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Resistance Narratives in Radical, Alternative Media: A Historical Examination of *Earwig*

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<a>Abstract

This research examines the discursive conventions and resistance narratives of *Earwig*, a New Zealand alternative magazine that began publication in 1969. This work reappropriates previous examinations of narrative fragments and constitutive functions that have been found to coalesce upon a physical anarchist gathering and suggests that such an approach can help to explain meta-narratives of meaning across the lifetime of a specific publication. In doing so, this work asks what kinds of meta-narratives can be created within a radical publication when there are no strong coalescing forces and the goal is anarchy. This study concludes by examining the kinds of resistance that emerged from the cultural values and identities found within these narratives of *Earwig*.

<a>Keywords: Alternative media, anarchy, cultural values, *Earwig*, historical analysis, magazines, narrative fragments, New Zealand, resistance narratives.

<a>Introduction

There is a long history of an active, alternative press in New Zealand. There was a particular increase in alternative press activity during the late sixties and early seventies. *Earwig*, more than any other alternative magazine of the time, expanded traditional magazine content with a reliance on psychedelic imagery, short stories, poems, and independent news stories to circumvent mainstream content. It began production in 1969 by John Milne and was

promoted as “the magazine with chomp.” Production began at Palmerston North Teachers College and later moved to Auckland. The magazine was produced irregularly for four years, whenever enough material for a new issue was generated. The simple ideology behind the magazine was that knowledge should be available to all. The magazine also functioned as a learning center, where they held media factories, shared facilities and resources, and taught writing, design, and production skills.

During its publication, *Earwig* was the only New Zealand member of the Underground Press Syndicate (UPS). This syndicate was a network of countercultural newspapers and magazines that began in the United States and extended around the globe. Some American members were the *East Village Other*, the *Los Angeles Free Press*, and the *San Francisco Oracle*. All UPS members agreed to allow any other member the right to freely reprint any of their contents. The result was a rapid expansion of anarchist news stories and countercultural critique throughout these independent publications that would have otherwise remained dormant in relatively obscure magazines peppered around the globe.

Given its importance in the history of New Zealand alternative media, it is rather surprising that no academic or professional examination of *Earwig* could be found. The present research hopes to fill this gap in the literature and explore how the discursive conventions of *Earwig* might also help to inform contemporary radical media practices. With these goals in mind, this research draws from a research methodology originally applied to resistance narratives surrounding the 2002 North American Anarchist Gathering (Atkinson, 2006). In that work, it was argued that specific narrative fragments and constitutive functions can coalesce across various supporting publications to create a broader meta-narrative, which is then imposed upon a physical, cultural site. Atkinson (2006) then challenged future research to appropriate this methodology for alternative media. The present research serves as an exploratory step toward that goal. In utilizing this methodology to examine a series of

open-source alternative media publications, rather than materials surrounding a particular event, this work asks what kinds of meta-narratives can be created within a radical publication when there are no strong coalescing forces and the goal is anarchy. This study will conclude by examining the kinds of resistance that emerged from the cultural values and identities found in these narratives.

<a>Historicizing Alternative Media

Historical examples of alternative media are often not readily accessible due to the ephemeral nature of many publications. Thus, much work in this area tends to be macro-historical, examining alternative media within the framework of other social institutions (i.e. Downing, 2001). However, by taking such a macro-level approach, research has not fully explored unique, alternative media content with much depth. Very little research has examined specific alternative media publications as symbolic documents and as a reflection of the social processes that produced such media (Hall, 1997). As Tracy (2007) has argued, “attending to a certain time and setting provides for the potential understanding of a community’s media, the social and ideational dynamics from which such media emerge, and whether they sustain or call into question dominant political and economic forces, institutions, and ideological frameworks.”

Such an analysis does as much to tell us what lies within an alternative publication as it does to reveal what is, and is not, found in the mainstream press of the time. Mainstream and alternative media are not diametric opposites. However, more generally one can describe mainstream media by the stories they tend to cover and the stories they ignore. Conventional media “omit or bury items which might jeopardize the socio-cultural structure and man’s faith in it” (Breed, 2004, p. 419). Conversely, alternative media can highlight topics that mainstream publications have avoided. There are many early examples from New Zealand

alternative publications that illustrate how marginalized groups aim to fill such an informational gap. The early twentieth-century New Zealand Protestant magazine *The Nation* argued against the pervasive proliferation of Catholic ideology throughout society, while the long-running women's newsletter *Women's Electoral Lobby* argued that “all the good works and achievements of those in the feminist movement are daily undermined by the images of women, children and Maori shown on television” (McLeod, 1988). These magazines and other alternative publications attempted to create content decidedly opposite to mainstream media fare.

As a historical artifact, *Earwig* documents a moment in time and illustrates the struggles of alternative media in relation to its mainstream and alternative counterparts. There were several competing alternative magazines of the time. However, *Earwig*, more than any other contemporary alternative magazine, used communication tactics that were far less explicit in their overt political use of discourse; even though, this research will argue, *Earwig's* tactics were equally persuasive and focused. The magazine drew from psychedelic imagery, short stories, poems, and independent news stories to circumvent mainstream content in a way not previously seen in alternative media outlets in New Zealand.

Through the exploration of discursive practices in *Earwig*, it may be possible to extrapolate some understanding of the social structures which the contributors of *Earwig* were participating within and against. This is an important exercise given the nature of communication in *Earwig* as both an open forum for artists and as an alternative current events, political magazine—a format that is now readily seen in modern alternative publications such as *Adbusters*, *Utne Reader*, and *Mute*. The only requirement *Earwig* had of its readers was that material must have “CHOMP.” As an aside, CHOMP was never fully defined, and was actually clearly stated as undefinable. There appeared to be an assumption that readers would understand its meaning.

<a>Examining Alternative Media

Alternative media have been traditionally very hard to categorize (Downing, 2003). Situated along a continuum of media, alternative media can be defined as “any media that are produced by non-commercial sources and attempt to transform existing social roles and routines by critiquing and challenging power structures” (Atkinson, 2006, p. 252). The existing social roles and routines that alternative media seek to critique generally stem from capitalism, consumerism, patriarchy, and the nature of corporations. It is this foregrounding in social critique that has historically placed alternative media in diametric opposition to the mainstream press. This opposition allows for an independent “alternative communication” that constructs different social orders, traditions, values, and social understandings (Hamilton, 2000). Alternative media offer an independent platform for groups and individuals that have been marginalized by the mainstream media (Atton, 2002) and provide much needed context.

Mainstream media have been traditionally viewed as maximizing audiences through pack-journalism that is conventional and formulaic, resulting in content that can be binary and reductive. In contrast, alternative media often advocate programs of social change through the framework of politicized and in-depth social commentary (Armstrong, 1981; Duncombe, 1997) found through distinctive, independent alternative journalism.

Alternative media have the capacity for “transforming spectators into active participants of everyday dealings and events affecting their lives” (Tracy, 2007, p. 272). Indeed, alternative media often view their role as “one of educating and mobilizing the ‘masses’ in the service of the cause or movement” (Hamilton, 2000, p. 359) and generally avoid one-way forms of communication. The frequent solicitation from alternative media outlets for feedback from viewers is purposeful so that an “egalitarian relationship” can be

formed between the media outlet and the viewers (Rodriguez, 2001). Often the social change desired within alternative media is strikingly opposed to mainstream culture. Many alternative media outlets draw from the anarchist principles of nineteenth-century Europe (McElroy, 2003) in their dependence upon decentralization and the self-sufficiency of their readers (Brecher, Costello, & Smith, 2000; Starr, 2000).

Social and political movements make great effort to forge alliances with alternative media (Atton, 2002; Santa Cruz, 1995). In an examination of the historical alternative media—*Freedom's Journal*, *Mattachine Review*, and *RAIN*—Ostertag (2007) found that these publications played a crucial role in bringing about social change. Social movement journals, such as *Sierra* and *Earth First!* have pushed forth social change by forcing issues on the public agenda and frequently scooping mainstream media coverage (Ostertag, 2006). Examples of the powerful effect of alternative media can have in fomenting social change stretch back to the American Revolution when the dissident printed press provoked a trumpet to arms for an entire nation (Armstrong, 1981; Kessler, 1984). The ability of an alternative press to incite change depends upon an engaged relationship with the audience that is not dependent upon caustic commentary that can be read as derisive toward the reader.

One of the central goals of alternative media is to subvert the “hierarchy of access” (Atton, 2002), which often dictates who is sourced in mainstream media content according to perceived credibility. Such practices “emphasise first person eyewitness accounts by participants; reworking of the populist approaches of tabloid newspapers to recover a ‘radical popular’ style of reporting; collective and anti-hierarchical forms of organization . . . an inclusive, radical form of civic journalism” (Atton, 2003, p. 267). This type of journalism has been called “native reporting” (Atton, 2002, pp. 112-117), and has been found to be a part of open publishing sources online, such as Indymedia (Platon & Deuze, 2003). Native reporting

is completely open to the reader as a welcome and inviting text without any coded language that might not be understood.

Michael Albert from the independent and “alternative” *Z Magazine*, wrote that “an alternative media institution sees itself as part of a project to establish new ways of organizing media and social activity and it is committed to furthering these as a whole, and not just its own preservation” (Albert, 2006). This very important point of demarcation has separated how alternative media have covered important social issues differently than the mainstream press. Alternative media offer the space for journalists to “become reporters of their own experiences, struggles and lives” (Atton & Wickenden, 2005, p. 349). However, proponents of alternative media argue that such personalized self-disclosure is not intended for personal gain. Its purpose is to provide relevant, meaningful news that “is best realised through the voices of the community itself” (Atton & Wickenden, 2005, p. 349). Such activism on the part of the “journalist” is often more valued than any traditional mainstream reporting experience (Atton & Wickenden, 2005). This approach favors bystanders to events rather than official voices, which are typically relied upon in the mainstream media (Harcup, 2003).

Most researchers agree that at the most fundamental core, alternative media facilitate democratic participation and cultural disruption while the mainstream press avoids such social critique (Makagon, 2000). However, the disruption that is advocated by many forms of alternative media exists on a continuum from hegemonic to emancipatory (Mumby, 1997). Truly resisting dominant ideology depends upon resistance being more emancipatory than hegemonic. While hegemonic resistance might feel active and confrontational, it is also consensual and benefits the dominant ideology (Pierce & Dougherty, 2002). The consent lies in the mutually accepted understanding that the behaviors of resisters actually “provide authorities with evidence that the current domination structures are necessary” (Atkinson,

2006, pp. 254-255). A classic example is of violent confrontations between protesters and police. The result of such action is confirmation that police presence is necessary for control—which is perhaps exactly what the protesters were arguing against but inevitably confirmed by their actions. Emancipatory resistance, however, carefully details societal forms of domination and educates on ways to circumvent dominant groups by creating a completely opposing and alternative ideology. Mumby (1997) argues that resistance is almost never exclusively emancipatory or hegemonic, but rather a combination of both.

<a>Methodology

This research follows the example of previous work that examined individual narrative fragments from different sources that combine to form an overarching narrative (Atkinson, 2006; McGee, 1990). This approach argues that meta-narratives are composed of multiple parts and do not exist as an entire entity but rather as a multitude of pieces. Narrative itself is actually a reconstruction of disparate discourse fragments from which they came (McGee, 1990). These bits of narrative can culminate at a specific cultural site (Atkinson, 2006). However, this research argues that a cultural site does not need to be manifest within a physical space. Rather, a cultural site can be a mental recognition of meaning—of a Gestaltian whole that inevitably defines its parts. When one views an individual copy of a magazine, or a narrative fragment, that they have had previous experience with, they instantly recognize something within those pages that is not simply on the page. A broader meaning, which consists of previous narrative fragments, comes together to constitute a cultural site that defines that magazine.

Such a cultural site is created by competing and conciliatory narratives that are conceptualized against one another to create a larger, comprehensive, narrative. These narratives actually work against and with each other to reformulate a new reality through

what has been called an “ideological rhetorical force” (Chatman, 1990, p. 198). Such force comes from the culmination of cultural value and identity. Storytellers build narratives within a dichotomous cultural framework that is shaped in relation to desires, values, and motives (White, 1984). This is done through polarizing language that pits “them” against a unified “us” who all relate along common cultural markers (Atkinson, 2006). As a narrative forms, a common identity within a particular cultural sphere develops that is based on “the unity of experiences and actions” (Carr, 1986, p. 149). This shared identity allows those within that participatory sphere to recognize common qualities within themselves, the text, and each other. This shared cultural value and identity also inevitably leads to an increased understanding of what it is that is different in other cultural spheres (Kelly, 2004).

This research examines eight narrative fragments or editions of *Earwig* through a qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004), which aims to explore the constitutive functions of cultural values and identity (see Atkinson, 2006) by examining any depictions of shared and opposing cultural values and identity in content. Cultural values were indicated by mentions of societal or organizational change, whereas identity was signaled through any retelling of action that created a “unity of experience and action” (Atkinson, 2006, p. 260). This deductive approach first begins with a loose, preconceived idea of the elements that may exist in content and then slowly proceeds in an attempt to reveal how narrative fragments, that may not have been considered, might contribute to overarching narrative themes (Gamson, 1992; Mayring, 2000). Instances of opposing and supporting resistance narratives within a societal framework will be examined under shared cultural values, and identities will be relayed primarily through “a unity of experience and action.” When applicable, specific strategies of signification (Mitra & Cohen, 1999) will be identified in content. As Foucault (1989, 1991) argued, and the work of Atkinson (2006) confirms, discourses are inevitably not

about a particular person, place or thing. Rather, discourses are part of a complex network of identity and power relations.

Thus, this methodological approach, drawing from the original work of Fairclough (1995) and the later work of Atton and Wickenden (2005), examines the interdependencies between textual, discursive, and social practices through narrative fragments and constitutive functions. This critical approach also involves a systematic process and examination of lexical choices, questioning the range of possible vocabulary items that could have been utilized otherwise (Matheson, 2005). These studies can be difficult to replicate and are quite labor intensive (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). However, they also allow for a deeper and more complex level of analysis.

<a>Results

Earwig 1: Love and the Caring Humanist

The opening cover of *Earwig* in the May/June edition of 1969 (Figure 1) had an unnervingly close image of a crying baby, perhaps to solidify that this magazine would be something uniquely new. *Earwig* was touted as completely open access—as long as submissions had the undefinable CHOMP, but the publication was available “for all those people who need it,”¹ which after examining the entire narrative, appeared to apply to anyone who was not part of the *Earwig* movement. *Earwig* would serve as an antidote to the indoctrination of mass media and mass society. And *Earwig* would speak directly to our primal emotions. In this first narrative fragment, the focus was love.

¹ There are no page numbers available for the quotations drawn from *Earwig*. However, all quotations taken from the magazine do have correlating information in the text that details the edition and when available, the date of publication.

The baby, as a cover image, is symbolic of love—whether that is the love between two people or the hope of love for the future life of that child. Several writings spoke directly to love. One unattributed piece of prose read: “As we lay in the soft of day, As we lay in brief repose, Bee-sucked kisses I would drink, From your lips of dewy rose.” This prose, written in the intimate voice of the first-person that is often found throughout the alternative press, showers the reader with moments of a very personal love between two people. In reviewing a book by Joan Baez, the author wrote glowingly that “the book, in its own way, is like a bean performing a miracle.” Rather than critiquing the contents of the book, the reviewer chose to demonstrate a profound admiration and love for the book as a whole.

Through the narrative fragment of love, an identity of the caring humanist emerged. The contributors to this narrative fragment focused on the role each individual must take to change society and urged readers to reconsider how love can be interwoven into daily individual decision making. One writer pleads that “acts of feeling have been translated into money but . . . money can’t buy love. We must seek peace, trust, love and freedom within ourselves before we can demand it from others.” By using the inclusive “we” this contributor urges others to do what he or she has already undertaken as a central identity in the *Earwig* cause.

Far from the political narratives that would encompass most of the future editions, this first narrative espoused the transformative power of love. The identity associated with those outside of the *Earwig* pacifist culture was one of hate mongering and fear. This opposing identity and a widespread cultural value of violence were presented as key components to most of the problems in society. *Earwig* answers this widespread value and argues for understanding: “You’ve got to know your enemies before you can begin to love them.” This conciliatory act was not seen often in the other narrative fragments sampled for this study. The rare recognition here of similarity between groups was the result of merging

the cultural value of love in accordance with an identity of the caring humanist. In doing so, the narrative fragment revealed content that had far less to do with divisions in society and were more reliant on exposing the similarities between traditionally opposing groups.

Earwig 2: Anti-governance and the Knowledgeable Humanist

The second narrative fragment examined had Jimi Hendrix on the cover pointing directly toward the viewer in a stance akin to the 1917 “We want YOU for the U.S. Army” posters. The cover of the undated, number 2 edition, ironically juxtaposed the iconic image of citizen responsibility toward a collective government and country with the opposite cultural value of anti-governance that emerged in the images and text. Anti-governance was a very important shared cultural value among the *Earwig* community:

<ext>The mass media is a term which must be applied to the education system, authority systems in commerce and industry, the religious instruction network, the money economy, etc., as well as the newspapers and the tele. All the media are guilty of presenting only some of the facts. The artificial needs inculcated by the mass media serve only to render a population governable, to make the population subject to mobilization in order to defend the vested interests of the power clique. . . . therefore urges you into non-participation with the mass media, and puts it to you that you need not be governed. Unless you give humanity this chance you will never be happy with the world.

As this passage illustrates, anti-governance was not seen as applying only to the government of New Zealand, but all systems of control, such as the education system and mass media. This shared cultural value was in response to the mind control of authority systems perceived by those in the *Earwig* community. This cultural value could be seen visually through one heavily contrasted image of a man using a stamp to presumably churn

out yet another homogeneous version of humanity (Figure 2). On the hand of this stark figure are the words, “It’s the price we all have to pay.” Thus, if one agrees to live within such a system of authority, the servants have no choice but to be governed.

Through the cultural value of anti-governance, capitalism was seen, in large part, to be the omnipresent engine of modern systems of control. Its omnipresence meant that a concerted effort across society was needed if capitalism, and governance itself, were to ever collapse. “Capitalism breeds ways of thinking which are plainly bad, and the thinking in turn creates friction between people. It is not the task of the humanist to destroy the capitalists, but rather to pour his balm on the hot points.” Such an emancipatory response to an obvious oppressor could only be possible with knowledge. The identity of a knowledgeable humanist emerged as an essential counterpoint to the mainstream capitalist. The knowledgeable humanist is one who “believe[s] that people are to be valued for what they are rather than for what they have . . . who vote[s] for the political party most likely to lose” because they know and understand the structures inherent to society.

The identity of a knowledgeable humanist is created in direct opposition to the counter-identity of an ignorant oppressor that permeates society. One contributor argued that “without a continuing humanist intervention, people can too easily be reduced to small wads of dollars. If you fancy yourself as a small wad, lock yourself to sleep tonight and try to buy a happy dream.” Therefore, those ignorant oppressors who do not approach societal issues from a humanist perspective are reduced to “wads” that simply do not understand that happiness is not a commodity to be bought.

Earwig 3: “Outsider” Anger and the Opposition as Idiotic

Early in this narrative fragment from the undated, number 3 edition, one writer proclaims that “the revolution is still going nowhere” and it was the fault of a morally blind, idiotic opposition:

<ext>Count to ten battery hens—then lay another automatic hair drier, another electric toothbrush, a new line of detergent to pour into lakes and streams. Sing while you work if you will, but fart prodigiously: breathe deep and buy a cure; patented, approved, inspected bottled and sealed by the productive society. So the wheels of production keep humming. Do what you must. Yeah! Produce!

This excerpt illustrates the seething anger and obvious ideological clash between “us” and “them.” The derision is heaped upon those that are part of mainstream society and only the individual activism of those within a purposeful counterculture can alter that establishment. As is patently clear to those in this counterculture, there has been a long history of wanton inaction that has countered societal good and is the fault of those who subsist in mainstream society. The cultural value of “outsider” anger is driven from the idiocy of “oldie propaganda” and will soon come to an end if the counterculture can amalgamate and demonstrate their presence. An image of police officers (Figure 3) in this narrative fragment indicates the anger toward those seen as oppressors and warns that the police should “Enjoy Your Trip—while it lasts.” The image also draws upon the derogatory use of “pigs” in describing the police officers, with its boldly printed word “OINK!” The divisions are clear. Oppressors are idiots and those within this counterculture are angry that such ignorance has been allowed to continue for so long.

The ideologues in mainstream culture espouse violence that must be stopped. Such violence is perceived as “cold-blooded” by those within this counterculture, but there is little evidence in this narrative fragment that those opposing mainstream violence would not respond in a similar fashion.

Earwig 4: Moral Superiority and the Political Activist

The purpose for struggle is the innate righteousness of the cause. This narrative fragment, from the undated fourth edition of *Earwig*, reveals a cultural value of moral superiority in opposition to the lack of morality in society that has led to such depravity and sickness. As one writer states, “The lawlessness of the state itself creates the greatest violence and that leads, because of its intense violence to a breakdown of moral authority. . . . We lose the battle morally if we permit ourselves to be brought to the level of treating any man as an object.” Those who are in agreement with the writer are elevated to a higher moral ground than those who cannot see their own depravity.

An image of a woman (Figure 4) who assuredly smiles into the camera while holding a placard saying, “I am a Lesbian and I am Beautiful” confirms that only through moral certitude can the violent mainstream be overtaken. She is confident and without malice. She is simply happy with who she is and welcoming to those who wish to know her better. The placard suggests she may be a protester of some sort, but her confident and placid moral righteousness contrasts with stereotypical images of an angry agitator.

This cultural value of moral superiority appears to work against the anger found in *Earwig 3*, and perhaps represents an open dialogue within the consciousness of this counterculture. Speaking in the affirmative for all those who concur with the positions within *Earwig*, one author writes, “If we see the threat violence poses to everyone, we shall not try using it to change society. The surrender of violence is a revolutionary act.” This knowing statement is based on a moral fortitude, which rests on the knowledge that their positions are just and decent.

Another article within this narrative fragment from *Earwig 4* states plainly that society must “remove the ‘punishment’ theme. The law [must] be based on a concept of

group responsibility—he who possesses too much is encouraging those who possess too little to defy the law.” This position shifts responsibility away from the individual who committed the actual crime to the individual who committed the first crime as a thought. It is not the person who steals from another who is wrong. It is the morally bankrupt opposition that deserves scorn, as it’s their greed that prompted the violent cycle to begin. Such a statement can only have validity if the person espousing such a position is morally superior to others.

The morality and justness of this counterculture demand action. Since “the worker is the last to know what it’s all about,” the revolution must act. In doing so, “the revolution may debate within itself, but it must not permit its own division.” To do so would fracture the strong moral base on which such action is grounded. The identity of an engaged, political activist was painstakingly created by directed dictums toward the reader: “There are too many lines around us. Begin by seeing the lines. And then cut the lines. Attack the laws and conventions. Then, if you want an orgy, have it. If you want a castle, build it. If you want euphoria, smoke it. . . . The greatest enemy working against us is APATHY.” As this passage illustrates, the text moves seamlessly between placing the reader as an individual agent of change and as a participant within a larger struggle against a morally bankrupt society.

Heralding *Earwig* 6: Solidarity and the Opposition as Idiotic

The cultural value of solidarity emerged in this narrative fragment as essential to the revolutionary cause. Statements such as “we need your help to beat ’em” in the undated 5th edition of *Earwig* clearly demonstrate that victory can only come through a unified front against the opposition. The call for coming together as an amalgamated and cohesive force is perceived as essential to survival. This cohesion is not merely for its own sake but to build a purposeful counterculture that can grow into a meaningful counterpoint to those “oldies” that simply do not have the wherewithal to understand the intricacies of social problems.

Solidarity as a cultural value is clearly not meant for everyone within society—only those who agree. “Pigs are servants of capitalists, and as such must be avoided.” Therefore, “pigs,” or the police, are not invited to participate within the unification exemplified by this narrative fragment.

Using the plural “we” to purposefully include the reader as a part of this united group, one author urges that “[we need to] help our own channels of communication and transaction in such a way to build an infra society of our own that will take the place of the oldies’ ‘system.’” The use of “our own” and “we” places ownership and accountability on the reader. As a new member of this group, the reader can take part in the overthrow of an opposition that is in the minority and declining. To be an “oldie” would be presumably closer to death and ineffectual. A new, young thinker is a worthy counterpoint to a dilapidated luddite. The reader becomes part of a large network of individuals that have the might of numbers behind them. If one reads the message, one is automatically included, unless they choose to be ridiculed along with the rest of the “oldies.”

These “oldies” in opposition are simply unaware of their own subjugation. As a member of the knowing and unified counterculture, one can see the perils of the plight of the “oldies.” This knowledge on the part of the reader does nothing to improve the cause of the opposition since they simply are ignorant. The first page of this narrative fragment exemplifies the identity as an idiot (Figure 5). In this cartoon, a person of authority, as is suggested by his homogenous uniform of suit and tie, stares off into the distance reciting the rights of the people while remaining unaware of the person peacefully waiting behind him who is attempting to engage him in a conversation. Both figures age as the cartoon progresses. The last cartoon frame shows the older man in authority who has just blown up his surroundings, wildly screaming, “JUST WHAT in the HELL do you expect to accomplish with all this senseless VIOLENCE?!!!” Here, the authority figure is clearly ignorant of his

own actions and the actions of those peaceably entreating him for change. This authority figure is part of a larger culture that revels in its ignorance. As one writer states, “the average kiwi has a weak concept of social justice and tends to label agitators as ‘grizzlers’ and ‘trouble makers’ without pausing to consider the rights and wrongs of the matter.” In this passage there are no inclusive pronouns, just the displaced and distanced “average” kiwi that does not have a place within the morally elevated and unified counterculture, which understands the true path to social change.

Earwig 6: Responsibility and the Honorable Citizen

Drawing from the solidarity cultural theme in the previous narrative fragment, the cultural value of responsibility emerges—a shared responsibility for each and every reader. One contributor writes, in this 6th edition, dated only as 1972, “We must give our brothers and sisters the support the community should be giving.” Another states, “We must not risk any of our brothers and sisters being destroyed in systematizing machines.” Clearly, the onus is on the reader, who has a responsibility to help correct the situation. Society can be changed only when those who have access to this knowledge actually act upon their insight.

At some points in the narrative fragment, the tone shifts from requests to demands for responsible action. One contributor proclaims that readers must “freak out on media and if you can’t manage that, piss off and start a commune up the Wanganui River.” The language is explicit: “There is a DUTY to publish the many facts which other media try to respect.” *Earwig* does not act out of profit or even the cultural values of love, anti-governance, or anger. Rather, it is the cultural value of responsibility that drives *Earwig* to continue its publications and pursue the truth.

Emerging from this narrative of responsibility is the identity of an honorable citizen. What kind of person truly has honor within society? In many cases, this identity is defined

by what a person is not. This counter-identity is a judge who puts people in prison to “hide their mistakes.” The counter-identity of a dishonorable person is a “pig,” or police officer, who is a “capitalist” and follows a “set of rules and they don’t ask whether the rules are good/bad/indifferent. It’s their JOB, you see.” Such dishonor embodies a person who is not a tyrant “masquerading as god.” A person who controls “the new media, the police force, the law courts, the army, and ultimately the law.” Such dishonor is embedded in Prime Minister Robert Muldoon, who is pictured as having a montage of little replicated heads coming out of his mouth (Figure 6). Muldoon has nothing of honor or merit to say, but, rather, rattles on in perpetuity for his own self-gratification. Instead of respecting only oneself, a person with honor follows “the cardinal rule—respect each other.” This identity is based on the precept that we must behave in ways that maximize “what we can do for each other” rather than “how much can I get out of him/them.”

Earwig 7: Sexual Egalitarianism and the Changing Gender Roles

A predominant image in this narrative fragment, from the undated, seventh edition, shows a naked woman with a gas mask on, plucking leaves off of a flower (Figure 7). This woman represents a version of femininity that is not prone to the trickery of romance and cannot be swayed simply by the fragrance of a well-placed daisy. Rather, this egalitarian “new” woman sees through the façade of sexual relations and argues for transparency and freedom. The first article within this narrative fragment is titled, “Ladies, Get on Top for a Better Orgasm.”

Germaine Greer, the Australian-born writer who penned the international best seller *The Female Eunuch*, wrote the article. She argues that “the prevalence of the missionary position of fucking in the Western world seems to mean a widespread unfairness in sex.” Without the opportunity to explore different sexual positions that might be more gratifying for women, sex has become yet another political act that disenfranchises them. “Once you have thrown

your leg over your man you have made a political gesture. You have taken command of your own sexuality and emancipated your pelvic musculature from a lifetime of unsuitable bearing.” Therefore, the cultural value of sexual egalitarianism is mandatory and to be pursued at all costs. “The man who can’t cope with the female on top of him is a male chauvinist,” and should be remanded for his sexist behavior that is no longer appropriate in an egalitarian society.

This emergent, cultural value is portrayed to be strikingly different from the values of chauvinism that have pervaded society in the past. A separate contributor writes that “this is the year for everyone to go back and start again, to come together again, in new ways, to build our culture without male chauvinism, bad drugs and crazy freak outs. We should try to build our culture once more, only this time with self-awareness and self-control.” The chauvinism that has plagued society is a central part of societal inequality. The cultural value of sexual egalitarianism revealed a new identity for both men and women that depended on radically different gender norms.

The identity of reconstituted gender norms is greatly dependent upon men, given that men have traditionally held such a dominating role in society. Men needed to take responsibility for their previous actions and release some of their power according to this new identity. This meant that men, in particular, needed to understand that “until you get competent, you’re the victim of your surroundings. To be part of the system when there is something better—even if it’s only in the act of eating white bread—is to think pig. We’re not giving you the message, we’re suggesting the alternative. Learn to survive. Think free.” There is an unequivocal argument in this passage that a new, revolutionary alternative is based on a society that is not founded in male domination. Such a society would emancipate not only women as sexual objects but humanity as equal partners in social change.

Earwig 8.5: Purposeful Change and the Successful Activist

The final narrative fragment revealed a cultural value of slow and purposeful change. This was confirmed repeatedly by the visual use of snails throughout this narrative fragment in the undated 8th edition. In one image a snail is emerging out of a coffee cup. In another, a snail inspects the text surrounding him. Symbolically, the snail has meaning for gradual, purposeful change. True systemic change will not occur through the impulsive actions of a few. Rather, change will occur through purposeful planning and methodical changes in behavior that are undertaken by a solidified and engaged group of revolutionaries.

Contributors to *Earwig 8.5* argued for a complete reversal of previous confrontational approaches to social change. In doing so, the producers of *Earwig* noted, “A few of our readers grizzle that we don’t provide directives which would help people get together to sort things out.” They counter by arguing that the system can only be changed through methodical and purposeful choices. As one author wrote, we “need a very considerable degree of unity” before large rallies can be planned. “You require support from scientists and technocrats who understand what the problems are all about. You need community leaders, lawmakers, administrators, doctors, engineers, philosophers and artists no less than ‘workers.’” Such an approach does not offer much immediate gratification but aims for a longitudinal goal.

Only by adhering to a cultural value that celebrates planned, purposeful methodical change can one achieve an identity as a successful activist. As another contributor writes, “It is the slow, plodding development that all of us must do if we are to challenge the ‘system.’ It is not enough to be proficient at raving—we must master all the important aspects of technology, administration, law, art etc. if only to know what to discard in building a richer and better alternative.”

<a>Cultural Values, Identity, and Resistance

As was the case in Atkinson's (2006) work examining the 2002 North American Anarchist Gathering, the purpose of this study was to rely upon qualitative analysis in examining the constitutive elements of narrative and narrative fragmentation. Through this analysis, an overarching meta-narrative might be explored, which would help to explain these narrative fragments in their entirety. It could then be possible to qualify what kind of resistance, according to Mumby's (1997) scale of hegemonic resistance, was present.

The meta-narrative emerging from *Earwig* as a cultural site was a fundamental ideological discord between the values and identities in mainstream culture and those who read *Earwig*. This meta-narrative was manifest in the first narrative fragment through the emergent cultural value of love toward "one another." Further analysis found that this love could only be explained as affection toward those who shared the same values and identity. Individuals in mainstream society held values that were simply too divergent to support. Throughout each narrative fragment examined for this research, the opposition held counter-identities of being idiots that were simply unaware of the morally superior cultural values held by those within the *Earwig* revolution. This was demonstrated repeatedly through depictions of police, the law, and the sexual dominance of men. This ignorance could only be countered through a righteous revolution that would inevitably result in a more just and humane society. Such a society can only be achieved through the steadfast unity, responsibility, moral superiority, and solidarity that is interwoven within a purposeful and methodical organization. If such a group could persist and continue to thrive, then mainstream society would finally be educated and led through progressive, societal development.

Thus, there were several constitutive elements of these narrative fragments that emerged through this research. The first was that mainstream society was ignorant. Their behavior was due to the fact that they simply did not know there was a more just and

appropriate way of life. Second, given the pervasiveness of mass media that indoctrinates those within the mainstream, the only way to change society was to create an alternative society. Third, such an alternative society had to be based on the cultural values of love, anti-governance, moral superiority, solidarity, responsibility, sexual egalitarianism, and purposeful action.

The path to this alternative society required resistance against mainstream forces, which were mainly characteristic of emancipatory resistance, although not completely so. There was evidence of hegemonic resistance as well, which aligns with Mumby's (1997) argument that the two are not mutually exclusive. However, resistance was primarily emancipatory given the clear delineations between mainstream and alternative identities. Such divisions were clear in the polarizing identities between the ignorant opposition and the morally superior alternative culture that existed within the *Earwig* community. Police were capitalist pigs, whereas an alternate sphere existed to create "our own channels of communication and transaction." Capitalists themselves were only focused on "beating" those around them, while the alternate humanist "believe[s] that people are to be valued for what they are rather than for what they have." The gender-conscious revolutionary, whether that be a man or a woman, enjoys sex as a mutually beneficial exchange between two equal partners, while the mainstream male is a "chauvinist" who is "full of castration fears." Throughout the narrative fragments examined here, there was a superior identity that opposed the antiquated thinking of mainstream culture.

Modes of resistance were also carefully explained and methods of domination were described in detail. This form of resistance is emancipatory as it provides people with the ability to create an alternative space based on the knowledge they have gained. The revelations explained within *Earwig* would not be immediately obvious to those not acutely interested in purpose and intent of democratic structures. For example, *Earwig* describes

advertising as an institution that “gives the impression of doing more for NZ culture than the government, thus appearing benevolent and high minded instead of coldly financial.” The view of advertising as a “benevolent and high minded” developing force in culture is a perspective not likely to be detailed in most classrooms. This type of information builds knowledge about the seemingly intractable systems of dominance. Rather than storming an advertising agency or vandalizing a billboard, *Earwig* challenged readers to understand how advertising fit within a larger social network of controlling institutions and then urged them to create their own, alternative ideology.

There was very little within *Earwig* that advocated direct protest or resistance. Indeed, most direct calls were for the immediate creation of an alternative state of consciousness that sat outside of mainstream confines. Without direct confrontation against institutions and systems of oppression, the actual need for these systems of oppression becomes far less obvious. However, evidence of hegemonic resistance was found in the dichotomous representations of mainstream and alternative societies and the absolutist requirement of uniform solidarity. Such a monolithic perspective of “us” versus “them” would undoubtedly overtake any internal dissenting positions. The plenary position presented throughout *Earwig* left no room for discussion or debate. Therefore, those in mainstream society can never share within the revolution unless they eschew any and all principles learned from that system of indoctrination. Potential participants or those loosely affiliated with such an alternative space would likely be shifted “outside,” thereby disillusioned and disaffected by this consummate approach to resistance. In the process, the revolution would be potentially limited.

However, the hegemonic resistance of absolutism does not measure when compared against the many forms of emancipatory resistance found in this narrative. Clearly, there were hegemonic forms of resistance that were poised to hinder the growth of those supporting *Earwig*, but the emancipatory resistance found overwhelmingly throughout these

narrative fragments helped to provide information for an alternative ideology that promised equality and justness for all its inhabitants.

<a>Conclusion

This research aimed to expose the cultural values and identities inherent in *Earwig*; extrapolate a meta-narrative that could be associated with such a cultural site; and examine how the narrative would impact emancipatory or hegemonic forms of resistance. This approach helped to gauge the importance of *Earwig* for the community that supported it, and also provided a replicable method for analyzing radical, alternative media.

Through this analysis of narrative fragments, it became clear that *Earwig* most certainly attempted to subvert the “hierarchy of access” with their open policy and their direct condemnations of those in authoritative power. These condemnations came in the form of personalized, native reporting that relied on self-disclosure—a key quality of alternative media as defined by previous scholars.

Earwig told stories of sexual dominance, police brutality, imprisonment, drug use, and love, using the voice of the first-person. These were highly intimate tales that drew the reader closer to the cause at hand. The producers of *Earwig* drew upon “native reporting” to compile each narrative fragment and assembled the content in such a way that clear themes could be seen. These cohesive narrative fragments emerged despite the lack of any clear directive to contributors—at least none that could be seen by the casual reader. Obviously, it is not known what content remained on the cutting-room floor, but the end result of this anarchist, counterculture magazine, was eight narrative fragments that each had clear cultural values and identities represented. This result poses interesting questions for future research when one considers the open-access format of many radical cultural sites on the Internet.

More work should explore if common narratives emerge from the open-source sites online or if there are differences between online and offline content in that regard.

As was discussed earlier, alternative media have the capacity for “transforming spectators into active participants of everyday dealings and events affecting their lives” (Tracy, 2007, p. 272). However, this capacity is often limited as much by the narrative fragments that evolve from such texts as the structural constraints that exist outside of an alternative communication sphere. The narrative fragments examined for this study revealed a fundamental and opposing ideological difference between the values and identities in mainstream culture and those held by readers of *Earwig*. These differences were countered through largely emancipatory forms of resistance. This form of resistance would likely prove positive for the evolution of an alternative sphere. However, the instances of hegemonic resistance, coupled with the very real cultural constraints within society, may have prohibited such change from occurring.

It is also not known whether social and political movements outside of *Earwig*’s readership ever connected with those producing the magazine. No group was ever specifically named within the pages of *Earwig*. Strong connections with social movements are often a marker of alternative media; however, they are not mandatory as an essential quality of what defines alternative media. Yet, the lack of such a connection may have contributed to the decline of *Earwig*. The magazine stopped publication in 1973 and was never revitalized. Although, it could be suggested that the slow, plodding pace of social change continued on and the cultural values and identities found in *Earwig* were likely sourced and reconfigured into other alternative publications.

This study was exploratory in that it appropriated Atkinson’s (2006) work on a physical, cultural site to the analysis of alternative media. Future research should continue to appropriate this methodology to examine categories of power within other forms of radical

media. This work could also examine the development of their causes in relation to the modes of resistance found within their media. Other research could also examine alternative media artifacts that rely solely on visual media to better understand how cultural values, identities, and forms of resistance emerge from images alone rather than in concert with accompanying text.

Figure 1: Cover of *Earwig 1*



Figure 2: Illustration *Earwig2* with “The Second Time” poem inset by Bruce Jackson.



Figure 3: Police “Pig” illustration from unknown origin in *Earwig 3*



Figure 4: Photograph of lesbian protester in *Earwig* 4



Figure 5: Cartoon of unknown origin from *Heralding Earwig* 6



Figure 6: Muldoon montage from *Earwig 6*



Figure 7: Cover of *Earwig 7*



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