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## "To liberate communication": the Realist and Paul Krassner's 1960s

Terry Joel Wagner

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

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*"TO LIBERATE COMMUNICATION:"*  
*THE REALIST AND PAUL KRASSNER'S 1960S*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

By  
Terry Joel Wagner  
B.A., Rice University, 2002  
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While every person and institution listed above has contributed to making this master's thesis possible, I alone am responsible for any misjudgments in reasoning and for choosing to write about a boundary-breaking magazine and a culture of potty-mouths.

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## Abstract

Paul Krassner began publishing a small-circulation magazine called *The Realist* in New York City in 1958 because he believed there existed excessive restraints on speech in American culture. The publication began with a combination of earnest critiques and good-humored satires on such topics as organized religion, sexual mores, Cold War paranoia, and civil rights. By the mid-sixties, the magazine was enlarging the space not just for what opinions could be expressed but also for the way those opinions were expressed and, in the process, testing the boundaries of obscenity. As Krassner became a bitter opponent of the Vietnam War and the administration that waged it, he combined vulgarity and protest into a startling form of self-expression that, ultimately, resulted in the magazine's best-remembered piece. Issues of *The Realist* from 1968 demonstrate that Krassner flirted with political radicalism, particularly in that heady year, but ultimately, his war was with the cultural censors. The humor in *The Realist*, both bold and sophomoric, led to denunciations from journalists, politicians, and feminists. The condemnation of the latter group particularly stung the usually thick-skinned editor, who had long made the case for equal pay and reproductive rights for women. *The Realist* is the principal example of a 1960s publication – and, by mid-decade, a widely read one – that reveled in psychedelic and sexual experimentation, condemned what it considered evil, but above all, considered the right to self-expression the most essential American value.

## Introduction

On Saturday evening, the regular printer, Don Chenoweth, took home the galleys for typesetting. Sunday morning, he called Paul Krassner to tell him that he would not finish the work on the newest issue of Krassner's monthly magazine, *The Realist*. The editor and publisher needed to look for another printer. Any involvement with the article that Krassner had given him, Chenoweth insisted, would send the editor of *The Realist* straight to prison for criminal libel. Chenoweth did not wish to learn what the consequences would be for himself. Not even Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, known for his tolerance of distasteful material, would believe that the First Amendment protected Issue Number 74 of *The Realist*.

It was an unfortunate time to be without a lawyer. Krassner's regular legal consultant, Martin Scheiman, had recently killed himself. Now, with the immediate dilemma before him, Krassner needed counsel, asking the constitutional lawyer Ernst Rosenberger if he would defend the editor if indicted. The security of having an attorney lined up would be nice, but Krassner intended to publish regardless. Rosenberger committed himself to defend the publisher. But where was Krassner going to find a printer? Each one that the ringleader of *The Realist* approached after Chenoweth also turned him down. Not even the shop that handled the Communist *Daily Worker* was willing to face the risk. Eventually, Krassner located someone in Brooklyn to do the typesetting, and ink finally met paper for the May 1967 issue.<sup>1</sup>

The article that caused so much consternation in the Spring of 1967 among this New York community of legal experts, printers, and an underground publisher involved some deleted portions of a new book about the assassination of John F. Kennedy, selections that had

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Krassner, *Confessions of a Raving, Unconfined Nut: Misadventures in Counter-Culture* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 135-6.

been removed from the original manuscript upon protest from the Kennedys themselves. Many speculated about what had been excised. The book, William Manchester's *The Death of a President*, had been commissioned by the former president's brother and attorney general, Robert Kennedy, and wife, Jacqueline. The former first lady sat for ten hours of taped interviews with Manchester. But the final product was undesirable. Jackie wanted Manchester's manuscript bowdlerized; there were details that she deemed too personal, and they needed to be removed. Robert Kennedy advised Harper and Row not to publish Manchester's book. Editor-in-chief at Harper and Row, Evan Thomas, thought the book was offensive to more than just the Kennedys. He believed that *The Death of a President* was "gratuitously and tastelessly insulting" to the current President Lyndon Johnson. An editor at Random House who read the manuscript said that it was filled with "unbelievable things that happened after the assassination." Lawsuits began.<sup>2</sup>

Paul Krassner had tracked down the offending material, and he was not going to let the courts decide what would be available to the public. Just what had he unearthed? "The Parts Left Out of the Kennedy Book" was certain to find an audience hungry for the tawdry details of the assassination and its aftermath. The longtime editor of *The Realist* knew that the material he had in hand would excite a level of attention unprecedented for his magazine. As it turned out, the May '67 issue of *The Realist* would forever define the publication's legacy, epitomizing its irreverence, its conflation of fact and fiction, and its insistence on the right to absolute, unfettered expression.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.



By the time that “The Part Left Out of the Kennedy Book” hit newsstands, at the beginning of “the Summer of Love,” Krassner had been publishing his magazine for a decade, all the while honing his satire and his talent for toying with the public’s expectations. Born to Jewish parents in 1932 – his mother a Russian immigrant and his father American-born with Hungarian ancestry – Krassner grew up in Queens, New York. A violin prodigy who performed at Carnegie Hall by the age of six, the future ringleader of America’s most sacrilegious periodical fell under the tutelage of publisher Lyle Stuart, whose muck-racking, anti-censorship magazine *The Independent* gave Krassner his first experience with the world of iconoclastic sentiments and marginal circulation numbers. Krassner graduated from errand boy to contributor to managing editor of *The Independent* in little time, and soon, Stuart was encouraging his protégé to launch his own magazine.

Krassner was both intimidated and enthusiastic. Though he had contributed some pieces to *Mad* magazine (which shared the same office building as *The Independent*), a few sketches to *The Steve Allen Show*, and editorials to Stuart’s magazine, his work had been edited, censored, or outright rejected in each format. *Mad* considered a satire of labor unions too adult for its readership. Steve Allen’s producers did not accept a skit that derided psychiatrists because Allen himself was seeing one regularly. And Lyle Stuart, politically correct before his time, would not allow Krassner to use the word “bogeyman” because it was offensive to African Americans. The restrictions placed on Krassner perturbed him. He needed to communicate as freely as possible. So, taking the name of the magazine from the suggestion of a columnist at the “free-thought” publication *Progressive World*, and taking his first subscribers from *Progressive World*’s mailing list, Krassner launched *The Realist* in June 1958. He hoped his

publication could find a halfway point between the world of social commentary and satire, “a healthy combination of entertainment and the First Amendment” which would avoid the self-seriousness of the know-it-all editorialists and the frivolity of pure humorists. The underground press of the counterculture was years away from being born (as was the counterculture itself). Krassner saw himself as part of an older tradition, tracing his roots to I.F. Stone’s *Weekly*, George Seldes’s *In Fact*, and of course, Stuart’s *The Independent*.<sup>3</sup>

The young editor began with the immodest goal of reviving satire itself. In the magazine’s first issue, Krassner’s maiden editorial reproduced a recent quotation from Groucho Marx: “Satire is verboten today. The restrictions—political, religious and every other kind—have killed satire.”<sup>4</sup> Also inspirational to Krassner was a piece he read in *Esquire* magazine as he was considering the mission of his new publication. “America Needs a *Punch*,” an article written by the former editor of the British humor magazine, Malcolm Muggeridge insisted, “The area in life in which humor is permissible is steadily shrinking. . . . [T]he only pleasure of living is that every joke should be made, every thought expressed, every line of investigation, irrespective of its direction, pursued to the uttermost limit that human ingenuity, courage, and understanding can take it. The moment that limits are set . . . then the flavor is gone.” The editorial would characterize not only the sensibility that guided *The Realist* through its first run (1958-74) but also much of the ethos of the counterculture that would flourish in the middle and late part of the 1960s. Muggeridge went on to promise, or perhaps warn, “By its very

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-42.

<sup>4</sup> Krassner, “An Angry Young Magazine . . .”, *The Realist*, June/July 1958, 2.

nature, humor is anarchistic.”<sup>5</sup> Krassner took the lesson to heart. Intent on remedying a too-serious America, an America in need of a court jester, he would have no sacred cows.

The new editor plucked talent where ever he could find it, and the finds were often fortuitous. Setting up shop in the same building as *Mad* magazine, Krassner enlisted *Mad*’s art director, John Francis Putnam, to design the logo of *The Realist*. Putnam also became a regular editorialist, the scribe behind the recurring feature, “Modest Proposals.” One sleepless evening, Krassner heard late-night radio commentator Jean Shepherd, who began transcribing his on-air monologues and printing them in *The Realist* under the title “Radio Free America.” The editor of the *Institute for General Semantics Newsletter*, Robert Anton Wilson, took the next step in his prolific career as a writer by helming the regular column “Negative Thinking.” And Krassner discovered the clever Marvin Kitman when, at a horse racetrack, he was amused by Kitman’s column in the handicap newsletter. Krassner was, perhaps haphazardly but with abounding fortune, building an arsenal of reliable satirists.

Readership built slowly but had something of a charmed beginning. In addition to making use of *Progressive World*’s subscription list, from which 600 subscribers (out of that magazine’s 3,000) were found, Krassner benefitted from the generosity of some show business friends when he was starting out. Steve Allen was the first subscriber to *The Realist*, and he bought several gift subscriptions. One was for his friend and regular television guest, the comedian Lenny Bruce. Impressed with the magazine, Bruce sent a few gift subscriptions to his friends. Even with such an auspicious beginning, Krassner had to launch his magazine on a shoestring budget. He decided on “Newsprint,” as his paper stock, a quality Krassner would

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<sup>5</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 42.

later describe as “somewhere between amateurish mimeograph pages and slick *New Yorker* types.”<sup>6</sup> Text-heavy in its initial issues, the magazine included an increasing number of cartoons and graphics as it matured. Krassner never accepted advertising in his magazine, but *The Realist* flourished nonetheless. With a distribution of just over 4,000 subscribers in mid-1961, the readership of *The Realist* had jumped to more than 30,000 by the end of 1963, and peaked with just short of 100,000 regular readers in 1967-68 (See Figure 1). Though described by *Time* magazine in the early ‘60s as “a shabby Greenwich Village periodical,” *The Realist* had transcended its roots by mid-decade to become a widely read magazine with international distribution.<sup>7</sup>

With increased readership, the famous came flocking, or perhaps it was the other way around. Regardless, the magazine interviewed or received contributions from (or both) comedians Mort Sahl, Henry Morgan, Dick Gregory, Richard Pryor, Woody Allen and Lenny Bruce, writers Norman Mailer, Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, Ken Kesey, and Terry Southern, and self-proclaimed revolutionaries of the late ‘60s such as Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman. Many among that list were not merely interview subjects or contributors, but friends and family. Krassner was the son-in-law of Norman Mailer, close friend of Lenny Bruce, and the Left-wing mainstay who would contribute to Hoffman and Rubin the name of their revolutionary group: the Yippies. Krassner’s *curriculum vitae* would have been full, even had he not helmed *The Realist*. During his tenure at *The Realist* and after, he was also an editor for *Playboy* magazine, the “society columnist” for the radical, West Coast glossy *Ramparts*, the

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with author, May 21, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> The circulation data listed can be found in *The Realist*, September 1961, December 1963, and October 1968. More complete data are available in Figure 1. *Time* magazine quote in Krassner, *Confessions*, 127.

editor of Lenny Bruce's memoir *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People*, and in the late 1970s, briefly the managing editor of *Hustler* magazine, while founder Larry Flynt pursued other ventures.

The iconoclasm of *The Realist* began with its beat. For the first several years, the magazine was concerned, above all, with critiquing religious institutions – especially the Catholic Church. The accusations and jibes that *The Realist* expressed were rarely leveled at popes and nuns in the mid-twentieth century United States. The magazine also embraced the Sexual Revolution with open arms, celebrating the pill for the freedom it gave men and women and insisting that the human body and human sexuality should elicit joy, not shame. More conventional topics of the turn of the decade, such as Cold War paranoia and civil rights for blacks, also appeared regularly in the magazine's pages. They were issues that most social publications addressed, but *The Realist* always pushed the envelope a bit further than its peers. While many agreed that African Americans in the South deserved to share lunch counters with whites, few delved into the underlying fear of interracial sex. For *The Realist*, that aspect of "the race question" was not just essential, but a lark. At bottom, the problems of American society grew from a diseased national mind. The nation's values failed Krassner's test; they were not humanistic, he thought.

Such sentiments alone were not enough. Increasingly, the means of expression became as important as the ideas themselves. Krassner and his cronies wanted to test the boundaries of speech. They found that the boundaries had mostly disappeared, leading to satirical content which some would consider brilliant and others obscene. "I felt my side was in the process of winning from the beginning," Krassner later said about the battle against obscenity laws. "I was

getting away with it. . . . At the same time, Lenny Bruce was getting busted . . . so maybe I as an individual was winning, but my side had a way to go.”<sup>8</sup> Epitomizing Krassner’s sense of mischief (and his ability, when he tried, to keep his wit concise) was a poster he designed with John Francis Putnam which read “Fuck Communism.” The incongruity, as Krassner saw it, was that the Right wing, which felt this sentiment most strongly, would be offended by its language, while the Left, more tolerant of expressive words, would not endorse the Cold War sentiment. It brought him deep pleasure to know that he could accuse anyone critical of the sticker of being either soft on Communism, or a prude, or both. In typical fashion, Krassner used the proceeds from the “Fuck Communism” stickers (one dollar a piece) to send *Ramparts* editor Robert Scheer on a fact-finding mission to Vietnam. That trip would eventually allow *The Realist* to scoop Scheer’s regular patron, *Ramparts*. As the Vietnam War became the center of national life, Krassner harnessed his gift for vulgarity as a weapon against the war. Following in the footsteps of Lenny Bruce, and engaging in aesthetic experiments of expressivity alongside Norman Mailer and some taboo-busting rock bands, Krassner crafted the satirical work that topped them all.

By 1968, *The Realist* had pushed the limits of taste and free speech for a decade. Krassner began to chronicle, and participate in, a new kind of expression. Teaming with protest performance artists Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, Krassner and his magazine ventured into political radicalism and became for a short time “a Movement paper.” The guerilla theater performed by the Yippies – a group of outlandish, politicized, hippie demonstrators – captured Krassner’s imagination. He advertised, participated in, and reported on several protest actions,

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with author, May 21, 2010.

including those at the Democratic Party's National Convention in Chicago. However, by the end of that year, the declining fortunes of the anti-war movement and the illusion of an alliance between counterculture and the New Left were becoming obvious. *The Realist* continued to deride the war, satirize what it considered the hypocrisies of American society, and push the boundaries of taste, but the magazine had lost its compass and jumped sporadically from one topic to another in its waning years, gorging on conspiracy theory and running low on humor.

Krassner's relationship to women's issues and the feminist movement was complicated and intriguing. From the magazine's inception, the editor had focused on reproductive rights, equal pay for women, and the right for women to experience the same sexual freedom as men. Yet, as the Women's Movement exploded in the late '60s, Krassner found himself on the defensive. What Krassner had considered a celebration of freedom and expression appeared to some feminist detractors objectifying and hurtful. In a seminal piece of writing about the rampant sexism of the New Left and the underground press entitled "Goodbye to All That," former Yippie Robin Morgan gave one of her longest and harshest harangues to Krassner and his magazine. Still, not all feminists agreed. In the last year of the magazine's publication,<sup>9</sup> The Feminist Party Media Workshop chose Krassner to receive its annual award, the only one which the man or the publication received in the 1958-74 period, for the editor's wit and his magazine's longevity. However, at the time Krassner received that award, *The Realist* had a different look. Krassner was soliciting more female contributors than male writers, and the women were giving the magazine a decidedly fresh perspective.

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<sup>9</sup> The magazine ended its first run in 1974. Krassner revived *The Realist* as a newsletter in 1985. This examination of the periodical restricts its focus to the years 1958-74, the magazine's first run.

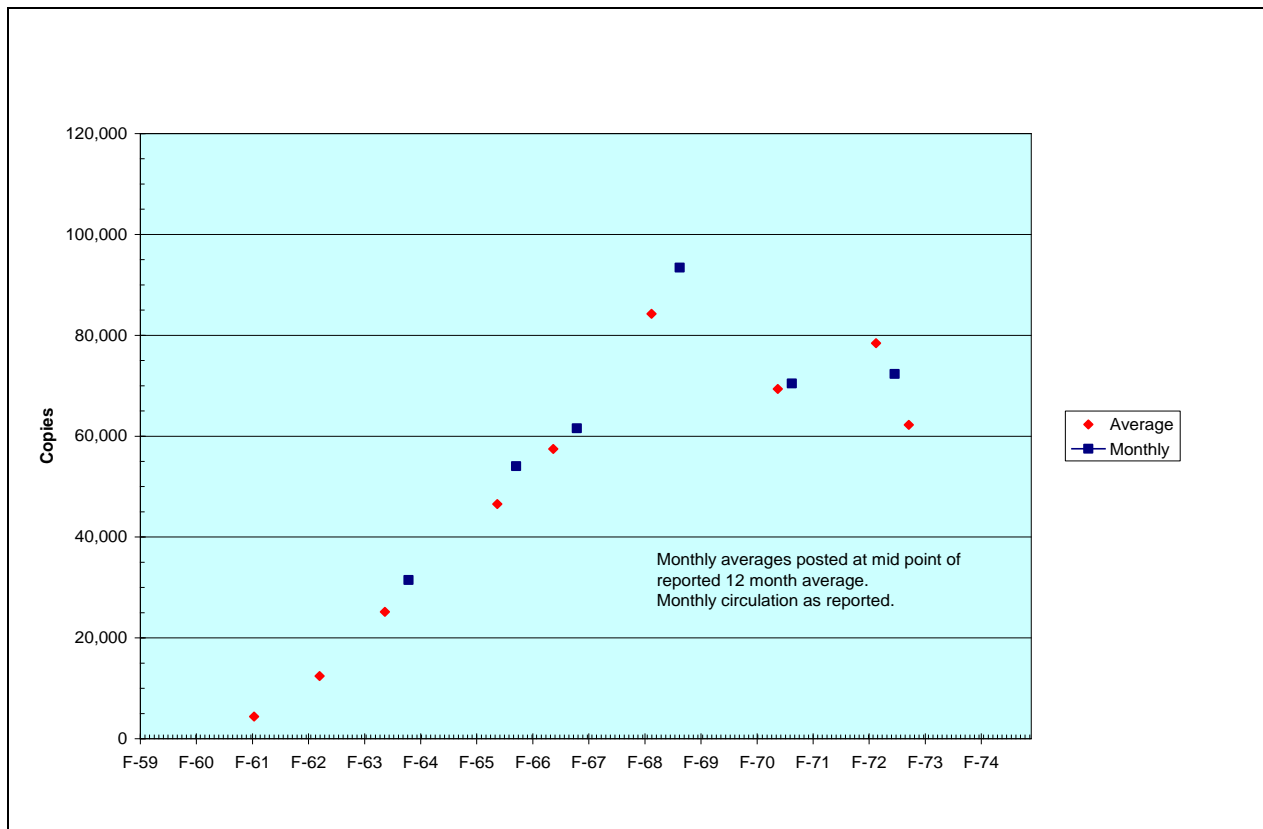


Figure 1: Reported Circulation of *The Realist* From 1960 to 1973

Historians of the underground press have made insightful observations about *The Realist* but have not given the magazine, and its impact, a full reading. Too often, they treat Krassner's rag as only a precursor to other papers of the underground press, rather than as an essential part of the alternative media until its demise. Tellingly, both *The Realist* and the underground press movement lost their vitality at the same time. In his engaging and widely-read tome *The Movement and the Sixties*, historian Terry Anderson discussed *The Realist* as merely an incipient sign of rebellion of the late '50s and early '60s, a precursor to



counterculture that “intellectual New York students might [have] read.”<sup>10</sup> Laurence Leamer, in his first-generation, contemporaneous investigation of the still-extant underground press, saw fit to consider only the content of the magazine’s first issue and asserted that, by the second half of the ‘60s, Krassner’s magazine “was having no more impact than a water pistol.”<sup>11</sup> *The Realist*’s circulation numbers in the late ‘60s, nearing 100,000, make a strong case against Leamer (Figure 1).

With two decades more perspective, Abe Peck correctly called Krassner “the iconoclastic parent of the underground press” in his monograph on countercultural periodicals. Peck made the insightful observation that Krassner was neither “an organizational Leftist” nor one who “wrote poetry,” indicating that his paper did not fall into the typical dichotomy of either political tract or forum for the psychedelic arts. The only doctrine that Krassner held dear was that every taboo must be brought out into the open, considered, and usually, mocked. Peck, the former editor of Chicago’s ‘60s underground paper, *Seed*, wrote that Krassner’s “take-no-prisoners voice” turned “the cultural landscape into a free-fire zone” and satirized a variety of targets, from telethons to political blacklisting. However, these targets were, again, manifestations of the earliest years of *The Realist* and suggest inattention to the magazine’s peak years, the high points in terms of both creativity and readership. Peck did address “The Parts Left Out of the Kennedy Book” and Krassner’s involvement with the Yippies at the Chicago Convention of 1968, but *The Realist* appears in *Uncovering the Sixties* only episodically, as Peck used the underground papers as a means to tell the story of the 1960s themselves.

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<sup>10</sup> Terry Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 33-4.

<sup>11</sup> Laurence Leamer, *The Paper Revolutionaries: The Rise of the Underground Press* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 23-5.

*The Realist* deserves a closer reading than even Peck gave it. Krassner was more than a parent of the underground press, his magazine was always evolving, and he wrote “the story most often recalled by those interviewed for [Peck’s] book.”<sup>12</sup> *The Realist* sits awkwardly in overviews of the underground papers because it did not blend in with either the revolutionary tracts of the New Left or with the blithe optimism of the psychedelic papers. This distinctness, the very aspect of the magazine that makes it difficult to classify, is why *The Realist* remains an extraordinary subject for an attentive study. Krassner’s magazine existed for longer than *New Left Notes*, or any of the hippie publications – preceding them all and outlasting most. It outsold most of them too. Because *The Realist* provided a unique voice, reflective of and attuned to its times without slavishly towing any line, it is the magazine to read for a new insight into the decade.

Though it encouraged experimentation with drugs and sex, as did competitors such as the *East Village Other* or San Francisco’s *The Oracle*, and protested the Vietnam War as fervently as *The Berkeley Barb*, *The Realist* put one issue above all of these. Whether Krassner and other contributors to *The Realist* were criticizing religion, the Vietnam War or American values – or advocating reproductive rights, civil rights or sexual libertinism – the ultimate aim of the magazine was always to explode taboos, to push further, to say what most believed could not, or should not, be said. Some radicals of the ‘60s have lamented in later memoirs that the mistake of their generation was to abandon pragmatic activism in favor of self-expression,

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<sup>12</sup> Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Citadel Underground, 1991), 12-3, 63.

forfeiting incremental victories for the short-lived pleasures of venting frustration.<sup>13</sup> However, the story of *The Realist* demonstrates that, for certain '60s miscreants, the decade was foremost about creating a space to say whatever they wanted, however they wanted. As the '60s wore on and obscenity laws appeared the antiquated vestiges of a seemingly distant past, *The Realist* learned to harness vulgarity as a weapon, using formerly verboten words and sentiments as the magazine's favorite means of protesting the Vietnam War and the Lyndon Johnson presidency. Throughout the decade, Paul Krassner was always pursuing the next phase in expressive politics, sometimes breaking through the boundaries of acceptability, on other occasions running to catch up. A close reading of *The Realist* demonstrates one lesson above all others: fighting for the *freedom* to express any idea – in any language or through any image – was as essential an aspect of the '60s as the ideas themselves.

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, the president of SDS at Columbia University during that school's infamous takeover in 1968, Mark Rudd, wrote in his memoir that he speaks to twenty-first century students about "the difference between organizing to build a movement . . . and self-expression, which was where Weatherman and the Weather Underground went wrong." Mark Rudd, *Underground: My Life with SDS and the Weathermen* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 183.

## Chapter 1: "An Open Field"

In "A Fable for Our Time," a short story that he wrote in an early issue of *The Realist*, Krassner detailed the exploits of an up-and-comer in the advertising business, Marvin "Slick" Fraser. Fraser's big break comes when he lands the account for the Survivall Fallout Shelter Corporation. "Over many months, he worked up a wonderful nationwide fear campaign," Krassner wrote, creating "a special identification trademark – Radioactive Randy – a mean-looking, cloudlike character carrying a giant spray gun." Fraser sponsors a competition to see who can best complete the sentence, "I think every American family should have a fallout shelter because . . ."; he then arranges a stunt in which he, the account executive himself, stays for two weeks in a Survivall Fallout Shelter "underground at the site of the next H-bomb test." The campaign is wildly successful, producing thousands of fallout shelter orders, until "a terrible thing happened. There was a peace scare."

Compounding Fraser's troubles, his first child is born with two heads, a result, presumably, of Fraser's exposure to radiation. Having "made the mistake of believing the claims of safety made by his own ads," Fraser produces a malformed son, who dies shortly after his birth. Ironically, the former advertiser buries the infant in "the never-to-be-used fallout shelter," with the words "TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER OF THE COLD WAR," printed on the shelter's walls. Fraser had been too clever; he manipulated himself with his own fabrications and poisoned his offspring in a mad pursuit of professional success. Rife with the pitfalls of greed, "Fable" reads like a 1950s version of the Midas tale.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Krassner, "A Fable for Our Time," *The Realist*, August 1959, 4.

“A Fable for Our Time” voiced an entire world of discontent. Krassner took aim at conformity, the fear of nuclear holocaust, and avarice so extreme that it bordered on mental illness. In other articles from the magazine’s early years, *The Realist* also critiqued organized religion, sexual repression, America’s imperialistic Cold War policies, and the nation’s abuse of African Americans. Those who wrote for the magazine wanted liberation – for themselves, whom they believed to be shackled by religion and mainstream sexual mores, for blacks who were denied civil rights, and for a whole world that was fearful of human extinction from a nuclear war. The topics that the magazine addressed during its years of maturation, from 1958 until the mid-60s, showed all of these concerns intermingling and congealing into a unified critique of the status quo.

When he launched his magazine in 1958, Paul Krassner was hungry to express himself without restraint. He looked out at the American cultural landscape and saw “just an open field mined with taboos waiting to be exploded.”<sup>15</sup> The first taboo involved God himself. In the declaration of intent which began his first issue, the twenty-six year-old editor wrote, “Much of the material . . . will be critical of specific social and political activities of organized religion.”<sup>16</sup> Like many dissidents before him, Krassner was free to criticize all paradigms and explore new values only after he had rejected the authority of religious leadership in his own life and the life of his culture.

Though a few years ahead of his time, Krassner was onto something. The ‘60s proved to be a secular decade, a time when many began to see religious institutions as contradictory, oppressive, and irrelevant. In 1963, the Supreme Court ruled in *Abington School District v. Schempp* that public school officials could not sponsor Bible reading or prayer. The ruling’s

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<sup>15</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Krassner, “An Angry Young Magazine . . .” *The Realist*, June/July 1958, 1.

consequences materialized rapidly. By 1970, fewer than five percent of the schools in the nation conducted Bible readings. Some academics celebrated this secularization. Harvey Cox argued, in the widely discussed *The Secular City* (1965), that urbanization would eradicate institutional religion from modern society.<sup>17</sup> When interviewed for *Time* magazine's 1966 cover story "Is God Dead?", the Episcopal Dean of the National Cathedral declared that he was "confused as to what God is." A movement of post-Christian theology developed that attempted to define the "Christian atheist."<sup>18</sup>

The preponderance of articles in *The Realist* that satirized religion appeared in the magazine's first few years. In his 1958 "Thanksgiving Message," Krassner preempted the confusion later demonstrated by the above-mentioned Episcopal Dean when he dubbed November "National Platitude Month," a time for uttering the word "God" without defining its meaning. "Somehow that would spoil the effect," Krassner declared. The piece progressed in an ironic, preachy tone, declaring that when Americans gave thanks for having avoided the hardships and tragedies of others in the world, "[s]uch gratitude is a cacophony of conceit, a display of profoundly profane pride."<sup>19</sup> More comically, "Second Coming" explored the chasm between Christian values and American mass culture by imagining Christ's return. In the satire, Jesus first appears on a game show in which contestants ask questions in order to guess the identity of a hidden celebrity. The insipid questions and Jesus' aw-shucks participation in the self-congratulatory celebrity-worship cheapen the deity. It gets worse. Christ's media consultant announces that the son of God will saturate all television programs, including celebrity chat shows,

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<sup>17</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), 1-4.

<sup>18</sup> David Steigerwald, *The Sixties and the End of Modern America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 244-6.

<sup>19</sup> Krassner, "The Realist's Thanksgiving Message," *The Realist*, November 1958, 3.

game shows and serious news interviews, mindful of “planned image projection,” which the consultant deems “undowithoutable.” After the media blitz, Jesus receives his own program, *Savior Time*, the ratings of which fall precipitously. The entertainment news magazine *Variety* sums up the fallout with the terse headline, “J.C. Bombs – Overexposure.”<sup>20</sup>

*Realist* contributors Bob Margolin and Mickey Gruber piled on the silliness with their comic book parody, “The Adventures of Churchman.” Called by the Pope via his Churchsignal, superhero Churchman and his sidekick Altar Boy battle such nemeses as the Fiend from the University and the Freethinker. When the religious duo arrives in Greenwich Village to break up the Freethinker’s Planned Parenthood meeting, the prophylactic villain unleashes what is, for Churchman, kryptonite: “a bevy of curvaceous blondes.” Ultimately, the hero is unharmed by the beckoning women due to his superhero strength, “The narrowness of his Limited Vision.” Unable to see the women, Churchman defeats and banishes the Freethinker.<sup>21</sup> Hammier even than actual comic books, “The Adventures of Churchman” requires no interpretation. For precisely this reason, as well as its adoption of the teenager’s medium, the comic book form, “Churchman” demonstrated how *The Realist* was crafting accessible commentary and satire. The magazine proclaimed its values in a ‘60s pop context.

However, not all of *The Realist*’s coverage was farcical. Krassner also published relatively straightforward articles. In “Malice in Maryland,” Madalyn Murray, the infamous atheist whose son’s refusal to participate in school prayer at his Baltimore high school would eventually contribute to the Supreme Court’s *Schempp* decision, gave an exhaustive account of the persecution she and her son had received at the hands of school administrators, neighbors and

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<sup>20</sup> Krassner, “The Second Coming,” *The Realist*, October 1960, 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> Bob Margolin and Mickey Gruber. “The Adventures of Churchman,” *The Realist*, February 1961, 17-22.

even such liberal organizations as the American Humanist Association and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). By her account, an ACLU lawyer told her that what she “was doing was evil and sinful.”<sup>22</sup>

Though the tone of contributors could veer toward condescension, Krassner seemed keenly aware that his magazine should not be dogmatic in its rejection of dogma. He declared in the first issue of *The Realist* that, when it came to religion, he and his writers were “certainly *not* despisers.”<sup>23</sup> In an interview conducted with West Coast Zen icon Alan Watts, Krassner demonstrated a curiosity in Zen Buddhism that, if not the enthusiastic embrace that Beats such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Gregory Corso gave it, proved at least his openness to spirituality. Watts distinguished the “way of liberation” of Zen from the “revealed rule of life” of a religion, “which one hears and obeys.” Yet, like Ginsberg had in “Howl,” Watts suggested that Christianity and Judaism could become free of the trappings of religion by employing mysticism. At the close of the interview, Watts warned Krassner and his readers that “freethinkers” could become compulsive about their identity. “If you wouldn’t be seen dead darkening a church door, you might have a closed mind,” Watts warned.<sup>24</sup> Krassner remained true to his pledge from the first issue’s declaration of intent that he would direct his satire toward “specific social and political activities of organized religion,” as well as the undesirable social values that he associated with religion, without renouncing spirituality itself.

Throughout the magazine’s run, Krassner and his contributors continued to satirize the church. After the court’s ruling in favor of Murray, Krassner wrote a response to the decision – in

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<sup>22</sup> Madalyn Murray, “Malice in Maryland,” *The Realist*, February 1961, 17-23. .

<sup>23</sup> Krassner, “An Angry Young Magazine . . .,” 2.

<sup>24</sup> “An Impolite Interview with Alan Watts,” *The Realist*, December 1959, 1, 8-11.



the guise of God himself. Surprisingly uninterested in the ruling, Krassner's supreme being tapped into the idea that Americanness and Godliness were synonymous, as the editorial epitomized low expectations and apathy: "It's no cinch being God. I didn't *ask* for the job. Listen, all I want to do is mind My own business and maybe watch Telstar once in a while."<sup>25</sup> Yet, by the time of the *Schempp* decision, criticism of organized religion in *The Realist* had begun to feel redundant and constricting. As Krassner would remark in a later interview, "I was the young atheist who was going to smash organized religion. And then I got bored with that. I mean it limited *The Realist's* scope."<sup>26</sup> And there were subjects sexier than God.

If God was dead, or at least moribund, what was the reason for restricting sex to marriage or even to a single partner? *The Realist* called for sexual freedom and a celebration of the body, again, in the accessible format of satire and, during its early years, in rather mild language. The first few issues displayed a didacticism characteristic of a publication which was still finding its voice. In the second issue of the magazine, Krassner linked sexual repression to the Catholic Church's ban on contraception via a satirical narrative. The editor's fictional married couple became so confused by the subtle distinctions the church makes – sanctioning family planning through strategically-timed abstinence but condemning "artificial" birth control such as the diaphragm – that all sex became, for them, plagued by guilt. The piece achieved a startling causticity when Krassner wrote that, had the parents of 136,000 stillborn children "interfered artificially with the process of procreation[,] God's purpose would never have been achieved."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Krassner, " . . . And God Bless the Supreme Court," *The Realist*, June 1962, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Krassner, "An Impolite Interview with Paul Krassner," *How a Satirical Editor Became a Yippie Conspirator in Ten Easy Years* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), 307.

<sup>27</sup> Krassner, "Sex Education for the Modern Catholic Child," *The Realist*, September 1958, 13.

In his long, regular column, "Negative Thinking," editorialist Robert Anton Wilson sketched out a philosophy of life, the cornerstone of which was the need to accept the body and human sexuality without shame. He began by quoting poet William Blake, "The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty." Reacting to a young woman who called a series of photographs of lovers displayed at the New York Museum of Modern Art "vulgar," Wilson argued that American society was "basically insane to produce people with such orientation." Similarly, the editorialist asserted that those who were disgusted by his work as a hospital orderly revealed themselves to be "squeamish and uncomfortable about the basic biological nature of life." For Wilson, the cycles of the body were indistinguishable from those of the cosmos and the seasons. Whether we "rejoice at their beauty or feel *hopeless* and *disgusted* about being involved in them – this tells us something about our own mental health, but not about the natural processes." Ultimately, such discomfort with biology and sexuality created a repression that poisoned other aspects of life, Wilson argued; when people rejected the body, they cut themselves off from sexual fulfillment. The editorialist even cited Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* to demonstrate that "rage and hatred stem directly from 'orgastic impotence,'" the inability of the repressed to achieve "total . . . orgasm."<sup>28</sup> The concept made Reich and his theories staples of *The Realist*. In the minds of Wilson, Krassner, and other contributors to the magazine, sexual repression seemed the root of all evil. Though the idea was not new, *The Realist* advanced the theory in language that was accessible to a mass readership.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Anton Wilson, "Negative Thinking: Sex Education for the Modern Liberal Adult," *The Realist*, October 1959, 10-12.

<sup>29</sup> The masses would take some time to find the magazine. During these early years, *The Realist* reached only a few thousand readers.

As the magazine matured, Krassner reinforced Wilson's ideas with less sermonizing, as though he expected that his readers had internalized the message, that they already understood. When writing about a *National Enquirer* story that contained pictures of babies who had been born with "seal flippers," due to their mothers' use of faulty tranquilizers, Krassner ended the piece by stating that the photos "are rendered totally obscene by the addition of black squares in order to censor out their genitals."<sup>30</sup> The editor assumed that readers understood his point. The *Enquirer* cashed in on tragedy, titillating its readers with the promise that they could gawk at the infants' deformities while treating their healthy sexual organs as dirty.

Campaigning for what he considered a healthy, secular sexuality, Krassner enlisted the typewriters of some celebrity academics. The University of Illinois dismissed Leo Koch from his position as professor of biology after the instructor sent the school newspaper a letter condoning student promiscuity. Koch briefly became a celebrity, a martyr for the cause of loosened sexual restraints. In a highly charged piece in *The Realist*, the former instructor not only declared college youth free from "the dead hand of dogma, either civil or ecclesiastical," but even went so far as to assert that the students' "puritan parents and Victorian grandparents" had "sowed the seeds of sexual rebellion in their children, by their systematic subversion of the Christian ideal of continence, by their obvious and total hypocrisy in this realm of interpersonal relations."<sup>31</sup> Renowned psychologist Albert Ellis wrote a short-lived series of columns in which he declared, "Teen-age copulation can be honestly and courageously faced." If Ellis were asked by a hypothetical teenage daughter about appropriate sexual activity, he would, he told readers encourage her to avoid venereal disease by choosing middle class males as her sex partners and

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<sup>30</sup> Krassner, "A Matter of Taste," *The Realist*, June 1962, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Leo F. Koch, "For the Separation of Church and Sex," *The Realist*, May 1961, 14.

would take her to a physician to have her fitted for a diaphragm.<sup>32</sup> For Krassner's magazine, it was the era of utter pragmatism.

As the sexual revolution brought sexuality from the shadows to center stage, *The Realist* turned its attention away from satirizing prudish restrictions and began to vent new anxieties that arose from navigating a cultural landscape without a rule book. One Krassner-authored narrative depicted a woman who wanted only sex from her lover, while the man craved intimacy, respect, and commitment.<sup>33</sup> More clever was a 1965 piece entitled "Free Enterprise in Action," by a pair of female writers who found inspiration in the experience of a friend who had received a series of obscene phone calls and then felt rejected when they ceased. Margaret Seligson and Janet Sorkin decided to create the Obscene Telephone Calling Service, asserting that anonymous calls were "a reflection of our changing morality. After all, what better illustrates frenetically-groping sexual abandon, coupled with total negation of personal commitment? It's merely the end product of 'I don't want to get involved.'" After giving examples of the "literate and meaty scripts" used for the calls, the authors managed to stretch the satire to indict paternalistic foreign policy and cultural chauvinism: "The inevitable offshoot of our service is to expand internationally, especially into backward areas where the obscene phone call is probably unknown."<sup>34</sup> The piece illustrated both how the best writing in *The Realist* managed to aim simultaneously at several targets – sex, alienation, greed, and imperialism – and how some participants in the sexual revolution realized that their newfound freedom was far from a panacea.

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<sup>32</sup> Albert Ellis, "if this be heresy . . .", *The Realist*, February 1962, 30-1.

<sup>33</sup> Krassner, "The Tale of a Particularly Emancipated Female," *The Realist*, February 1964, 20.

<sup>34</sup> Marcia Seligson and Janet Sorkin, "Free Enterprise in Action," *The Realist*, April 1965, 21-2.

If we carry Robert Anton Wilson's logic to its conclusion, American society should have become healthier as it shed its sexual repression. After all, if hate stemmed from sexual shame, a culture which began to embrace sex, even become casual about it, would eradicate its rage and its exploitive impulse. Yet, as was evident in "Free Enterprise in Action," casual sex did not magically engender mass satisfaction or simplify the complexities of desire and rejection. Neither would it quiet the instincts of exploitation. Rather, American society absorbed loosened sexual mores into its culture rather effortlessly without a profound realignment of values. Capitalism cannibalized the Sexual Revolution and sold it back to its promoters and the general population as another product. American society's impulse to turn a buck on everything was rooted deeply within the culture, even more deeply perhaps than religiosity. As *The Realist* knew from its earliest days, there was something rotten in America beyond intolerance and prudishness. Just turn on the TV, *The Realist* insisted, and you could see that.

The satire from the magazine's early period that remains most compelling argued that the media – television, news, and advertising – embodied the worst American tendencies, reflecting a sick society which profited from violence and tragedy. Equally bad were the schemes of the advertising world's master manipulators, who exacerbated the culture's tendency to put style above substance. Krassner struck at the heart of a media culture of insincerity with "See the Tired Man," a piece that employed a format of expression that he had learned from years of reading, and involvement with, *Mad* magazine. The satirist used the motif of an adult explaining the world to a young person in order to dissect the paradoxes and hypocrisies of a fund-raising telethon. When the entertainers and politicians of the telethon gather to raise money to fight leukemia, something is amiss. The "sexy girl" singer cannot remember if the telethon is for dystrophy or

gonorrhea, but she performs because “[s]he needs the exposure,” while the politician electioneers behind the thin guise of the philanthropic enterprise. Yet, Krassner seems more troubled by the relish the audience takes in the spectacle, applauding the exotic calypso singer and a little boy with leukemia with equal enthusiasm. The entertainment and the disease merge into a blurred whole.

Where did the fun of the entertainment end and the sympathy for the suffering begin? Of course, the money-making impulse underlies the whole affair as a “wealthy businessman” makes a donation: “Then we can buy his product. Then he will make profits. Then he can make another donation next year.” Somehow, Krassner was insisting, the economic system fed off the repulsive orgy of disease, entertainment, avarice, and guilt. Krassner capped the grotesque display by mentioning that the government, which has “many million dollars,” could not aid those suffering from leukemia because it needed the money for weapons. By the end, the explanation given to the child was a confused and horrific jumble: “See the mushroom cloud. That costs lots of money. It has loads of particles. They cause leukemia. Money might help to find a cure. That is why we have telethons.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, in Krassner’s analysis, the government poured money into weapons of mass destruction, which caused the very diseases that the telethon was allegedly promising to eradicate. The American people paid taxes to create bombs that would spread cancer on an unimaginable scale and then sent additional money to telethons which would pay for research to cure the disease. A masterpiece of paradox, “See the Tired Man” fired a first volley against the self-contradicting American culture.

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<sup>35</sup> Krassner, “See the Tired Man . . .,” *The Realist*, September 1958, 25.

It was not just that American society was engaged in an apocalyptic game with band-aid balms, *The Realist* argued. Suffering itself had become a booming financial industry, especially for media culture. In reflections on the trial of Nazi holocaust architect Adolf Eichmann and a panoply of movies about Nazis, Krassner declared his sentiments with unusual directness: "What I am offended by is the showbusinessization of tragedy."<sup>36</sup> The statement was a premonition of what Krassner considered the media's ghastly response to the assassination of President Kennedy. In "Confessions of a Guilty Bystander," Krassner observed that greedy entrepreneurs sought to make hay out of the president's death. While one "post-assassination manufacturer" sold "photostatic copies of President Kennedy's will," Hilton Hotels ran an advertisement declaring their dedication "to the hope of a new world of friendship symbolized by the eternal flame" that would appear at the president's gravesite in Arlington cemetery. Furthermore, the Colpix record company was selling an LP entitled *Four Days That Shocked the World*, which reproduced Lee Harvey Oswald's denial of guilt, statements of the Dallas police, and an "[o]n-the-spot report from [the] basement of the Dallas jail at the moment Oswald is shot by Jack Ruby." The businessmen of the burial industry also saw an opportunity. Krassner noted that a funeral service periodical entitled *Casket and Sunnyside* trumpeted the national healing provided by the simultaneous burials of Kennedy and his assassin, Oswald. Both funerals, the scribes of the death business asserted, had "reaffirmed the dignity of man."<sup>37</sup> Some commentators have speculated that the Kennedy assassination was the moment when the Baby Boomer generation lost its innocence, but Krassner insisted that the media's response to the assassination was the decisive factor in alienating masses of young people from the culture of their elders.

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<sup>36</sup> Krassner, "I Like Eich," *The Realist*, May 1961, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Krassner, "Confessions of a Guilty Bystander II," *The Realist*, March 1964, 3-5.

As *The Realist* perceived it, the advertisers of Madison Avenue intensified that alienation. The agents of advertising compromised the very way that media consumers experienced the world, causing those who watched television (who, after all, was practically everyone) to grow confused in a specious version of reality. TV writer and later host of *The Twilight Zone*, Rod Serling, told *The Realist* that his sponsor for the program *Playhouse 90*, the Ronson Lighter Company, had forced him to alter the dialogue “Have you got a match?” because they perceived matches as “competitive.” In a different episode, program sponsor Ford Motor Company demanded that the Chrysler Tower be removed from an image of the New York skyline.<sup>38</sup> Advertisers were not merely promoting their products but rather invading the content of television entertainment itself, altering the image of the world at whim, and fabricating a reality in which only their own products existed. God help the babies raised on television.

In *The Realist*’s appraisal, Madison Avenue’s claims seemed to venture further and further from reality. One advertising agency that promoted Colgate-Palmolive’s Rapid-Shave cream had faked a demonstration in which the shaving cream (with an unnamed razor) removed the grains from sandpaper. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) discovered, however, that the ad-men had filmed “a piece of plexiglass sprinkled with sand to simulate sandpaper” in the television commercial. The world experienced through television was an illusion. When the shaving cream manufacturer insisted that its claims were still true despite the ad’s simulation – the optical illusion necessary, advertisers claimed, due to sandpaper’s “unphotogenic surface” – *Realist* contributor Marvin Kitman promised to cut through the war of words between the ad agency and the FTC by performing the test himself. Upon finding that, “[a]fter twelve strokes, my razor was

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<sup>38</sup> Krassner, “The Advertising Culture,” *The Realist*, June/July 1958, 16.



still jumping over the sandpaper like a bicycle over trolley tracks,” Kitman good-humoredly exposed the ad as a misleading gimmick.<sup>39</sup>

By mid-decade, the maturing magazine was making connections between the various sources of its discontent, as its tone grew more insightful and cutting. Using the strife of the civil rights struggle as a vehicle to satirize both the white South and the superficial mentality that advertisers had injected into American culture, “A Possible Memo from a Modern Advertising Agency” suggested that the manipulative tactics of the mainstream racist culture be used against it. In order to address the “pressing problem” of African-American unemployment, writer Rick Rubin insisted, “[A]s in all advertising you need to switch the appeal to a stronger area. Sex. . . . In the ad you show a picture of a beautiful girl, and behind her this executive type is shaking hands with this Negro working class fellow. The girl is saying: ‘I go for a man who hires a colored cat.’”<sup>40</sup> The implication was clear; in America, accomplishing one’s aim was a matter of changing image, not values. How could Americans afford to become lost in the distracting, superficial gloss of television and Madison Avenue, *The Realist* wondered, when the nuclear arsenals of the US and USSR seemed to promise the extermination of human life?

No critique of American culture in the 1950s and 1960s was complete without addressing the Cold War. *The Realist* found that by mocking the fear of world annihilation, Krassner satisfied his need for existential satire that pushed boundaries of taste and discomfited the touchy reader. Contributors to the magazine demonstrated an engagement with specific political figures and policy decisions in a tone that managed to find humor buried in the prospect of nuclear war. Krassner’s principal trope in the late ‘50s was inventing dialogues between famous figures. In the

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<sup>39</sup> Marvin Kitman, “I Tried the Rapid-Shave Sandpaper Test,” *The Realist*, March 1960, 15-16.

<sup>40</sup> Rick Rubin, “A Possible Memo from a Modern Advertising Agency,” *The Realist*, February 1965, 14.

magazine's maiden issue, he imagined a conversation between then-Secretary of State and aggressive Cold Warrior John Foster Dulles and Bertrand Russell, English pacifist, philosopher and Nobel Laureate for Literature. Russell, whom Krassner idolized, insists that nothing short of nuclear disarmament can save the world. Dulles spouts paradoxical statements such as, "You know very well that we're testing H-bombs because we're trying to preserve peace" and "Nobody's going to start an atomic war. Not us, anyway. But just in case *they* do . . ."<sup>41</sup> In a dialogue between Vice President Richard Nixon and the Soviet Union's Council-of-Ministers Chairman Nikita Khrushchev, the two statesmen hatch a plot to feign a "public argument," which will boost the men's standings in their native countries. Nixon affirms: "Hey, that's not a bad idea. Just the usual my-country-can-beat-up-your-country stuff, huh?" As the two men willfully exacerbate the public's fear of annihilation to bolster their own political prospects, the piece reaches its ironic apex when Nixon decides where the two should stage their argument: "In the kitchen! Americans always fight in the kitchen—they'll identify with me."<sup>42</sup> Thus, the vice president sought to make an emotional connection with voters through a manipulation of their fears (the faux dispute) and his image (the kitchen).

Such macho brinksmanship wreaked havoc on the American psyche, *The Realist* insisted. So many pieces interrogated the meaning of the fallout shelter phenomenon, which *The Realist* considered the ultimate symbol of dread and isolation, that these articles constituted their own subgenre of the magazine's satire. In a 1961 issue, Krassner published a letter from a federal official, F.L. Parnell, Deputy Assistant Director of Food and Water, together with selections from the pamphlet *Food Stockpiling for Emergency Shelters*. Krassner had asked the bureaucrat, "What

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<sup>41</sup> Krassner, "Diabolic Dialogues: John Foster Dulles & Bertrand Russell" *The Realist*, June/July 1958, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Krassner, "Diabolic Dialogues," *The Realist*, August 1959, 14.

would happen to our nation's economy if everyone stocked a two-week food supply?" and then printed Parnell's response without editorial comment, trusting that the materials were self-parodic enough to speak for themselves. Parnell told Krassner not to worry about supplies because "The alert retailer, conscious of his customer's needs, may be depended upon to recognize the temporary increase in sales and adjust accordingly." The text of the *Food Stockpiling* pamphlet provided further nonchalant advice, seemingly unanchored from the unimaginable catastrophe of a nuclear war. The pamphlet included fallout shelter menu planning: "One-dish items may be included for several meals and the same meats and other items can be repeated on different days and still avoid monotony."<sup>43</sup> The next year, contributor Terry Carr marveled at a fallout shelter display in Union Square, where representatives of the US Army and the fallout shelter industry broadcast the record *What to Do till the Fresh Air Comes*.<sup>44</sup> Again, the leaders of American society saw economic opportunity, even in the face of the extinction of the species.

Marvin Kitman produced the fallout genre's *piece de resistance* in "How I Fortified my Family Fallout Shelter." Convinced by the words of Jesuit priest L.C. McHugh that, if others attempted to break into his shelter, "they may be treated as unjust aggressors and repelled with whatever means will effectively deter their assault," Kitman considered what arms he would need in the event that his unprepared neighbors would attempt to enter his shelter and crowd his fallout space. First, he studied the neighborhood through a general's "field glasses," in order to best strategize against the assaults of his neighbors, and then assembled a ridiculous arsenal of weapons, including 60 mm. mortars and an anti-tank cannon. Absurdities built upon one another until the writer panicked that, should the nuclear war begin while he was at work, his wife was

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<sup>43</sup> Letter from F.L. Parnell and *Excerpts from 'Food Stockpiling for Emergency Shelters, The Realist*, August 1961, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Terry Carr, "Thru a Fallout Shelter Darkly," *The Realist*, October 1962, 4-5.

“completely inadequate behind a Swedish Boffors gun” and could not be trusted to protect the shelter from neighbors until he returned home. Kitman decided that he must hire guards to protect the shelter while he was at work, but then realized that such an action would launch an inevitable game of keeping up with the Joneses among his neighbors. “Status-seekers would undoubtedly hire more guards than they actually need,” Kitman writes, “just to be one up on their neighbors.” Thwarted in his attempt to achieve piece of mind, Kitman finally dismissed the idea altogether, suspecting Father McHugh – his project’s inspiration – of being a “Communist dupe.” In Kitman’s analysis, Americans were too petty and competitive to even begin to comprehend how catastrophic a nuclear war would be. Blinded by his instinct to protect his property from neighbors, Kitman’s first-person narrator was hopelessly incapable of contributing to a constructive dialogue about how to move the world back from the brink of apocalypse.<sup>45</sup>

While annihilation might have made all other issues seem to pale in comparison, one article that *The Realist* published in 1964 demonstrated how early the magazine was attuned to the fledgling war in Vietnam, a conflict Krassner and his contributors were already convinced was immoral. More surprising, the author of “Academic Sin” indicted American academicians for their participation in carrying out the clandestine activities of the US government. The article preceded any student protests against university involvement in Vietnam. An employee at San Francisco’s City Lights Books (a Beat hangout) and the future managing editor of the leftist periodical *Ramparts*, Robert Scheer, wrote the piece of investigative journalism, in which he explicitly detailed the work of professors from Michigan State University in constructing the police state apparatus of tyrant Ngo Dinh Diem. Because American agencies like the C.I.A. were limited by the

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<sup>45</sup> Marvin Kitman, “How I Fortified my Family Fallout Shelter,” *The Realist*, December 1961, 1, 11-2.

Geneva agreements from the overt support of Diem's forces, M.S.U. faculty "filled the gap," helping to create for Diem a V.B.I. (Vietnamese Bureau of Investigation) and developing a "rural-based militia of 40,000 men placed at Diem's disposal." Publishing items from the monthly reports of M.S.U. faculty, Scheer explored the "unemotional and scientific manner" in which the academics facilitated Diem's construction of a police state, printing one memo in which Michigan State faculty members wrote that the V.B.I. would "be responsible for the many other enforcement duties that are particular to this part of the world, such as information and postal control, etc."<sup>46</sup> Scheer's article about M.S.U. faculty involvement in Vietnam would not appear in *Ramparts* until April 1966.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the ever-present fear of a nuclear holocaust and the proxy war developing in Southeast Asia, many activists mustered the energy to combat the centuries-old dilemma of American racism and the unequal status of minorities. *The Realist* demonstrated an instant affinity for Southern civil rights activity. Disarmed by the pathos of the struggle, Krassner and other contributors wrote direct appeals to readers, as well as exposes. Robert Anton Wilson penned the simple poem "To the White Citizens Councils" which asserted to those who considered the Councils more reputable than the Ku Klux Klan, "[A] man doesn't have to pull a sheet over his head to shut out the light."<sup>48</sup> Dave Berkman, a professor fired from his post at Mississippi Southern College for his vocal support of integration, wrote an exhaustive account of the tactics that school administrators employed to hound him before his eventual dismissal. The former Broadcasting instructor found that the South's obsessive racism was leading to a police-state

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Scheer, "Academic Sin," *The Realist*, March 1964, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Richardson, *A Bomb in Every Issue: How the Short, Unruly Life of Ramparts Magazine Changed America* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 49.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Anton Wilson, "To the White Citizens Council," *The Realist*, December 1959/January 1960, 14.

mentality. Decrying “the highly efficient classroom spy system” which informed the deans about the content of his lectures, Berkman despaired for American democracy itself: “I suspect my experiences would not have been too different had I been teaching at a German university in the mid-‘30s, or in a school behind the Iron Curtain today.”<sup>49</sup>

Closely following each incident that occurred below the Mason Dixon line, writers for *The Realist* eventually became disillusioned. In “Alabamy-Bound,” Krassner critiqued what he saw as the chasm between the rhetoric and action of President Kennedy and his brother Robert, the Attorney General, as well as the petty ways that white Southerners were inventing to circumvent federal laws. In order to avoid implementing federally-mandated integration of interstate bus terminals, Krassner wrote, Southern leaders were hanging signs that read “White Intrastate Passengers” and “Negro Intrastate Passengers.” Adopting the persona of a schoolteacher several decades in the future, who is explaining the events of the 1960s, Krassner cited Robert Kennedy’s prediction that “in forty years, there might well be a Negro elected President of the country.” The prediction came true in 2001, Krassner’s teacher informed his students, but unfortunately, the president-elect was “arrested in Jackson, Mississippi for using an intrastate white urinal.”<sup>50</sup> How could Robert Kennedy make such a grandiose claim, Krassner was asking, when he could not ensure integration even at a bus terminal? The following year, the editor expressed exasperation that James Meredith, the African-American student who integrated the University of Mississippi, had to answer reporters’ questions about his grades after he had revealed that white supremacists had fired bullets into the home of his parents. Even the black reporters, Krassner lamented,

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<sup>49</sup> Dave Berkman, “College Teacher in Mississippi,” *The Realist*, March/April 1961, 1, 15-20, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Krassner, “Alabamy-Bound,” *The Realist*, June 1961, 6.

seemed to miss the real story – the violence – when they parroted the white reporters’ silly questions.<sup>51</sup>

Disillusionment began to crystallize into bitterness and a rejection of immoral government authority. African-American journalist William Worthy wrote a piece in 1962 about being interrogated by the FBI after speaking at a New York City rally for wrongly-accused civil rights activist Robert F. Williams. Williams had been the president of a North Carolina NAACP chapter before local authorities accused him of kidnapping a white couple, when in fact he had harbored the couple from an incensed black mob in his neighborhood. The FBI added Williams to their “wanted” list and circulated flyers, while Williams escaped to Cuba. At the rally, Worthy castigated the FBI for its flyers’ erroneous claims, such as the statement that Williams had been “diagnosed with schizophrenia.” In his article for *The Realist*, “A Visit from the FBI,” Worthy recapitulated a statement from the rally that interested the FBI: “Outraged at the ‘schizophrenic’ claim and angry to see the photograph of a civil rights leader alongside pictures of bank robbers and murderers, [an unnamed] person had simply ripped [the flyer] off the wall.” The FBI, alleging that the poster-ripper had stolen government property, questioned Worthy about the individual’s identity. “On matters of this kind, I never give information to investigators,” Worthy claimed. By 1962, Krassner was publishing editorials which perceived federal authorities as enemies – an intimation of the increasingly rancorous attitude *The Realist* would bare toward authority.<sup>52</sup>

Contributor Saul Heller provided a satirical article later that year, the hyperboles of which would prove prescient as the ‘60s progressed. Lamenting that civil rights legislation was difficult to pass and rarely enforced anyway, Heller considered alternative strategies for the civil rights

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<sup>51</sup> Krassner, “The Black Caucasian,” *How a Satirical Editor*, 73-4.

<sup>52</sup> William Worthy, “A Visit from the FBI,” *The Realist*, March 1962, 10.

movement. He suggested “importing a few hundred Congo Negroes, or several dozen Mau Mau tribesmen, and letting them infiltrate below the Mason-Dixon line.” Bringing in such famous African revolutionaries would be effective, Heller claimed, because “[i]t’s a little more difficult to oppress a man who is eager to cut your throat, than it is to victimize one who is used to turning the other cheek.” Heller presaged the movement’s turn away from non-violence, as he fantasized about armed confrontation with the racist authorities. Though the suggestion to import violent Africans was facetious, the idea that blacks had, for too long, borne their victimization was not. Heller took the idea a step further. “Maybe the Mau Mau, impressed by U.S. plans to train and export guerrillas to foreign countries where democracy needs saving,” Heller wrote, “ may train a few of their own public-spirited people and send them in to save democracy in the United States.”<sup>53</sup> Not only did Heller question America’s right to call itself a democracy, he suggested that Third World revolutionaries were the international vanguard, a model for social change.

The article ran just two months after the appearance in New York of the first mimeographed copies of *The Port Huron Statement*, the manifesto of Students for Democratic Society (SDS), which asserted without further clarification, “[T]he counter-impulse to life and creation is superbly manifest in the revolutionary feelings of many Asian, African, and Latin American peoples.”<sup>54</sup> By the end of the decade, militant spokesmen for the New Left would claim that white radicals were the agents of Third World revolutionaries, agents who were strategically placed within the belly of the beast, “Amerika,” the evil empire. Heller’s article inviting the Mau Mau to straighten out the situation in the South found its author both in sync with, and a little

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<sup>53</sup> Saul Heller, “Solving the Negro-White Problem,” *The Realist*, September 1962, 3.

<sup>54</sup> , Students for Democratic Society, *The Port Huron Statement* (1962) reproduced in James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 348.



ahead of, SDS. Heller's piece was an example of what Krassner gloried in above all else: "prophetic satire." Yet, the magazine began to push for something even more astounding than uncanny foresight. As *The Realist* entered the mid-sixties, pushing the boundaries of expression would become its obsession, until Krassner wed allegory and obscenity into a masterpiece that savaged a complacent society, the president, and the Vietnam War.

## Chapter 2: Aiming Obscenity

From the beginning, Krassner had set out to destroy American culture's taboos. His vocation required a steady diet of new sacred cows to slaughter. Atheism, sexuality, and an indictment of American values would remain mainstays of the magazine, but, like all obsessions, the topics ran the risk of becoming stale. Once Churchman had been excoriated in February, a diatribe against Catholicism in March felt redundant, especially in the middle of a decade when culture seemed to accelerate exponentially.

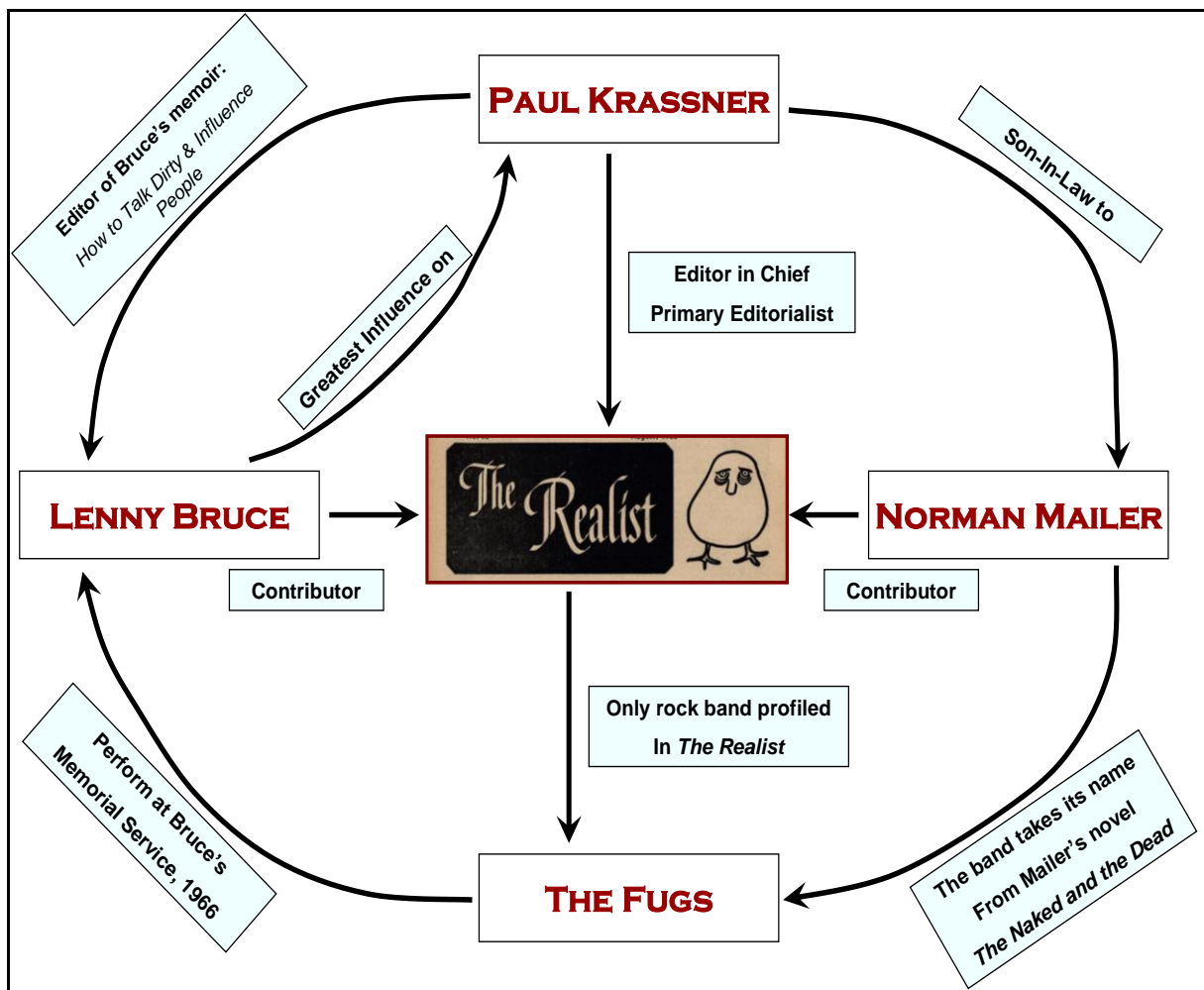


Figure 2: Relationship of Significant Actors in Chapter 2

*The Realist* sought to break out of such a cul-de-sac by experimenting with forms of expression that complemented, but sometimes overshadowed, the publication's iconoclastic values. As the magazine approached its mature period, how writers expressed their ideas took on as much significance as the sentiments they expressed. The earlier modes of expression – for instance, the “Child's Primers” that characterized *The Realist* in its infancy – were quaint compared to what lay in store. In the mid-to-late '60s, Krassner pursued a more extreme expressivity, setting out on a journey in which he would test if there still remained any limits on what Americans could publish, a journey that would lead the magazine to its May 1967 magnum opus – as well as its infamy.

The Vietnam War was essential inspiration. In the Spring of 1965, the Free Speechers of Berkeley and the growing national organization, Students for Democratic Society (SDS), began to see Southeast Asia, rather than the American South, as the vortex of American misdeeds. *The Realist*, too, fell under the spell of Vietnam. At the same time that novelist Norman Mailer, folk singer Phil Ochs, and SDS President Paul Potter were redirecting the attention of restless Berkeley students at the May 1965 Vietnam Day Teach-In, the issue of *The Realist* that reached approximately 46,000 mailboxes and newsstands that month focused Krassner's “investigative satire” on the war. According to the magazine's editor, the dregs of popular culture, not the brightest minds in Washington, were dictating America's strategy.<sup>55</sup>

In “Comic Book Escalation of America's War on Vietnam,” Krassner claimed to have stumbled upon the source of the United States' strategy. One issue of the children's comic, *Jungle War Stories*, a cartoon set in Vietnam, addressed the difficulty of combating guerilla

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<sup>55</sup> Circulation numbers 1965.

warriors who hid in villages and used civilians as shields. In the comic, Captain Duke Larson, in an effort to undermine the Viet Cong's underhanded strategy, has a "crazy idea." The captain instructs the helicopters to drop tear gas on a Cong-infiltrated village, a gesture that incapacitates the enemy without killing innocent villagers. The soldiers found a way to defeat the enemy and avoid collateral damage. The good guys made sure that only the bad guys felt the sting of American righteousness.

Most interesting to Krassner was the comic book's February release date. By his calculations, *Jungle War Stories* must have gone to the printer in December and been written and illustrated in November or before. The comic book ideas dated from 1964. The first actual news from reporters in Saigon of gas being used as a weapon in Vietnam came in March 1965. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara responded to those reports on March 23, explaining that the "riot-control agent" had been used to save lives. A March 26 *Wall Street Journal* article quoted a U.S. officer on the subject: "If we could douse a hamlet containing Viet Cong soldiers with a temporary incapacitating agent long enough to go in and sort out the Good Guys from the Bad, this could be a boon to the war effort." This background was the investigative half of Krassner's job description, all a setup for the editor's satire, a rhetorical question infused with both irony and conviction: "Is it not clear now that the Pentagon relies on *Jungle War Stories* for its military strategy in Vietnam?" The editor fantasized that the climax of a different story from the same issue of *Jungle War Stories*, in which soldiers drop Florida alligators onto a contingent of Viet Cong hiding in swamps, would soon infuse actual news reports from Vietnam.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Krassner, "Comic Book Escalation of America's War on Vietnam," *The Realist*, May 1965, 1, 21-23.

The satire was intriguing, but slight. Krassner captured something of the absurdity of the war, but little of its vulgarity. "Comic Book Escalation" suggested that America's involvement in Vietnam stemmed from a juvenile understanding of the world. The rationale for the war exhibited such a simplistic vision that it only made sense that the military strategies would be drawn from children's entertainment. Likely to make the sympathetic giggle, or shake their heads in acknowledgement and disgust, "Comic Book Escalation" remained facile, a farce that relied on coincidence to deride American policy, a lampoon inadequate to its target. It would take two years before Krassner crafted a satire commensurately caustic, visceral, and gruesome to the war. He finally achieved the breakthrough by testing the new possibilities of expression that had been opened up by comedian Lenny Bruce, rock and roll bands such as The Fugs, and federal courts. Krassner pushed past what the previous taboo-busters had envisioned, declaring opposition to public policy and the culture itself (some said "decency" itself) while he explored the potential of "sick humor" to its furthest realms.

The direction that Krassner and his magazine took would have been inconceivable without the quick erosion of obscenity laws. In *Roth v. United States* (1957), the Supreme Court upheld the convictions of two book dealers, which appeared briefly to be a victory for those who supported censorship. However, by declaring that obscene material must appeal to the prurient interests of the average reader, Justice Brennan, author of the majority opinion, opened a door to the challenge of all obscenity convictions. Defense attorneys queried arresting officers to find if they had been sexually aroused by the material they confiscated or the performance they witnessed. The answer was invariably that they had not been aroused. Furthermore, expression could also be defended on the basis of artistic merit. Even if a piece of

writing did sexually excite its audience, it was still defensible, and legal, if the work had redeeming social or artistic value. Libertarians and free speech advocates convinced federal courts that the First Amendment protected novels such as D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934) because, despite their sexual content, they were valuable literature. By the time that the Supreme Court gave its seal of approval to the fictional memoir of a prostitute, *Fanny Hill*, in *Memoirs v. Massachusetts* (1966), the chance that a prosecutor could obtain an obscenity conviction against any published work was highly unlikely.<sup>57</sup> Krassner followed obscenity cases closely and internalized both the "prurient interest" and "redeeming social value" tests.

Just as significant as the rulings of the court for the development of *The Realist* was Krassner's close friendship and working relationship with Lenny Bruce. Bruce, labeled by such mainstream publications as *Time* magazine as "king of the sicknicks" was Krassner's greatest influence and a regular contributor to *The Realist*. In return, Krassner was editor of Bruce's memoir *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People* (1963), a collection of writings first serialized in *Playboy* magazine. Both influenced the thinking of the other, and both shared a similar sensibility from the beginning when it came to the nature of language, obscenity, sexuality, religion, and hypocrisy. One reader who wrote a letter to *The Realist* was exactly right when he asserted, "[T]he editor's admiration for Lenny Bruce must proceed from a similarity of opinions."<sup>58</sup> Those opinions were of the sort that would raise eyebrows even when the satirists presented them without profane language.

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<sup>57</sup> Charles Rembar, *The End of Obscenity* (New York: Random House, 1968).

<sup>58</sup> Randolph Mark, "On Lenny Bruce," *The Realist*, April 1964, 20.

Sometimes Bruce would write a piece specifically with *The Realist* in mind, and other times, Krassner would merely transcribe and reprint Bruce's stage material. Just as Krassner and cartoonists for *The Realist* joked about interracial dating (almost a decade before Sidney Poitier "came to dinner" (1967)), Bruce told a joke about bringing home a Gentile fiancée to introduce to his Jewish parents. "But I thought the fact that her father was a doctor would soothe my family," Bruce quipped. "He was the only colored doctor in Freeport, Long Island."<sup>59</sup> More likely to jeopardize Bruce's livelihood than jokes about dating a black girl was his excoriation of what he perceived to be religious hypocrisy, especially when he performed in a city which prided itself on faith. In 1963, *The Realist* reproduced some Bruce routines that he had performed at the Gate of Horn club in Chicago. If Jesus Christ returned, Bruce claimed, he would be confused by his church's opulence, especially when the cathedrals towered over the squalor of neighboring ghettos: "[Jesus] would wonder what 50 Puerto Ricans were doing living in one room. That stained glass window is worth nine grand!"<sup>60</sup> More sacrosanct than religion, perhaps, was America's conduct during the Second World War. Even some patriotic atheists might have squirmed over Bruce's assessment of the use of atomic weapons against the Japanese: "Do you people think yourselves better because you burned your enemies at long distance with missiles without ever seeing what you had done to them? . . . If we would have lost the war, they would have strung Truman up by the balls. . . . They would just *schlep* out all those Japanese mutants."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Krassner, "Lenny Bruce Revisited," *The Realist*, December 1960, 15.

<sup>60</sup> Krassner, "The Arrest of Lenny Bruce," *The Realist*, June 1963, 30.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

Such taboo sentiments earned Bruce a bad reputation indeed. Between 1961 and 1966, *Time* magazine called Bruce “the sickest of them all,” “the four-letter comedian,” the “triple-sick Comedian,” and “the sick, beat comic.”<sup>62</sup> Krassner was quick to defend his friend from the criticisms. Those who believed that Bruce was sick, or even that he should be imprisoned, revealed “not the sickness of the comedian but the sickness of the critic: the depth to which his fear of ideas has driven his freedom to think.”<sup>63</sup> The editor’s support was unrelenting. As Bruce’s legal troubles mounted with the authorities who policed obscenity, Krassner wrote about what he perceived as the real obscenity: “the obscene interrelationship between church and politics and justice.”<sup>64</sup> Such rhetoric, which asserted that the obscenities of injustice – and eventually, of violence against foreign nations – were more offensive than any sentiments or words could ever be, would only grow more prevalent as the decade pressed on, more prevalent in *The Realist* and among other artists and satirists.

In the early ‘60s, Bruce’s ideas were iconoclastic, but his language remained clean. He felt that the four-letter words of private conversation would never be allowed in print or on stage. Krassner persuaded him otherwise, insisting that the Supreme Court’s “prurient interest” and “redeeming value” tests guaranteed that the First Amendment would now protect *all* speech. Krassner showed Bruce an interview he had conducted with the psychologist Albert Ellis. Ellis declared, and Krassner published: “My own standard is that certain modes of expression, including the use of many of the famous or infamous four-letter words, are usually appropriate, understandable and effective under certain conditions, and at

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<sup>62</sup> Richard Corliss, “A Tribute to Lenny Bruce,” *Time*, August 10, 2006.

<sup>63</sup> Krassner, “Bruce Revisited,” 15.

<sup>64</sup> Krassner, “The Arrest of Lenny Bruce,” 31.



these times they should be unhesitatingly used. Words such as **fuck** and **shit** are most incisive and expressive when properly employed [bold in original].”<sup>65</sup> Bruce marveled that Krassner had printed the words without asterisks. “Are you telling me this is legal to sell on the newsstands?” Bruce demanded. That night, he took that copy of *The Realist* on stage with him at a midnight performance in New York and read from it. He was barred from performing at the venue again.<sup>66</sup> (The owners eventually reneged and brought him back due to Bruce’s ever-increasing draw). The “king of the sicknicks” had received his first taste of unfettered self-expression. Of course, many people felt that there still were, and still should be, restrictions on the words a man could say on stage, and many of them were in law enforcement.

In a fraudulent obituary for Bruce (1964), published as a hoax more than a year before the struggling comedian’s death, Krassner explained what he perceived as his friend’s dilemma. “Because Lenny found that the novelists didn’t have to say ‘frig’ anymore[, h]e began to want the same privilege of nonrestriction,” Krassner wrote. “His point of view was the same onstage and off, and he wanted to talk to his friends in the nightclub with the same freedom of vocabulary he could exercise in someone’s living room.”<sup>67</sup> However, performers had not yet been guaranteed the rights that novelists had, a reality which Bruce would learn in the courtroom. His fight for such freedom of expression would ruin the comedian at the same time that it broke down barriers for his successors.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> “An Impolite Interview with Albert Ellis,” *The Realist*, March 1960, 11.

<sup>66</sup> Krassner, “*Confessions*,” 59.

<sup>67</sup> Krassner, “An Obituary for Lenny Bruce,” *How a Satirical Editor Became a Yippie Conspirator in Ten Easy Years* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1971), 93.

<sup>68</sup> Krassner’s advice to Bruce may have been ill advised. An attorney who defended booksellers accused of obscenity and subsequently wrote a history of the erosion of obscenity laws in the 1960s declared, “The cases in this volume have to do with expression, not with conduct. And among modes of expression, they have to do only

Some questioned if Bruce's words and sentiments actually stemmed from a genuine desire to communicate freely, as he claimed. Was Krassner being too generous when he stated that Bruce merely wanted the same freedom on stage that "he could exercise in someone's living room?" Or was the "sicknick" really out to offend for kicks, to punish his audience, to inflict upon them discomfort through obscene language and unseemly opinions? By the mid-60s, the word "sadism" was very much in vogue. Sadism seemed rife in society, from the assassination of President Kennedy to the escalating war in Vietnam, and the word appeared repeatedly in the print and television. Perhaps assassinations and bloody, proxy wars were not aberrations, but rather the manifestation of human nature, or of American society. Writing for *The Realist* in 1965, Laurence Janifer asserted, "[S]adism, here and now, in this country and in this year, is a major force . . . it controls more of our actions, our patterns and our drives than any other force of any sort—and . . . nobody seems to be aware of this."<sup>69</sup> The sadistic impulse was not limited to right-wing reactionaries, assassins, or soldiers, Janifer insisted. It applied to shock humorists as well, "also such publications as the one you're reading (and I'm writing for). The drive to shock, the drive to destroy—no matter what's being destroyed, good or bad—is sadistic, of course." Janifer's indictment of *The Realist* within the pages of the magazine itself might have surprised readers, but they would not have been unfamiliar with the argument that the desire to shock was a form of sadism. Back in a 1960 interview with Bruce, Krassner himself had put the question to "the sickest of them all," "[Some have claimed that] people today are bored with ordinary comedy and want to be hurt. Do you think there's any sadism in your

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with books; the treatment of sex in other forms of communication is another story. It is in relation to books that obscenity has had its main meaning." Rembar, 493.

<sup>69</sup> Janifer, "You Sane Men," *The Realist*, February 1965, 2, 7.

comedy?”<sup>70</sup> Bruce was nonplussed by the thought, but joked that if such an accusation were true, he should be beaten “with a large belt that has a big brass buckle.”

*Time* magazine was concerned about the state of American humor. The problem derived, in part, the magazine’s editors claimed, from “the considerable Yiddishization of American comedy.”<sup>71</sup> The magazine quoted film critic Pauline Kael on Jewish humor: “[T]here’s a lot of hostility in it.” Of course, Bruce got a brief mention, as a satirist who “confused black humor with sick humor.” Ultimately, however, the magazine’s editors did not seem to know what they wanted. They longed for a point of view, for the reemergence of clever, cutting satire of the Mort Sahl and Henry Morgan variety. At the same time, the writers lamented, “Today the humorists are outexamining the examiners, some of them even making second careers as commentators who probe and pontificate on the radio and TV panels that ceaselessly sift American manners, morals and more.” The magazine’s readers were left to wonder what the editors considered the appropriate object of satire to be.

*Time* was not alone in fretting about the state of American comedy. Police and the federal courts of the United States also had a problem with modern humor, specifically with Lenny Bruce’s. Bruce’s first arrest occurred in 1961 at the Jazz Workshop, a San Francisco club, when the comedian used the word “cocksucker,” in a literal sense. Eventually resulting in an acquittal, the San Francisco arrest was the first but not the most vexing of Bruce’s legal troubles. In Chicago, local police arrested Bruce after his performance at The Gate of Horn, ostensibly for his lewd act; other commentators, Krassner included, suspected that the perturbation of the local police stemmed more from Bruce’s derision of the Catholic church

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<sup>70</sup> “An Impolite Interview with Lenny Bruce,” *The Realist*, February 1960, 3.

<sup>71</sup> “AMERICAN HUMOR: Hardly a Laughing Matter,” *Time*, March 4, 1966, 46-7.

than from four-letter words or explicit references to sexuality. The first two arrests caused minor sensations among the hip and the national press. Soon the arrests became frequent enough to be banal. In fact, by mid-decade, the entertainment industry publication, *Variety*, thought that a performance which did not result in Bruce's arrest was worthy of a story.

The arrests and trials often boiled down to issues of semantics. Could a word itself, a group of letters on paper or a mere utterance of the tongue, be obscene? In the pages of *The Realist*, Bruce mocked the idea. He wrote sarcastically, "[A]ccording to the R.V. Hicklin test, the word f-u-c-k alone, written on a wall, can incite lewd and lustful thoughts."<sup>72</sup> In a more literal and sober mood, as he stared into the face of incarceration, Bruce wrote a long piece in *The Realist* about a significant disagreement between the prosecutors and defendant. The crux of the debate, as Bruce saw it, was whether the word "shit" could refer to anything other than excrement. The state said no. Bruce, and *The Dictionary of American Slang*, insisted that "shit" had many potential meanings.<sup>73</sup> Bruce eventually died – from an overdose of morphine – eager to be exonerated but with trials still pending. Those who found the dead comedian in his home noted that his electric typewriter was still on; the comedian-turned-defense attorney had been in midsentence, that inchoate idea a fitting metaphor for an entertainer and satirist who had much left to say.

Krassner's critics also tended to focus on his increasing usage of four-letter words, but his detractors neither dragged him into a courtroom nor hounded him into a grave. In an appearance on the Joe Pyne show, the editor of *The Realist* found himself defending his magazine against a vituperative critic, Pyne himself. "Why do you feel compelled to print the

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<sup>72</sup> Bruce, "In Defense of Censorship," *Best of the Realist* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 1984), 173.

<sup>73</sup> Bruce, "The Fecalphilies," *The Realist*, November 1964, 1, 10-13.

most obscene words in the English language every month?" the host asked. Krassner responded, "Well, why do *you* feel compelled to underline a few words in a magazine that contains twenty or thirty thousand words?"<sup>74</sup> The divide between the Krassners and the Pynes centered on whether words themselves could have an intrinsic nastiness. Krassner and his readers insisted that fretting so much over verbiage was energy misdirected. As one reader wrote in a letter to *The Realist*, "I'm delighted you intend to publish my exchange with a local dean over the word 'fuck,' a breach of etiquette that upsets deans in a way Vietnam, Mississippi, the total prostitution of education, etc., do not . . ."<sup>75</sup> Such rhetoric – how can words matter more than the repression of minorities or the lives of soldiers and peasants in Southeast Asia? – would grow increasingly persuasive to Krassner and his readers as the decade reached its seemingly apocalyptic pinnacle. For now, however, the sentiment was simply one more rhetorical and logical device hauled out in defense of Bruce and *The Realist*.

Ultimately, Bruce's greatest legacy for the counterculture, the anti-war movement, and *The Realist*, was an idea that he did not invent, but for which he was a persuasive spokesperson. American attitudes toward sex were unhealthy. For instance, Bruce and Krassner met a man who forbid his daughter from viewing the movie *Psycho*, not because of its violence, but because the film showed a partially unclothed couple kissing in bed.<sup>76</sup> What perplexed Bruce was the concept that bodies were dirty. "One of the things I got arrested for in Chicago was showing a picture of a girl that was really pretty. I wanted to point out the God-made-the-body paradox of the decent people who would object to that groovy-looking chick,"

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<sup>74</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 116.

<sup>75</sup> Krassner, "An Obituary for Lenny Bruce," 96.

<sup>76</sup> Krassner, "Lenny Bruce Revisited," 15.

Bruce wrote in *The Realist*.<sup>77</sup> The idea was one on which Bruce fixated. As Krassner summarized one of the comedian's standard bits, "If a titty is bloodied and maimed, it's clean; but if the titty is pretty it's dirty. And that's why you never find any atrocity photos at obscenity trials, with distended stomachs and ripped-up breasts . . ."<sup>78</sup> Bruce and Krassner both were arriving at the conclusion that American attitudes toward sex were at the root of repressive laws against expression.

The two misguided beliefs, one that repressed unbridled sexuality and the other that suppressed free expression, could be challenged in one masterstroke, as Krassner saw it. Enter *Mad* magazine cartoonist Wally Wood. The artist had worked with Krassner even before the launch of *The Realist*, illustrating the first piece Krassner sold to *Mad*. After the death of Walt Disney, Krassner had an idea more bold than any he had previously pitched to Wood. As Krassner put it, "Disney's death occurred a few years after *Time* magazine's famous 'God Is Dead' cover, and it occurred to me that Disney had indeed served as God to that whole stable of imaginary characters. . . . [H]e had repressed all their baser instincts, but now that he had departed, they could finally shed their cumulative inhibitions."<sup>79</sup> Wood ran with the idea, outpacing even Krassner's original conception (Figure 3). "The Disneyland Memorial Orgy," the centerspread image of the magazine's most notorious edition, celebrated a fantasy world that had achieved sexual liberation. Tinker Bell stripped for Jiminy Cricket and a panting Peter Pan. Prince Charming peaked under Cinderella's dress, as he placed the glass slipper on her foot, a formerly innocent act now rendered fetishistic. For her part, Cinderella stared back with

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<sup>77</sup> Bruce, "Obscenity, Narcotics, and Me," *The Realist*, March 1964, 23.

<sup>78</sup> Krassner, "An Obituary for Lenny Bruce," 96.

<sup>79</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 142.

seductive eyes. Other characters copulated all around, or acted as voyeurs to the trysts of others. Snow White was embroiled in an orgy with all of the Seven Dwarves.<sup>80</sup>

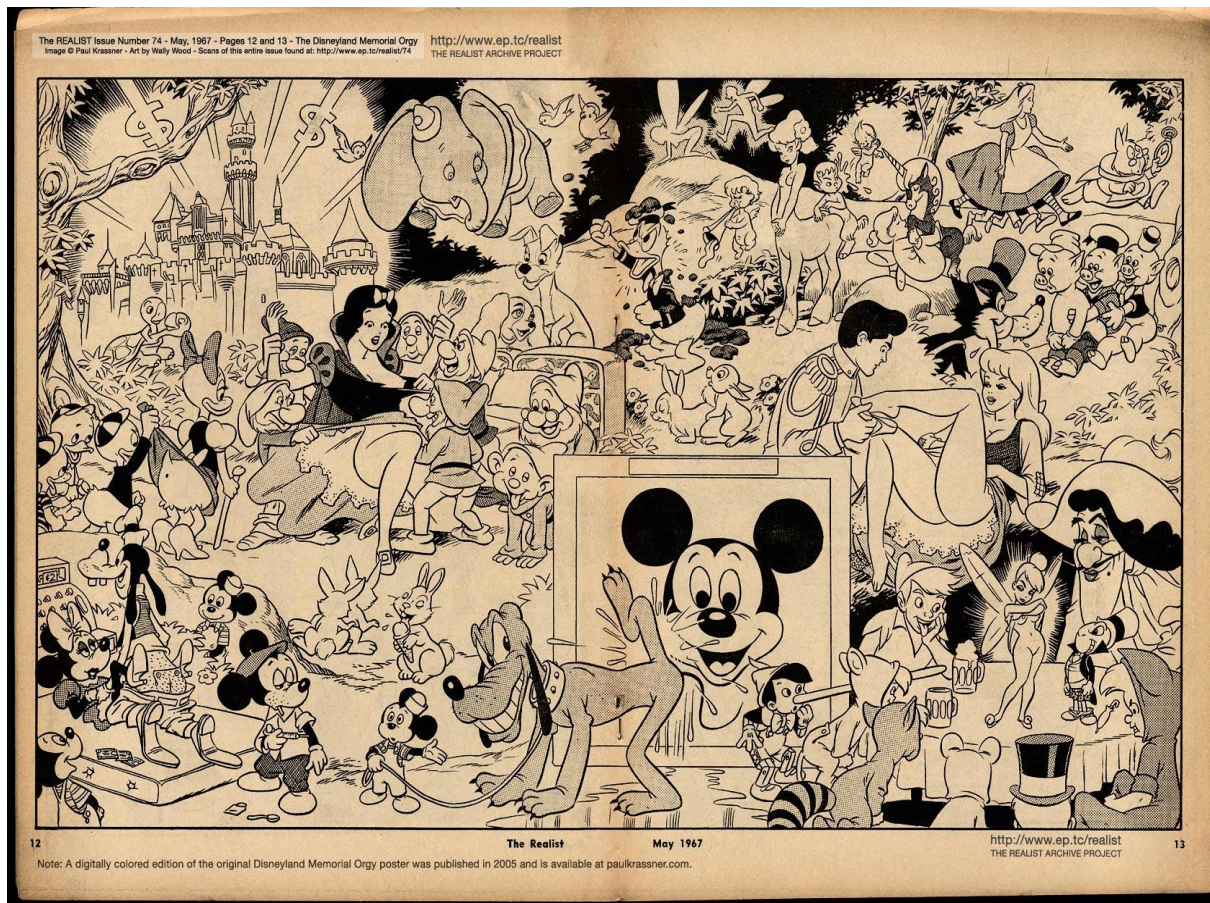


Figure 3: “The Disneyland Memorial Orgy”

Wood had achieved exactly what Krassner envisioned. “Although no genitalia were shown, Wally Wood had nonetheless unleashed the characters’ collective libido,” Krassner boasted.<sup>81</sup> Though some distributors across the nation experienced harassment for this

<sup>80</sup> Donald Barthelme’s novel *Snow White*, which imagines the Disney character in a similar sexual predicament, appeared the same year as Wally Wood’s poster, 1967.

<sup>81</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*.

debasement of Disney's iconic characters, Krassner received no trouble from law enforcement. "The Disneyland Memorial Orgy" demonstrated how *The Realist* operated. Krassner learned what freedoms of expression existed through trial and error. He pushed and, usually, found little pushback, at least legally. Print was safer than actual verbal speech, and Krassner never felt handcuffs around his wrists for his ideas or words, the way Bruce had. Thus, the magazine's vision of liberated libidos, a fantasy of unbound sexuality, found the appropriate images in which to be articulated. Krassner had wed the mode of expression with the ideas expressed, as the magazine embraced, simultaneously, the Sexual Revolution and the disappearance of obscenity laws.

It is no wonder, then, that in the mid-60s – in the midst of rock music's ineluctable ascendancy – *The Realist* profiled only one rock group, a commercially middling, foul-mouthed outfit named The Fugs. Taking the name of the group from the substitute term for the ultimate English-language obscenity that Norman Mailer had used in his first novel *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), the members of the Fugs consciously called attention to their interest in unfettered expression and what they considered the absurdities of censorship. As one of the songwriters, vocalists, and leaders of the band, Ed Sanders later reminisced, "We drew inspiration for the Fugs from . . . our concept that there was oodles [*sic*] of freedom guaranteed by the United States Constitution that was not being used."<sup>82</sup> Sanders and his cohort embodied the same two impulses toward unfettered expression that *The Realist* did: celebration of the creative, sexual impulse and protest against the Vietnam War, a conflict that epitomized the destructive impulse.

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<sup>82</sup> Ed Sanders, liner notes for *Fugs First Album* reissue, Fantasy Records, 1994, 1.



The Fugs approached both the celebratory and castigatory with equal enthusiasm.

Songs such as “Slum Goddess,” “Dirty Old Man,” and “Group Grope” embodied what Sanders would later characterize as “testosterone-addled eros crooning.”<sup>83</sup>

The first time that we balled, it nearly drove me insane  
The next time that we balled, it ripped me out of my brain  
The third time that we balled, you know, I fainted nearly dead  
I woke up, she was on her knees covering my head  
“Slum Goddess”<sup>84</sup>

The Fugs foresaw also their unseemly future as they sang about “hanging out by the school yard gate / looking up every dress I can,” in “Dirty Old Man.” Even their promotional material channeled Lenny Bruce’s sensibility into pithy barbs, with one poster proclaiming “The FUGS are COMing” above the silhouette of a bikini clad woman whose head disappears into an image of a man playing electric guitar.<sup>85</sup>

When interviewed by contributor John Wilcock for *The Realist*, founding Fug and vocalist Tuli Kupferberg expounded on the importance of sexual liberation and self-expression, echoing the philosophies of Wilhelm Reich that the magazine frequently invoked. “Americans like to kill or be killed—aggression is a reaction to frustration,” Kupferberg explained. “Sexual frustration is still the major problem to be solved and in my opinion the appearance of sexual humor is a healthy sign. And if we can put some joy, some real sexy warmth into the revolution, we’ll have really achieved something.”<sup>86</sup> For the Fugs, freedom of the body, freedom to speak about the body without restrictions on the words they used, and the prospect of profound and positive social change coalesced into a single vision of the ideal

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> The Fugs, “Slum Goddess,” *The Fugs First Album*, ESP Records, 1965.

<sup>85</sup> Ed Sanders, Fugs First Album liner notes, 3.

<sup>86</sup> John Wilcock, “Who the Fugs Think They Are,” *The Realist*, August 1966, 9.

society, or at least, of the ideal life. The vision that the Fugs celebrated and promoted found an audience beyond their home turf, the grubby, bohemian community of New York City's Lower East Side. The group's self-titled second LP –released at the same time that *The Realist* interviewed the band – sold well enough to enter the Top 100 on Billboard's sales charts, making the album a pop record of sorts.<sup>87</sup>

The group did not evangelize only about the merits of bohemian promiscuity to their broadening audience. The Fugs, like a growing number of youth-culture spokespeople, felt compelled to address the Vietnam War also. How the band protested the war is significant. Sexuality became not merely a taboo to be exploded but a weapon to be hurled against an Establishment whose fear of and disgust toward the body seemed, to the Fugs, at the core of America's international aggression. If sexual frustration, as Kupferberg had told *The Realist*, was the underlying cause of violence, the Fugs knew how to resolve the issue. "I'm not ever goin' to Vietnam / I'd rather stay right here and screw your mom," they sang in "Doin' All Right."<sup>88</sup> The group sought a message that expressed disgust at the war and that affronted the sensibilities of hawkish citizens who supported America's policy in Southeast Asia without acknowledging its carnage. In the Fugs' fantasies, they even presented an alternative to what the band and its supporters viewed as America's frigid and brutal imperialism. The Fugs intended to fug, not fight. Simultaneously, they envisioned how laying their sexual desires bare could be a form of cultural combat.

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<sup>87</sup> The record peaked at 95 on Billboard's sales charts. The album was popular enough to win the attention of the FBI, which fretted over the band's content, but ultimately decided that "the recording is not considered to be obscene." [www.fugs.com](http://www.fugs.com) (Accessed May 19, 2010).

<sup>88</sup> "Doin' All Right," *The Fugs*, ESP Records, 1966.

The group groped restlessly for a mode of expression that would capture what they considered the insanity of American policy. At a New York performance entitled “The Night of Napalm,” the Fugs concluded a performance by tossing tubs full of spaghetti and sauce onto the audience while chanting, “No redemption.” Spotting painter Andy Warhol in the front row, Sanders targeted a handful of spaghetti into Warhol’s face, so that, as Sanders put it, he could give Warhol “a symbolic sense of what American planes were doing in Southeast Asia.”<sup>89</sup> “Kill for Peace” was the Fugs’ most effective anti-Vietnam protest song, capturing the imagination of many listeners, including John Wilcock, who reproduced the lyrics in his profile for *The Realist*: “If you don’t kill them then the Chinese will / You don’t want America to play second fiddle / Kill Kill Kill for peace.”<sup>90</sup> Coupled with tracks about the joys of orgies and old perverts, “Kill for Peace” wrote off the world as it was and hinted to listeners what kind of universe the Fugs dreamed would supplant it. Yet, as the band strove to arouse and horrify, which of those reactions they hoped to elicit at any given moment was not always clear. Was there any line the group would not cross? In response to that question, Fugs member Ken Weaver told *The Realist*, “Scatological references to LBJ, maybe . . . . But then again, maybe not. There are a few things that we wouldn’t mind singing but probably wouldn’t print in the song book. For example, we have a song with the line, *I believe in teenage legs wrapped around my body*.”<sup>91</sup> By the next year, others would break the barriers that prevented portrayals of sex with teenagers or a debasement of the president’s body. The Fugs were the first, but far from the last, performers of a brand of titillating protest shtick that was gaining traction.

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<sup>89</sup> Sanders, liner notes for *Fugs First Album*, 5.

<sup>90</sup> “Kill for Peace,” *The Fugs*, ESP Disk, 1966.

<sup>91</sup> Wilcock, 10.

In fact, many musicians and writers were creating images intended to repulse mainstream society. What made them kinfolk to the Fugs was the belief that such repulsion at depictions of taboo sexuality would somehow transform into repulsion against the war. Artists could expand the boundaries of free speech, express disgust at American foreign policy, and turn the tide of public opinion against the war, all by broadcasting sentiments that had previously been relegated to latrine walls. To certain high priests of hipness, faith in this faux-syllogism was the essence of “getting it.” Frank Zappa proved that he understood the logic when he directed his large ensemble, The Mothers of Invention, on the 1967 LP *Absolutely Free*. Just a year before, the Mothers mocked the political status quo by singing about “The left behinds of the Great Society,” but by 1967, the group was ready for a far more confrontational approach.<sup>92</sup> On “Brown Shoes Don’t Make It,” the Mothers explored the in-office daydreams of a white-collar pedophile. Seemingly incongruous at first, the title of the song referred to a fashion faux pas made by President Lyndon Johnson the day he made a surprise trip to Vietnam. In choppy but gleeful harmonies, the group sang, “Only thirteen, and she knows how to nasty . . . . If she were my daughter I’d . . . Smother my daughter in chocolate syrup / And strap her on again . . . . I’d like to make her do a nasty on the White House lawn.”<sup>93</sup> Most interesting is not that Zappa committed his perverse horror fantasy to vinyl record but that he took his unseemly tryst to Lyndon Johnson’s house. The Mothers were hardly ostracized by the consuming public for pushing past the shock treatment of the Fugs; *Absolutely Free* peaked just short of the Top 40.

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<sup>92</sup> “Hungry Freaks, Daddy,” *Freak Out!* Verve, 1966.

<sup>93</sup> “Brown Shoes Don’t Make It,” *Absolutely Free*, Verve, 1966. Far from being the esoteric pleasure of a small band of miscreants, “Brown Shoes” was named by the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as one of the 500 songs that shaped rock and roll.

*Getting Straight*, a Hollywood film about youth in revolt on college campuses, provided the most literal explanation of repulsion protest. In the film, a campus public affairs director offers a job to Leftist veteran Harry Bailey (Elliot Gould), a longtime hipster of the New Left, now thirty years old and in need of a salary. Bailey attempts to be polite as his would-be employer insults the students who protested at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, but inadvertently, Gould's character begins to defend them passionately, accusing Chicago police of causing the riot. The public affairs director challenges Bailey: "What do you expect with what those monsters were doing, cursing and defecating in the halls of the Hilton Hotel?" Bailey responds, "Those kids are protesting a bunch of maniacs who are sending them off to drop napalm on people. . . . Merely defecating in the lobby of the Hilton Hotel seems to be a pretty tame gesture. I'd call it fantastic restraint."<sup>94</sup> Everyone, it seemed, was juxtaposing any aberrant behavior to the Vietnam War and found the behavior acceptable by comparison – acceptable as a form of protest, or even just for the hell of it.

Krassner, too, was beginning to filter every subject through the prism of Vietnam. On a trip to San Francisco, he gave a dollar bill to a performance artist who immediately put the currency to a candle and taunted Krassner as it burned. "I had to put this into perspective," wrote the editor of *The Realist*. "We were, after all, burning over a billion dollars every month to force Vietnam into seeking what we considered their proper destiny."<sup>95</sup> In a long, elliptical cover story from 1966, Krassner's attention drifted between reminiscences of a Vietnam Teach-in and a conference sponsored by the Society for Humane Abortion, but he finally found the

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<sup>94</sup> *Getting Straight*, DVD, (Culver City, CA: Martini Movies, 2009), directed by Richard Rush, Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1970.

<sup>95</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 109.

analogy to hold together the free-floating ruminations: “We have more respect for an undeveloped fetus than we do for an undeveloped nation.”<sup>96</sup> In a strikingly positive profile of Krassner in *Life* magazine in 1968, the editor made the point most directly: “[A]nything you see or read in *The Realist* is anticlimactic to napalm.”<sup>97</sup> For those who had become convinced that the war was an obscenity, no thought or activity was unrelated to the ongoing, ever-present conflict.<sup>98</sup> Yet, the public seemed not to be paying attention at all. How could they be, if opinion polls still demonstrated substantial support for America’s involvement in Southeast Asia?

Attending the anti-war rallies often felt useless – the parades of pre-programmed phrases, hackneyed sentiments, cheering and booing on cue – it was all so much preaching to the choir. Perhaps, it would be better if the already-converted provoked one another, rather than attend rallies of self-congratulation and back-patting. When writing about a demonstration against the war in Philadelphia, Krassner ruminated, “Listen to the speeches, one after another telling the audience what it already knows, evoking applause with necessary clichés, no longer shocking anybody with the shocking facts of the war because you can become so jaded with horror that you develop an emotional callus [*sic*].”<sup>99</sup> Krassner’s conclusion to the dilemma of apathy was remarkably similar to that of the Fugs, the Mothers, and the defecating students. He would provoke the public to a level of repulsion that the war should have created,

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<sup>96</sup> Krassner, “I Was an Abortionist for the FBI,” *The Realist*, April 1966, 23.

<sup>97</sup> “Close-up, Underground Editor Paul Krassner: Easygoing Advocate of the Outrageous,” *Life*, October 4, 1968, 46.

<sup>98</sup> As SDS leader Mark Rudd, later characterized his obsession, “Every second of my life from 1965 to 1975, I was always aware that our country was attacking Vietnam. I could be up in the mountains, I’d be thinking about the war in Vietnam. I could be taking an acid trip, and I’d be thinking about the war in Vietnam.” “War on Foreign Soil,” *The Weather Underground*, directed by Sam Green and Bill Siegel, The Free History Project, 2002.

<sup>99</sup> Krassner, “Lenny Bruce, Tim Leary and the Search for Alienation—or, Which Deodorant Does Lyndon Johnson Use?” *The Realist*, February 1967, 23.

but had failed to. He would utilize the new freedom of expression that the Supreme Court had seemingly sanctioned as a weapon against the war. In the effort to end American involvement in Vietnam, Krassner would make dirty words into a means rather than an end.

He had been toying with the idea for a while. In the first year of Johnson's massive escalation of the war, 1965, Krassner congregated with a large group of folk singers at Carnegie Hall (as the only non-singing speaker) for the event "Sing-in for Peace." Given the formality of the setting, and perhaps, thinking of the tedious and expensive legal battles of his friend and hero Lenny Bruce, Krassner's early attempt to conflate expressiveness and protest was tentative, a toe in the water. However, his strategy was unmistakable. After reading the American Ambassador to the UN's defense of the United States' policy in Vietnam to the Carnegie audience, Krassner declared, slowly and distinctly, "That is a bunch of *ka-ka*." As he recapitulated the events of that evening for his magazine's readers, Krassner emphasized, "That's right, you heard me, *ka-ka*. I'm sure it's the first time that *ka-ka* has ever been said in Carnegie Hall. I have visions of being dragged off the stage by some indignant official berating me: 'You can't say *ka-ka* here! What do you think this is, a goddam *nursery*?' . . . But nothing happens."<sup>100</sup> Neither Krassner's reference to feces nor his reversion to the language of the toddler provoked the audience reaction he sought. Like Lyndon Johnson, he would have to escalate.

One way that Krassner escalated the aesthetics of repulsion was with a rape analogy. *The Realist's* editor utilized the format of a screenplay to depict a man who had become obsessed with contributing to the American war effort. The character was wracked with guilt

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<sup>100</sup> Krassner, "Salougey Died for Your Sins," *How a Satirical Editor Became a Yippie Conspirator in Ten Easy Years* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), 142.

over his lack of sacrifice. In bed with his wife in the evening, he lamented, "It's always *they*. Never *we*. I want to feel *involved* in the world situation."<sup>101</sup> The man spent his day at work researching the average height of the Viet Cong, desperate to find information that could benefit the American military. Then, as he walks home from work, he stumbles upon a rape in progress. Krassner portrayed the workings of the man's mind, as he encountered the situation: "Why is everybody just standing around and *watching*? . . . There's a perfect chance for *personal* involvement here . . . . You've been waiting all your *life* for an opportunity like this . . . . Go *ahead* . . . Go on . . . *go on* . . . Now!" The man ends his deliberation, and jumps into the fray, jumping on the *victim* of the assault, beating her, and ripping off her remaining clothes. The crowd of bystanders that had been watching without involving themselves cheered their approval of the man's actions. Krassner's ironic all-American protagonist had finally found an opportunity for direct action, but he had sided with the belligerent against the helpless target. The analogy between the Vietnam conflict and sexual violence demonstrated that Krassner was merging unsettling portrayals of sex with satire of America's war policy in a way similar to the Fugs and the Mothers of Invention. The body was a thing to be celebrated, as everyone from Wilhelm Reich to Tuli Kupferberg had insisted, and yet, depictions of sexual violation seemed the supreme metaphor for America's violence against a Third World nation. Many believed, along with Reich and the Fugs, that the aggressive foreign policy of the United States was a manifestation of sexual repression; appropriately, sexual violence became a recurring motif through which to depict the nation's policies.

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<sup>101</sup> Krassner, "Don't Get Involved," *The Realist*, February 1966, 5-6, 11.



Another common symbol of American wrongheadedness and vulgarity was President Johnson himself. Widely regarded by his opponents as a crude rube, the president's earthiness, his temper, and his identity as a Texan all seemed to be traits that embodied America's war in Vietnam. In one article about a peace march at the University of California, Berkeley, Krassner summarized how *The London Observer* had portrayed Johnson: as a nose-picking, linguistically limited Southerner who would "reach casually and unashamedly into his groin to ease his pants."<sup>102</sup> For Krassner, the president was not merely an embarrassment, he was dangerous. "Now there is nothing intrinsically evil about scratching your balls during a press conference . . . the frightening thing is the *megalomania* of his crudeness . . . [A]t the end the reporter asked him about the war. 'What the Commies are saying is 'Fuck you, Lyndon Johnson.' And no one's going to say 'Fuck you, Lyndon Johnson' and get away with it'." To Krassner, Johnson was determining American foreign policy as if he had a personal vendetta against the forces of Ho Chi Minh. The president was going to prove that he was tougher than the peasant communists of Vietnam. Though Krassner declared, "It's too easy to make a connection between violence and Texas," the mastermind of *The Realist* could not help himself. He listed Lee Harvey Oswald, Jack Ruby, and Lyndon Johnson as "the unholy trinity of power crazies."<sup>103</sup> Later, Krassner would add University of Texas tower-sniper Charles Whitman to the list. The repulsive war plan, Krassner insisted, sprouted from the mind of a repulsive individual, a man who embodied the worst traits of his region.

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<sup>102</sup> Krassner, "Hell's Angels vs. Berkeley Vietniks," *The Realist*, February 1966, 9.

<sup>103</sup> Krassner, "Lenny Bruce, Tim Leary and the Search for Alienation—or, Which Deodorant Does Lyndon Johnson Use?" *The Realist*, February 1967, 23.

Krassner's former father-in-law, the renowned and controversial novelist Norman Mailer, also became convinced that understanding Vietnam involved understanding the president who waged the war. In a speech at an anti-war rally, later reprinted in *The Realist*, Mailer explicitly equated the war and the man who decided to wage it. Why the United States was involved in the war at all was, to Mailer, puzzling. "Never in our history has so portentous a war been accelerated in a place which means so little to Americans," the novelist declared.<sup>104</sup> The conflict was not, Mailer insisted, a necessary part of Cold War strategy, nor the result of "inevitably historic forces." Rather, President Johnson had made the decision to escalate an unnecessary war, and "the mystery of Vietnam revolve[d] around the mystery of Lyndon Johnson's personality." Bearing "the vanity of a modern dictator" and "an ego which had the voracity of a beast," Johnson pushed the country into a violent quagmire because he was pig-headed, ferocious, even mentally ill. "[H]is mind has become a consortium of monstrous disproportions," Mailer bellowed to the Berkeley campus, and Krassner reproduced the assessment for his magazine's readers.<sup>105</sup> Johnson bore the same traits as all those who suffered from alienation: "that sense of the body growing empty within, of the psyche pierced by a wound whose dimensions keep opening."

As time passed, Mailer continued to probe the meaning of the Vietnam War, and repeatedly, his searching led him back to Johnson. His novel, *WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?* (1967), bore the title of an explanatory essay but was actually a story – packed wall to wall with the kind of four-letter words that were forbidden when Mailer first started writing – about a foul-mouthed teenager from Texas and his equally vulgar parents. The actual story had little

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<sup>104</sup> Mailer, "Mailer on LBJ," *The Realist*, June 1965, 12.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

direct reference to Vietnam; rather, the Texas setting and the crude characters were an elliptical way of equating Johnson's personality and the reasons for the war. Each of the characters demonstrated that only the boorish, violent sensibilities of a virility-obsessed Texan could explain America's involvement in Southeast Asia. The novel is about verbiage, more than plot, but moves in the direction of a bear-hunting trip in Alaska. With the constant verbal obscenity, Mailer intended to force readers to confront the obscenity of the war.

The analogy between the crudeness of the characters and the vulgarity of the war – or “shortest possible equals sign,” as Mailer himself put it – was not lost on critics. *WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?* inspired reviewer Eliot Fremont-Smith to label Mailer “this country's most intrepid political metaphorist” in *The New York Times*.<sup>106</sup> In the book, aggression is not just a trait of Mailer's characters; it is a virtue and one readily imparted from parent to child. “[Y]ou got to be a nut about competition,” the teenager's blustering father tells him. “You got to be so dominated by a desire to win that if you was to squat down on the line and there facing you was Jesus Christ, you would just tip your head once and say, ‘J.C., I have to give you fair warning that I'm here to do my best to go right through your hole.’”<sup>107</sup> Such competitiveness finds its apogee in the hunting trip. As Mailer puts it, “He too has got to get his grizzer. The wolf is burning fever in him now, best future of his blood is going to boil off if he can't get on a bear . . . he had blown up in bull buck bear fever.” The characters have a need to best their opponents, on the football field and on hunting trips, but the need to win translates quickly into bloodlust.

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<sup>106</sup> Eliot Fremont-Smith, “Norman Mailer's Cherry Pie,” *The New York Times*, September 8, 1967, 37.

<sup>107</sup> Mailer, *WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), 42. Other quotations are taken from pages 127-8, 9, and 165-5, respectively.

The bloodlust of Mailer's Texans emanates from a psychosexual, sadomasochistic, death-wish confusion. The author describes the private lives of Texas police thusly: "[E]very one of these bastards has the sexual peculiarities of red-blooded men, which is to say that one of them can't come unless he's squinting down a gunsight, and the other won't produce unless his wife sticks a pistol up his ass." The principal characters of Mailer's novel exhibit "peculiarities" more disturbing than those of the police. The teenage boy and his best friend demonstrate a more startling antisocial behavior:

They also on freak activities. Not just fucking two or three forty-year-old women on separate shots in the bathroom in one night . . . but they off on real freaks. For instance, they are digging corpses in Tex's father's funeral parlor, I don't mean the ultimate, the boys are never without some kind of jammed up taste and principles but listen city slickers from the East, they are engaging in private autopsies, undercover undertaker surgical activities—this weird unpalatable action to be explained on the basis that it gives them powers.

The characters, and the president they represent, are mired in a morbid and perverse delirium. The novel, and ostensibly the masterminds of Vietnam, is obsessed with the violent and the scatological, and the characters express their obsession in the most vulgar language available. In his review of the book, Fremont-Smith thought that the novel was effective "in part because it is so blatant that one cannot become inured to it, in part because the rhetoric is not genital but anal."<sup>108</sup> Mailer communicated his understanding of Vietnam not by writing about Vietnam, but by concocting a fever dream of repulsion, "deliberately relentless in its use of revolting imagery."

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<sup>108</sup> Fremont-Smith.

In his masterpiece for *The Realist*, Krassner used a similar strategy, albeit a pithier one.<sup>109</sup> When he claimed to have located the excised portions from William Manchester's original manuscript version of *The Death of a President*, thousands, if not millions, anticipated reading what Krassner had found. Of course, he had not located the deleted sections. He had simply made them up. His writing was strategic. Krassner mimicked Manchester's style, attempting to earn readers' trust with a convincing facsimile, as Krassner later put it, "peeling off layer after layer of verisimilitude, getting closer and closer with each new paragraph to some unknown core at the center of this apocryphal onion" until he stumbled upon "an astounding metaphorical truth."<sup>110</sup> A front page article whose real meat lay deep inside the magazine, "The Parts Left Out of the Kennedy Book" began by summarizing some well known animosity between the Kennedys and Lyndon Johnson. Then, Krassner moved on to those coarse aspects of Johnson's personality that so obsessed the president's other detractors, such as Norman Mailer. "It is difficult to ascertain where on the continuum of Lyndon Johnson's personality innocent boorishness ends and deliberate sadism begins," Krassner (still in the guise of Manchester) pondered at the beginning of a new section of the text.<sup>111</sup> Critics had, of course, accused Krassner's shock humor of being sadistic, but the editor of *The Realist* was out to demonstrate that the president who continued to escalate the war exhibited, in his every action, a more personal and cutting desire to discomfit and punish. "To have summoned then-Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon for a conference wherein he, the new President, sat defecating as he spoke, might charitably be an example of the former [boorishness]," Krassner

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<sup>109</sup> Krassner continues to believe that "'The Parts Left Out of the Kennedy Book' (May '67) to this day remains my favorite, and that of virtually every subscriber I meet or hear from on Facebook." Interview with author, May 20, 2010.

<sup>110</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 134.

<sup>111</sup> Krassner, "The Parts Left Out of the Kennedy Book," *The Realist*, May 1967, 18.

wrote. “[B]ut to challenge under the same circumstances Senator William J. Fulbright for his opposition to Administration policy in Vietnam is considered by insiders to be a frightening instance of the latter [sadism].” Ken Weaver of the Fugs’ ultimate barrier had been broken. There, in print, was a scatological reference to the president of the United States. Krassner accused the president too of “bursts of phallic exhibitionism.” But these accusations were only a stepping stone on the way to Krassner’s unforgettable depiction of Johnson.

“The Parts Left Out of the Kennedy Book” reported that Gore Vidal had declared on a London television program that, during the transportation of John Kennedy’s corpse from Dallas back to Washington aboard Air Force One, Jackie Kennedy had found Lyndon Johnson at the back of the plane, standing over Kennedy’s casket and chuckling. The revelation caused a stir in Britain, but the story never made it back to the States. What Vidal revealed, however, had just been the tip of the iceberg. As Krassner reached the climax of the piece, he unleashed the final revelation, in the guise of former First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy:

She corroborated Gore Vidal’s story, continuing: “That man was crouching over the corpse, no longer chuckling but breathing hard and moving his body rhythmically. At first I thought he must be performing some mysterious symbolic rite he’d learned from Mexicans or Indians as a boy. And then I realized—there is only one way to say this—he was literally fucking my husband in the throat. In the bullet wound in the front of his throat. He reached climax and dismounted. I froze. The next thing I remember, he was being sworn in as the new President.”<sup>112</sup>

Krassner was not interested in writing about how Johnson was abusing Kennedy’s legacy, or in postulating abstractly about the psychology of a man who escalated a needless war. He was dramatizing the fact. Most cheeky of all, he was submitting a grotesque allegory as journalism.

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

It was the magazine's most anarchic and successful hoax and excited much response, as Krassner had certainly intended. In his memoir, the magazine's editor claims that the circulation of Issue 74 reached 100,000 and a pass-on readership of two or three million.<sup>113</sup> Regardless of how he calculated those estimates, the magnitude of response underscores his claim for the issue's wide reach and lasting impact. When journalist, and historian of the underground press, Abe Peck, conducted oral interviews with numerous movers and shakers of the 1960s, the researcher found that "The Parts Left Out of the Kennedy Book" was the incident most often recalled by his interviewees.<sup>114</sup> Millions were paying attention, but reactions varied wildly. Some demanded that Krassner either explain how he obtained the text or admit that the article had been a fraud. Others admitted to having been duped. Daniel Ellsberg, later the leaker of the Pentagon Papers, admitted he had been suckered. "Maybe it was just because I *wanted* to believe it so badly," he said.<sup>115</sup> Others insisted that the metaphorical truth of the piece transcended any meager concerns about the literal truth. "It doesn't make any difference whether it's true or not, because that's really where they're *at*," one reader professed. Here was an individual who understood the aesthetic strategy of Frank Zappa, Norman Mailer, and Paul Krassner. Editor of *Ramparts* magazine, Warren Hinckle, expressed his admiration for the piece succinctly. His telegram to Krassner stated merely, "BRILLIANT DIRTY ISSUE." *The Library Journal* was more effusive and verbose in its praise, calling Krassner's periodical "the best

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<sup>113</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 143.

<sup>114</sup> Peck, 63.

<sup>115</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 139.

satirical magazine now being published in America. . . . The only sick part about the whole thing is *The Realist's* limited circulation in libraries.”<sup>116</sup>

Of course, plenty expressed their disapproval. Numerous subscribers, even from a group that prided itself on its ability to take the magazine's shocking sentiments in stride, nonetheless found the Kennedy piece to be too much. The anticipated subscription cancellations came in droves. In his master's thesis, published in 1968, about the satire of *The Realist*, Richard Patrick Norris was conflicted. He wrote in one portion of his thesis, “Krassner's satire on President Johnson . . . [brought] out the power of satire even more directly,” yet later wrote that Krassner's most famous piece, “neglect[ed] the audience, purpose, and hope of political satire, as his final satire dissipate[d] its power by jolting the reader and holding his attention to the fictional incident, instead of its reference.”<sup>117</sup> White House correspondent for news outlet UPI, Merriam Smith, denounced the piece utterly, referring to it as “senseless hatred” and lamenting that it was “seriously damaging the legitimate right to political protest.”<sup>118</sup> More extreme still, a producer of the television program “I Spy” threatened Krassner: “[O]nly a diseased and perverted mind could conjure up such rubbish. I trust that someone will put an end to your sick and perverted brain and thus stop you from sowing the seeds of lies in the brains of the American public. Hopefully, another sick human being will put a bullet in your throat and end your short, unhappy life.”<sup>119</sup> Some friends and associates had warned Krassner that the Kennedy article would land him in prison; others predicted it would precipitate his death and offered him a hideout. He ignored all warnings and escaped

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<sup>116</sup> Krassner, “Case History of the Manchester Caper,” *The Realist*, June 1967, 16, 15.

<sup>117</sup> Richard Patrick Norris, “Political Symbols and Political Satire – *The Realist* Magazine and American Politics: 1958-1968,” (master's thesis, State University of New York, Binghamton, 1968), 48, 68.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>119</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 141.



unscathed. To the police who showed up at Krassner's office to investigate obscenity complaints, he proved that he had broken no laws, invoking, as he put it "the Concept of Prurient Interest According to the Gospel of the Supreme Court."<sup>120</sup> Krassner was clearly relishing his newly allowed freedoms of expression and his ability to harness that freedom as a weapon against the war.

A letter from reader Margaret McCormack, reproduced by Krassner in *The Realist*, did the best job of putting the whole affair into perspective, as well as explaining Krassner's motivations and satirical intentions. "I don't cancel my subscription to the *Chronicle* because I read every day of the horror, the obscenities, the crimes committed by LBJ." McCormack mused. "Why cannot I be shocked enough to do something about reality?"<sup>121</sup> This reader had understood. Verbal obscenity, even fraudulent accusations of the basest sort against the president of the United States, paled in comparison to bombed villages in the Third World and children whose skin had been melted from their bodies by napalm. McCormack was disturbed by the fact that she was "not shocked by the real thing, I have to be shocked by sex. . . . I eat my dinner watching TV news of Vietnam atrocities. I doubt if I could eat my dinner watching LBJ screw *any* corpse, let alone JFK's. . . ." Krassner's hoax had made McCormack aware of an inescapable paradox in her sensibility. The piece did not free her from that paradox, but she believed that what Krassner had revealed was a truth worth pondering.

Or had McCormack been too generous? Was the Kennedy piece nothing more than the "senseless hatred" that Smith had accused it of being? Perhaps, it was a purposeful hatred, born of an appropriate indignation against the atrocities of the war. Krassner ended the long

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<sup>120</sup> Krassner, *How a Satirical Editor*, 256.

<sup>121</sup> Krassner, "Case History of the Manchester Caper," 14.

piece that chronicled responses to “The Parts Left Out of the Kennedy Book” with a philosophical assertion: “Whether my motivation—to share this outrageous apocrypha with you—stemmed from hostility or affection is . . . a matter of subjective interpretation.”<sup>122</sup> By 2010, Krassner refused to acknowledge the possibility of a hostile or sadistic motive: “To shock for shock’s sake is not my game. I would be naïve if I didn’t realize that there were some things I published which would shock some readers, but my conscious motivation was to share, and to communicate without compromise, at the risk of being misunderstood.”<sup>123</sup> In the final analysis, the reality about Vietnam was a terrible truth, one that required a horrific means of expression to communicate it.

“The Parts Left Out of the Kennedy Book” demonstrated, even as the so-called Summer of Love was about to begin and more than year before the violent riots at the Democratic Convention in Chicago and the dissolution of SDS into the terroristic Weathermen, that some malcontents were already savaging the leaders who directed the war, the public that passively accepted escalation, and the culture that cared more about dirty words at home than about violence abroad. Even as television and *Time* magazine informed the public that San Francisco’s “flower children” epitomized the times, Krassner countered with an aggressive and confrontational protest, protest that shared with those San Francisco hippies a gleeful irreverence and a taste for the absurd, but which insisted on facing a sadistic, cruel world and eschewed blithe escapism. Most readers of *The Realist*, a group who had been primed for devastatingly direct dissent by other comedians and musicians, embraced Krassner’s satire.

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with author, May 20, 2010.

There were two 1967s. Millions sang along as psychedelic musicians repeated the word “love” as if it were a talismanic incantation. Yet, at the same time, more than a million people read – and many reveled in – Krassner’s unflinching statement, his portrait of President Johnson as the personification of a perverse public policy and diseased national values. As its creativity and readership both peaked, *The Realist* demonstrated that the ‘60s did not occur one sentiment at a time as the simplified popular histories suggest: universal good will in 1967, disillusionment in the streets of Chicago in 1968, and, finally, the ultimate unmitigated rage of 1969 and 1970. Rather, the decade occurred as a jumble of simultaneous, confused sentiments, when elation met disgust, and unfettered expression cleared the space for the prophets of good vibrations, sexual liberation, and obscene dissent alike.

### Chapter 3: 1968—Yippies, Guerillas, and the New Self-Expression

Paul Krassner had always been a prankster, a persona that *The Realist's* 1960 "TV Hoax" put on vivid display. Perturbed by what he saw as excessively innocuous television, and excessively sensitive viewers, Krassner enlisted readers to assault one particularly dull program. *Masquerade Party* was a TV show in which contestants guessed the identity of masked celebrities. For Krassner, it epitomized sterile, mind-numbing entertainment. "The nothingness" of the program and the host's "depressing effervescence" were contemptible manifestations of the plastic, square world.<sup>124</sup> Thus, Krassner dreamed up a scheme in which readers of *The Realist* wrote to the program's producers and advertisers to complain about "the deplorable incident."

No incident had occurred. Yet, one hundred of Krassner's dutiful followers joined him in the prank, complaining about the same moment from the same episode, using hyperbolic language to describe the egregious indecency, but avoiding specifics.<sup>125</sup> Vagueness masked their conspiracy, and the stunt was a success. *Masquerade's* producers contacted each letter-writer, seeking clarification about the complaints and assuring each respondent, erroneously, that his letter had been the only grievance registered.<sup>126</sup> By targeting a television program and its advertisers, *The Realist* lodged a complaint against American mass culture and the large, impersonal organizations which created and promoted it.

The *Masquerade Party* hoax proved that Krassner was a "Yippie" even before he had invented the term. Drawn to media manipulation in the early '60s, the editor of *The Realist* was

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<sup>124</sup> Krassner, "A Stereophonic Hoax," *The Realist*, March 1960, 6.

<sup>125</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 48.

<sup>126</sup> Krassner, "Case History of a TV Hoax," *The Realist*, June 1960, 1, 3-4.

always interested in a combination of protest and performance, the type of theatrics that late '60s practitioners of guerilla theater such as the Diggers and the Yippies would glory in. By the end of the decade, the stakes would be higher. As 1968 took on the air of a global revolution, Krassner became increasingly committed to fighting the Vietnam War in startling ways. The only place left to go after he had written and published "The Parts Left Out of the Kennedy Book" was to the streets. Spurred by a friendship with the politically-minded performance artist Abbie Hoffman (another disciple of Lenny Bruce), Krassner crossed the line from reporter to activist and ended the year as much a conspirator as a satirist.<sup>127</sup> Beginning in 1967, Hoffman became the king of the media stunt and a natural ally of and kindred spirit to Krassner. In perhaps his most notorious performance-prank, Hoffman dropped hundreds of one dollar bills onto the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), leading to pandemonium that shut down trade for the day. Hoffman and Krassner's affinity for throwing a wrench into "the system" combined with a new spirit of militancy and immersed the men in a brief moment when the line between theatre and combat became blurred. That new spirit of militancy was evident from the first 1968 issue of *The Realist*.

Page one of the January edition featured an image by artist Dick Guindon. "The Spirit of '69," a parody of Archibald Willard's famous Revolutionary War painting "The Spirit of '76," was Guindon's attempt to forecast what the fast-moving radicalism of American youth would look like in a year's time. Surely the image arrested the attention of every reader (Figure 4). Like many comics of the underground press, "Spirit" captures id unleashed – prejudices, fears, and fantasies ejected from deep within the artist's psyche, likely with the aid of hallucinogens. The

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<sup>127</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 148.

three figures in the cartoon included a small, hideously mutilated, androgynous Viet Cong soldier, a nude woman playing a flute and covered in the hippie's body-paint symbols of flowers and bells, and a black person whose head, mouth, hands and feet appeared a caricature of gigantism. The African-American wore the overalls of a Southern sharecropper and played a bongo drum attached to his waist. Together, the three seemed to be exploding through an American flag. The viewer could not see their eyes.

The grotesqueries were more than the incoherent daydream of an artist attempting to pique the attention of his audience with some combination of titillation and revulsion. Guindon's image embodied the tension at the center of 1968. Was the revolution that young radicals promised principally about art, seen in the flute and drum, and personal liberation, the "love" literally spelled out across the voluptuous woman's belly? Or was the revolution a literal war, a violent confrontation against the oppressive, imperialist forces of "Amerika," a confrontation seen in the torn flag and the ghoulish figure who wielded his amputated leg as a weapon and had a grenade for a groin? These questions would fundamentally split the Youth Movement and cause division, too, among the underground press that was both the offspring and mirror of that movement. Not inconsequentially, with the January issue, Krassner labeled *The Realist* "the magazine of cherry pie and violence."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *The Realist*, January 1968, 1.



# The Realist



No. 76

35 Cents

*We're a little late, folks . . .  
This is the August 1967 issue  
being published in January '68  
of The Realist (the magazine  
of cherry pie and violence)*



<http://www.ep.tc/realist>  
THE REALIST ARCHIVE PROJECT

Figure 4: "The Spirit of '69"

The editor was wrestling with just how militant the tone of his magazine should be, as the zeitgeist of the late '60s changed by the day. He was also attempting to define his own stance. Krassner was an outlaw of the pen, an Establishment-basher in print, but he was uncertain precisely what kind of revolutionary he was: Would he embrace armed resistance? In a long, stream-of-consciousness confession from the first '68 issue, Krassner explored his evolving thinking on how to end the war in Vietnam and rectify the evils of American society. "I had always been Against Violence," the editor wrote. "There seems to be no alternative again [referring to Fidel Castro's overthrow of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba] but some sort of violent revolution. . . . At the moment my philosophical position along the pacifist-violence spectrum is one of loving-sabotage."<sup>129</sup> With "loving-sabotage," Krassner had found an evocative phrase, but it was hardly a well-defined position to take at a moment when many young radicals believed they were witnessing the first stages of an actual coup.

Perhaps the new breed of activist art was what Krassner had in mind. As the editor later mused, "[T]he very nature of antiwar rallies was evolving into something else."<sup>130</sup> The guerrilla theater practiced by such radical groups as the Yippies and the Diggers was an attempt to combine the creative energy of art and the destructive power of confrontation and combat under the banner of revolutionary performance. Indebted in concept and execution to the pioneering San Francisco Mime Troupe, the Diggers originated in San Francisco and then began to proselytize nationally. For the August 1968 edition of *The Realist*, Krassner turned over his magazine completely to the Digger collective, allowing them control over all text and layout in order to craft their manifesto. Yippies received even more attention in the magazine's pages.

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<sup>129</sup> Krassner, "Reason, Let Us Come Together," *The Realist*, January 1968, 15-6.

<sup>130</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 147.



It was Krassner himself who coined the term “Yippie,” a word that, for him, denoted a member of the Youth International Party (Y.I.P.) and, simultaneously, expressed jubilation. Together with Abbie Hoffman and fellow activist Jerry Rubin, Krassner organized public spectacles and birthed the myth of a new and menacing youth conspiracy.<sup>131</sup> As Krassner grew increasingly cozy with Hoffman and Rubin, his two new friends became contributors to *The Realist*. At the moment that his magazine reached its widest readership, Krassner decided to use his publication as a forum in which radicals could share, vent, and sermonize.<sup>132</sup> *The Realist* of 1968 became a paper largely about and for the Movement, particularly for those who pushed their fellow “freaks” to “act out” the revolution, to blur the line between expression and combat, imitation and action, art and life.

For Diggers and Yippies, guerrilla theater – events that were both staged and spontaneous – did not merely *represent* the clash between the old society and the new culture. The performances were actual confrontations *and* enactments of conflict, exhibitions that managed to be exactly what they signified. For instance, when Diggers arranged spectacles that blocked the streets of San Francisco and refused to disperse when instructed by police, they disseminated a message at the same time as they impeded rush-hour traffic and invited spectators to join in their disruptive performance.<sup>133</sup> Calling on all to be “life-actors,” the Diggers believed that theater existed for, and involved, everyone present. Any person whom

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<sup>131</sup> For Krassner coining the term “Yippie,” see Krassner, *Confessions*, 156-7; for confirmation, see Jerry Rubin, *DO IT! Scenarios of the Revolution* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970), 81; for definition of the term “Yippie,” see Abbie Hoffman, *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture* (New York: Putnam, 1980), 137.

<sup>132</sup> In 1968, *The Realist* was approaching a regular readership of 100,000. See Figure 1.

<sup>133</sup> For a more detailed description of Digger antics, as well as an incisive discussion of the Digger theory of transforming the world by acting out their vision of utopia, see Michael William Doyle, “Staging the Revolution: Guerrilla Theater as a Countercultural Practice 1965-68,” in *Imagine Nation*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 78-85.

the performance encountered was a participant; the group frowned on the very concept of spectators. “No play can change your life unless you are in it,” one Digger wrote in *The Realist*.<sup>134</sup> Yippies, on the other hand, courted spectators. When they engaged in legitimate street confrontations with police that they tailored for news cameras, Yippies attempted to transform physical altercations into symbols of liberation and repression, all for the benefit of television watchers. In distinct ways, both groups attempted to transform life into theater.

Ultimately, however, a close reading of the 1968 issues of *The Realist* demonstrates that the liabilities of guerrilla theater overwhelmed its potential. The euphoric appraisals of spring mellowed into anxiety and self-doubt by summer. At year’s end, *The Realist* filled its pages with litigation coverage, the fallout from performers who had promised that free speech was limitless and taunted authorities to prove them wrong. Of course, courtrooms provided opportunities for theater just as the streets did (Lenny Bruce had shown that), but no amount of clowning before a judge could diminish the revolutionaries’ dawning awareness that a fight to escape incarceration was not a milestone on the path to victory.

Yet, the year began with a heady optimism for Krassner and his new cronies, as Hoffman was emerging from a series of successful stunts that had recently made his name synonymous with masterful manipulation of media. In addition to the money drop at the NYSE, he had staged an exorcism to remove evil spirits from the Pentagon. Later, Hoffman orchestrated a faux massacre in a New York subway, in which police cornered and beat “flower children” while reporters took notes and photographed the display, aghast. Hoffman wrote a piece for the January ’68 *Realist* that radiated the self-certainty and optimism of one who had emerged from

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<sup>134</sup> “Free City Bloodlight,” *The Realist*, August 1968, 22.

a handful of early successes and envisioned only bigger and better actions in the future. In the piece, Hoffman spliced memories of his 1967 performance at the Pentagon with incantations for mass liberation and incipient revolution. “Our alternative fantasy will match in zaniness the war in Vietnam,” he boasted.<sup>135</sup>

With the manic gusto that made him the honcho of the Yippies, Hoffman compared protest to football and related the anecdotes of his and wife Anita Kushner’s law-breaking with glee. “FLASHBACK: *Baby and I, complete with Uncle Sam hats and Flower Flags, jump a barbed wire fence and are quickly surrounded by marshalls [sic] and soldiers,*” Hoffman wrote. The puzzled police interrogated: “‘*You’re under arrest. What’s your name?*’” The renegade responded toyingly: “‘*Mr. and Mrs. America, and Mrs. America’s pregnant.*’ *The troops lower their clubs in respect. A marshall writes in his book: ‘Mr. and Mrs. America—Trespassing.’ We sit down and make love. Another marshall unarrests us. A lieutenant arrests us. A corporal unarrests us. We continue making love.*” The day proceeded in the same festive spirit, every act aimed at confusing soldiers and seducing reporters. Hoffman capped his reminiscence with a statement that epitomized the celebratory optimism conveyed in *The Realist* at the beginning of the year: “Baby and I retreat to the bowels of D.C. and grab a night’s sleep after an orgy of champagne poured from an MP’s helmet. It sure is one hell of a revolution.” For Hoffman, life could be an advertisement for liberation both personal and public, for the freedom of the intimate space of the body and the shared sphere of the Pentagon.

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<sup>135</sup> Quotations on pages 77-79 are from Abbie Hoffman, “How I Lost the War,” *The Realist*, January 1968, 15, 22-3.

In the same piece, the purveyor of pop revolution advised any like-minded disciples how to manipulate the media.<sup>136</sup> He gave as an example a press conference he called to introduce LACE, a phony substance that combined LSD with a skin-penetrating agent, which, when squirted onto the skin of any individual, acted as an irresistible aphrodisiac. Like the ringleader of a psychedelic medicine show, Hoffman planted two couples at the press conference, held in an apartment, who agreed beforehand to pretend that LACE put them into a trance and, then, to commence intercourse in the presence of the startled reporters. The sensational story went out in a heartbeat. Such stunts were the way to command public attention, Hoffman insisted. No boring, Old Left Marxist theorists would capture as many imaginations in a lifetime as Hoffman had that afternoon. The farce communicated, he believed, a message to the public: Yippies were the champions of love, and they had figured out how to use it as a weapon! The LACE put-on was one of many schemes that would, as Hoffman put it, “*contrast Free America vs. the Uniformed Machine.*” His anecdote was instructional in another way for those who hoped to stage events in the Yippie style. As Hoffman wrote, “Media is free. Use it. Don’t pay for it. Don’t buy ads. Make news.” As Krassner later reminisced, it was a line of thinking borrowed from the CIA.<sup>137</sup>

The scourge of the “Uniformed Machine” closed his article with an eye toward the future. He predicted, presciently, “Small battles will occur in countless communities around the

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<sup>136</sup> For information on the forebears of Hoffman’s thinking about media, see David Joselit, “Yippie Pop: Abbie Hoffman, Andy Warhol, and Sixties Media Politics,” *Grey Room*, no. 8, Summer 2002, 63-79. Wide reading about theater and media informed Hoffman’s understanding of the two. Deferential toward both Antonin Artaud, the proponent of a “Theatre of Cruelty” and the omnipresent media theorist Marshall McLuhan, Hoffman also took a great deal from Daniel Boorstin’s discussion of “pseudo-events” and cyberneticist Norbert Wiener’s figure/ground theory. Hoffman, elaborating on Wiener’s ideas, spoke about television programs as merely “ground” for the “figure,” or content of commercials. In the same way, Hoffman declared that the majority of television news programs were merely “ground” for the brief mentions of real information, the “figure” of Yippie spectacle.

<sup>137</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 152.

country; most centered at local induction centers.” Indeed, blocking the entrance of draftees into military buildings would remain a tactic of anti-war activists throughout the rest of the 1960s. Some of the leading militants had already begun. During October 1967, when Hoffman was copulating on the grounds of the Pentagon in an effort to establish “liberated zones,” anti-war activists in Oakland, California – site of the largest induction center in the United States – fought a three-day battle with police and soldiers in an effort to block the admittance of draftees. In California, too, activists were merging self-expression and a moderate combat into street performances, theater with real blood. The Oakland incident would result in the indictment of seven event leaders, one of whom would author the last front-page story that *The Realist* published in 1968. But, for now, the future seemed bright. Hoffman closed his piece with a tip, “Get ready for a big event at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago next August.” He sensed the approach of his legacy-defining moment, and the pivotal moment for the American New Left.

Prompted by Hoffman’s outpouring, editor Paul Krassner also recorded the state of his mind for readers in the January issue. Somewhat more pessimistic than Hoffman, Krassner expressed his sense of inevitable violence, but he managed to share some of Hoffman’s enthusiasm for the possibilities of guerrilla theater, especially when it came to the approaching Democratic Convention. Perhaps, the dichotomy between love and war was a false one, the founder of *The Realist* suggested with his opening line: “Now that [daughter of the president] Lynda Bird Johnson has publicly revealed in *McCall’s* magazine the occasional bedroom togetherness of her parents, the slogan *Make Love, Not War* can no longer be thought of as

necessarily requiring a choice between those two alternatives.”<sup>138</sup> Perhaps, sliding flowers into the barrels of soldiers’ guns and shouting “peace” or “love” was a dead end. What were drop-outs and peace activists to do? “[H]ippies aren’t dead, they’re just evolving into guerilla warriors,” Krassner insisted. The editor’s call was direct: “No more marches. No more rallies. No more speeches. The dialogue is over, baby. Tolerance of rational dissent has become an insidious form of repression. The goal now is to disrupt an insane society.” Just as he had when he coined the phrase “loving sabotage,” Krassner had left himself wiggle room. After all, there were many ways to disrupt a society.

For the time being, he was fully in favor of the disruptive antics of Abbie Hoffman. Like Hoffman, he had set his sights on Chicago. The incumbent president had not yet dropped his bid for reelection, and Krassner predicted that Lyndon Johnson would be “the first President in American history to be renominated under military guard.” However, the real joy would be found in altering the consciousness of politicians. “[N]either rain nor sleet nor martial law can stay these hippy chicks disguised as hotel whores from placing LSD in [delegates’] beverages,” Krassner wrote. Just as Hoffman had written about the need to make advertisements for revolution, Krassner described the battle between anti-war freaks and pro-Vietnam straights as one of public relations. It all begged the question, were the Yippies merely hip politicians? Was guerrilla theater anything more than the Baby Boomers’ version of a sound bite? It remained to be seen if Yippie antics could effect social change.

The Diggers had their own vision. For the August issue of *The Realist*, Krassner handed the reins of his magazine over to the group that had profoundly influenced the thinking of

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<sup>138</sup> All Krassner quotations in this and the next paragraph from “Reason, Let Us Come Together,” *The Realist*, January 1968, 15-21.

Yippies Hoffman, Rubin, and Krassner.<sup>139</sup> The San Francisco-based collective trumpeted the potential of street theater, as did the Yippies, but, when Diggers “lived the revolution,” they did not do so for the benefit of news cameras. What occurred on the streets mattered only to those present and participating. Spectators were not welcome, either live or, worse yet, at home watching television. In addition to clarifying their vision of street theater and its potential in *The Realist*, the Diggers also reflected the confused mélange of lifestyle liberation and violent dissidence that, increasingly, constituted the tension at the heart of the Movement.

If Dick Guindon’s “Spirit of 69” cartoon could have been expanded into a manifesto, it would have been the Diggers’ *Realist*. For the group, sentiments of love, freedom, and violence were inextricable. A pair of poems best illustrated the conflated sentiments. Neither work indicated authorship. No one owned anything in the Diggers’ universe, not even his art. In the poem “A Curse on the Men in Washington, Pentagon,” the anonymous writer sought to eradicate everything fake and plastic, while reinstituting an American Indian identity and reclaiming a sullied land. The objects of his animosity were both external – the aforementioned men of the Pentagon – and internal – the avarice and evil that resided within the poet himself. The author wrote, “As I kill the white man / the ‘American’ / in me / And dance out the Ghost Dance: / To bring back America, the grass and streams. / To trample your throat in your dreams. / This magic I work, this loving I give / That my children may flourish / And yours won’t live.”<sup>140</sup> Dancing, verdant fields and streams mingled with trampled throats and exterminated children. Would a Diggers’ utopia be a dystopian nightmare for everyone else?

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<sup>139</sup> In fact, Hoffman and his cohorts began their theatrical politics in 1967 using the name New York Diggers. Doyle, 86.

<sup>140</sup> “A Curse on the Men In Washington, Pentagon,” *The Realist*, August 1968, 2.

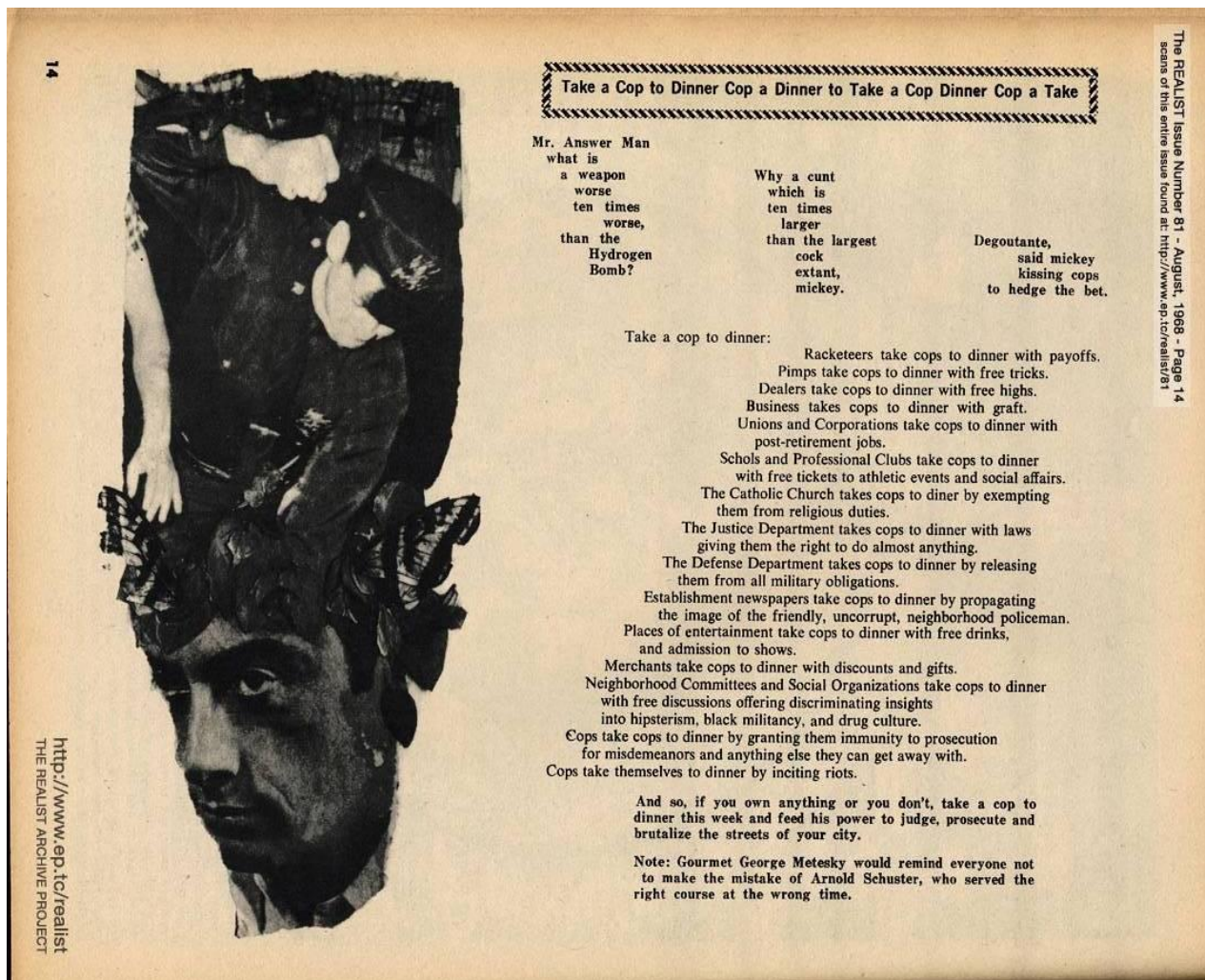


Figure 5: "Take a Cop to Dinner Cop a Dinner to Take a Cop Dinner Cop a Take"

Police became the specific target in "Take a Cop to Dinner Cop a Dinner to Take a Cop Dinner Cop a Take." The author issued a systemic indictment, but ultimately, the police resided at the corrosive center of the sick society. "Pimps take cops to dinner with free tricks," the poet declared. "Establishment newspapers take cops to dinner by propagating the image of the friendly, uncorrupt, neighborhood policeman. . . . And so, if you own anything or you don't, take a cop to dinner this week and feed his power to judge, prosecute and brutalize the streets



of your city.”<sup>141</sup> The accompanying graphic employed the same spliced and bemusing style as did the poem’s title: a photograph of a policeman throwing a punch downward into a perch of butterflies nestled on the head of the recently deceased Lenny Bruce (Figure 5). In the worldview of the Diggers, the persecuted dissidents of America represented the possibilities of a liberated, beautiful society, but they found themselves continually pummeled to the ground by the swinging fists of the fearful and intolerant power structure.

Street theater, not poetry, was the Diggers’ calling card. Group leaders were straightforward about the aims of the performances. They intended the spectacles that they crafted to awaken all who beheld them. “Street events are social acid heightening consciousness of what is real on the street,” wrote one who attempted a Digger statement of purpose.<sup>142</sup> The “street events” could vary wildly, but they always sought to startle. Claiming to draw inspiration from the festive pageantry of the Mexican Day of the Dead, Diggers assembled a colorful and heterogeneous group with any props they could dream up: hippie women painted in bright day-glo swirls, Hell’s Angels in black leather, whistles blowing, mirrors catching the sun or reflecting the puzzled faces of onlookers back at them. Such performances, Diggers believed, would revive the souls of Americans trapped in dull rituals and consumer “psychosis,” cleansing minds and eventually the polluted landscape itself. “The U.S. standard of living is a bourgeois baby blanket for executives who scream in their sleep,” the Digger wrote. “No Pleistocene swamp could match the pestilential horror of modern urban sewage.” The Diggers were confident that the shock therapy of performance would remedy what had grown dull and rotten in America. However, the countercultural group had a premonition of backlash.

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<sup>141</sup> “Take a Cop to Dinner Cop a Dinner to Take a Cop Dinner Cop a Take,” *ibid.*, 14.

<sup>142</sup> “Trip Without a Ticket,” *ibid.*, 3-4.

As one contributor put it, “How would real wardens react to life-actors on liberated ground?” The Digger program had enemies, the group insisted, and the promise of violence lurked inevitably behind the pageantry.

Despite the paranoia and hostility that the Diggers expressed in the pages of *The Realist*, their viewpoint remained, on the whole, an optimistic one. Yet, a hopeful tone became more difficult to muster as 1968 progressed. In the September issue, Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin wrote about the prospects for resisters, activists, and performers at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, and their anxiety and self-doubt were becoming palpable. Yippie planning was in shambles. Hoffman and Rubin’s nervous editorials were written before the late-August convention but did not run until the month following. Krassner and his cohorts had been too busy preparing for and acting in Chicago to get the Convention edition of *The Realist* to its readership while it could still be useful. This meant that even before the violence of Chicago, Hoffman and Rubin sensed that danger awaited them at the convention, and expressed a feeling of being rudderless.

Belying the exclamatory title “The Yippies Are Going to Chicago,” Hoffman essentially called for the guerrillas to retreat, for less farce and greater seriousness.<sup>143</sup> He summarized Yippie philosophy through the summer of 1968. They had believed that the expression of their message “[had] required the construction of a vast myth, for through the notion of myth large numbers of people could get turned on and, in that process of getting turned on, begin to participate in Yippie and start to focus on Chicago. Precision was sacrificed for a greater degree of suggestion.” Conceiving of himself as both philosopher and comedian, Hoffman quoted the

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<sup>143</sup> All quotations in the paragraph are from Hoffman, “The Yippies Are Going to Chicago,” *The Realist*, September 1968, 1, 23-4.

premier media critic Marshall McLuhan, who praised youth for their protest theatrics, for “putting on the universe.” Yet, Hoffman was beginning to question if Yippie theater was in any way different from the brand of public relations in which professional politicians engaged. Hoffman had freely admitted that his strategy was to “advertise” revolution, but by the time of Chicago, he seemed to be questioning whether he could actually advertise a new world into being. “What we need now, however, is the direct opposite approach from the one we began with,” wrote Hoffman. “We must sacrifice suggestion for a greater degree of precision. We need reality in the face of American political myth.” The pensive editorialist even suggested that, when in Chicago, youth activists and hippies should hold a new constitutional convention and “address themselves to the task of formulating the goals and means of the New Society.” It was, for Hoffman, a moment of self-doubt, a retreat from fresh, unpredictable performance to the boring, Old Left, literal-minded, mission-statement approach. While struggling to maintain a cheerful tone, the formerly fearless Yippie wrote, near the end of his article, “We are fantastically broke and in need of funds.” Fantasy and performance were failing to sustain the Yippies.

Hoffman’s uncertainty mirrored an emerging sentiment among the New Left – a judgment which has been shared by most historians since – that groups such as the Diggers and Yippies were doomed to be nothing more than ephemeral sensationalists. SDS characterized Hoffman as fundamentally unserious and careless about the fate of the youth who joined him in staging Yippie events. Even the sympathetic, or “turned on” as the Yippies would have put it, reconsidered the group’s efficacy. Julius Lester, a writer for New York’s *Guardian* newspaper and one of the rare African-American scribes of the underground press, had been an early

proponent of Yippie street theater. By the autumn of '68, Lester cautioned the Movement's clowns: "No matter how easy it may seem, one cannot use the media to one's own ends. Whatever gains are made are ultimately illusory. In present-day America, the media can be nothing but an enemy of revolution."<sup>144</sup> Hoffman must have been having similar thoughts when he called for less myth and more reality.

Critics piled on. Jann Wenner of *Rolling Stone* accused Yippies of luring unsuspecting adolescents into dangerous situations with the promise of free rock concerts. Laurence Leamer, the contemporaneous chronicler of the underground press movement, offered an assessment that had become conventional wisdom by the early 1970s. Yippies could command attention. But what else? "[Yippies'] dramas can fill the television screen, magazines and newspapers with evocative and symbolic vignettes that erode the myths, rituals and truths on which the American society is based," Leamer wrote. "The cultural radicals, however, cannot put forth their counter myths, rituals and truths with such impunity."<sup>145</sup> Many later historians were even less generous. When discussing Yippies in his survey of the 1960s, historian Allen Matusow lamented that the anti-war movement was co-opted "by a pair of Jewish comedians" who had eschewed "linear thought and serious politics."<sup>146</sup> Deserved or not, Yippies were headed for a long winter of discontent and ultimate ignominy.

Condemnation from the left was nothing compared to what the right had in store. While Yippies and their critics were considering if guerrilla theater was perhaps a fruitless endeavor, a distraction from real revolution, federal and local authorities found Yippie

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<sup>144</sup> For SDS criticisms, see Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties*, 105. Lester quote is in Peck, 131. Wenner's critique is in Peck, 167.

<sup>145</sup> Leamer, 75.

<sup>146</sup> Allen Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the Sixties* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 413.

productions threatening enough to monitor, harass, and arraign the insurrectionary artists. Hoffman's brother-in-arms, Jerry Rubin, described the creeping paranoia that was gripping the Movement and the legitimate reasons that activists had to be afraid. In the same issue of *The Realist* in which Hoffman rethought his approach to Chicago, Rubin chronicled being arrested in his home and beaten in jail, all at the hands of narcotics officers whom he accused of taking orders from the FBI's Red Squads. "In the movement, hardly a week goes by without some mention of the day when the round-up "knock on the door" will roust us out of bed in the middle of the night," Rubin fretted.<sup>147</sup> The knock came, but less ominously, in the afternoon. The police who entered threatened to maim Rubin if he did not immediately relinquish his guns and dope. The police shouted typical epithets, mainly that he was a communist and a traitor, and they tore down a poster of Fidel Castro, as Rubin ironically phrased it, "scoring a major victory for the Pentagon in the war with Communist evil." All the while, the activist felt trapped in a tired performance, unhappy with his role and unimpressed with the police: "They were satirizing themselves but I guess we all do."

Tired as the police routine was, Rubin related being overcome by a fear that he could not suppress, despite himself. He wrote, "I felt ashamed to be scared because I am a revolutionary. But my reactions were personal not political. Stripped of ideology, I was one guy being pushed around by three goons in my own home. . . . My universe was caving in, and I fought back tears." Without being accused of any crime, Rubin was soon handcuffed and driven to the courthouse. As his arresting officer led him to his cell, the policeman kicked him in his lower back, sending him tumbling into a holding tank with twenty other prisoners. Later,

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<sup>147</sup> Quotations in this and the following paragraph are from Jerry Rubin, "The Yippies Are Going to Chicago," *The Realist*, September 1968, 1, 21-2.

at Bellevue Hospital, he would learn that his coccyx had been fractured. The next day, the state charged him with felonious possession of marijuana. Rubin warned readers that selective drug busts were the most potent weapon the federal government would use to target dissidents, calling arrests for marijuana “the form McCarthyism takes in the late 1960s.” There was more to Rubin’s article than accusation or self-pity, however. With acute foresight, he perceived the demise of Yippie theatrics and the larger Movement too: “An arrest is a form of repression in this country. One of the ways cops clean up the streets is by throwing rebels into the courts. Tie us up with charge after charge. Teach us some manners by having us stand up for the Judge every time His Honor enters or leaves the room, even to go take a leak.” According to Rubin, the American way was not to “disappear” undesirables in the night but rather to incapacitate them with fatuous indictments by authorities who feigned a devout adherence to the law.

Soon arrests and trials became the principal activity in which Yippies were engaged. For the November edition of *The Realist*, Krassner ran as his front-page feature a trial transcript. Abbie Hoffman was the defendant, and he had been indicted for wearing an offensive shirt.<sup>148</sup> Walking up the steps to the Cannon House Office Building in Washington D.C. on his way to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) just over a month after the Chicago Convention,<sup>149</sup> Hoffman ran afoul of Federal Code 18 USC 700. That law, only recently passed by Congress, restricted “whoever knowingly casts contempt upon any flag of the United States by publicly mutilating, defacing, defiling, burning, or trampling upon it.” Violation could carry up to a year in prison, and Hoffman had dared the authorities to define what exactly

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<sup>148</sup> Quotations in this and the following paragraph are from “The Trial of Abbie Hoffman’s Shirt,” *The Realist*, November 1968, 1, 7-11.

<sup>149</sup> HUAC was a chief enemy of dissidents and radicals, a congressional organization with the power to subpoena any citizen who might be considered, or believed to have information about, communist or subversive activity within the United States.

“defiling” meant. He wore a shirt that seemed to have been tailored from an American flag, the white stars over his left breast and shoulder and the white and red stripes extending down his right arm. On the shirt were two political buttons, one reading “Vote Pig in Sixty-Eight, Yippie” and the other “Wallace for President, Stand Up for America.”<sup>150</sup>

The prosecution insisted that the mere act of placing a button on a piece of fabric that resembled the flag constituted defacement. The defense insisted that Hoffman’s symbolic act was one of speech, protected under the First Amendment. Only Hoffman took the stand during the course of the trial, and the prosecution’s cross-examination provided him an opportunity for performance, mostly jokes meant to startle and taunts that the Yippie would beat the authorities at their own game. When questioned how he made his living, Hoffman responded with sardonic wit: “I write books and articles about being arrested.” Thriving on government persecution was indeed a powerful idea for the adherents of Yippie. But, did the math add up? Hoffman confessed to having been arrested approximately twenty or thirty times over the course of the decade. Surely the legal costs outweighed the income he derived from chronicling his adventures in the justice system. At the close of the trial, Hoffman spoke briefly before his sentencing, “I consider this decision as ridiculous as [HUAC]. . . . Uncle Sam—you’re making him a criminal under the law. And every political convention, they put buttons all over things that look like flags. This is ridiculous. Why aren’t all these people arrested?” The rant towed the line between protesting an injustice and merely venting frustration. Despite the thumbing of his nose at prosecutors and celebrating that such persecution “put bread on his

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<sup>150</sup> At the Chicago Convention, Yippies had elected and paraded their candidate, a swine that they named Pigasus. George Wallace, independent candidate for president in the 1968 election, was the most right-wing of the three major candidates. The Alabama governor had become famous in 1964 by uttering the words, “Segregation Today, Segregation Tomorrow, Segregation Forever.” His running mate, a retired general, made headlines when he defended the notion of preemptive nuclear strikes.

table,” Hoffman betrayed in his statement a certain exacerbation at having to live his life in courtrooms. And the infamous, five-month trial of those indicted for inciting riots at the Chicago Convention was still to come.

More prosecutions mounted. As 1968 progressed, each issue became increasingly burdened with pleas to raise funds for a dizzying array of semi-celebrity defendants.<sup>151</sup> Rubin’s prediction that the government would attempt to stem the tide of radicalism by tying up the perpetrators in court was, it seemed, becoming reality. However, the trials grew, also, out of different understandings of what constituted protected speech and mirrored the decade’s battles over what words were legally sanctioned in print and on stage. In the trial of Hoffman’s shirt, the prosecuting attorney, Benton Becker, explained that the freedom of speech was a particularly literal right, not one which extended protection to any non-linguistic performance, much less to guerrilla theater. “To carry a sign which says I am opposed to trains carrying boys to Viet Nam, that sign is symbolic of what you would be saying,” Becker declared. “It’s something *different* to put yourself on the railroad track and say, ‘If that train wishes to go to Viet Nam, it must go over me.’ That, I submit, is not speech; that is an act.”<sup>152</sup> Becker’s declaration alluded to the actions of anti-war activists in Oakland, California during Stop the Draft Week in 1967. For their efforts, leaders of that performance were indicted also, earning the group the kind of title that was quickly becoming a press cliché: the Oakland Seven.

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<sup>151</sup> *The Realist*, September 1968. The trial-conscious mentality became overwhelming. The September issue referred to numerous political trials. In the single issue, *The Realist* solicited funds for a Massachusetts man, Bill Baird, who displayed contraceptives during a talk at Boston University, *still* a crime in that state for anyone who was not an M.D. “The Progress Report from the Parents Aid Society,” *ibid.*, 4; while speaking about the risk that black nationalist poet Leroi Jones could be indicted for conspiracy to riot in Newark, writer Ron Porambo alluded to the trial of Black Panther Huey Newton, indicted in what he claimed to be a self-defense shooting of an Oakland police officer. Porambo, “What Really Happened with Leroi Jones in Newark?” *ibid.*, 14.

<sup>152</sup> “The Trial of Abbie Hoffman’s Shirt,” 11.



“A Day in the Life of an Oakland Seven” was virtually the only feature in *The Realist’s* four-page December 1968 edition. Not officially connected with Diggers or Yippies, the Californian Stop-the-Drafters, nonetheless, partook in an action that was as much theatrical communication as it was actual resistance. After all, though they participated in genuine, physical altercations for three days in an effort to block the entrance to a draftee induction center, none could have been naïve enough to believe that they would hold their position indefinitely or occlude the path to the military structure permanently. Therefore, the Oakland Seven engaged in a media-conscious performance almost as much as did the Yippies. The author of “A Day in the Life,” Reese Erlich, captured the essence of the Oakland action with the phrase “militant street demonstration.”<sup>153</sup> Back in the autumn of 1967 that followed the Bay Area’s “Summer of Love,” the war was serious business, of course, but the effort to flaunt authority and end America’s Asian intervention still had something of the feeling of a game. “In concert with the optimism of the times, we had laughed about possible retribution by the power structure,” Erlich reminisced. “[T]he government doesn’t consider us dangerous,’ we chortled. It turned out to be a case of He who chortles last.”

By the time he wrote his article, Erlich was in danger of spending the next three years in a state prison. He fantasized about transforming the trial into guerrilla theater, as Hoffman and Rubin and the other Chicago Eight were about to do at their own trial. Erlich wrote, “A proper political defense should turn the court into a street demonstration: supporters crowded in the aisles, loud booing when the police finks take the stand, speech-making by the defendants at every opportunity, and general pandemonium. The judge should have to clear the courtroom

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<sup>153</sup> All remaining quotations in the essay are from Reese Erlich, “A Day in the Life of an Oakland Seven,” *The Realist*, December 1968, 1-3.

every 15 minutes and the courthouse should be in a constant state of siege.” But Erlich’s daydreams were nothing more. Few artists or protesters would risk a substantial bout in prison for such evanescent shenanigans. The defendant longed for “pandemonium,” courtroom chaos, the invasion of guerrilla combatants to overtake the hall of justice and murder his tormenters.<sup>154</sup> Instead, Erlich towed the line. He made sure that he was never late to court because tardiness would enable the judge to revoke bail and force Erlich to spend the remainder of the trial in jail. So, the defendant ran to court every morning to assure that he was not late. He rose when the judge entered the room, just as Rubin had lamented that revolutionaries would, when he wrote his despondent article for *The Realist* back in September. Erlich recognized that he was participating in a performance, but now, that performance called for the insipid rituals of the courtroom. “All the actors resume their exact stage positions from the previous afternoons,” he wrote of his dull morning routine. Kowtowing to the judge, relying on the rules and legal formulas of the land to secure his freedom, Erlich fretted about his bona fides as a revolutionary.

He used his available time to participate in some slight activities. He attended demonstrations during lunch breaks and days off. He went to a rally in support of the San Francisco Presidio prisoners who were undergoing their own trial for staging a sit-in. There it was again. The Movement appeared enveloped in trials, confined to courtrooms. Fighting to end the war was becoming transformed into a fight for the right to protest the war, or merely to stay out of jail. “A Day in the Life” captured the New Left’s sense of defeat as 1968 ended, at

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<sup>154</sup> In one of the many fantasies interwoven with his courtroom narrative, Erlich imagined a giant “dark skinned man wearing only a loin cloth” invading the courtroom and murdering the judge, D.A., and “piggish assistant” with a blow-gun.

least insofar as *The Realist* portrayed it. Erlich's closing summary of his life while on trial remains devastating. He wrote, "For the first few weeks of the trial I actually found myself in front of the TV watching grade B westerns—drinking a can of beer. Now, at least, I'm back to getting stoned." All that remained for Erlich was the personal, hidden act of smoking illicit herbs. Even the author must have doubted his own rationalization. Erlich epitomized how the pageantry of revolutionary resistance had gone awry. Political radicals who had believed in the efficacy of street theater, the power of symbols to effect what they represented, were reduced to the impotent rituals of private rebellions, the self-delusion that the solitary, stoned tree falling asleep in the forest not only makes a sound, but disrupts a system. Below Erlich's piece was an Editor's Note: "Funds are urgently needed to aid in the defense of the Oakland Seven. Send what you can afford to."

#### Chapter 4: The Trouble with Women

“With joy and relief the world would welcome a climate of general demobilization,” wrote Clement Droz in a 1959 editorial for *The Realist*. Had his piece been about nuclear disarmament, or the cultural climate of the Cold War in general, Droz’s writing would have blended in with many of the magazine’s other editorials from the period. But Droz was not writing about international relations, or nuclear annihilation. He was speaking about women in the workforce. They were taking away all the jobs from men.<sup>155</sup>

The equality that women were demanding threatened civilization itself, Droz insisted. Though appearing in a satirical magazine, the writer’s comments betrayed no trace of irony when he wrote, “We will either be destroyed or redeemed by the way we respond to this challenge. This is why the irresponsible manner in which the woman of our time is trying to give meaning to her emancipation, presents us with a problem that is not only serious, but dangerous.” Unemployment would cease to exist if only women would return to the home, Droz promised. He conceded that those women who needed to work for economic reasons deserved equal pay as men, and the author feigned a detached objectivity by including statistical evidence to support his case. However, a caustic edge leaked out, especially as Droz approached the end of his overlong piece: “[I]f these women would spurn the processed and packaged foods and ‘instant’ preparations that are on the market, and would volunteer to spend two or three hours in the kitchen each day, learning how to be women again, and even trying their hand at baking a loaf of bread once in a while, just for the hell of it, then that might go a long way toward solving their unhappy dilemma.”

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<sup>155</sup> Clement Droz, “The Women Are on the Job,” *The Realist*, August 1959, 15-8.

Read today, the editorial is a relic. Just a few years after it was written, no writer for a hip, “freethought” publication would have put his point so bluntly, unless his entire editorial had indeed been satire. Yet, “The Women Are on the Job” was a title of lament, and an unapologetic one. Droz’s piece reminds readers that Krassner barred no point of view. After all, the Jewish editor published a self-professed “teenage Nazi” and George Lincoln Rockwell, the leader of the Nazi Party of the United States. Insisting that men needed jobs more than women did because they had families to support was certainly not as extreme as calling for the extermination of Jews, but, in the twenty-first century (or even just a decade after it was written), the opinion is just as much a sentiment of the fringe. Droz’s piece did not appear without comment or challenge. Among the claims he made, Droz wrote, “Emancipated housewives and grandmothers now have so much time on their hands that they can take jobs outside the home, and in many cases when they get tired of their ‘activities’ or feel the pinch of inflation, they do just that, leaving the ‘burden’ of child-care to the day nursery and sitter.”<sup>156</sup> For Droz, the day nursery was a self-evident horror, one that needed no further denunciation.

More focused in her analysis, Ethel S. Beer wrote about the dilemmas of day nurseries in the same issue of *The Realist*.<sup>157</sup> Many were overcrowded and could not accept all the children whose parents needed help. Often, the day care centers did not begin care for the young until the children were two years old. The New York City Department of Welfare Day Care Centers had recently raised the age to three. Beer did not believe, as Droz did, that the problem stemmed from the vanity of women who were bored or sought extra spending money. Her article studied working class mothers, those for whom working and day care were necessities,

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>157</sup> Ethel S. Beer, “Please Give Me a New Mummy and Daddy . . .,” *The Realist*, August 1959, 19-20.

not choices. “[W]orking mothers have a hard lot. So when they strive to keep their family together—such as it is—they should be helped, not hindered.” Beer’s piece appeared in *The Realist* more than three years before Betty Friedan emphasized the significance of providing childcare in her landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique*. “When enough women make life plans geared to their real abilities, and speak out for maternity leaves or even maternity sabbaticals, professionally run nurseries, and the other changes in the rules that may be necessary, they will not have to sacrifice the right to honorable competition and contribution anymore than they will have to sacrifice marriage and motherhood,” Friedan wrote.<sup>158</sup> Refuting the likes of Droz and more forceful than Beer, Friedan sought not only to remedy the existing dilemma of working women but to open the opportunity for all women to find satisfaction in fulfilling work.

What did Krassner, the editor who ran Droz and Beer in the same issue of his magazine, believe? The Krassner of 1959 comes off as interested, but uncommitted. Certainly, he did not speak about the plight of women with the same enthusiasm with which he lambasted the pope. Nonetheless, he reiterated the many discriminations women faced, according to a study by Joseph B. Furth, quoting that scholar frequently and emphasizing that receiving less pay for the same work and having fewer professional opportunities were not women’s only hardship.<sup>159</sup> They experienced a double standard of sexuality, censured for behavior for which many men would be celebrated. Furthermore, women could not become religious leaders in most sects. Krassner was diplomatic when he mentioned the pairing of Droz and Beer. They both did agree, at least, that there were problems with day nurseries. Of course, Droz and Beer had

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<sup>158</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), 375.

<sup>159</sup> Krassner, “Equal Rights and Day Nurseries,” *The Realist*, August 1959, 15.

nothing else in common, and the contrast between the two writers hints at some of the contradictions that *The Realist* would embody when the topic was women.

Krassner grew to be a committed feminist. Hypocrisy was *The Realist's* great target, and the magazine never tolerated the sexual double standard or the Madonna-whore complex. In fact, Krassner published Madalyn Murray's comment, "[T]he Virgin Mary obviously played around as much as I did, and certainly I feel she would be capable of orgasm" – as succinct as possible a rejection of the false, Madonna-whore dichotomy.<sup>160</sup> Krassner felt strongly enough about women's reproductive rights to operate as an underground abortion referral service throughout the sixties, in addition to lobbying for and writing about the need for legalized abortion. He was a gleeful participant in, as well as chronicler and satirists of, the sexual revolution. Yet, satirizing the country's changing mores easily degenerated into sophomoric celebration. Publishing images of women's bodies, in defiance of censors or in the service of humor, or both, easily slipped into the realm of objectification. And where, in the pursuit of free communication, does openness and honesty with readers become simply a chronicling of studly adventures, locker room braggadocio brought out into the world? By the end of the decade, feminist critics, including some former friends, would take Krassner to task for what they considered exploitation and derision.

From its inception, *The Realist* endorsed birth control, especially the pill that hit the scene at the beginning of the 1960s, but the magazine still posed questions about health concerns and affordability. When Krassner wrote, in the second issue of his magazine, about "laws which prohibit the sale or use of birth control devices or drugs, and forbid doctors from

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<sup>160</sup> Madalyn E. Murray, "Malice in Maryland," *The Realist*, February 1961, 23.

giving advice on birth control,” his disdain for what he considered such hypocritical remnants of the nineteenth century was palpable.<sup>161</sup> The title of the article even included the word “inhumanity,” as it chronicled stories about mothers who risked death if they became pregnant. Such laws remained a part of *The Realist’s* beat. In 1959, the magazine reported on the arrest and acquittal of two New Jersey drug store clerks who sold prophylactics and contraceptive jelly. Not merely reporting, the editorial insisted, “We seriously question that there is *any* situation where the licensed sale and voluntary use of contraceptives should be legally prohibited.”<sup>162</sup> Another article from the same issue did, however, raise the question of “long-range side effects” and “the price of the pill,” which might keep the new medication out of the hands of the poor women who needed it most.<sup>163</sup>

Those questions would persist. After the pill had been available for a few years, journalists were checking in to see how satisfied women users were and to solicit professional opinions. Many women had nothing but praise for “the gift” as they called the new contraceptive; it freed them from such interruptions to the spontaneous sexual act as prophylactics or diaphragms. “[I]t has a great emotional effect,” said one woman, whose comments were printed in *The Realist*. “It means that everything is completely natural.”<sup>164</sup> The nausea that some women experienced after taking the contraceptive almost always disappeared by the “third cycle.” In response to questions about the pill possibly causing cancer, one doctor claimed, “[C]linical tests which have been done suggest that the pill, if anything, is anti-cancerous in its effect. Of course, we won’t know the final answer for 20 years

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<sup>161</sup> “Birth Control and Man’s Inhumanity,” *The Realist*, September 1958, 4.

<sup>162</sup> “The Contraceptive Case Trial,” *The Realist*, June/July 1959, 3-4.

<sup>163</sup> Harry Kursh, “The Birth Control Pill,” *The Realist*, June/July, 1959, 7.

<sup>164</sup> “The Pill,” *The Realist*, September 1962, 15.



or so.”<sup>165</sup> Not everyone agreed. One medical consultant was far more concerned about the potential side effects of the pill, claiming its “oestrogens” were known to be carcinogenic. Ultimately, cost was the most immediate drawback to the pill, especially for women in the Third World. “[W]hile it is comparatively expensive in [Western countries], it is prohibitively expensive in poor countries like India, Malaya [sic] and Latin America [where population is growing most rapidly]; people in those countries really cannot afford to pay anything for family planning.”<sup>166</sup> *The Realist* was first and foremost a humor magazine, but it was committed, too, to covering the cost and health issues that were the flipside of the new world of supposedly carefree sex.

Krassner was just as committed to what he considered a woman’s right to a safe and legal abortion. The ubiquitous *Look* magazine told readers in 1962 that no doctors who performed abortions were humane. The procedure was illegal, so the doctors were, by definition, criminals, interested only in money. Krassner disagreed and found a Pennsylvania doctor who had performed abortions for decades. In the first of *The Realist*’s “Impolite Interviews” with an anonymous source, Krassner and the unnamed surgeon attempted to dispel what they considered to be myths about abortion. Living up to his own insistence that one should value directness above politeness, the editor asked if the procedures that the doctor performed were murder. “[Y]ou don’t call an embryo a human being,” the anonymous physician responded. “It’s a few cells developing in the muscle called the uterus, and if you let the thing go, it may materialize—you can’t say it’s *going* to, because sometimes they don’t—it’s

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> “The Pill [Part III],” *The Realist*, October 1962, 14-5.

just a possibility.”<sup>167</sup> Krassner and the doctor attempted to expose the hypocrisy of those who took the anti-abortion stance. The abortionist claimed that he had undertaken the procedure on behalf of the wives, mistresses, and girlfriends of policemen and FBI agents, politicians, and two Catholic priests, who had their “housekeepers in trouble.” The doctor further listed troubling and painful stories about women who had attempted to abort without the aid of a physician and who came to him with severe complications, such as a cocktail stirrer lodged in an abdomen and a catheter stuck in a bladder.

As the interviewee saw it, unwanted pregnancies and the fear of terminating them were both problems that stemmed from the subjugation of women. Both men used the word “brainwashed” to describe the women who felt guilty about having abortions. The doctor lamented, “[A] lot of women just look on themselves as a breeding animal; they don’t have any regard for their health, their vitality—they have one child right after the other. And if the woman doesn’t give into the man all the time, then the husband beats the devil out of her. They’re in a phase of slavery.”<sup>168</sup> As Krassner presented it, the doctor he interviewed was a great humanist, providing an essential service at great personal peril. He was old, he had been arrested a few times, and he was retiring. Krassner asked to whom the doctor could refer women seeking his services. With an air of crisis, the abortionist responded, “I haven’t got a soul to refer them to; my friends are all arrested—there seems to be just lately more clamping-down on this since any time since I’ve been here.” Women with unwanted pregnancies would have fewer options, it seemed, even underground.

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<sup>167</sup> “An Impolite Interview with an Abortionist,” *The Best of The Realist*, 67.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

The anonymous abortionist was Robert Spencer of Ashland, Pennsylvania. He did not retire immediately, and when women who were seeking abortions began to ask Krassner for aid, the editor referred them to Dr. Spencer. When Spencer did retire, after more arrests, Krassner sent the women to doctors whom Spencer recommended. "It was preposterous that they should seek out the editor of a satirical magazine, but their quest so far had been futile, and they simply didn't know where else to turn," Krassner later mused.<sup>169</sup> The volume of calls increased throughout the decade, as Krassner continued to run an underground referral service at no charge. When subpoenaed to testify against abortionists in two cities, the editor refused to testify. Despite threats, blustering, and routines of good cop/bad cop, Krassner felt he had nothing to fear because he had never taken a kickback from a woman or a doctor. He continued the service for a decade, and no law enforcement pressed charges against him.

Krassner was still writing about the need for safe and legal abortions in the mid-sixties, but his tone had evolved from that of the educator to the activist. "I Was An Abortionist for the FBI" also bristled with the manic energy and stream-consciousness prose of a man who was ingesting LSD regularly (and who adored Lenny Bruce). Though the piece ran long and included random ruminations on The Beatles' inescapable single "Day Tripper" and street corner evangelists, Krassner competently summarized the highlights of a conference in California put on by the Society for Humane Abortion. One doctor attended who no longer insisted on anonymity. Perhaps it was the fact that the man had just served twenty-five months in prison for the abortions he had performed. Dr. W. J. Bryan Henrie from Grove, Oklahoma declared at the conference, "I'm not ashamed for the things I did that had me sent to prison. I'm not

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<sup>169</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 53.

ashamed that I listened to those pleading women. I'm ashamed of a law that must be broken to save the honor and dignity of women."<sup>170</sup> In addition to recording the highlights of the conference, Krassner also considered how access to abortion was a class issue, how wealthy women could avoid having unwanted offspring "under safe and sanitary operating conditions," whereas the poor woman's experience would be "an unsuccessful hassle." He also recounted an exchange he had witnessed between a district attorney and a young woman seeking an abortion. As Krassner related the exchange, the woman expressed what Krassner considered the crux of the debate: "[B]y catching these doctors who are the best ones available, you're only forcing girls to go underground to less competent people. Your whole concern isn't to protect lives but to force girls to find better means to *destroy* their lives by going to unqualified people."<sup>171</sup> The D.A. responded with the sentiment that *Look* magazine had expressed earlier in the decade. There were no qualified or humane abortionists.

Abortion would not become legal until 1973, but the increasing availability of contraception, especially the pill, and other social factors helped precipitate the sexual revolution of the 1960s nonetheless. Many were troubled by the imagined ramifications of liberated sexuality, and not only the idea that women would be free from the constraints of pregnancy and child-rearing. If women entered the workforce in greater numbers and experimented sexually – free of the fear of pregnancy – what distinction between the genders would remain? An androgynous future could be a terrifying thought, a fear often at the core of anti-feminist attitudes and resistance to social change. In a striking satirical fiction from 1963, Krassner offered a vignette of "a particularly emancipated female." Throughout, the humor lay

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<sup>170</sup> Krassner, "I Was an Abortionist for the FBI," *The Realist*, April 1966, 6.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

in reversed sex roles. The woman lights the man's cigarette. He complains that their relationship is only physical, that she does not respect him, is not interested in him as a person, only a body and sexual object. She essentially concedes the point. "'You're a real son of a bitch,' he says, blowing some smoke her way."<sup>172</sup>

Unsatisfied with only the physical connection, the man in the tale seeks ways to impress the lover. He wants commitment. He reads *The New York Times* and a best-selling book each week so that she will respect his mind, but to no avail. She accuses him of doing the reading only to impress her. (Guilty). Krassner described his protagonist's attitude: "She, on the other hand, not having his need to be emotionally involved with a bed partner, saw other men . . . and as long as she felt she was being honest, she was able to avoid any possible guilt about exploiting him." Again, the humor lay in the reversed roles, her sentiment expressed in a typically masculine confessional mode. The man in Krassner's tale lives with the situation, adjusting "to the fact that she would not call him at the office the next day." Ultimately, the fictional man is unfulfilled, and he finds his partner's perspective threatening. What about Krassner? Did he find a woman with such a perspective threatening? His tone was ambiguous. In an issue of the magazine from years before, he had argued that newspaper classified sections for employment should eliminate separate sections for men and women, making solicitation for work gender-neutral. Yet, to what extent Krassner believed in absolute freedom from gender roles remains unclear. He endorsed reproductive rights and equal employment opportunities, but he did not spell out whether he believed there were any fundamental distinctions between men and women. His male character certainly feels emasculated: "The sex act provides a sort

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<sup>172</sup> Krassner, "The Tale of a Particularly Emancipated Female,"

of fluctuating compensation for his inferiority in other areas. Still, he doesn't find it very elating to go through life with but a prone ego." The "particularly emancipated female" was a comedic figure, but perhaps she was also a fearsome one.

Whether Krassner believed that the appearance of such a female was an imminent reality or a lark, *The Realist* was clearer when it denounced certain types of exploitation. In certain pieces, Krassner demonstrated that he understood the forces that dehumanized and objectified women and some of the consequences of those forces. Ten years before New York feminists protested the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City in 1968 for its sexist assumptions, Krassner parodied many of the same aspects of beauty pageants that the radical women of '68 would deride. Speaking from the perspective of a failed beauty pageant contestant, Krassner wrote about the ridiculous and degrading hoops through which the women had to jump, "I practiced playing tennis without watching the ball—because one of the rules for being Miss Rheingold is, 'Always look directly into the camera no matter what you're doing.'"<sup>173</sup> Further, the narrator remarks that all the women in the pageant had to wear the same outfit, "so that none of us could take unfair advantage of individuality." The incisive line would be echoed a decade later when feminists listed ten grievances against the Miss America pageant:

"Conformity is the key to the crown—and, by extension, to success in our society."<sup>174</sup>

The Miss Rheingold Loser admires the winner of the Miss America contest because that individual demonstrated some impressive traits: "[T]he girl who won said something very intelligent about how people should have 'communication and understanding' and like that."

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<sup>173</sup> Krassner, "Monologue by a Miss Rheingold Loser," *The Realist*, October 1958, 16.

<sup>174</sup> "No More Miss America," in *Takin' it to the streets*, ed. Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 483.

Krassner could not resist inserting his own editor's note after that comment: "Miss America was not merely indulging in platitudes, either. In the talent contest, she had communicated by performing a modified striptease. And the judges understood."<sup>175</sup> It seemed that Krassner understood too. The Miss America protesters of '68 decried the "*Degrading, Mindless-Boob-Girlie Symbol*" and "*The Unbeatable Madonna-Whore Combination*" that pageant winners embodied. "To win approval, we must be both sexy and wholesome," the critics insisted, and in the point titled, "*The Irrelevant Crown on the Throne of Mediocrity*," they shunned the beauty pageant ideal of "unoffensive, bland, apolitical" women.<sup>176</sup> Again, Krassner's Rheingold Loser embodied everything feminists found offensive in the beauty pageant and cut through the façade with insightful humor. At the end of the piece, the Miss Rheingold Loser says that she has heard about a woman who briefly brought a pause to fighting in Lebanon simply by walking down the street. The snipers were too busy wolf-whistling to fire at one another. "Now if that's all it takes to stop guys from killing each other, then that's what I want to do," Rheingold Loser insists. "I'd pack sandwiches and just keep walking back and forth until they declared a truce or something."<sup>177</sup> The idea of inducing peace by a strategic use of women's sexuality echoed a long line of reasoning, all the way back to *Lysistrata*. It was similar to the sentiment that Tuli Kupferberg of the Fugs would later express in the pages of *The Realist*: men fought only when they were not having sex. While clever, Miss Rheingold's (and perhaps Krassner's) solution seems pat. Voyeurism is no panacea.

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<sup>175</sup> Krassner, "Monologue," 16.

<sup>176</sup> "No More Miss America."

<sup>177</sup> Krassner, "Monologue," 14.

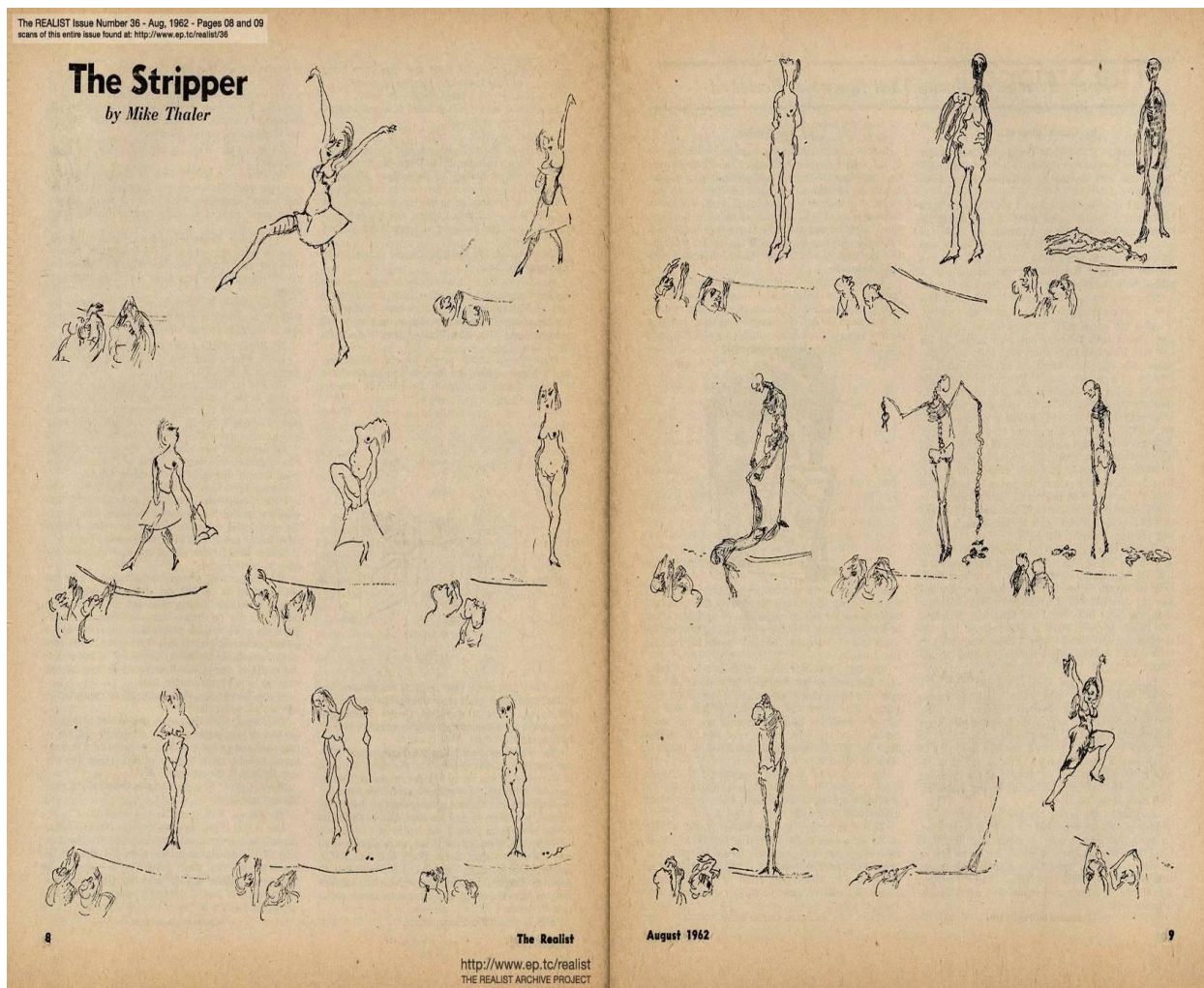


Figure 6: "The Stripper"

In fact, other contributors to *The Realist* seemed to understand the intrinsic violence that lurked beneath the objectification of women. Sex was not perverse. Lust was not perverse. Yet, somehow, something was still wrong with the woman-as-object. As Alden A. Nowlan remarked in *The Realist* in 1958, "The real obscenity of the striptease isn't even sexual. It is the participants' loss of their animal dignity."<sup>178</sup> Yet, the loss of dignity alone did not fully explain the dilemma. A cartoonist came closer to the truth in a 1962 edition of the magazine. In "The Stripper" (Figure 6), artist Mike Thaler depicted a woman on stage shedding her clothes,

<sup>178</sup> Alden A. Nowlan, "Some Thoughts on Pornography," *The Realist*, November 1958, 15.



to the hoots and cheers of two men in the front row.<sup>179</sup> The Stripper does not stop when she is nude. She begins to shed her skin, until she is just a skeleton. She removes layers until there is nothing left. The men's eyes pry until they have left her a pile of bones and then finally, a mere wisp. In the final panel, the woman revives, body intact, and bounds off the stage to applause. But the essential kernel of the cartoon lies in its penultimate image: beneath the clothes was skin, and further down a skeleton. The men's leering tore away until all that remained were bones, fit for a coffin rather than a stage.

Like any publication, *The Realist* could not escape completely from the attitudes of the society it satirized. Reflecting on communes at the end of the '60s, Krassner made a comment that could apply equally to the limitations in the consciousness of his magazine through the decade: "[A] lot of people living in communes now are victims of their own conditioning, and sometimes it's not that easy to change."<sup>180</sup> If society had conditioned Krassner to sexualize women to the point of objectification, the attitudes that resulted from that conditioning found their way into *The Realist*. Then again, the shortcomings of the magazine might simply have reflected the plight of a social commentator who specialized in undermining taboos and shocking the audience. As the original patron of and sometime contributor to *The Realist*, comedian Steve Allen saw how Krassner's dilemma might have resulted from his vocation: "If what you do for a living is shock people, and Paul's in that category, occasionally you may try a little hard to shock them and succeed in that regard, but risk having them miss the point or

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<sup>179</sup> Mike Thaler, "The Stripper," *The Realist*, August 1962, 8-9.

<sup>180</sup> Krassner, "An Impolite Interview with Paul Krassner," *How a Satirical Editor . . .*, 313.

simply being on the wrong side of an issue.”<sup>181</sup> Krassner was free of the responsibility of satisfying advertisers, but he had to provide a reliable service to readers. He had to startle them. As Allen put it, “People who live by daring propriety, by challenging commonly held views, can fall into some bad habits. If you haven’t shocked the world within the last two weeks, you’ll sit down and think, ‘Now what can I say that is worse?’”

Whether Krassner could not escape deep-seated sexism, satirized it imperfectly so that his message was not clear, or merely pushed to shock his readers so aggressively that he lost sight of how his female readers might perceive his portrayals, *The Realist* participated in the sexism it condemned. Look again at “The Disneyland Memorial Orgy” (Figure 3). Is Daisy Duck inviting that her three young nephews peer under her skirt? Snow White, perhaps the figure to which viewers’ eyes are first drawn, looks startled, even scared. Are the seven dwarves raping her? Rape, too, often became a celebratory word among underground publications, one that implied an uncontrollable, commendable lust. In her brilliant essay on images of sexual violence in countercultural publications, historian Beth Bailey demonstrated that several underground writers imagined “a vision of postrevolutionary possibility in which rape played a central role and the word ‘fuck’ was a powerful incantation.”<sup>182</sup> One writer for an underground publication called *Vortex* from Lawrence, Kansas, complained, “[P]eople in Omaha don’t know who Paul Krassner is.” He recommended quizzing the local librarian to find out if she knew who Krassner was. If she did not, his recommendation was simple: “Pinch her tit.” As Bailey

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<sup>181</sup> Bob Edwards, “Profile: *The Realist* founder Paul Krassner,” Morning Edition, NPR, January 17, 2001 (transcript accessed at <http://ebshost.com> on 5/20/2010).

<sup>182</sup> Beth Bailey, “Sex as a Weapon: Underground Comix and the Paradox of Liberation,” in *Imagine Nation*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 311.

analyzed the editorial, “The librarian stands for repression and dried-up sexuality, to which the appropriate response is sexual violence.”<sup>183</sup>

Of course, Krassner did not request that the Kansan editorialist attack librarians for the crime of failing to recognize his name. But he partook in his own aggressive fantasies. When the editor of *The Realist* imagined a “Rape-in” which targeted the wives of legislators who opposed abortion, he was fantasizing about an extreme way to achieve what he considered to be a legislative victory. After all, if the representatives’ wives were impregnated with the children of dirty hippies, and if they had conceived under the conditions of rape, the politicians would finally understand the plight of women with unwanted pregnancies. Yet, in the scenario, the wives suffered for the wrongheadedness of their husbands. Krassner’s “Rape-in” still involved sexual violence against women as a tactic for social change. It continued to treat rape something that was perhaps bad, but maybe effective and fun.<sup>184</sup>

Many women found the sentiment intolerable. They could no longer suppress their revulsion at such a celebration of sexual violence. One was Robin Morgan, a former Yippie and close friend of Krassner. When the women of the New York underground magazine *Rat* took over the publication in order to produce a women’s issue in January 1970, Morgan published “Goodbye to All That,” a resounding and moving denunciation of sexism in the counterculture and the New Left that was syndicated and republished in newspapers internationally throughout the decade. Morgan lamented the underground press’s “sexist comic strips,” “the

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<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Krassner later admitted that his idea was misguided, but “well-intentioned.” As he put it decades later, “Even in a joke, why should women be assaulted because men make the laws? Legislators’ wives were the victims in that joke, but the legislators themselves should have been the target.” Paul Krassner, “A Response to ‘Why Did Jon Stewart Apologize?’” [www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-krassner/a-response-to-why-did-jon\\_b\\_200512.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-krassner/a-response-to-why-did-jon_b_200512.html) (accessed May 27, 2010).

liberal co-optative masks on the face of sexist hate and fear, worn by real nice guys we all know and like,” and “the friends, brothers, lovers in the counterfeit male-dominated Left . . . who proceed to degrade and destroy women by almost everything they say and do.”<sup>185</sup> The message resonated with the increasing numbers of women who were leaving the Movement behind, who were ceasing to read the underground papers, and who were organizing with other women for a new kind of Movement.

Morgan proceeded to “Run it all the way down,” that is, to call out by name the sexist men and organizations of the counterculture who were making women’s continued participation and acquiescence impossible. She denounced Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, the Black Panthers and the White Panthers, the Weathermen, and many more. But Morgan saved her longest denunciation for Paul Krassner:

Goodbye to lovely pro-Women’s Liberation Paul Krassner, with all his astonished anger that women have lost their sense of humor “on this issue” and don’t laugh any more at little fantasies that degrade and hurt them: farewell to the memory of his “Instant Pussy” aerosol-can poster, to his column for *Cavalier*, to his dream of a Rape-In against legislators’ wives, to his Scapegoats and Realist Nuns and cute anecdotes about the little daughter he sees as often as any proper divorced Scarsdale middle-aged (thirty-eight) father; goodbye forever to the notion that he is my brother who, like Paul, buys a prostitute for the night as a birthday gift for a male friend, or who, like Paul, reels off the names in alphabetical order of people in the Women’s Movement he has fucked, reels off names in the best locker-room tradition-as proof that *he’s* no sexist oppressor.<sup>186</sup>

Krassner had started *The Realist* so that he and “other Martians” could speak without restrictions from religious or governmental organizations, from advertisers, from prudes, or from themselves. As he told *Newsweek* in a mid-sixties profile, the magazine was dedicated to

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<sup>185</sup> Robin Morgan, “Goodbye to All That,” in *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 122.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

no cause other than “compromising as little as possible.”<sup>187</sup> Now, however, the man who refused to compromise was being told that his refusal to censor or mitigate any thought revealed his hurtful hostility toward women. And it was a friend who was telling him. “I couldn’t believe it. I was being purged from my own extended family,” Krassner thought.<sup>188</sup> Coming to terms with how Morgan and many other “hip” women felt marginalized and degraded by portrayals of women in *The Realist* and other undergrounds would hang over the magazine’s remaining years, eventually resulting by the last year in a magazine with a different group of contributors and a quite different tone.

Reading Morgan’s essay makes clear that Krassner was not alone in expressing an attitude hostile to women, or that sexualized women into a role inferior to men. In fact, the other men Morgan denounced in “Goodbye to All That” were Krassner compatriots. One could almost imagine Morgan composing her essay with the assistance of Krassner’s address book. She dismissed “sexist bastard” Norman Mailer, who had said in an interview in *The Realist*, “I would guess that most men who understand women at all feel hostility toward them. At their worst, women are low sloppy beasts.” Later, Mailer actually declared, “It’s better to commit rape than masturbate. Maybe, maybe.”<sup>189</sup> To his credit, Krassner pointed out the incoherence of Mailer’s thinking and grew increasingly confrontational during the course of his interview with the man who, at the time, was his father-in-law. Morgan had also claimed that “good ol’ Abbie [Hoffman]” was a narcissistic celebrity who had abandoned his first wife when he gained fame. Hoffman, too, had demonstrated in his writings in *The Realist* an undeniable attitude

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<sup>187</sup> “Man With a Ho,” *Newsweek*, August 3, 1964.

<sup>188</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 229.

<sup>189</sup> “An Impolite Interview with Norman Mailer,” *The Realist*, December 1962, 15-6, 20-1.

that he controlled the women with whom he was associated. Hoffman had, like a prankster version of Charles Manson, promised that Yippie women would pose as prostitutes at the Democratic Convention of 1968 in order to spike delegates' drinks with LSD. Further, the sentence that began a chapter of his book *Woodstock Nation* (1969) that began, "God, I'd like to fuck Janis Joplin!" suggested a predatory mentality that discounted whether Joplin might reciprocate Hoffman's sentiment.<sup>190</sup> The exclamation was the writer's version of the cat-call, the sort of action that prodded '60s poet Denise Levertov to ponder, "Those groans men use / passing a woman on the street / or on the steps of the subway / to tell her she is female / and their flesh knows it, / are they a sort of tune, / an ugly enough song, sung / by a bird with a slit tongue / but meant for music? / Or are they the muffled roaring / of deafmutes trapped in a building that is / slowly filling with smoke?"<sup>191</sup>

Morgan even censured the Fugs. "Goodbye to Tuli and the Fugs and all the boys in the front room—who always knew they hated the women they loved."<sup>192</sup> The Fugs certainly acted as though sex, especially when described as graphically as possible, could cure all. Though Tuli Kupferberg was the musician singled out, it was Yippie ringleader Ed Sanders who crafted the most thorough depiction of violent sexual fantasies in his novel *Shards of God* (1970). Claiming to chronicle the work of the Yippies and regularly mentioning Hoffman, Rubin, and Krassner, Sanders perceived aggressive sex as the remedy to every problem, especially those that involved women. What to do about a female undercover police officer monitoring Yippie activity? "Fuck a lady cop, today!" Sanders demanded. "And all you fathomlessly hungry

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<sup>190</sup> Abbie Hoffman, *The Best of Abbie Hoffman* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1989), 165.

<sup>191</sup> Denise Levertov, "The Mutes," (1966) in *The Portable Sixties Reader*, edited by Ann Charters, (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 525.

<sup>192</sup> Morgan, 125.

furburgers, fuck a desk sergent [sic] immediately!”<sup>193</sup> Krassner was certainly immersed in a world that bore a great deal of hostility toward women, but, while he did not transcend the limitations of his peers, he was not his subculture’s most gruesome perpetrator.

Krassner was nonchalant about the attacks of Morgan and other feminist critics in a 1970 interview. When asked if he received “any hostility from Women’s Liberation,” Krassner responded, “There are a few individuals in the movement who consider me a male chauvinist.”<sup>194</sup> He found this ironic, considering himself a longtime champion of women’s rights, citing his call ten years prior to eliminate the division of employment ads into male and female sections.<sup>195</sup> The mastermind of *The Realist* did demonstrate, however, that he was giving the issue some thought: “I had been making my living, first doing interviews for *Playboy* and then as the film critic for *Cavalier*, which also treats women as sexual objects by printing nude photos which they know will be used by guys for masturbatory fantasies.” Krassner believed he could infiltrate such publications and change minds. “In my column, I was getting in a lot about the war, racism, abortion. But what I thought of as infiltration, some women thought of as complicity.” Ultimately, upon receiving complaints from distributors, *Cavalier* fired Krassner. The magazine had not changed, but he had served them until they were finished with him. This “impolite interview” gives the sense that, while somewhat defensive, Krassner was at least reconsidering those things for which he was coming under fire by feminists.

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<sup>193</sup> Ed Sanders, *Shards of God* (New York: Grove Press, 1970), 160.

<sup>194</sup> “An Impolite Interview with Paul Krassner,” *How a Satirical Editor . . .*, 313.

<sup>195</sup> A law did make the practice illegal in 1964.

Little by little, the magazine reflected a new consciousness. That is not to say that it became wholesome. In fact, Krassner began running the cartoons of S. Clay Wilson in the early 1970s, an artist whom most feminists considered not just a repulsive male supremacist but a violent, woman-hating reactionary. To the end, Krassner would not kowtow to any party line, leftwing, patriotic, or feminist. But, as the magazine neared the end of its first run, more female voices appeared in *The Realist*, and they spoke not only from a woman's perspective, but specifically about women's issues. The magazine had long addressed employment discrepancies and reproductive rights, but new contributors pushed farther. In 1972, Margo St. James, famous for her efforts to unionize prostitutes, wrote an article about the plight of sex workers. "Half the women in the county jail are there on sex charges—political prisoners, arbitrarily chosen by society to pay dues for its sexual guilt."<sup>196</sup> Sylvia Anderson informed readers that New York hospital mailed birth certificates to new mothers who were married, while single mothers had to travel to the hospital to pick up the certificate. When asked why, the clerk replied, unhelpfully, "It's a regulation."<sup>197</sup>

In Issue 96, which appeared in three installments over the course of 1973, *The Realist* ran seven women writers, who contributed mostly extensive pieces, compared to one male contributor, Allen Ginsberg. Laurie Garrett wrote about cervical cancer. Lia Stahrlite shared her harrowing tale, "What It's Like to Have a Baby in Prison." According to Stahrlite, the attitude of prison officials, judges, and counselors alike was that she had put herself and her unborn child into the predicament in which they found themselves, and there was no use

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<sup>196</sup> Margo St. James, "Prostitutes as Political Prisoners," *The Realist*, December 1972, 9.

<sup>197</sup> Sylvia Anderson, "Telephone Conversation with a Clerk at the Bureau of Vital Statistics," *The Best of the Realist*, 240.



complaining about the lack of nutritious food, physical constrictions and discomfort, or harsh treatment from prison guards.<sup>198</sup> Below the piece, Norma Stafford contributed a poem in Stahrlite's honor, celebrating Stahrlite as a "swift sure female warrior." In perhaps the first cover illustration by a woman, Penelope Rogers drew an evocative image of a woman with smaller and smaller women inside her; in the background, Punch has killed Judy.<sup>199</sup>

Perhaps the most remarkable issue from 1973 featured two stories, one about a woman who encouraged at-home births and the other by a woman who had vowed never to have children. *The Realist* had always been a magazine that would endorse both decisions as equally valid. Now, however, women were expressing their perspectives in their own worlds, without the male filter. 1973 was a rare year, in which Krassner's voice did not dominate the magazine. Stephanie Mills wrote with a tone of the weary activist, almost ready for retirement, but her concisely told life story made for compelling reading. When she delivered her college's commencement speech, she asserted that fear of imminent dangers of overpopulation had convinced her to avoid having children. Mills gained an instant notoriety and became a speaker for Planned Parenthood, a comfortable home for her, where the people were "wonderful to work with. As a rule, whether or not they admit it, they see nothing wrong with enjoying sex. This modest wisdom seems to make for rounder character somehow. Furthermore, most of them see nothing wrong with having babies; they just want the kids to have the advantage of being desired."<sup>200</sup> The hate mail from strangers poured in, a bizarre experience Mills likened to "having your house hit by a meteorite." She received the usual epithets: "godless communist,

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<sup>198</sup> Lia Stahrlite, "What It's Like to Have a Baby in Prison," *The Realist*, April 1973, 2-5.

<sup>199</sup> Norma Stafford, "... and her mug shot is taken before she has breathed," *The Realist*, April 1973, 5. Penelope Rogers, *The Realist*, April 1973, 1.

<sup>200</sup> Stephanie Mills, "Memoirs of an Infertility Goddess," *The Realist*, February 1973, 7.

selfish bitch, and queer.” Mills soldiered on, speaking and attending workshops. She matured, and so did her opinions. “In the adolescence of my activism . . . I did sink to condemning mothers of huge families.”<sup>201</sup> As she continued to travel and speak out for women’s rights to reproductive choices, she realized that the choices of mothers of large families were as valid as her own choice. The article was weary by its conclusion, as indeed, Mills seemed to be. Her fame seemed to be receding, and she was probably relieved.

Less famous but just as passionate was the woman who shared the February issue of *The Realist* with Mills. Raven Lang told the story of how she came to believe that obstetricians and hospitals held a monopoly over the care of pregnant women, took them for granted, and served them poorly. Lang began her activism by attending a home birth and found the experience exhilarating, “so incredibly beautiful that I was as high from it as I was from my own. I couldn’t sleep for the following two nights.”<sup>202</sup> She also accompanied a woman, Kathy, who sought out her out for support when she delivered at the hospital. A birth that started normally went terribly wrong, and Lang was convinced the doctor was at fault. Not only had he called the hospital and ordered that Kathy be given drugs to slow the birth process so that he could spend several hours attending to other activities outside the hospital, but worse, he lied to Kathy and the author, Lang, about the drugs he was administering. “You can imagine how I felt toward that smiling/lying doctor at that moment,” Lang wrote. The doctor was unapologetic, either about his lack of transparency or the eventual injuries to the infant (“a concussion on his head with a large swelling about the size of a tennis ball.”) When he refused to reunite mother

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<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>202</sup> Raven Lang, “The Politics of Childbirth at Home,” *The Realist*, February 1973, 1.

and child, he purportedly told Lang, “Motherly love kills more babies than bullets.”<sup>203</sup> Lang learned that day to mistrust the institution of the hospital and committed herself to providing women an alternative means of having children.

While Lang resented the doctors who misinformed women and attempted to use their professional accreditation to marginalize her and her clinic in the community, she never condemned the women who chose to deliver in hospitals. The tolerant attitude showed a growth in the attitudes expressed in *The Realist*, a marked departure from Krassner’s condemnatory observation a decade prior that so few new mothers were breastfeeding their children. The tone of *The Realist* on motherhood had evolved from prescriptive to educational, and it was probably not a coincidence that the shift occurred when the editor opened his magazine to more female writers. Perhaps the accusations of sexism had driven Krassner into towing a feminist line. More likely, his thinking evolved, and his consciousness grew to keep pace with the times. After all, the premier benefit of running a journal of “freethought” is that opinions can change without worrying about inconsistency. Though Krassner probably did not fully grasp the fact when he launched his magazine, the freedom to grow and evolve proved as significant to *The Realist* as the freedom to mock the sacrosanct.

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<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

### Conclusion: “Out of Taboos”

By the mid-’70s, when Paul Krassner stopped publishing *The Realist*, the magazine maintained a striking social conscience but little of its original whimsy. Humor and boundary-breaking no longer seemed to be Krassner’s principal concerns. One of the editor’s most prolific new columnists was a conspiracy theorist named Mae Brussell, whose “conspiracy newsletter” warned readers that the Senate Watergate Committee would hide the president’s conspiracy from the public. As always, Krassner was following his muse, but fewer readers were paying attention anymore. As the once-satirical editor later reminisced, “Circulation had dropped off. Readers wanted me to be funny, while I had become obsessed with conspiracy.”<sup>204</sup> In the cynical decade that a later president would characterize as one of “national malaise,” some good jokes would have been appreciated.

The state that waged the Vietnam War proved that it could outlast its critics, prosecuting the war until dissidents could think up no new ways to denounce it. The Yippies were already becoming a hazy memory by the early ’70s. Many commentators and historians have pinpointed moments that signify the end of the ’60s. For *The Realist*, nothing could have better epitomized the sense of deflation and loss than the arrest of Abbie Hoffman – this time for the sale of cocaine to undercover narcotics officers, his first arrest for an action other than political protest, and the first one in which severe penalties seemed certain. In the magazine’s ante ultimate issue, none other than Allen Ginsberg, poet laureate of the counterculture, wrote about Hoffman’s arrest. Ginsberg praised Hoffman to the skies, hyperbolically, but his words bore the same pensive tone as a funeral eulogy: “Like Tom Paine, he is a classic example of

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<sup>204</sup> Mae Brussell, “Why Is the Senate Watergate Committee Functioning as Part of the Cover-up?” *The Realist*, December 1972, 13. Krassner quotation from *Confessions*, 228.

philosophic and poetic dramatist of public Ideals, a pamphleteer and book man, seeking liberty for his country and sanity on its government.”<sup>205</sup> When Jerry Rubin predicted that drug laws would criminalize dissent in a 1968 issue of *The Realist*, he was both right and wrong. Laws against the sale of narcotics drove Abbie Hoffman into hiding, but he had already given up on the idea of a revolution. Even Ginsberg conceded Hoffman’s “recent disillusioned withdrawal to private life.” Hoffman was a groundbreaking performance artist, just as Krassner was an innovative satirist, but neither man had brought about his vision for society or, by 1973, extricated the United States from involvement in Vietnam.

Ultimately, however, Krassner had begun *The Realist* not as a utopian or pacifist publication. He had set out to express his ideas without restraint, and later, to find means of expressing those ideas that demanded the attention of readers and the surrender of censors. Perhaps, Krassner had made himself obsolete. If, in 1958, American culture was “an open field mined with taboos,” by the 1970s, it was a pock-marked plane. After more than a decade of gleeful detonations, Krassner was “out of money and taboos,” perhaps stuck in one of the craters he had created.<sup>206</sup> As he wrote in the preface to a collection of his writings published in 1971, “Over the past decade the climate has changed so much that stuff I might once have published now appears in *The Wall Street Journal*.”<sup>207</sup> Was Krassner celebrating or lamenting this fact?

Regardless, it was reality. The sentiments of *The Realist* were everywhere. Tellingly, in the same issue of *Life* magazine that presented a positive profile of Krassner, the editors of *Life*

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<sup>205</sup> Allen Ginsberg, “Allen Ginsberg on the Arrest of Abbie Hoffman,” *The Realist*, June 1973, 2.

<sup>206</sup> Krassner, *Confessions*, 228.

<sup>207</sup> Krassner, *How a Satirical Editor Became a Yippie Conspirator in Ten Easy Years*, 22.

noted what it called “a mass walkout,” during a Catholic religious service in which a cardinal instructed his parishioners to continue to avoid birth control.<sup>208</sup> Whereas Krassner was instructing the students in the ‘60s, his lessons had been internalized by the ‘70s. Mocking the longtime slogan of *The New York Times*’ motto “All the News That’s Fit to Print,” a short-lived paper launched in 1974 at the College of William and Mary, called *Rip-Off*, adopted the slogan “all the news that fits, we print.” By the time Krassner discontinued publication of *The Realist*, his magazine and a cultural tidal wave of expression had moved American media away from the idea that anything might remain “unfit.” Perhaps wistful for the life of an “investigative satirist,” Krassner relaunched *The Realist* again in 1985 as a newsletter. But American culture was no longer an open field.

Older concepts of propriety did not, and, of course, still do not, restrain popular media. When he stopped publishing the original magazine in 1974, Krassner could find nothing about which he was forbidden to write – at least nothing that he felt was worth exploring. The second generation of *The Realist* had its moments, but neither the publication nor the world it addressed was the same one that the young atheist of ‘58 had rolled up his sleeves and taken on. Krassner came to believe that pushing the envelope of expression for its own sake was an unworthy cause. Reflecting on the state of culture in the early twenty-first century, Krassner rejected manifestations of shocking self-expression that had no purpose or legitimate point of view: “There seems to be too much irreverence for its own sake these days. In some cases, victims, rather than oppressors, have become the target. . . . [T]oo often sarcasm passes for irony, name-calling passes for insight, bleeped-out four-letter words pass for wit, and lowest-

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<sup>208</sup> “For Birth Control, a Mass Walkout,” *Life*, October 4, 1968, 30-3.

common-denominator jokes pass for analysis. Satire should have a point of view.”<sup>209</sup> During its first run, *The Realist* was blasphemous, shocking, and sometimes vulgar, but it always had a point of view.

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<sup>209</sup> David Kupfer, “In the Jester’s Court: Paul Krassner on the Virtues of Irreverence, Indecency, and Illegal Drugs,” *The Sun*, February 2009, [http://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/398/in\\_the\\_jesters\\_court](http://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/398/in_the_jesters_court). (Accessed May 22, 2010).

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## Vita

Terry Joel Wagner was born in Houston, Texas, and received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Rice University in 2002. He has published about the FBI's 2004 reinvestigation into the murder of Emmett Till and about documentary films on the Till case.