories, issues, and ideas—these are important loci of political struggle. They help to set the parameters of debate. They bend minds and win hearts. And the field of discourse is one where the little magazines can play an important role. They can engage in political debates by publishing sharp critiques that can then be shared and employed by allies, thereby helping to change hearts and minds on issues of immediate salience. To take an example from December 2015, the *Baffler* ran “My Kind of Misogyny,” an essay by Amber A’Lee Frost about the Democratic Party’s presidential primary. In it, Frost mercilessly assails the tendency of the Hillary Clinton campaign and its supporters to parry attacks by claiming they are driven by misogyny and to characterize supporters of self-described socialist candidate Bernie Sanders as sexist “Bernie Bros.” “It’s a strange sort of ‘misogynist,’” Frost writes, “who condemns Clinton for her endorsement of ‘welfare reform,’ which eviscerated a social safety net that primarily benefited women and children.”¹⁸⁷ The direct impact of such a piece is difficult to measure, but a piece like this is more than a musing; it’s an intervention.

Yet it is important that they—or, as the editor of one such magazine, I should say “we”—do not flatter ourselves and overestimate our role in fomenting political change.

¹⁸⁵ Gude, “Occupy Anti-Politics,” *Jacobin*.

¹⁸⁶ Ruth Milkman, Stephanie Luce, and Penny Lewis, “Occupy After Occupy,” *Jacobin*, 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/06/occupy-after-occupy/>.

¹⁸⁷ Amber A’Lee Frost, “My Kind of Misogyny: I Don’t Care If They Call a Warhawk ‘Cankles,’” *The Baffler*, December 3, 2015, <http://thebaffler.com/blog/my-kind-misogyny>.

Essays, pamphlets, and tweets matter, but if we want to do more than expand people's minds, if we want to ease the worry of those living paycheck to paycheck or to rein in the reckless behavior of Wall Street firms, then votes, legislation, and tangible political power must also matter, and we must be willing to work in concert—or at least in parallel—with activists who are willing to dirty their hands with the compromises of political work. This doesn't mean sacrificing our critical edge or becoming PR agents for political movements or parties. It doesn't even mean giving up the motivating, inspiring rhetoric of utopia. But it does mean entertaining the potential of imperfect remedies and mundane political work, even as they run counter to romantic bohemian longings for beautiful rebellion, *l'homme révolté*.

CHAPTER FOUR:
LITTLE MAGAZINES AND THE CHANGING
POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INTELLECTUAL LIFE

The previous two chapters assessed the limited strength of new little magazines as agents of political power. With occasional exceptions, their tendency to write for an inward facing bohemian community has curtailed their potency as a social force. Though they have acted as enthusiastic cheerleaders for—and, sometimes, intelligent interpreters of—mass political movements, they have not proven vital to their functioning. During Occupy Wall Street, these publications served neither as clearinghouses for movement news (à la the underground press of the 1960s and 70s), nor as key theoreticians who guided the movement's tactics, strategy, and sense of mission (think of Lenin and Trotsky's various publishing ventures in revolutionary Russia). The resurgence of little magazines and the emergence of Occupy share some root causes—a troubled economy and a renewed interest in the political left, both disproportionately potent among the young—but the former was of limited importance to the latter. By and large, *Jacobin*, the *New Inquiry*, and *n+1* were much more interested in Occupy than Occupy was in them.

In this chapter, I will narrow the lens a bit. While this dissertation has touched on how the new little magazines relate to the academy and to mainstream commercial journalism, I will now provide a more sustained analysis of their engagement with these discourse-producing institutions. In each case, the little magazines demonstrate a pragmatic balance of criticism and collaboration. Rather than draw any hard ideological lines against cooperation, they critique what they see as the failings of these institutions whose work is so often adjacent to their own, but also prove willing to take advantage of what they can offer in terms of publicity, financial support, and intellectual influence.

With regard to the commercial press, the new little magazines have proven more amenable to collaboration than previous generations of bohemian publishers, such as their forebears in the underground press and zine scene. They participate in content sharing arrangements, engage amiably in profiles and interviews, and, as individual writers and editors, float freely between little magazine positions and gigs for more mainstream outlets. As long as the relative noncommercial sanctity of the content within the little magazine itself is preserved, these kinds of collaborations happen with a minimal amount of the social censure that met “sellouts” of earlier generations. I will explore the economic, social, and technological reasons for this increasing subcultural acceptance of commercial collaboration, and explain how the more rigid attitudes concerning art and commerce fell out of fashion.

Next, I will turn to the relationship between little magazines and academia. The turbulent situation in American universities helped to create the conditions that gave birth to the new little magazines; a decline of secure faculty jobs has created a surplus population of intellectuals and the stylistic constraints of peer-reviewed journals

presented an opportunity for magazines willing to offer their writers more freedom. Yet at the same time, little magazines benefit from a solvent academy. Much of the noncommercial theoretical writing that informs little magazine writing is produced by scholars with academic posts, and faculty salaries and graduate student stipends indirectly subsidize little magazines by allowing those who receive them to write for little or no payment. Finally, I will demonstrate that for all the exciting work they publish, the new little magazines are ill-equipped to pick up the slack should the deteriorating political economy of higher education further jeopardize its ability to serve as a primary underwriter of intellectual work.

The declining job markets in both commercial media and academia have severely curtailed young intellectuals' prospects for traditional social advancement. Secure editorial jobs at a magazines or publishing houses and tenured faculty positions in the humanities are now farfetched career goals. In this chapter's final section, I will look at how the new little magazines function as a response to this shakeup in the political economy of intellectual life. Rather than as a base of operations from which to effectively challenge these conditions, the counterpublic of little magazines serves as a method for young intellectuals to cope with their tenuous social positions. It creates a context where their work is validated, community is created, and even a degree of celebrity can be attained.

4.1 Commercial Media: Pragmatic Collaboration and the Death of the "Sellout"

In Chapter Two, I looked at the little magazines' attitude of bohemian exceptionalism; even as lucrative mainstream outfits like *BuzzFeed* and *Vice* publish content that is

frequently as politically radical as anything in little magazines, the little magazines understand themselves to be operating in opposition to the dominant culture. They are often vociferous in their espousals of antipathy toward the mainstream—remember Rachel Rosenfelt calling the *New Inquiry* “hostile to capital,” or *n+I*’s rhetoric of displacement in a founding statement that assured its readers “you have known the exile, and are acquainted with the wilds.” The self-image of these publications is resolutely alternative, and they can be intransigent their political and aesthetic positions.

However, their dealings with commercial media have been marked by pragmatism. Even as they lodge sharp critiques of what they perceive as the biases and shortcomings of major media outlets, they have proven very willing to collaborate with these outlets, and to do so with little of the angst over “selling out” that has traditionally characterized the relationship between bohemian subcultures and commercial institutions.

4.1.1 The Flavors of Commercial Collaboration

Little magazines often take great relish in criticizing the commercial media. The early issues of *n+I* were loaded with broadsides against media outfits & personalities that the editors believed “smeared the walls with shit” (the *New Republic*),¹ made “an egregious ass of” themselves (Christopher Hitchens),² “represent a perfection of the outsourcing ethos of contemporary capitalism” (literary blogs),³ or whose “default mode was a

¹ “Designated Haters,” *n+I* 1 (Fall 2004): 6.

² Geroge Scialabba, “Farewell, Hitch,” *n+I* 2 (Spring 2005): 213.

³ “The Blog Reflex,” *n+I* 5 (Winter 2007): 6.

vacuous sarcasm” (*Gawker*).⁴ More recently, they have inveighed against “‘click bait’ in publications” that encourage a “semi-permanent state of rage”⁵ and the preponderance of news outlets that responded to Seymour Hersh’s questioning of the official narrative of the Bin Laden raid by “lash[ing] into [Hersh] himself” with “takedowns” that were not “backed by follow up reporting.”⁶ Similarly, the *New Inquiry* has challenged the “grand epistemological claims” of data journalism sites like *Vox* and *FiveThirtyEight*,⁷ as well as the *New York Times* for describing the “police shooting nine people as ‘nine people were wounded in gunfire’, as though ‘gunfire’ were a weather pattern.”⁸ *Jacobin* gets in on the game, too, arguing, for example, against what it sees as the penchant of media policy wonks to conceal “both one’s ideological biases and one’s substantive lack of knowledge, and relying on the borrowed prestige of academics and experts,” and of journalists in general for centering on individual cases rather than critiquing systems.⁹

Despite these criticisms, all of the new little magazines studied in this dissertation—even the ideologically purist *New Inquiry*—have chosen to pragmatically collaborate with the mainstream media. The interchange between little magazines and commercial media happens at both the individual and the institutional level. For

⁴ Carla Blumenkranz, “In Search of Gawker,” *n+1* 6 (Winter 2008): 218.

⁵ “Against the Rage Machine,” *n+1* 18 (Winter 2013): <https://nplusonemag.com/issue-18/the-intellectual-situation/against-the-rage-machine/>.

⁶ “Evil but Stupid,” *n+1* 23 (Fall 2015): <https://nplusonemag.com/issue-23/the-intellectual-situation/evil-but-stupid/>.

⁷ Nathan Jurgensen, “View From Nowhere,” *The New Inquiry*, October 9, 2014, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/view-from-nowhere/>.

⁸ Willie Osterweil, “Media is Better Police,” *The New Inquiry*, August 27, 2012, <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/zunguzungu/media-is-better-police/>.

⁹ Elizabeth Stoker Bruenig, “The Personal and the Political,” *Jacobin*, December 7, 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/12/the-personal-and-the-political/>.

individual writers and editors, the boundaries that separate the world of little magazines from that of the commercial media are quite porous. Rachel Rosenfelt followed her tenure as editor-in-chief of *TNI* with a brief stint at *Gawker*, and her replacement Ayesha Siddiqi arrived from *BuzzFeed*. Keith Gessen of *n+1* has written for the *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic*, and *New York Magazine*, among others. *Jacobin*'s Bhaskar Sunkara makes occasional appearances on MSNBC. The borders crossed here—from non-profit to commercial, subcultural to general audience—barely register as something to comment upon within the little magazine counterpublic.

Institutionally, collaborations between little magazines and the commercial media can take several forms. One, of course, is the profile piece. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, *n+1*, the *New Inquiry*, *Jacobin*, and the *American Reader* have each been the subject of a profile in the *New York Times*. They all appeared in the *Guardian* as part of a broader profile of “a new, post-digital dawn in which a web-literate and politically engaged generation is re-energising journalism with fierce-thinking in stylish print and online publications.”¹⁰ Such articles can theoretically be written without the participation of the subjects, but at least in the case of otherwise relatively obscure cultural corners, the usually aren't. Quotes and photos of charismatic young writers provide the oxygen for these pieces, and they save the journalist the time needed to sift through a profiled magazine's archives in order to gain an impression of it. With the new little magazines, such research was not necessary. Each of them chose to participate in their respective profiles, providing interviews and access to staff meetings. The tone of the quotes provided by editors, it should be said, is earnest without exception. There are no pointed

¹⁰ Hermione Hoby, “New York literary magazines – start spreading the news,” *The Guardian*, January 5, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/jan/06/new-york-literary-magazines-publishing>.

jabs at the corporate media, and no impish attempts to feed their profilers misinformation that would embarrass them later.

This choice is, of course, has its benefits. Such profiles offer tremendous exposure for magazines that by definition (“little”) have relatively small circulations. They also offer an imprimatur; if the Newspaper of Record thinks that your publication is worth covering, they are, in a sense, vouching for you. This is only amplified when your *New York Times* profile lauds you, as *n+1*’s did, for working to “organize a generational struggle against laziness and cynicism, to raise once again the banners of creative enthusiasm and intellectual engagement.”¹¹

Beyond offering themselves up as fodder for mainstream journalists, the little magazines have regularly engaged in content sharing arrangements with more highly trafficked commercial news sites. *Jacobin*, for example, has an ongoing arrangement with *Salon*,¹² in which *Salon* republishes select *Jacobin* articles, prefacing them with a *Jacobin* logo and links to the *Jacobin* site (see Figure 6). The *New Inquiry* had a similar arrangement, though their content has not appeared on *Salon* since 2013,¹³ and the *American Reader*’s relationship with the site lasted until the magazine went defunct.¹⁴

While I am not privy to the financial details of these specific arrangements, I can speak to those that my own publication, *Blunderbuss Magazine*, has with the *Guardian*. As part of

¹¹ A.O. Scott, “Among the Believers,” *New York Times*, September 11, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/11/magazine/among-the-believers.html?_r=0.

¹² “Jacobin,” *Salon*, <http://www.salon.com/topic/jacobin/>.

¹³ “The New Inquiry,” *Salon*, http://www.salon.com/topic/the_new_inquiry/.

¹⁴ “The American Reader,” *Salon*, http://www.salon.com/topic/the_american_reader/.

the *Guardian* books network,¹⁵ the *Guardian* pays *Blunderbuss* 50% of the advertising revenue brought in on any *Blunderbuss* article that they republish. I would expect that the magazines listed above, as more prominent publications with more leverage, could negotiate terms at least that favorable.

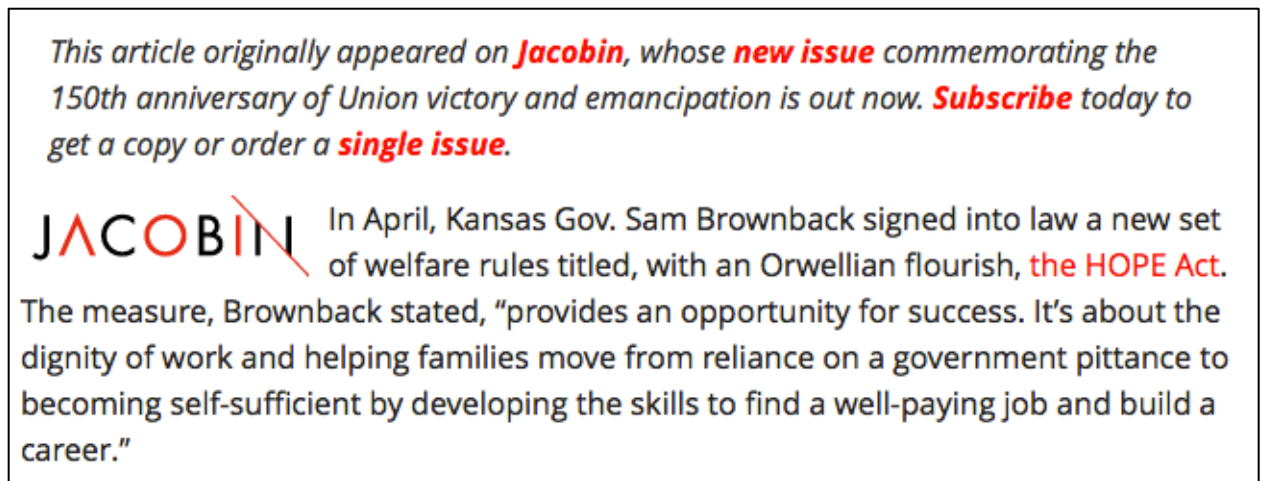


Figure 6: The header of a Jacobin article as reprinted on Salon.

Both *n+1* and *Jacobin* have benefitted from similar arrangements with *Slate*, even as both magazines delight in mocking the site. *N+1* used *Slate*'s reputation for counterintuitive click bait headlines to send up its skeptical coverage of Seymour Hersh's Bin Laden raid article: "It was left unnoticed that Hersh's original piece—which might have been titled 'Everything You Think You Know About the Bin Laden Raid Is Wrong'—was an almost ideal *Slate* pitch."¹⁶ *Jacobin* sounded a similar note when it took to Facebook to post a link to *Slate*'s reprint of one of their pieces: "The first tactfully

¹⁵ Marta Bausells, "Welcome to the Guardian books network," *The Guardian*, October 21, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/oct/21/welcome-guardian-books-network-literary-content>.

¹⁶ "Evil but Stupid," *n+1*.

titled Slate.com piece in history. Little surprise it's a Jacobin reprint!"¹⁷ Bhaskar Sunkara's comment on that Facebook post further elaborates on his feelings for the outlet:

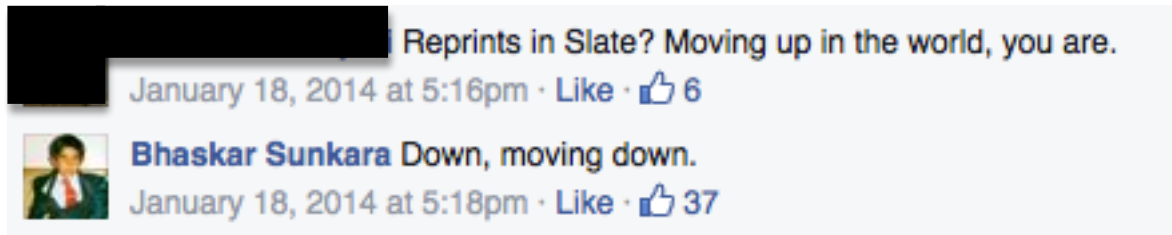


Figure 7: Bhaskar Sunkara appraises Slate's credibility.

Despite the lack of respect these publications evidently have for *Slate*, the site has had played a substantial role in helping work from both *n+1* and *Jacobin* attain the escape velocity to reach beyond the readership of far-left little magazines. In its Fall 2010 issue, *n+1* published "MFA vs. NYC," an essay by Chad Harbach that used Mark McGurl's book *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* as a jumping off point to theorize on what he believes are the two main cultures in American literary fiction: the quiet, academicized culture of MFA programs and the comparatively commercial game of New York publishing. On November 26 of that year, *Slate* posted an abridged version of the essay. Sprung from behind the *n+1* site's paywall and delivered to *Slate*'s enormous readership (4.5 million monthly unique visitors in 2010¹⁸), the article was briefly the talk of the literary Internet, provoking the attention of *Bookforum*,¹⁹ the

¹⁷ "Jacobin Magazine," Facebook, January 18, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/jacobinmag/posts/10201729449222593>.

¹⁸ "Online: By the Numbers," Pew Research Center, <http://www.stateofthemediamedia.org/2011/online-essay/data-page-7/>.

¹⁹ "Paper Trail," *Bookforum*, December 15, 2010, <http://www.bookforum.com/paper/archive/20101215>.

Millions,²⁰ and the *New Yorker*,²¹ among others. In February 2014, *n+1* parlayed this attention into the release of *MFA vs. NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction*, an essay collection that was published jointly with Faber and Faber (owned, it should be mentioned, by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, and therefore a subsidiary of Macmillan), and featured contributions from heavyweights like George Saunders, Frederic Jameson, and the late David Foster Wallace. The book release inspired another round of attention for *n+1*, with book reviews appearing in top-tier commercial media outlets like the *New Yorker*,²² the *Los Angeles Times*,²³ the *New Republic*,²⁴ and the *New York Times*,²⁵ which also prominently featured the volume in a separate article titled “Why Writers Love to Hate the M.F.A.”²⁶

Miya Tokumitsu’s *Jacobin* article “In the Name of Love,” published in the Winter 2014 issue, followed a similar trajectory. A version of the piece, which critiques the career mantra “do what you love” for obscuring the material needs of laborers and for

²⁰ “Most Anticipated: The Great 2011 Book Preview,” *The Millions*, January 3, 2011, <http://www.themillions.com/2011/01/most-anticipated-the-great-2011-book-preview.html>.

²¹ Eileen Renyolds, “In the News: M.F.A. vs. NYC, Cervantes to Matute,” *New Yorker*, November 28, 2010, <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/in-the-news-m-f-a-vs-n-y-c-cervantes-to-matute>.

²² Andrew Martin, “MFA vs NYC’: Both, Probably,” *New Yorker*, March 28, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/mfa-vs-nyc-both-probably>.

²³ Carolyn Kellogg, “‘MFA vs. NYC’ debates the usefulness of creative writing degree,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2014/feb/20/entertainment/la-ca-jc-chad-harbach-20140223>.

²⁴ Leslie Jamison, “Which Creates Better Writers: An MFA Program or New York City?,” *New Republic*, February 27, 2014, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/116778/mfa-vs-nyc-most-useful-explanation-how-writers-get-paid>.

²⁵ Dwight Garner, “Creative Writing, via a Workshop or the Big City,” *New York Times*, February 25, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/26/books/mfa-vs-nyc-the-two-cultures-of-american-fiction.html>.

²⁶ Cecilia Capuzzi Simon, “Why Writers Love to Hate the M.F.A.,” *New York Times*, April 9, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/education/edlife/12edl-12mfa.html>.

devaluing unfulfilling but socially necessary work, was reprinted by *Slate* in January of that year. As with “MFA vs. NYC,” this delivered the article to a larger audience and inserted it into the discourse of commercial media. Response articles in the *Guardian*,²⁷ the *New Republic*,²⁸ and the *New York Times*²⁹ followed. Tokumitsu rode this momentum to a book contract, and *Do What You Love: And Other Lies About Success and Happiness* was released by Reagan Arts in August 2015. The book release prompted a round of publicity, with Tokumitsu being interviewed by *Time*³⁰ and the *Atlantic*.³¹

4.1.2 The Obsolescence of the “Sellout”

The decision to engage in these kinds of collaborations may seem like an obvious one. They can provide little magazines with significant exposure and bestow them with an imprimatur of broader relevance. Collaboration with commercial media outlets can also provide much-needed funds, either directly (as in the case of shared advertising revenue on reprinted articles) or indirectly (as when the increased attention can be parlayed into a book contract or new subscribers). However, the choice to collaborate with commercial institutions has not traditionally been an easy one for bohemians. In his post “What

²⁷ Heather Long, “We are told to ‘do what we love’ in life and our careers. Is that a fallacy?,” *The Guardian*, January 20, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jan/20/do-what-you-love-good-or-bad-advice>.

²⁸ Amanda Palleschi, “The ‘World Domination Summit’ Wants to Teach People to Do What They Love,” *New Republic*, August 22, 2014, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/119175/rise-do-what-you-love-inspires-thousands>.

²⁹ Gordon Marino, “A Life Beyond ‘Do What You Love,’” *New York Times*, March 17, 2014, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/05/17/a-life-beyond-do-what-you-love/>.

³⁰ Katy Osborn, “Why You Should Ignore Career Advice to ‘Do What You Love,’” *Time*, August 11, 2015, <http://time.com/money/3990452/tokumitsu-do-what-you-love/>.

³¹ Bouree Lam, “Why ‘Do What You Love’ Is Pernicious Advice,” *The Atlantic*, August 7, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/08/do-what-you-love-work-myth-culture/399599/>.

‘Sellouts’ Were,” writer Hamilton Nolan succinctly sums up the countercultural mentality of decades past: “That is, [artistic subcultures] didn't just believe that the art *should* be free of the influence of money and corporate sponsorship; they believed that it *had* to be free of those things, or else it was corrupted.”³² (Ironically, Nolan’s post was written for *Gawker*, the flagship blog of the \$250 million Gawker Media Group Inc.,³³ which has long avoided US taxes by incorporating in the Cayman Islands.³⁴)

Art and commerce have, of course, always been intertwined. Renaissance artists produced their greatest works under the commission of aristocrats and wealthy clerics. The novels of counterculture icons Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs were published not by small independent presses, but by Viking Books, now a division of Penguin Random House. The hyperconsumptive excesses of rock bands like the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin are well documented. I say this not to diminish the work of these artists, but only to point out that the intermingling of money and art is not a recent development.

However, at least since the counterculture of the 1960s, bohemian communities have demonstrated an anxiety about this relationship, and have used allegations of “selling out” to police their own boundaries. Perhaps the most well known examples of this phenomenon come through music. Already in 1967, British rock band The Who played with the trope of the commercially corrupted musician by titling their album *The*

³² Hamilton Nolan, “What ‘Sellouts’ Were,” *Gawker*, September 30, 2013, <http://gawker.com/what-sellouts-were-1426892512>.

³³ Alyson Shontell, “Gawker Media Generated \$45 Million In Net Revenue Last Year And It’s Raising A \$15 Million Round Of Debt,” *Business Insider*, January 28, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/gawker-media-raising-money-2015-1>.

³⁴ John Cassidy, “Gawker Stalker: Nick Denton Spotted In Cayman Islands,” *New Yorker*, December 2, 2010, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/gawker-stalker-nick-denton-spotted-in-cayman-islands>.

Who Sell Out and interspersing satirical faux advertisements among their tracks. Emerging in the late 1970s and early 80s, the DIY-minded punk scene has been especially attuned to perceived capitalist threats to their music's integrity. Fans and anti-commercial music magazines like *Maximumrocknroll* have routinely pilloried bands who migrate from tiny independent labels to marginally less tiny ones, to say nothing of acts who make the jump to corporate-backed major labels.

A parallel, though less famous, phenomenon played out for radical bohemian publishers. Amongst the underground press of 1960s and 70s, there was fierce debate about whether the “bourgeois media” should be strategically collaborated with or boycotted completely.³⁵ Amongst zine creators in the 1980s and 90s, the response to attention from the mainstream media was almost uniformly negative: zinesters adopted a siege mentality and use the epithet “sellout” to keep each other in check.³⁶ They often refused interview requests, fed the corporate media false information for the amusement of insiders, and turned on zines that they believed betrayed their values. The *Baffler*—which was born into the zine scene in 1988 but grew into something more polished and professional, a little magazine in its own right—made challenging the corporatization of culture into a cottage industry, eventually giving an anthology of its essays the appropriate title *Commodify Your Dissent*. (It should be noted that in its more recent iteration, even the *Baffler* has allowed its content to be reprinted in *Salon*,³⁷ and its founder has written for the *New York Times*, though not until a dozen years into the

³⁵ Dale Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Citadel Underground, 1991): 148.

³⁶ Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (Portland, OR: Microcosm, 2008), Kindle edition, loc. 3083.

³⁷ “The Baffler,” *Salon*, http://www.salon.com/topic/the_baffler/.

Baffler's run.³⁸) In 1992, at the height of grunge music's crossover mainstream success, an employee at Seattle's Sub Pop Records fed a *New York Times* journalist phony slang for a "Grunge Lexicon" to accompany an article about the newly popular genre. Phrases like "swinging' on the flippity-flop"—allegedly grunge-speak for "hanging out"—were solemnly relayed as fact to the *Times* readership.³⁹ The *Baffler* broke the news of "The Great Grunge Hoax of 1992," writing, "When the Newspaper of Record goes searching for the Next Big Thing, and the Next Big Thing piddles on its leg, we think it's funny."⁴⁰ Other zinesters, like Ananda of *Riot Grrrl* were against any sort of cooperation with mainstream media.⁴¹ When Kurt Cobain, the frontman of grunge rock pioneers Nirvana, showed up for a *Rolling Stone* cover shoot, he was wearing a t-shirt he had hand-lettered with "CORPORATE MAGAZINES STILL SUCK."⁴²

The new little magazines, by contrast, have not shown this impishness or aggression. *n+1*'s profile in the *New York Times* came in September of 2005, a year after the journal had launched its first issue with an editorial statement that bemoaned the fact this era "will be seen as a the time when some of the best people in our intellectual class gave their 'critical support' to a hubristic, suicidal adventure in Iraq."⁴³ If any member of *n+1*'s editorial board appeared to the interview wearing a "CORPORATE

³⁸ Thomas Frank, "It's a Small World," *New York Times*, October 29, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/29/books/it-s-a-small-world.html>.

³⁹ Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, loc. 2928.

⁴⁰ "The Great Grunge Hoax of 1992," *The Baffler*, <http://thebaffler.com/the-great-grunge-hoax-of-1992>.

⁴¹ Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, loc. 2915.

⁴² "15 Rock & Roll Rebels," *Rolling Stone*, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/15-rock-roll-rebels-20130603/kurt-cobain-19691231>.

⁴³ "Editorial Statement," *n+1* 1 (Fall 2004): 3.

NEWSPAPERS KILLED IRAQIS” t-shirt, or indeed said anything negative about the *Times* specifically or mainstream journalism more broadly, A.O. Scott did not note as much. Their quotes are polite and informative. Mark Greif even splits a pot of tea with Scott.⁴⁴ Even the more combative and purist *New Inquiry* did not use their profile in the *Times* to critique that paper’s failings (or if it did, it did not end up published). The farthest anyone seemed willing to go was Rosenfelt’s off-hand comment about her internship at a commercial magazine (the *New Yorker*) being “boring.”⁴⁵

Such earnest collaboration with the commercial press is not necessarily less principled than the zine scene’s uncompromising line. Broadening the reach of your radical ideas is a reasonable political aim. However, the new little magazine’s unapologetic, untortured demeanor when doing so is both a break from the recent bohemian past and part of a widely noted generational trend toward an enthusiasm for—or at least acceptance of—commercial brands making inroads into all aspects of life. Research from the USC Annenberg Center for the Digital Future found a “Millennial Rift,” with Millennials showing “more willingness [than older internet users] to allow access to their personal data or web behavior and a greater interest in cooperating with Internet businesses -- as long as they receive tangible benefits in return.”⁴⁶ A study by the public relations firm Edelman similarly found them to be relatively “open to brand engagement and advertising,” inspiring *Gawker* to dub Millennials “The Sellout

⁴⁴ A.O. Scott, “Among the Believers,” *New York Times*.

⁴⁵ Alex Williams, “The Literary Cubs,” *New York Times*, November 30, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/01/fashion/new-yorks-literary-cubs.html?_r=0.

⁴⁶ “Is online privacy over? Findings from USC Annenberg Center for the Digital Future show Millennials embrace a new online reality,” USC Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism, June 10, 2015, <http://annenberg.usc.edu/news/around-usc-annenberg/online-privacy-over-findings-usc-annenberg-center-digital-future-show>.

Generation.”⁴⁷ During his PBS *Frontline* episode “Generation Like,” media theorist Douglas Rushkoff expressed surprise at how few young people he encountered even knew what the term “sellout” meant. (“I guess, I don’t know, I think first about a concert that’s, like, totally sold out, like, no tickets left,” one young woman says. “That’s probably not what you meant, though.”)⁴⁸

The question, then, is what has changed? Why is the current crop of bohemian publishers seemingly less conflicted about collaborating with commercial media than the Generation X and Baby Boomer bohemians that preceded them? The new little magazines have themselves taken up the question. In a 2014 editorial, *n+1* recollects the Gen X mindset:

Twenty years ago, art and commerce appeared to be opposing forces. The more you were paid for your work, the more likely you were to be a hack.

The term of art was “sellout.” Any artist who tried to make money would end up unable to make art. Record producer and guitarist Steve Albini outlined the story of the sellout in the *Baffler* in 1994. A sympathetic scout would persuade a band to sign a letter of intent, and from that moment forward the terms of the deal would become the most important factor in their work. An incompetent producer would make their songs sound “punchy” and “warm.” (“I want to find the guy who invented compression and tear his liver out,” Albini wrote.) Worse, the band wouldn’t even make money. Their manager, producer, agent, lawyer, and above all label would turn a profit, but the members would probably end up in debt.

For Albini, the only solution was to exist at the edges of the system, living for your art and only occasionally interacting with the corporate beast—by working a job as a copy editor or graphic designer at a major corporate entity, or producing, grouchy but tenaciously, Nirvana’s second and final major-label album, *In Utero*, as Albini did in 1993. But you kept these things separate. There was hackwork, and there was artwork, and everyone knew the difference.

⁴⁷ Hamilton Nolan, “Millennials (The Sellout Generation) Love Advertising,” *Gawker*, <http://gawker.com/5965906/millennials-the-sellout-generation-love-advertising>.

⁴⁸ “Transcript: Generation Like,” PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/generation-like/transcript/>.

This changed, however, when the hackwork dried up: “By the mid-aughts, a day job was no longer an inconvenience but an aspiration, and attitudes toward it changed. The work writers could get at corporations—as listings editors or fact-checkers—may have remained secondary to artwork in their minds, but that work, so much less reliably available than before, demanded a new level of effort to find and to keep. Not only one’s position but one’s entire department could, without much warning, disappear.”⁴⁹

A doctrinaire approach to separating art and commerce was, in this view, predicated on the financial ability of artists to support themselves well enough to keep their art lives uncoupled from their financial lives. The evaporation of subsistence jobs—especially subsistence jobs that leave adequate free time and mental energy to pursue fundamentally noncommercial art—means that the model of using such jobs to finance a separate art life was no longer sustainable, and without the material conditions to support it, the puritanical, anti-sellout mood faded.

It is true that in the post-2008 era, unemployment among the young grew substantially higher than in the period immediately preceding it, or in Albini’s 1994. However, this analysis ignores the fact that there were periods of very high youth unemployment even during the era when selling out was still a paramount artistic concern. According to the Federal Reserve, youth unemployment during the Great Recession peaked in 2010 at 18.4%. In 1982—during the heart of punk’s hardcore era and the same year that Albini’s band Big Black released its first EP—it reached 17.8%.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ “The Free and the Antifree,” *n+1* 20 (Fall 2014): <https://nplusonemag.com/issue-20/the-intellectual-situation/the-free-and-the-antifree/>.

⁵⁰ “Unemployment Rate for Youth in the United States (DISCONTINUED),” Economic Research: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, <https://research.stlouisfed.org/fred2/series/USAURYNA>.

An absence of jobs doesn't necessarily lead to a comfort with artists cozying up to commercial interests, at least not in a one-to-one fashion.

Writer, documentarian, and editor of *n+1*'s *Occupy! Gazette* Astra Taylor gets, I believe, closer to the mark in her 2014 book *The People's Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age*. Taylor pushes back against techno-utopian shibboleths that hold the free flow of creative content online to be an unalloyed good. By framing the trend toward "free culture" as a labor issue that threatens the livelihoods of writers, musicians, artists, and other culture producers, *The People's Platform* encourages readers to focus on the corporate entities who profit from uncompensated creative work: Google, Facebook, Twitter, Huffington Post, and other web platforms that monetize our pursuit of "content" by selling our attention to advertisers along the way.

For Taylor, the increasingly savvy use of digital technology by advertisers has increased people's—especially young people's—comfort with explicit interventions of commerce into culture. Advertisements on Facebook float freely among posts from friends, often in the form of amusing pictures and videos that can be liked, shared, and displayed as a signifier of one's identity. (To cite one successful example from 2012, Oreo posted a Facebook photo of one of their cookies with six layers of frosting, each one a different color of the rainbow. Below the cookie the word "PRIDE" was rendered in bold text. [See Figure 8.] The post earned 280,000 likes, 90,000 shares, and the goodwill of gay-friendly Millennials across the country.⁵¹) Further, advertisers now have the unprecedented ability to target their ads using the data that companies like Facebook trawl from their users. As anyone who has noticed Amazon's uncanny facility with book

⁵¹ "Oreo – Timeline Photos," Facebook, June 25, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150998259519653&set=a.124804629652.101377.114998944652&type=1&theater>.

recommendation can attest, targeted marketing is succeeding in making sure that a greater portion of the ads that you see are relevant to you than was the case, say, two decades ago. A 24-year-old bohemian in 1975 or even 1995 was used to ads that were designed to appeal to broad, middle-of-the-road audience. A 24-year-old bohemian in 2015 sees many more ads specifically designed to appeal to 24-year-old bohemians. Therefore, the “badness” or “squareness” of brands is no longer self-evident.



Figure 8: Viral image of a pro-LGBT Oreo cookie.

Taylor writes:

Surely our social standards will begin to shift in response to these trends. Why worry about selling out when you are already an ad and have been your whole life? Why fret over the ethics of promoting yourself when you are already being used to promote something else? Under the “open” model, where the distinction between commercial and noncommercial has melted away, everything is for sale. When there is no distinction between inner and outer, our bonds with family and friends, our private desires and curiosities, all become commodities. We are sold out in advance, branded whether we want to be or not.⁵²

At the *New Inquiry*, Rob Horning has similar thoughts:

⁵² Astra Taylor, *The People’s Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014), iBooks edition, 238-239.

In social media, advertising's perennial message—that one's inner truth can be expressed through the manipulation of well-worked surfaces—becomes practical rather than insulting. We no longer need to fear “selling out” by blending self-expression with hype, as the terms of service of online selfhood already presume our sell out as a foregone conclusion. We sell out simply by choosing to have subjectivity on social media's terms. Selling out becomes the prerequisite for achieving an even more authentic-seeming self, one that is routinely validated by peer recognition and by recommendation engines, predictive search, and other automatic modes of anticipation.⁵³

Of course, this technological explanation for a generational unconcern with “selling out” is not exclusive from the economic theory advanced by *n+1*. Taylor herself has written about the role that the drastic increase in student debt has had in making Millennials less concerned about being seen as sell outs. The two factors—technological and economic—are likely working in concert. When youth unemployment hit its Great Recession high in 2010, Millennials had been culturally primed to accept constant contact with brands as part of everyone's identity formation, even bohemian radicals. At the 1982 peak, young people were operating fresh off of the influence of punk, and the counterculture of 1960s and 70s before that. Even if the opportunities for radical artists and writers to collaborate with commercial brands were there (and they were there—just ask any of the myriad bands tarred as “sellouts”), there was still a cultural dualism between credible art and commerce. To quote *n+1*, “There was hackwork, and there was artwork, and everyone knew the difference.” Technology and advances in advertising have helped to collapse that difference.

And yet, by comparison to other areas of the arts and culture, the collaboration of little magazines with commercial concerns is relatively light. There are limits to what kinds of commercial collaborations they and their audience would accept. They would

⁵³ Rob Horning, “Social Media, Social Factory,” *The New Inquiry*, July 29, 2011, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/social-media-social-factory/>.

almost certainly face blowback from readers if they sold ads for a right-wing tract like, say, Donald Trump’s *Crippled America*, but the pertinent issue would be a conflict political ideology rather than commercialism as such. There is also reason not to venerate and recycle the tendencies of bohemians past. That cover image of Kurt Cobain, shirt emblazoned with anti-corporate defiance, is one of the most iconic in *Rolling Stone* history, and helped the magazine sell itself. Thomas Frank, whose *Baffler* helped publicize “The Great Grunge Hoax of 1992,” has noted that even with the fake jargon, the *New York Times* still got the trend piece it wanted.⁵⁴

What the little magazines engage in, then, is certainly not commercialism without limits or without self-reflection. It is an acquiescence to the realities of life under capital. While baser motivations for fame and validation are almost definitely part of the equation (as they are for practically any writer or artist), the collaboration with mainstream media through profiles and content sharing agreements serves, in a sense, to buffer the actual pages and websites of the publications from becoming too beholden to commercial concerns. The *New Inquiry* is ad free. *Jacobin* and *n+1* work only with select advertisers—publishing houses and other leftist journals, for example. None trade in the “sponsored content” or “native advertising” that so blurs the boundaries between advertising and editorial work. They do not run articles that contradict their editorial mission in order cultivate clicks and advertisers. Without making such concessions in their own magazines, the publications must pursue other paths to solvency. Content sharing arrangements and a willingness to play nice with the occasional interviewer or profiler in order to boost subscriptions help to do that. In a sense, the editors dirty their hands with commerce to keep the publications themselves clean.

⁵⁴ Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, loc. 2931.

4.2 Little Magazines and the (Post-)Academic Life

A leitmotif of this dissertation has been the turbulent situation of academic labor in the United States. Both in terms of job security and compensation, it is a difficult time to be an aspiring professor. In 1969, 78.3% of college faculty either had tenure or were on the tenure track.⁵⁵ By 2011, that figure had plummeted to below 25%.⁵⁶ The median per-course compensation for part-time faculty is a paltry \$2,700.⁵⁷ Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) threaten to further reduce the work force needed for college teaching. Each of these factors, combined with university administrations that are increasingly adopting corporate values that favor efficiency, commercial payoffs, and quantifiable outputs over the less tangible effects of scholarship and education, are changing the country's intellectual life. The space within the ivory tower is shrinking relative to the number of people who would like to work inside it, and as Boards of Trustees increasingly seek to squeeze more educational blood from the stones that remain, the time and resources to engage in humanities-focused intellectual work within a university context are likely to continue to diminish.

Should these trends continue, there will be, at the very least, fewer jobs within the academy that reward intellectual labor with a living wage. At worst, the great middle-class of scholars will be almost wholly wiped out and replaced with an army of adjuncts

⁵⁵ Adrianna Kezar and Daniel Maxey, "The Changing Academic Workforce," *Trusteeship Magazine*, Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, May/June 2013, <http://agb.org/trusteeship/2013/5/changing-academic-workforce>.

⁵⁶ John W. Cutis and Saranna Thornton, "Here's the News: The Annual Report of the Economic Status of the Profession 2012-13," *Academe*, American Association of University Professors, March-April 2013, 8, <http://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/files/2013%20Salary%20Survey%20Tables%20and%20Figures/report.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Curtis and Thornton, "Here's the News," 9.

on one end of the spectrum and perhaps a few superstar professors broadcasting their MOOC lectures to classrooms across the country on the other end. It is a state of affairs that could have a profound impact on the future of humanities.

In rehabilitating the genre of the little magazine, *n+1*, *Jacobin*, the *New Inquiry*, the *American Reader*, and other publications in their cohort have created homes for the humanities as the fields of academia threaten to go fallow. Though their writing styles are less technical and their interests more general than in most of the work done in highly siloed academic departments, little magazines do share with the academy a commitment to producing serious writing on culture, literature, art, and politics. It can be tempting, then, to think of them as harbingers of a new intellectual future, where, as in the early 20th century, most important intellectual writing in America takes place in publications outside of academia, and universities serve almost solely as sites of instruction rather than underwriters of scholarship and criticism.

However, the financial situations at new little magazines are often precarious, and they almost never have enough money to meaningfully compensate more than a handful of writers and editors. Little magazines were never a goldmine—Max Eastman was famously conscripted into the service with a memo reading “You are elected editor of *The Masses*. No pay.”⁵⁸—but in the early-to-mid 20th century, relatively lower costs of living in urban areas and higher wages in publishing made the life the freelance intellectual feasible if not comfortable. Now, such a life is all but impossible without a preexisting financial means. Keith Gessen admits that even *n+1*, the most established of

⁵⁸ Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2000): 167.

the new little magazines, still has not hit upon a sustainable funding model.⁵⁹ The number of people who make a living solely, or even primarily, through independent little magazines in New York probably numbers in the low double digits. *Jacobin* and *n+1* only have two full-time staffers⁶⁰ apiece. The *New Inquiry* is a relative behemoth with three.⁶¹ As of 2014, *Jacobin* paid \$50 for pieces on its website and \$200 for print articles.⁶² An article in *n+1* might go for around \$300,⁶³ and at the *New Inquiry*, \$50 is reportedly the norm.⁶⁴ For context, the average one-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn rents for \$2,625 per month as of July 2015.⁶⁵ This is roughly equivalent to 52 web pieces for *Jacobin* or *TNI*, or nine long, polished *n+1* essays. The idea of keeping a roof over one's head by writing for little magazines is even less tenable than doing so through adjunct teaching; an adjunct professor receiving average compensation would need to teach four courses to cover her rent—and only her rent—during a four-month semester.

Further, the little magazines are intellectually and financially tethered to academia, and a turbulence in the former could therefore lead to trouble in the latter.

⁵⁹ Keith Gessen, interview by author, digital recording, New York City, February 23, 2015.

⁶⁰ Caroline O'Donovan, "n+1: Learning that print and digital can peacefully coexist," Nieman Journalism Lab, September 15, 2014, <http://www.niemanlab.org/2014/09/n1-learning-that-print-and-digital-can-peacefully-coexist/>.

Bhaskar Sunkara, interview by author, digital recording, Brooklyn, July 14, 2015.

⁶¹ Caroline O'Donovan, "The New Inquiry: Not another New York literary magazine," Nieman Journalism Lab, September 18, 2014, <http://www.niemanlab.org/2014/09/the-new-inquiry-not-another-new-york-literary-magazine/>.

⁶² Caroline O'Donovan, "Jacobin: A Marxist rag run on a lot of petty-bourgeois hustle," Nieman Journalism Lab, September 16, 2014, <http://www.niemanlab.org/2014/09/jacobin-a-marxist-rag-run-on-a-lot-of-petty-bourgeois-hustle/>.

⁶³ "The Free and the Antifree," *n+1*.

⁶⁴ "The New Inquiry," *Who Pays Writers*, <http://whopays.scratchmag.net/?s=the+new+inquiry>.

⁶⁵ "Brooklyn Rental Market Report," MNS, http://www.mns.com/brooklyn_rental_market_report.

Intellectually, much of the work that provides the theoretical underpinnings of little magazines has been produced by academics, even if it is not the sort of writing that gets published in refereed journals. Throughout this dissertation, I have noted the prevalence of academic allusions in little magazines and the sometimes scholarly style of disputation they employ. However, the influence of university scholarship comes into especially plain view when one looks at *What We Should Have Known: Two Discussions*, a pamphlet published by *n+1* in 2007. The pamphlet reproduces the transcripts of conversations among *n+1* staffers about what they believe college-aged people should be reading. A helpful appendix of works cited shows *n+1*'s enormous intellectual debt to writers who have drawn faculty salaries. University instructors are well represented among *n+1*'s favorite writers of non-fiction (ex. Perry Anderson at UCLA, David Harvey at CUNY, Frederic Jameson at Duke, and Francis Fox Piven at CUNY) and fiction (George Saunders at Syracuse, Donald Barthelme at Houston, and Raymond Carver in sundry English and creative writing departments). Some of these eminences (Barthelme, Carver) are dead and the others are not exactly young, evidence, perhaps, that the writing prized in the little magazine world—stylistically lucid, overtly politicized, engaged with big ideas rather than hyperspecific subfields—is waning within the academy. And while, of course, the work of these teachers will continue to exist and potentially to influence generations of little magazine writers, the continued evaporation of steady faculty jobs now and in the future—especially jobs that do not require the overburdening four- or five-course loads that sap instructors elsewhere of the energy needed to write—could prove to be a broken link in the chain of intellectual production. If neither universities nor little magazines have the money in the coffers to materially support a network of writers

pursuing noncommercial work—a network, that for all of the aspersions little magazines sometimes cast on the academy, has produced much of the work that they find to be most influential for their own thinking—then who will provide that support? Will it be provided at all?

Beyond financing writing that influences little magazines, universities provide them with real, if indirect, material support. This, I know from experience. A \$25,000 per year graduate student stipend might not buy you much in New York City, but it did provide me with the support and the unstructured time I needed to found *Blunderbuss Magazine*. I could pour my labor into a project that I never believed would make me any money because Columbia University was, just barely, covering my basic needs of shelter, food, coffee, and cheap beer. Such a flow of cash from academic institutions into the wallets of little magazine editors and writers is not at all unusual. The Creative Publishing and Critical Journalism department at the New School for Social Research has both *n+1*'s Mark Greif and the *New Inquiry*'s Rachel Rosenfelt on their faculty.⁶⁶ Keith Gessen has taught at Sarah Lawrence.⁶⁷ Further, according to Nieman Journalism Lab, the majority of *Jacobin*'s contributors are graduate students or young professors,⁶⁸ and *n+1*'s pages are filled with work from “mostly grad students or writers on the fringes of academia, plus a few professional writers.”⁶⁹ Similarly, the *New Inquiry* draws many

⁶⁶ “Faculty,” Creative Publishing & Critical Journalism, The New School for Social Research, <http://www.newschool.edu/nssr/creative-publishing-critical-journalism-faculty/>.

⁶⁷ Keith Gessen, “Money (2014),” *MFA vs. NYC: The Two Cultures of American Fiction*, ed. Chad Harbach, (Brooklyn: n+1, 2014): 175-185.

⁶⁸ O'Donovan, “Jacobin: A Marxist rag run on a lot of petty-bourgeois hustle,” Nieman Journalism Lab.

⁶⁹ O'Donovan, “n+1: Learning that print and digital can peacefully coexist,” Nieman Journalism Lab.

contributors from “the periphery of academia.”⁷⁰ Comfortable academic salaries, and even tiny graduate student stipends, provide a safety net that allows those who draw them to write for nominal sums, or even for free. Indeed, academics are already accustomed to not receiving compensation for their articles; peer-reviewed scholarly journals seldom pay for the work they publish.

This comfort with un- or underpaid labor provides the grounds for a critique lodged by freelance writers who feel that those willing to write for free devalue the labor of writing and push down the market value of work by those who sell their words to survive. Freelancer Yasmin Nair puts it bluntly: “[T]hose who write for free or very little simply because they can afford to are scabs. This would include not just academics with tenured or tenure-track positions, but adjuncts, professionals (like paid activists and organisers), as well as, really, just about anyone who writes for places like Guernica, The Huffington Post, open Democracy.net, and The Rumpus (and this is a very, very tiny list).”⁷¹ After a dispute with *Jacobin* over the spiking of one of her pieces, Nair took that magazine in particular to task:

Jacobin’s cultural cachet emerges, perhaps somewhat ironically, from a very particular set of circumstances bred by neoliberalism. The breakdown of the stability of university jobs, the dwindling prospect of tenure for many in academia, and the fact that professors are increasingly being admonished to publish in the “real world” to prove that their work is “relevant” has meant that publications like *Jacobin* are able to depend on a large number of highly educated (but not necessarily qualified) writers for whom writing is not their source of

⁷⁰ O’Donovan, “The New Inquiry: Not another New York literary magazine,” Nieman Journalism Lab.

⁷¹ Yasmin Nair, “Scabs: Activists and Others Who Write for Free,” Yasmin Nair website, March 11, 2014, <http://www.yasminnair.net/content/scabs-academics-and-others-who-write-free>.

income and whose names lend a star quality. These kinds of publications also attract established writers looking for newer, hipper markets for their writing.⁷²

I question Nair's assertion that academics face a strong pressure to publish in the "real world"—status within the academy is more often a product of one's academic publishing success than how prolific one is in non-specialist venues that scholars largely hold to be unrigorous—but her larger critique has merit. When academics are able to write for little or no pay, it becomes easier to pay freelancers little or nothing.

Little magazines, then, benefit both from academia's declining ability to provide space and support to aspiring intellectuals, and from the support that it still manages to provide for a lucky few. As described in Chapter One, the troubled job market creates a surplus population of writers and intellectuals whose identities are bound up in their intellectual work but who are forced, by the finitude of available positions, to pursue such work outside of academic institutions. A fraction of those who *are* still supported by universities maintain an active interest in publishing outside of academic venues, and therefore constitute a pool of well-credentialed writers with the ability both to imbue magazines with their institutional credibility and to write for free or nearly free, thereby helping to suppress wages for both the academic and non-academic writers. This is not to say that *Jacobin* and the other little magazines are especially exploitative operations—it is difficult to claim "exploitation" when editors are making meager wages or no wages at all. However, at least in their current institutional form, little magazines are not viable sources of financial support for writers and refugees from the academic job market.

⁷² Yasmin Nair, "On Writers as Scabs, Whores, and Interns, And the Jacobin Problem," Yasmin Nair website, December 10, 2013, <http://www.yasminnair.net/content/writers-scabs-whores-and-interns-and-jacobin-problem>.

They do, however, offer a venue in which the contours of a potential post-academic intellectual future can be discussed and debated by people who hope populate it. In 2013, *n+1* published an unsigned appraisal of the future of the American intellectual. “Logically, there seem to be three possible results of the mounting economic insecurity of intellectuals and ‘culture producers’ amid a general population scoured by the same blast,” the editors write in “Cultural Revolution.” These possibilities bear quoting at length:

One possibility, and the worst, would be to see the next decades exacerbate the class character of culture. In this scenario, since very few people not already wealthy would risk careers as writers or artists, certain vital strains of culture would become, more exclusively than today, the expression of an upper-class stratum. A basic relegation of literature, art, and philosophy to pastimes of the idly rich (as, say, in prerevolutionary France) doesn’t seem impossible.

A second possibility, closer to realization today, would be the confinement of important varieties of culture not to a single socioeconomic stratum but to demographic archipelagos amid rising seas of mass corporate product. Young people might give up hopes of gainful employment through art or serious writing—without giving up the production or consumption of those things. Holding down uninspiring and ill-paid day-jobs, they would huddle together in select neighborhoods of big cities and devote their evenings and weekends to culture (and laundry, shopping, and cleaning). This doesn’t sound so bad; it sounds in fact like the cozily disappointed existence, streaked with fear of unemployment, of half the people we know.

[...]

A more optimistic third possibility glimpses, in the dark cloud already raining on us, a silver lining of cultural revolution —of rapprochement, that is, between intellectuals and nonintellectuals, the intellectuals becoming more like workers and the workers more like intellectuals without the broadening of cultural life diminishing its liveliness or highest achievements. On the contrary, per Trotsky: “The powerful force of competition which, in bourgeois society, has the character of market competition, will not disappear in Socialist society, but, to use the language of psychoanalysis, will be sublimated, that is, will assume a higher and more fertile form. There will be the struggle for one’s opinion, for one’s project, for one’s taste. . . . Art will then become more general . . . the most perfect

method of the progressive building of life in every field. It will not be merely ‘pretty’ without relation to anything else.”⁷³

The university plays a central role in none of these visions of the future. *N+I* takes for granted that artists and intellectuals will go “without much help from universities.”⁷⁴ The other little magazines also are similarly pessimistic about the future of academia as a space of intellectual ferment. *Jacobin* has published an edited version of a speech from Noam Chomsky with the frank title “The Death of American Universities,”⁷⁵ has chastised highly-paid administrators as “Higher Education’s Aristocrats,”⁷⁶ and has written about how the revenue-centric management practices at the University of Chicago represent “Higher Ed’s For-Profit Future.”⁷⁷ At the *New Inquiry*, Aaron Bady has published prolifically and pugilistically about academia in his blog Zunguzungu, including a long essay that he jokes could just as well be titled “MOOCification of Higher Education is a Terrible No Good Very Bad Thing.”⁷⁸

But as *n+I*’s third scenario attests, there is some hope that culture can survive, indeed be democratized, by collapsing material support for intellectuals. It is a stirring vision in which “proletarianization of bohemia may lead to a ProBo challenge to the Bobo [bourgeois bohemian] consensus on the irresistible embourgeoisement of all

⁷³ “Cultural Revolution,” *n+I* 16 (Spring 2013): 14-15.

⁷⁴ “Cultural Revolution,” *n+I*, 15.

⁷⁵ Noam Chomsky, “The Death of American Universities,” *Jacobin*, March 3, 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/03/the-death-of-american-universities/>.

⁷⁶ David Francis Milhalyfy, “Higher Education’s Aristocrats,” *Jacobin*, September 27, 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/03/the-death-of-american-universities/>.

⁷⁷ David Francis Milhalyfy, “Higher Ed’s For-Profit Future,” *Jacobin*, June 7, 2014, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/06/higher-eds-for-profit-future/>.

⁷⁸ Aaron Bady, “The MOOC Moment and the End of Reform,” *The New Inquiry*, May 15, 2013, <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/zunguzungu/the-mooc-moment-and-the-end-of-reform/>.

culture.”⁷⁹ The authors admit, though, that they are unable to provide the details of what such a world might look like:

What, practically, do we mean by such rhetoric? That’s what we have to find out—or else we have produced one more sonorous elite hypocrisy. Reformable institutions should be reformed, and unreformable ones abandoned or replaced. Figuring out what’s reformable is the trick: how about the university, for instance? Until a new system of “higher and continuing education” is in place, adjuncts should be paid better, grad students should unionize, and we should demand that college be made free, at a cost of merely 2 or 3 percent of GDP. These are battles worth fighting. But new institutions are needed too, and more of us should be setting up progressive continuing-ed schools that charge small fees (like the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research, in the middle of New York), or low-overhead cost-free ones (like Deep Springs College, in the middle of nowhere). That’s to name two institutions with elite connotations, but, as in Engels’s second law of dialectics, a change of quantity can become one of quality. The more of these schools that come into existence, the easier it becomes to detach education from the reproduction of class privilege. Every new independent reading group or research collective marks a step in the right direction.⁸⁰

This is effectively a call for a dual-power strategy applied to the realm of culture. Dual-power was theorized by Lenin after the February Revolution, when the Soviet of Workers vied with the official Provisional Government for legitimacy.⁸¹ By acting as a government of its own, the Soviet undermined the authority of Provisional Government, eventually toppling it. Though “dual-power” is not explicitly mentioned in “Cultural Revolution,” it is actually the title of *n+I*’s eleventh issue, published in Spring 2011. It was an approach that gained favor among Occupy activists, including *Tidal* co-founder Yates McKee, who wrote that it “means forging alliances and supporting demands on existing institutions — elected officials, public agencies, universities, workplaces, banks,

⁷⁹ “Cultural Revolution,” *n+I*, 15.

⁸⁰ “Cultural Revolution,” *n+I*, 16.

⁸¹ V.I. Lenin, “The Dual Power,” Marxist Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/09.htm>.

corporations, museums — while at the same time developing self-organized counter-institutions.”⁸²

Under a dual-power approach, little magazines could serve as part—or, arguably, *are* serving as part—of a counter-academia, providing space for intellectual discourse outside of peer-reviewed journals. There are certainly ways in which this is true. While subscriptions to academic journals are often exorbitant, basically rendering them inaccessible to anyone without an institutional affiliation, little magazines post much of their content online for free, with the rest accessible for a relatively modest subscription fee (\$36/year for a print & digital subscription to *n+1*, \$29.95/year for *Jacobin*, \$36/year for a digital subscription to the *New Inquiry*, which has no print version). The writing can sometimes be more broadly accessible than in the academic press, though as we have already seen, this varies from magazine to magazine and article to article.

However, despite the apparent crisis in the academy, little magazines are still a long way from constituting a formidable “ProBo challenge.” For one, their ranks—and their assumed readership—are as elite, if not more so, as that of the academy. Their web of allusions and prerequisite knowledge, acquired through the very systems of accreditation whose legitimacy they question, serve to separate *n+1* from “The People.” In the “Cultural Revolution” essay, for example, the authors presume an audience with an educational background much like their own. Even as it argues that “the entire Marxist lexicon, like that of other varieties of Theory from which it now borrowed, made it impossible for the college-bred radical to communicate with ordinary middle- and working-class Americans in anything like the language in which she wrote her articles or

⁸² Yates McKee, “Art after Occupy – climate justice, BDS and beyond,” *Waging Nonviolence*, July 30, 2014, <http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/art-after-occupy/>.

books,” the essay mentions Western Marxism, Marcuse, Lukács, Althusser, and other esoteric references without explaining or contextualizing them. Its “we”—which seems to include the assumed reader—is quite specific: “we left intellectuals,” the “cozily disappointed” artists & writers make up “half the people we know,” etc. The essay even contains untranslated French: “‘*Il faut travailler, rien que travailler,*’ Cézanne wrote to Rilke: probably the one common motto of artists and thinkers.” (For the record: “One must work, there is nothing but work.”) All of this indicates that *n+1* is writing for its own particular counterpublic, and that this essay, at least, does not represent a “closer consorting between culture and the rest of life, and among intellectuals and nonintellectuals.” Indeed, when the authors write of a “rapprochement, that is, between intellectuals and nonintellectuals, the intellectuals becoming more like workers,” they are talking within their own bohemian community about an era that they hope is soon to come, but is not here yet, and as such, they are using a rhetoric that makes no attempt to imagine such an unstratified audience into existence.

If we are indeed moving to a post-academic era in American intellectual life, the new little magazines may indeed play a role in shaping the discourse and the organization of that era. They provide moral support for young non-academic writers and thinkers to continue their work, and, as we saw in the previous section, conversations that they begin on their pages do occasionally breakout into the larger discursive media ecosystem. However, they are nowhere near ready to assume the crucial role that universities played in American intellectual life for the second half of the 20th century; these magazines have no sustainable financial model to substantively support noncommercial intellectual and literary work. As a community, they also lack connections to sources of political power

that could help to change the material conditions for writers in the digital age. As of yet, they have not made the inroads into institutional halls of power that their antecedents among the New York Intellectuals eventually did, nor—with the possible exception of *Jacobin*—are they grounded in a broad activist movement like the underground press of the 1960s and 70s. In their inward facing bohemianism, the political efficacy of the new little magazines does not ripple to far beyond the borders of their small counterpublic. However, the rewards that these publications can provide to the writers and editors who within that counterpublic are real indeed, even if they are no the type of rewards that will not pay one's rent or make a dent in one's student loan balance.

4.3 Not a Resistance, but a Coping Mechanism

The political economy of intellectual life in the United States is, then, in a state of turmoil, and the new little magazines are not currently poised to lead the way to a more favorable paradigm. By a tremendous margin, they lack the financial resources to provide meaningful material support to the serious-minded writers, artists, intellectuals, and journalists that they publish. They also, by and large, lack the political will to organize an effective opposition to the current state of affairs. Naming a problem and expressing a hope for a favorable resolution—as *n+1* did in their “Cultural Revolution” essay—is only a very early step in the process of bringing that resolution about. It is, however, the relative extent of the steps that the new little magazines are willing or able to take. The inward facing bohemian community fostered by these publications has proven ill suited to marshalling the political and economic resources to effectively challenge their circumstances, let alone the circumstances of those outside of their counterpublic.

Instead, they have provided a space in which young intellectuals can gather to cope with their precarity in the broader culture. They have created a safe space—precarious in its own right—where their work is validated, community is created, and even a degree of celebrity can be attained.

N+I itself has, in the past, keenly observed the limitations of insular bohemian communities. In the spring of 2009, the magazine hosted a symposium on the “hipster” at the New School in Manhattan. The borders of any subculture are, of course, fuzzy, and the participants struggled to define the characteristics that separate the hipster from the non-hipster, but many of the descriptors that recurred throughout the conversation— young, white, well-educated, urban, interested in literature and the arts—mapped quite cleanly onto the *n+I* masthead. The magazine’s suspect status as a “hipster publication”⁸³ was explicitly brought up during the Q&A, but in his preface to *What Was the Hipster*, a pamphlet inspired by the event, Mark Greif adamantly defends *n+I* against charges of hipsterdom. He claims that far from being a hipster journal, “The hipster represents, in a deep way, a tendency we founded the magazine to combat; yet he exists on our ground, in our neighborhood and particular world, and is an intimate enemy—also a danger and a temptation.”⁸⁴ Are Greif and his co-editors hipsters, or maybe hipster fellow travelers? This question is not an especially interesting one, and is largely dependent on which of the innumerable definitions of “hipster” one chooses to subscribe to. (At the panel, Greif

⁸³ “Discussion,” *What Was the Hipster?: A Sociological Investigation*, ed. Mark Greif, Kathleen Ross, and Dayna Tortorici, (Brooklyn: n+1, 2010), Kindle edition, loc. 605.

⁸⁴ Mark Greif, “Preface,” *What Was the Hipster?: A Sociological Investigation*, ed. Mark Greif, Kathleen Ross, and Dayna Tortorici, (Brooklyn: n+1, 2010), Kindle edition, loc. 166.

himself hazarded three distinct definitions, which he called “the white hipster,” “hipster culture,” and “the hip consumer.”⁸⁵)

However, in his “Epitaph for the White Hipster”—a contribution to the book’s essay section—Greif turns to the motivations of the young hipster, and, while he does not reference them, provides a model that sheds some light on the subcultural function of the new little magazine. The essay—which I touched on in my last chapter when discussing the *New Inquiry*’s habit of foregrounding the discursive aspects of Occupy Wall Street— theorizes that when new college graduates move to a big city, they experience a sharp and sudden “declassing.” Greif writes of the hipster: “He or she still possesses enormous reserves of what Pierre Bourdieu termed *cultural capital*, waiting to be activated—a degree, the training of the university for learning tiny distinctions and histories, for the discovery and navigation of cultural codes—but he or she has temporarily lost the *real* capital and background dominance belonging to his class. Certain kinds of subculture allow cultural capital to be re-mobilized among peers and then within the fabric of the “poorer” city, to gain distinction and resist declassing.”⁸⁶

“Declassing” is, perhaps, an imprecise description of the process that Greif describes. It assumes that the hipster arrivistes formerly possessed an upper- or middle-class standing that they then “fell out” of. While this may be true of many, it is not true of all saddled with the mantle of hipster (nor, even, of the entirety of the little magazine crowd—Jonathon Kyle Sturgeon of *n+1* and the *American Reader*, for example, had a

⁸⁵ Mark Greif, “Positions,” *What Was the Hipster?: A Sociological Investigation*, ed. Mark Greif, Kathleen Ross, and Dayna Tortorici, (Brooklyn: n+1, 2010), Kindle edition, loc. 260.

⁸⁶ Mark Greif, “Epitaph for the White Hipster,” *What Was the Hipster?: A Sociological Investigation*, ed. Mark Greif, Kathleen Ross, and Dayna Tortorici, (Brooklyn: n+1, 2010), Kindle edition, loc. 1947.

self-described lower-middle-class upbringing⁸⁷). And even for those who hail from well off families, it doesn't follow that the pursuit of hipster status is a remediation for a drop in socio-economic class. When middle-class youth in the 1960s chose to affiliate with that era's bohemian counterculture (and to pursue status within that counterculture's social framework), it was not a choice made in response to their declassing. After all, the opportunities for them to enter middle-class jobs were plentiful during that economic boom time. Rather, the life and work necessary to retain the class standing they were born into was unattractive to them, and they sought their validation within the context of a subculture whose values and aesthetics they found more pleasing. The fact of the matter is that within bohemian communities—whether hippie, punk, grunge, hipster, or little magazine—status has *always* been substantially decoupled from, and often anathema to, economic success. As Elizabeth Wilson notes, “[Bohemia] was the ‘Other’ of bourgeois society”⁸⁸—accrual of material wealth is subordinated to other values like creativity, intellect, and willingness to challenge mainstream orthodoxies. Rather than responding to “declassing,” then, it seems more accurate to say that Greif's hipster is proactively upwardly mobile in the bohemian milieu he has chosen to presently inhabit, whatever his background.

Greif is, however, more accurate (and more useful for our purposes) when he describes the means by which status is sought within hipster communities. When these post-collegiate twentysomethings gather in relatively cheap urban enclaves, they put their skills of cultural discernment to use. Using the sense of taste that they acquired in college

⁸⁷ Jonathan Kyle Sturgeon, interview by author, digital recording, New York City, December 12, 2014.

⁸⁸ Wilson, *Bohemians*, 240.

(or before), they seek out the hip bands, the hip books, and the hip clothes, and the distinction this earns them within their subculture and social set provides a specific type of validation unavailable to those who have pursued more mainstream and more lucrative paths. “[Y]ou may be tending bar,” Greif observes, “but if you are tending bar in hip clothes and you’re in a band at night, you’ll always possess higher status in *culture* (if not income) than the bond-trader losers ordering vodka tonics in button-downs.”⁸⁹

He could substitute “in a band” with “writing for a little magazine” and the statement would still hold. As the opportunities for serious, stimulating work in journalism, publishing, and academia wane, the bohemian subcultural route to status and validation becomes increasingly relevant. A few decades ago, the academy could provide many young thinkers with both a comfortable income and social recognition as an intellectual. I have already discussed the diminished financial prospects faced by a generation of aspiring professors. However, the consequences of the difficult job market and the adjunctification of the academy are also social. A rhetoric of humiliation is common when discussing the life of the grad student or adjunct professor (demographics, it should be mentioned, that have substantial overlap). “Welcome to the perilous, humiliating and distinctly un-remunerative world of the ‘adjunct professor,’” says the *Los Angeles Times*, before going on to describe lives full of “Dickensian misery” and to note that those on the tenure-track regard them as “losers.”⁹⁰ The popular blog *100 Reasons NOT to Go to Graduate School*⁹¹—whose post routinely garner hundreds of comments

⁸⁹ Greif, “Epitaph for the White Hipster,” *What Was the Hipster?*, loc. 1947.

⁹⁰ Charlotte Allen, “The highly educated, badly paid, often abused adjunct professors,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 22, 2013, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-allen-adjunct-professors-20131222-story.html>.

⁹¹ *100 Reasons NOT to Go to Grad School*, <http://100rsns.blogspot.com>.

and has been mentioned in outlets like *Inside Higher Ed*⁹², the *Chronicle of Higher Education*⁹³, and the *Guardian*⁹⁴—lists among its eponymous reasons that “Rejection is routine,” “Respect for the academic profession is declining,” “There is a psychological cost,” “There is a social cost,” and “Downward mobility is the norm.” A 2014 study found that 47% of PhD students at the University of California, Berkeley scored as depressed; in the arts and humanities, the figure is 64%.⁹⁵ Declining support caused by particularly savage budget cuts in the UC system might partially account for this astronomical figure, but a study based on national data collected through the Fall 2009 American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment also found startlingly high numbers, with nearly 40% of graduate students reporting feeling hopeless during the previous year and 27.2% saying they felt depressed.⁹⁶

The economic conditions of journalistic employment are discussed more thoroughly in the opening chapter of this dissertation, but as with the academic aspirant, the would-be reporter has few opportunities to do serious journalistic work for mainstream outlets, and to garner attendant social esteem. Writing jobs that pay a living wage are difficult to come by, and, if he finds a job at all, the former English major is

⁹² Scott Jaschik, “Reasons Not to Go to Grad School,” *Inside Higher Ed*, March 12, 2012, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/03/12/website-offers-regular-debates-wisdom-going-grad-school>.

⁹³ Ms. Mentor, “They Say I’ll Never Get a Job,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 15, 2014, <http://chronicle.com/article/They-Say-III-Never-Get-a-Job/148793/>.

⁹⁴ Gwen Boyle, “PhD supervisor: the perfect one doesn’t exist so where else can you find help?,” *The Guardian*, March 27, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2014/mar/27/phd-supervisor-university-seek-help-online-communities>.

⁹⁵ Graduate Assembly, *Graduate Student Happiness & Well Being Report 2014* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, Berkeley, 2014), 7.

⁹⁶ Tammy Wyatt and Sara B. Oswald, “Comparing Mental Health Issues Among Undergraduate and Graduate Students,” *American Journal of Health Education* 44.2 (2013): 96-107.

likely to, in a matter of months, go from having his short stories workshopped and pondering the novels of Don DeLillo to pumping out three web posts a day about internet memes and reality television. As *TNI* editor (and former Columbia philosophy major) Atossa Araxia Abrahamian wrote in the magazine's second issue, "What college did was make me want more than the adult world has to offer."⁹⁷

The skills of writing and criticism that this cohort of students were praised for and came to value during their collegiate years are rapidly devalued in the adult economy. "Our precious credentials are increasingly useless for generating income and—let us hope—social prestige, too," says *n+1*. "This should mean that most intellectuals view ourselves as sinking, economically, into the lower-middle or working class, and that 'meritocratic' markers—the contents of our bookshelves and iPods; our degrees—accord us less and less social status in our own and others' eyes."⁹⁸ This experience poses a stark choice: does the young person abandon the activity (writing) that had formerly given her a sense of identity and distinction (as "Writer," "Critic," "Intellectual," etc.) to pursue paths to status that are more easily navigable, or does she maintain her former identity and seek out and create venues that will reward her (socially, if not financially) for writing intellectual and political criticism?

The new little magazines provide a coping mechanism for these anxious young people, whether they are working-yet-dissatisfied academics and journalists, or have never formally pursued careers in those fields. Without substantively altering the bedrock economic conditions that created their anxiety, little magazines offer the comfort and validation of a likeminded audience. They summon a counterpublic in which the values

⁹⁷ Atossa Araxia Abrahamian, "Grade Deflation," *The New Inquiry* 2 (March 2012): 13.

⁹⁸ "Cultural Revolution," *n+1*, 15.

critical analysis and esoteric knowledge of theory, culture, and politics are celebrated rather than viewed as suspect, or worse, worthless. When asked about when he felt that *n+1* had “made it” as a publication, Keith Gessen did not speak first about the recognition from the media establishment that his publication eventually would obtain, of running a particularly outstanding essay, or of the tony houses he and his colleagues would go onto publish with. He talked about the crowd that turned out for the first issue’s launch party: “We threw our first Issue 1 party and there was like 300 people there, and we’re like, “Oh my god! All these people love literature!” Which was not true [laughs], they just wanted to come to the party. [...] To understand that there were this many people in New York who are willing to come to an event for a literary magazine, and they were young people, that was interesting.”⁹⁹ When a community shows up to celebrate the things that you care about—and *your* engagement with those things—this validation can help ease the burden of going without traditional status markers like money. The work of running a little magazine may pay little or nothing, but when 300 people show up to your party, that work is not thankless. Even for those who don’t—like *n+1*’s Harbach, Gessen, or Kunkel—make the jump from little magazines to six-figure book deals, or—like *Jacobin*’s Sunkara—garner guest appearances on cable news talk shows, this accrual of social capital matters. It provides reassurance that critical and literary writing is something that other people value, and it provides a path by which people can attain status within this community of like-minded others. As a young writer accumulates by-lines, he also may accumulate Twitter followers, invitations to participate in readings, and solicitations to write for other publications. With enough success, this writer can plausibly hope to attain a kind of microcelebrity.

⁹⁹ Gessen, interview by author.

One of the clearer distillations of little magazine celebrity culture is the “Mornings After” series at *Adult*, “a magazine of contemporary erotics and experience”¹⁰⁰ founded and helmed by *TNI* contributing editor Sarah Nicole Prickett. Each installment includes photos of a young New York bohemian in his or (more frequently) her bedroom, a short and typically fawning intro from the photographer, and a brief essay from said bohemian on his or her morning routine. The series is well-populated with mainstays of the little magazine world, and photographs seem designed to make them appear alluring and intelligent: *n+1* editor Dayna Tortorici is pictured reading manuscripts on her bed, and another image shows *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, *Feminist Thought: From Margin to Center*, and a volume of Chekhov splayed across her comforter;¹⁰¹ Natasha Lennard, special projects director for the *New Inquiry*, is sprawled out on her bed, eyes locked on the camera, with a hand on the shoulder of a shirtless, tattooed man smoking a cigarette;¹⁰² and Rachel Rosenfelt sits tapping on her laptop in a crop top and a pair of short shorts that show the whole of her crossed legs.¹⁰³ The text similarly balances a bohemian mix of intellectualism and sex appeal. Rosenfelt’s bed is described as being under the shadow of a bookshelf that “spans from wall to wall”; it is also “where the magic happens.” In another installment, the photos show Molly Crabapple, a writer and artist who has worked with *n+1*, *Jacobin*, and the *New Inquiry*, lounging in a sheer black slip, and the accompanying text tells us she starts her mornings

¹⁰⁰ “About Adult,” *Adult Magazine*, <http://adult-mag.com/about-adult/>.

¹⁰¹ “Dayna Tortorici’s House Plants,” *Adult Magazine*, September 15, 2014, <http://adult-mag.com/mornings-after-dayna-tortorici/>.

¹⁰² “Natasha Lennard’s Pre-Dawn,” *Adult Magazine*, July 18, 2014, <http://adult-mag.com/natasha-lennards-pre-dawn/>.

¹⁰³ “Rachel Rosenfelt’s Spiritual Recovery,” *Adult Magazine*, March 20, 2014, http://adult-mag.com/rachel_rosenfelt_morning_after/.

with the *London Review of Books*.¹⁰⁴ Life in little magazines is cast as glamorous. One's critical facility and fluency with leftist theory might not earn much money, but "Mornings After" can at least make such fluency look cool.

4.4 Conclusion

It would be reductive and inaccurate to assert that those who work for little magazines do so only, or even primarily, as a series of moves and countermoves to build up cultural capital that, along with actual capital, is no longer readily available through careers in mainstream journalism, publishing, or the academy. *N+I* explicitly challenged the ubiquity of such a Bourdieuan framing in its Spring 2013 editorial "Too Much Sociology."¹⁰⁵ While conceding that Bourdieu's use of concepts like distinction and cultural capital have helped to demystify the once-nebulous concept of taste and to explicate the class dimensions of culture, the editorial argues that Bourdieu's matrices also form a closed critical system, "unbeatable on [its] own terms." According to the Bourdieuan model, even the anarchist arguing for an abolition of all hierarchy is doing so to demonstrate his difference from—and superiority over—the more vertically-minded mainstream, and is therefore paradoxically chasing status. It is not, *n+I* argues, that such an analysis is completely wrong or useless, but it does effectively subordinate the content of art, culture, and ideas to the status jockeying of the people that consume them. Individual preferences, and the language and logic used to express them, are reduced to the input to and output of a system of social rank. *N+I* takes culture—and judgments

¹⁰⁴ "Molly Crabapple's Too Many Things," *Adult Magazine*, May 5, 2014, <http://adult-mag.com/molly-crabapple-morning-after/>.

¹⁰⁵ "Too Much Sociology," *n+I* 16 (Spring 2013): 1-6.

about culture—very seriously, and so it is no surprise that editorial responds the Bourdieuan challenge by asking, “Can we no longer really provide good faith reasons for our cultural preferences[?]”

The commitments that members of the little magazine community hold to literature, art, and leftist politics certainly appear to be genuine. There is no reason to believe that these writers and editors are putting on an elaborate, disingenuous performance for the sake of subcultural cred. However, the status they can accrue within their counterpublic is real, and it is important within these circles. There are very few people who have the fortitude to develop specific skills and interests without validation and a community that supports them. The kind of thought, criticism, and writing that flourishes within the world of little magazines will often gain writers little acclaim in traditional publishing, and little remuneration on the market. Articles placed in these non-peer-reviewed journals are of little use in landing their authors tenure-track positions. I know from experience that the uncompensated hours spent editing a little magazine are more likely to earn parental concern than admiration. Thus, the existence of a community where astute critical writing *can* earn respect is vital to making sure this kind of criticism continues to exist.

However, the new little magazines still have a very long way to go if they hope to serve as viable counter-institutions capable of offering meaningful support to serious, politically-engaged intellectual work, and to serve as agents of political power beyond their own small bohemian circle. Rather than working to transform the conditions of American intellectuals, let alone the broader society, new little magazines are serving as a salve, offering some emotional and intellectual rewards to writers with few options. This

is not nothing—as stated above, the validation of a community can provide an impetus to continue working when other forms of recompense are absent. Nor, however, is it effective politics. The building of sympathetic, likeminded communities is at most a sort of proto-politics, a space where ideas can be incubated, goals developed, and relationships forged before the community’s resources are then marshaled for expeditions beyond its borders, to the heterogeneous spaces where politics happen. For little magazines to succeed on a political—rather than literary or intellectual—measure, that leap must be made.

CONCLUSION

Little magazines matter deeply to me. As a scholar, editor, and writer, these publications have consumed the last three years of my life and are poised to consume the years that lie ahead. It wasn't easy, then, to arrive at the conclusions I came to. I wanted nothing more than to discover that the work little magazines were doing—that I was doing—is effective and necessary, a boon to American political discourse, a potent challenge to orthodoxies of both mainstream journalism and the academy. Instead, I found an inward-facing community whose political power is curtailed by its willingness to preach to its own choir of young lefty bohemians. I still think that much of the writing printed in little magazines is beautiful and insightful. At times, it's even emotionally powerful. I'm slightly embarrassed to admit this, but the unsigned *n+1* essay "Cultural Revolution," discussed at some length in Chapter Four, made my eyes well up the first time I read it. It ends:

We can't bring ourselves to cheer the failure of institutions that have sustained us—but we can at least be grateful that the collapsing structures are carrying out a

sort of structural rescue of meaningful individual choice, in politics and culture. Bobo or ProBo? Siege mentality (“We writers are in this together!”) or sorties beyond the walls: “We’re in this with almost everyone!”? Reform existing institutions, or replace them, or cultivate your own garden, or retire to your Unabomber cabin? Join the traditional intellectuals and seek patronage among think tanks, foundations, rich individuals, and multinational corporations, or do something for cultural revolution? Not that the old Marxist jargon matters too much, adopted or abandoned. What counts is history asking us a question—about our content or purpose in a society of accelerating insecurity, including our own—that one way or another we need to formulate as sharply as possible, since we answer it with our lives.

It still gives me chills—*we answer it with our lives*. As I embark on my life beyond a PhD program, I must now answer with mine. It is rare that a passage has made me feel this understood. I feel a visceral kinship with its unnamed author. We are would-be intellectuals in an era where the templates for what an intellectual should be have broken down. It is comforting to know that I am not alone.

But that sense of comfort is not enough.

I don’t want our work—the criticism we write, the insights we share, the arguments we have, the politics we envision—to be like opera. Some people enjoy opera. They appreciate its nuances, are dazzled by its virtuosos, and are moved by its resonances. For this small sliver of society, the music can provide solace and the stories can inform worldviews. Attending a show and being among other opera lovers can create community. Yet opera is rarefied—it speaks only to those who know its codes, and alienates the greater portion who do not. The Revolution, it’s safe to say, will not be sparked by an especially stunning aria.

At this moment, the world of new little magazines looks quite a bit like the world of opera. If one views little magazines only as artistic projects, this might be okay. For those of us who see them as—or who want them to be—agents of politics, it is not. Yet

still, there is hope. As I write this in December 2015, *Jacobin* is currently raising funds for a special booklet titled *The ABCs of Socialism*. With the surprising momentum of the Bernie Sanders campaign, *Jacobin*'s editors say that "they've had more conversations about socialism with their friends and family in the past six months than in the last six years."¹ They are capitalizing on this surge of interest by writing, printing, and distributing 10,000 copies of a primer for the uninitiated. They are looking beyond the bohemian counterpublic, and are therefore willing to address questions that might seem naïve or laughable within the little magazine echo chamber ("Don't capitalism and democracy go hand-in-hand?" "Isn't redistribution theft?").

Unless those of us who create little magazines are content to become—or remain—about as subversive as opera, we should follow *Jacobin*'s lead. The conversations we have amongst ourselves are of little importance if we do not push them beyond our insular circles and make them relevant to the broader polity. One of the great strengths of little magazines is that we are unconstrained by the alienating conventions of academic writing, enforced by peer-review and tenure committees. We are free to write in a way that can be broadly understood, yet all too often we load up our writing with jargon and demand a tremendous amount of prerequisite knowledge from our readership. And even when our work is accessible, we have shown little ability to get into the hands of a broad array of people.

As a step toward remedying this, my team at *Blunderbuss* is planning the launch of free newsprint publication to serve as a complement to our web magazine. While most little magazines function as luxury items—expensive, handsomely printed, suitable for

¹ "The ABCs of Socialism," *Jacobin*, December 8, 2015, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/the-abc-of-socialism/>.

coffee table display—we are moving in the other direction. We want to create something that is approachable, broadly comprehensible, and not laden with self-seriousness, and we want to distribute it not just at bookstores patronized by bohemians with elite educations, but in more diverse spaces like subway stations and street corners.

There is no telling whether this plan will work out, but for little magazines to be politically relevant, such attempts to reach beyond the borders of our small counterpublic are a necessity. We must forge relationships with activist organizations and devise ways to work together. We must strive to be relevant and comprehensible to people who don't know what "intersectionality" means, but who are experiencing (and hoping to cast off) intersectional forms of oppression. We must do more than say smart things at each other, and then pat each other's backs for being smart.

Will new little magazines be an instrument of political and social change, or will we become opera? Only time will tell, but if we are to be intellectually honest, we need to ask ourselves difficult questions about what our aims really are and whether or not we are really acting in accordance with the values we espouse. And then we need to answer these questions with our lives.

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