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YOUNG ACTIVISTS AND THE NEW “NO WAVE”: TWO ANTHOLOGIES FOR A FEMINIST FUTURE

by Alycia Sellie

Melody Berger, ed., *WE DON'T NEED ANOTHER WAVE: DISPATCHES FROM THE NEXT GENERATION OF FEMINISTS*. Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006. 318p. \$15.95, ISBN 1-58005-182-0.

Lisa Jervis & Andi Zeisler, eds., *BITCHFEST: TEN YEARS OF CULTURAL CRITICISM FROM THE PAGES OF BITCH MAGAZINE*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2006. 372p. \$16.00, ISBN 0-374-11343-2.

We were working at *Ms.* magazine in 1996 when a xeroxed pamphlet arrived at the office bearing the name *Bitch*. We opened the zine and found what we'd been fearing didn't exist: feminist writing that was funny, engaged with pop culture, and yet intellectually rigorous. Eureka!

— Jennifer Baumgardner & Amy Richards (back cover of *Bitchfest*)

DIY, or “Do It Yourself,” is an important maxim for the feminists anthologized in the books *Bitchfest: Ten Years of Cultural Criticism from the Pages of Bitch Magazine*, and *We Don't Need Another Wave: Dispatches from the Next Generation of Feminism*. This new generation of feminists proclaims that all people who identify as feminists have an important role in defining what the movement is today and how we all affect its future. Both books present an extremely varied view of feminism, and the one thing that binds them both at their centers is the idea that feminist activism is participatory, inclusive, and should consist of whatever we can make of it.

For Lisa Jervis and Andi Zeisler, doing it themselves in the early 1990s meant co-founding the zine *Bitch*. The publication represented their as-yet-unexpressed-elsewhere vision of feminism. Growing from its stapled and photocopied roots into a widely distributed magazine and now into a bound anthology, *Bitch* is a success story of self-publishing and community-building. The independent style in which *Bitch* was created extends to its content as well. The coeditors describe their early realization that “if we wanted to read

something like this, we would have to write it ourselves” (p.xxiii, *Bitchfest*). They set forth to examine popular culture through a feminist lens — a considerable challenge in a culture framed by the *Girls Gone Wild* video craze, “girl power,” and American Girl dolls.

In the introduction to *Bitchfest*, Margaret Cho explains that being called a “bitch” should be considered a compliment, “because not being one sucks. Not being a bitch means not having your voice heard. Not being a bitch means you agree with bullshit. Not being a bitch means you don't appreciate all the other bitches who came before you” (p.xv). Jervis and Zeisler argue that the term is just as loaded for women as “feminist” is. They adopted “bitch” for the title of the zine because of the reality that both words are “lobbed at uppity ladies who dare speak up and don't back down,” and because of the double use of “bitch” as a verb as well as a noun (p.xxi).

A great variety of topics is covered in *Bitchfest*, from public breastfeeding (“Double Life: Everyone Wants to See Your Breasts — Until Your Baby Needs Them” by Lisa Moricoli Latham) and “domestic arrangements” to gender bias

in scientific studies, new definitions of virginity, and women's unaccepted and repressed sexual desire for female fashion-magazine models. In “The Paradox of Martha Stewart,” Jennifer Newens addresses popular criticism of the celebrity's cringe-inducing single-woman status. Julie Craig examines the “Feminists Who Aren't”; Leigh Shoemaker explores “Urinalysis: On Standing up to Pee” (and the social effects thereof, in response to Camille Paglia); and Marissa Meltzer deconstructs the humor of obesity in “Are Fat Suits the New Blackface?” *Bitchfest* is thrilling and punchy read, appropriate for “bitches” of any age or wave. Its widely ranging voices speak just as powerfully in book form as they did from between the covers of a monthly magazine.

We Don't Need Another Wave is similarly rooted in DIY. Editor Melody Berger is also the founder and editor of the zine *The F-Word*, a self-published periodical aimed at consciousness-raising for teens or “youthful people.” Berger hesitantly describes herself as a “post-Third Wave. A Fourth Wave, if you will” (p.20). She acknowledges

that in the lives of the women who have come before her, identifying as part of a particular wave may have been an important way to align oneself with a particular movement. Yet she is disgruntled by the “ways in which feminism gets discussed in the mainstream media...when it gets discussed at all. There is so much focus on the packaging of our ‘message’ that we hardly ever talk about what that ‘message’ is. As if there is only one” (p.21). Her vision of today’s feminism cannot be summarized in one neat definition or wave, and she doesn’t think it ever should be. Contributor Lisa Jervis agrees: “We’ve reached the end of the wave terminology’s usefulness” (p.14).

We Don’t Need Another Wave illustrates the inclusive and individualist form of feminism that its editor voices. In contrast to *Bitchfest*, this anthology is filled with many first-person narratives of how gender and societal conventions have shaped the authors’ lives. The contributors to this book are highly active and visible in the struggle to make feminist criticism heard. Many of them are very young and yet very well-versed in organizing, making change, and creating spaces for themselves.

In “A Time to Hole Up and a Time to Kick Ass: Reimagining Activism as a Million Different Ways to Fight,” Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha explores the climate of post-9/11 protests for women of color and how expressing feelings of fear and confusion with one another during this time was just as important as (and safer than) activism in the streets. Both “Troubling the Performance of the Traditional Incest Narrative,” by Alexia Vernon, and “The Chain Reaction of Unsilencing,” by Cindy Crabb, present ways that the authors have examined and shared their experiences as survi-

vors of childhood sexual abuse. Both of these women, like many others in the anthology, are working artists who have been motivated by their experiences living under patriarchy and have made their artwork encompass their activism. In “Por El Amor Del Mundo,” María Cristina Rangel searches for the history of her late uncle’s life and reflects on the ways that his legacy as a queer Latino murdered in conservative Washington has affected her own perceptions of her home, her family, and her own identity. kat marie yoas presents the difficulties she has had being working-class and attempting to participate in academia and women’s studies, in her piece, “I Went to College and All I Got Was this Trailer Trash T-Shirt.”

Both *Bitchfest* and *We Don’t Need Another Wave* each end with their own instructional essay by Jennifer L. Pozner. Both essays stress not only that we can be our own media makers, but also that each woman can take a stand to change the status quo for a “Progressive Feminist Future,” Pozner encourages creative actions to set records straight. In *We Don’t Need Another Wave*, she writes of the current political climate — about how activism in the streets, like the March for Women’s Lives in 2004, broadcasted the energies of active feminists, and yet, “faced with a women’s rights demo bigger than any 1960s Civil rights or antiwar march, the American media responded with a whimper...” Fed up with the current status quo of media representations of women, Pozner gives advice on how to influence mainstream media coverage, from challenging double standards, seeking positive reinforcement, engaging in dialogues, and correcting the record to “doing opposition research” and getting to know the enemy (pp.291–94). In *Bitchfest*,

Pozner also warns that one person’s actions may not make a stunning change overnight, but that “your and others’ media outreach and advocacy efforts will still help generate informative, critical, accurate, authentic, positive, and influential coverage of women and the issues that most affect us — and our collective efforts can and will result in structural change. Learn from your mistakes, replicate your successes, and never give up. The fight for media and gender justice needs you.” (p.352).

Those who have constructed these two anthologies are heeding Pozner’s call. Both books are inspiring, fresh, and full of desire for a better future. As Lisa Jervis succinctly summarizes for the new “no-wave” generation:

We all want the same thing. To borrow bell hooks’ phrase, we want gender justice. We may not all agree on exactly what it looks like or how to get it. We should never expect to agree. Feminism has always thrived on and grown from internal discussions and disagreements. Our many different and often opposing perspectives are what push us forward, honing our theories, refining our tactics, driving us toward a more thorough dismantling of the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (to borrow another phrase from hooks). (p.17, *WDNAW*)

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