Devilishly Deviant: The Performative Resistance of WITCH Activism

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MA Global Order in Historical Perspective

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"*For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.*" (1 Samuel, 15:23)

Following the 2017 Women's March in Washington D.C., homemade signs went viral proclaiming: "We are the Granddaughters of the Witches You Could Not Burn" (Alter 2017). The reclamation of this historically stigmatised female identity went further: a distinct contingent of self-identifying witches was present on the day (Schultz 2017). This was only the beginning of a supernatural battle against Donald Trump. Under the hashtag #MagicResistance, a global community of 13,000 "resistance witches" collectively cast spells on President Trump during his time in office (Burton 2017). The *New York Times* argues that this revival of the witch is not only a political phenomenon, but a cultural one too; she is now an omnipresent figure in the world of books, podcasts, and Instagram posts (Bennet 2019). Even within this context, "[w]hen a group of anonymous protesters show up at rallies […] wearing pointy black hats, people pay attention" (Birnbaum and Lancaster 2017). Thus, striking images of W.I.T.C.H., Women's International Troublemaker Conspiracy from Hell, at a counter-protest to a white supremacist rally in Boston, Massachusetts, also went viral in August of the same year.

The attention generated by covens of W.I.T.C.H.es, formed in a host of U.S. cities following Trump's election, has engendered a new appreciation of the original WITCH: Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, a feminist direct action protest group operating from 1968 to 1970 in the United States.[1] Combining "theatre, revolution, magic, [and] joy," WITCH protested (mainly women's) oppression under structures of capitalism, patriarchy, and U.S. imperialism (WITCH 1968). Dressing up as witches and casting hexes, the women who constituted WITCH targeted the systemic—as symbolised by Wall Street and Bridal Fairs—to more localised issues—including transit fare hikes, inflationary supermarket prices, and the firing of a university professor—with a humorous and magical theatricality (Morgan 1970, 1977).

While a handful of scholars,[2] some utilising WITCH/W.I.T.C.H. specifically, have already investigated the use of witchcraft and a collective witch identity within contemporary feminist politics, there is an aspect of WITCH outside of religion and identity work that deserves attention: their performative, guerrilla theatre style of protest. WITCH clearly possessed an awareness of

[1] Note that the modern revival of W.I.T.C.H. will be discussed with an acronym that includes full stops, while the original group will be referred to as WITCH without punctuation.
[2] See: Schweigert, 2018; Sollée, 2017; and Scheurich, 2022.

performance aesthetics, paying attention to visual aspects of their protests, which they deliberately employed to transgress norms and garner public attention. The revival of W.I.T.C.H. demonstrates that the attention WITCH generated through their performances is not temporally limited but extends to the present day with productive effect. Further, W.I.T.C.H. similarly gained public recognition due to the visual nature of their protest; their witch costumes made them stand out, highlighting and delivering their message to a wider audience. Since both group's use of the witch was more satirical than spiritual, and the history of the witch heavily involves the productive spectacle of her burning at the stake, this alternative aspect of WITCH's protests seems worthy of scholarly attention.

The performative nature of WITCH protests goes beyond the adoption of a witch identity. How WITCH prefiguratively lived out another political reality will be analysed, taking prefiguration as "the creation of alternatives in the here and now" (Maeckelbergh 2011, 3). In this, it will be shown how they employed the tactic of "guerrilla theatre": the spontaneous dramatization of a political cause in a public area with the intention to both "teach [and] be an example of change." Guerrilla theatre is almost always performative, taken to mean an act with constitutive power; this is because it seeks to "impact and modify the world beyond the performance" (St John 2008, 179). As such, it defies usual understandings of protest and resistance as purely acts of "opposition to, destructive against, or critical of the prevailing order" (Lilja 2022, 154). Instead, we shall see how resistance can be present and future orientated, progressive and transgressive, oppositional and constructive. To explore this, the following research question will be pursued:

How did WITCH perform a politics of resistance within their protests?

The aim of this question is not to identify the definitive and quantifiable political impact of WITCH, but to explore the practices of resistance that they actualised within their protests. Typically, studies into historical and contemporary instances of protest employ a politics of demand approach, establishing the "for whom we speak" and the "for what political objective we act" of social movements. This engenders a focus on processes of political mobilisation and consequences for policymaking (Amoore and Hall 2013, 95; Maiguashca 2011). Instead, taking resistance to be a performative practice, we can ask what it is that resistance does in its moment of articulation (Brassett 2016). In line with this, we can interrogate how resistance is "constructive," or how it produces new "knowledge, subjectivities, *and* alternative institutions" (Lilja 2022, 150, emphasis in original). Thus, WITCH's protest will be analysed in terms of the "alternative political imaginaries" that they prefiguratively performed, empathetically "taking seriously" the intention behind these performances (De Goede 2005; Abraham 2019).

A focus on the performance and performative force of WITCH's protest can provide insights that are widely relevant to contemporary transnational and global activism, beyond the bounds of the feminist movement in its global or U.S. form. In our current media-saturated, "entertainment politics" age, (trans)national social movements and activists must employ increasingly creative tactics to capture public attention and gain recognition for their causes (Malmvig 2022). Creative in this context refers to a divergence from "conventional" methods and "rituals" of protests, such as marches, strikes, and rallies (Maiguashca 2011, 537; St John 2008, 168). Yet, creative does not necessarily mean novel; while Just Stop Oil became infamous for their (attempted) destruction of paintings in late 2022, this was a tactic that women demanding the right to vote had deployed prior to World War I (Gayle 2022; Richards 2019, 69). While not the subject of this thesis, this trans-historical current of shared repertoires of activism highlights the contemporary relevance of creative, non-traditional protest as both an ongoing repertoire of resistance available to transnational social movements and one with the potential to help achieve desired social transformations.

Yet, the under-appreciated nature of this historical parallel is evidence of a general scholarly neglect of non-traditional civil disobedience as a force of social change, and of women as historical actors with political agency and potential. WITCH offers a resolution to this gap, being situated within a global and domestic high point of both women's organising and creative protest: the 1960s. The simultaneous revolt of students, anti-colonial nationalists, anti-communists, black power advocates, countercultural radicals, and feminists embarking on their "second wave" produced an "experimental laboratory of emancipatory […] politics," within which the tactic of guerrilla theatre was first concocted (Chaplin and Money 2017; St John 2009, 168).[3] However, the sheer quantity of resistance that occurred in the 1960s has served to obscure the legacy of WITCH. Despite the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) across the "developed" world heralding a new feminist era, Evans (2015, 142) argues that the WLM has retroactively been relegated to "the edges of the [feminist] movement."[4] As "the striking arm" of the WLM in the U.S., WITCH has faced a similar fate (Morgan 1970, 538); the group usually appears only briefly within domestic histories of the period, while its mentioning in international histories of this rebellious decade is even rarer.[5] This treatment contrasts the seriousness with which the authorities

[3] Second wave feminism refers to the inclusion of social and economic rights within the feminist agenda, contrasting first wave feminism's focus on women's suffrage.
[4] Groups adopting the WLM label were present in Western Europe, Australasia, Asia, and North America from the late 1960s to 1970s (Carr 2019).
[5] Evans (2009) is unique in this regard, providing a gendered analysis of the "international 1968," which includes WITCH.

regarded WITCH at the time, making them the subject of FBI surveillance (Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities 1975, 576-584).

In contrast to this scholarly neglect, this study is undertaken with the belief that WITCH has a global and domestic, contemporary and historical relevance as a group that conceptualised itself within a global revolutionary movement for liberation—of women, of African Americans, of Vietnam, of people generally—and employed a unique style of performance protest. Furthering Maiguashca's (2011, 546-547) argument that feminist practice, as well as theory, can help us "rethink taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes the political, in general, and political practice, in particular," a study of WITCH has the potential to expand material and ideational understandings of resistance, citizenship, rights, and global politics.

Structure

What will follow in the subsequent chapter is an explanation of the approach of this study, addressing the methodology of "taking seriously," and the theoretical framework of performance and performativity. Afterwards, the central concept of resistance will be expanded upon to map out the intellectual terrain to which this study, of a particular form and instance of resistance, will be an addition. Within this section, it will also be shown how studies of resistance build on crucial feminist scholarship within the discipline of International Relations (IR).

In chapter 3, the historical context of WITCH will be briefly outlined. For reasons of clarity and space, this will be a history of U.S. domestic politics and protest. While WITCH conceptualised themselves as part of a global struggle, their activities remained mainly limited to the U.S., with interventions into the realm of foreign policy being their most significant engagement with the international.[6] Thus, the development of WITCH within a U.S. Cold War context will be central to this historical inquiry.

Chapter 4 will then analyse how WITCH operationalised a constructive and oppositional politics of resistance within their protests, studying how they not only critiqued current conditions, but acted out an alternative social reality. WITCH will be seen to challenge American culture (along with its imperialistic tendencies) under the guise of "witch-hood," an alternative form of womanhood developed from an alternative conceptualisation of the history of witch-hunting, using practices of satire and the supernatural.

[6] Morgan (1970, 538), Bruley (2016, 732), and Griffin (2005, 58) suggest the existence of WITCH covens in Canada, the UK, and Japan.

Finally, Chapter 5 will offer concluding remarks, returning to the research question and highlighting potential avenues for further research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical, Methodological, and Research Foundations

Preparing the ground for an analysis of WITCH's performance of resistance, this chapter will set out the methodological and theoretical framework of this study, followed by an evaluation of existing literature in relation to resistance in IR.

Methodology and Sources

As a methodology, the notion of "taking seriously" refers to a thorough contextualisation of the meanings and principles that inform choices of action, hence a cultural anthropological case study. The phrase is taken from Abraham (2018, 25), who articulates his approach to studying the performance activism of the West Hollywood freaks, the Haight-Ashbury Diggers, and the Lower East Side Yippies as an attempt to "take countercultural radicals seriously, on their own terms." To do this, he examines, through extensive archival research, how their protest practices and aesthetics aligned with their core ideologies. For Abraham (2018, 12), this enables a fairer, more accurate interpretation of their politics compared to an approach that attempts "to fit the square peg of the counterculture into the round hole of the New Left." Methodological similarities exist here with Rossdale (2019) and Rowe's (2013) ethnographic investigation into anti-militarist activism in the UK and U.S. in a post-9/11 context. Due to the contemporariness of the groups they studied, Rossdale and Rowe could undertake extensive fieldwork investigation, carrying out participant observation within meetings and demonstrations, along with group member interviews. While a slightly different approach, the underlying methodological motivation was similar: to discover the "tactics, strategies and philosophies at the heart of anti-militarist campaigning," enabling an assessment of such campaigns on these terms (Rossdale 2019, 3). Rather than a method of data-collection, ethnography is employed here as a method of "intimate and empathetic understanding" (Rossdale 2019, 7-8). The aim of this study is to analyse the resistance practices of WITCH through a similar frame of understanding and interpretation.

To achieve this, a range of primary sources have been consulted including WITCH leaflets, manifestos, and curses, along with images and (self-)reports of WITCH protest events. Further, the autobiographical writings of a founding WITCH member, Robin Morgan, as well as recent interviews conducted with original WITCH members, have been consulted. Together, these sources provide a detailed picture of the "ideologies, practices, and aesthetics" that constituted WITCH, enabling a greater appreciation of the intention and meaning behind their protests

(Abraham 2018, 6). Yet, when analysing the resistance practices of WITCH, the focus has been narrowed to documentation from four particular protests. These protests have been selected as exemplary of three themes of resistance—socio-cultural, political, and economic—and based on the criterion of being the most well reported instances of WITCH protest.

The normative reasoning behind the selection of WITCH as a case study stems from a desire to recover "neglected and marginalized voices from the feminist past" (Leng 2016, 1). While Abraham (2018, 11) believes that radical countercultural groups have received "unfair" treatment within political histories of the 1960s in the U.S., general tendencies within the discipline of History (which were first critiqued by members of the WLM, engendering the subdiscipline of Women's History) would suggest that WITCH have fared worse. Consequently, Abraham's approach, with modifications, will be applied to WITCH.

Theory

When analysing WITCH, their protests will be taken as not only performances, but performative, as is inherent in a prefigurative politics that seeks to bring an alternative social reality into being. This draws on the theory of performativity, which will now be explained.

The notion of a constitutive performance lies at the heart of Butler's (1990, 2015) theory of performativity. Developed from an analysis of gender, Butler concluded that the gendered body is brought into being through its repetitive enactment of gender norms—actions with a signifying power to "say" a gender identity. This instance of vocalisation is understood as a "speech act": a linguistic utterance that goes beyond a mere description of reality, to its inscription. Butler emphasises that gender is not inherent but *performed* through bodily action. Within these bodily performances, in which one performs an action to the extent that they fulfil it, one's gender identity is constructed, consolidated, and made real.

The difference between a theory of performativity and a theory of performance, where individuals "put on an act" that will "display for others the meaning of [a] social situation," lies in the emphasis given to subject construction, as well as intentionality versus frequent and subconscious repetition (Braun, Schindler, and Wille 2019, 795). Yet, both performance and performativity have been deployed to denaturalise everyday practices, exposing their constructed and imitative nature. In IR, practices of security and diplomacy have been theorised as rituals with pre-set scripts that both display sovereignty and have the power to bring it into being (Amoore and Hall 2010; Day and Wedderburn 2022). By highlighting mechanisms of social construction,

these studies display the porous nature of the boundary between the genuine and the artificial, demonstrating that the genuine is a naturalised form of the artificial.

Prefigurative performance protest seeks a similar destabilisation of what is considered real, blurring the boundaries between future and present, reality and utopia, as one seeks to "create a new society by acting it out" in the here and now (Goldhaft 2015, quoted in Abraham 2018, 19). When we consider prefigurative politics in terms of performativity, that is we consider them in relation to what they bring into being, we will inherently be taking them seriously and focusing on the constructive aspects of their resistance. For this reason, the theory of performativity will be deployed within this study.

Resistance (with)in IR

Resistance is a cross-disciplinary category relevant for almost any study that deals with the concept of agency; its Latin roots translate as "to endure or withstand," thus, resistance can be understood as a mode of existence within "the strategic field of power relations" that constitutes a subject's context (Brassett 2016, 186-187; Foucault 2005 quoted in Brassett 2016, 187). Subject-orientated, resistance generates a research agenda for studying "hidden or less dramatic forms of agency" than have been hitherto appreciated within IR (Lilja 2022, 153). Similarly, Women's History endeavours to expose the historical agency of women that was previously minimised or ignored. Both subdisciplines owe much to feminist resistance as theorising, which produced new notions of what knowledge is, what is worth knowing, and who can be "knowers" (Eschle and Maiguashca 2006, 120). Consequently, and in line with the feminist commitments of WITCH, this review of relevant literature on resistance politics will privilege women's resistant political activities, both historic and contemporary. Firstly, the concept of resistance, and its development out of critical feminist IR will be explained. Following this, the resistance politics of women within social movements and transnational advocacy networks will be addressed, followed by a wider range of constructive, playful, and performative instances of resistance with more direct relevance for WITCH. The latter section will not be limited to the actions of feminist women but will mention them where possible.

The study of resistance in IR stems from a re-politicisation and democratisation of "the international," making it something socially constructed and contestable, rather than a domain of states with certain "rules of the game." Feminist theorising has been central to this process, problematising binaries of public/private, socio-cultural/political, and local/global to demonstrate the truth and palindromic nature of statements like "the personal is political" and "the personal is

international" (Enloe 2014). Enloe pioneered this approach in *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases;* she documented how the lives of individual women were enmeshed in the world economy, international politics, and global relations of power by investigating how they interacted with, were affected by, and contributed to global phenomenon like tourism, militarism, and international trade. However, if we accept that individuals create and reinforce political, economic, and social structures on a local to a global level, then they must also be able to challenge, resist, and potentially alter these structures. This is not only the re-politicisation of international politics, opening its "taken-for-granted" assumptions to dispute, but its democratisation, a re-assertion of the influence of domestic populaces. Such insights form the intellectual background of this study.

Processes of negotiation, contestation, and possible modification can be conceptualised under the broad category of "resistance." This incorporates a range of deviant responses to power including the collective opposition of traditional social movements, potentially subversive minor everyday acts, and those "constructive" attempts to "create, […], cultivate and experiment with" an alternative to dominant structures and power relations (Lilja 2022, 150). While the former has been privileged as "an engine of 'real' social change," the latter two may produce "ongoing small-scale differences that might appear trivial, yet still hold the potential to create a major societal effect" (Lilja 2022, 152, 166).

While each form of resistance is not necessarily discrete, examples of them will now be discussed. Guiding this assessment is an attempt to address the question of how women have shown resistance—moulding the international sphere through opposition, subversion, and the offering of alternatives—to the "white male order" of international politics. The intellectual canon of IR suggests that women have generally failed to think internationally, resistant or otherwise, while its canonical history corroborates that they have failed to act internationally too. Corrective canons that include the historical intellectual work of women are now being undertaken by Hutchings, Owens, Dunstan, and Rietzler (2022). Moreover, the histories of major international political events have been rewritten to highlight the influence, constructive and obstructive, of women.

Rupp (1998), Marino (2019), and Chen (1995) offer new historical interpretations of women's role in shaping international organisations, highlighting effective instances of resistance. Rupp (1998) studies how an international women's movement was formed at the start of the twentieth century around issues of women's suffrage and peace and justice. These women worked hard from within and without the League of Nations to keep social and humanitarian issues on the agenda, ensuring that the League "would not have been the same place without the[ir] insistent lobbying" (Rupp 1998, 222). Marino (2019) explores the efforts of six Pan-American female

activists and the effects of their "feminismo americano" on the development of international human rights around the mid-century mark. These women produced the doctrine of "women's rights are human rights" that was to be codified in the UN's Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Updating this to the latter end of the twentieth century, Chen's (1995) study of the UN's "Decade for Women" (1975-1985) continues to conceptualise influence as flowing from an NGO-led international women's movement towards the UN. Aligning these studies with broader work within the field of IR, the women involved can be conceptualised as "norm entrepreneurs," or as part of "transnational advocacy networks." Such terms explain how non-state actors can "interact with each other, with states, and with international organizations," to influence global politics by creating new standards of "appropriate or desirable behavior" and persuading states to adhere (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Keck and Sikkink, 1999).

The women studied by Rupp, Marino, and Chen enacted resistance towards the white male status quo of international politics by actively organising and campaigning to have their perspectives heard. In doing so, they exerted a productive influence on the development of the international sphere, engendering modifications to dominant structures through opposition. This scholarly work is important for demonstrating how individual women can be relevant international actors, an important starting point for an analysis of WITCH.

Yet, Rupp, Marino, and Chen prioritise resistance as a concerted challenge and "an instrumentally driven course of action" (Maiguashca 2011, 537). They, thus, value resistance in relation to its ability "to change the course of decision-making at the political centre" (Brassett 2016, 172). This is not necessarily an inaccurate, but an incomplete picture of what resistance can and could be. Studies by Lilja (2022), Scott (1985), Butler (1990), and Brasset (2016) can help engender greater awareness of how "resistance can be expressed in multifaceted ways and diverse locations" (Eschle and Maiguashca 2007, 296).

Lilja (2022) studies the contemporary resistance of women in Japan within the #MeToo movement, and Scott (1985), the resistance practices of Malaysian peasants during the Green Revolution. As a global movement of solidarity, the resistance #MeToo enacts is less instrumentally strategic than other social movements. Rather than producing a coherent programme of reform, the focus is on enabling and potentially ameliorating women's survival within a given (patriarchal) context. Instead of using this to dismiss #MeToo, particularly in Japan where limited political successes were achieved in terms of legislation or altering the hegemonic cultural ideal of "comfort women," Lilja seeks to emphasise the constructive qualities of its resistance. Consequently, she documents how new discourses of gender and narratives of sexual

harassment were produced, enabling Japanese women to more openly discuss their experiences of unwanted sexual advances. Tweeting a personal story of sexual harassment can perhaps be conceptualised as a new "weapon of the weak," in line with Scott's (1985) terminology, essentially referring to an everyday act of subversion. In his study, Scott (1985, xvi) posits foot dragging, false compliance, and, moreover, gossip and slander as "ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups." These actions may not prevent the exploitative extraction of labour, food, taxes, and rent, but they are evidence of a "prosaic but constant struggle" in the context of such extraction. In this scenario, the practice of resistance can be as simple as the transgressive choice "to do *this* and not *that*," even when the consequences of such a choice may be minimal (Saunders and Crilley 2019, 451, emphasis in original).

Lilja and Scott's work demonstrates that resistance can be practiced non-instrumentally and away from "the political centre" of international organisations and states. While Butler (2015) has theorised how assembly can be an important performative practice of resistance, an articulation of popular sovereignty that acts as a reminder of "how legitimation functions in democratic theory and practice," it is important to know that physicality does not set the limits of resistance. Yet not only where those practicing resistance not present at sites of power; they also did not direct their resistance at/through these sites. Scott studies resistance within local class relations, and Lilja, local gender relations. Under negotiation in these interactions is the dominant culture of their contexts, rather than a certain policy regime, thus, demands against the state are not articulated. Such an insight is important for WITCH, as the group did not always engage with the state in their protests.

Building on this, one cultural and yet corporal practice of resistance that stands out as relevant to WITCH is laughter since WITCH's transgressive protests not only shocked, but also amused. Critchley (2002, 10, emphasis in original) argues that "true" humour "brings about a change in situation," not materially, but ideationally: the defamiliarization of the familiar, the "*surrealization* of the real," which, in turn, produces "a consciousness of contingency." A joke is an "anti-rite," a "play upon form" with accepted societal practices, combining elements of what we expect with those which we do not to highlight "the sheer contingency or arbitrariness of the social rites in which we engage." As such, humour is a practice of resistance since it undermines the authoritative status of such practices, creating space for the imagination of alternatives. The work of Butler (1990) and Brassett (2016) demonstrates practical examples of this, selected for their combination of three themes relevant to WITCH: resistance, performance, and laughter.

Butler (1990) and Brassett (2016) study resistance within the specific cultural performance instances of drag and stand-up comedy. The relevance for WITCH is twofold, since their protests

were also creative performances, and their demands for revolution often prioritised socio-cultural transformation. Within the parodic practice of drag, Butler (1990, 200-201) sees potential for the resistance of gender norms through "subversive repetition." Drag, as mimetic while also excessive and transgressive, destabilise gender binaries. Further, "in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself," creating "a subversive laughter" that questions hegemonic claims of "truth and falsity" in relation to gender (Butler 1990, 175, 200; Pullen and Rhodes 2013, 518). For Brassett, British stand-up comedy has the potential to subvert the dominant and produce alternative form(s) of market subjectivity. He conceptualises joking, irony, and satire as "everyday acts of refusal" that critique and politicise dominant market life within the neoliberal state, producing alternative meanings for daily market practices. Much like the resistance of women in Japan and Malaysian peasants, comic subversion as a form of resistance does not "overcome" its target, whether gender or market subjectivity, but disrupts its complacent status as common sense, engendering an awareness of its contingency. In this, it is performative.

These studies of individualised resistance are important for freeing assessment of dissent from a comparison to some pre-defined "correct" form, intention, and outcome, highlighting instances of diversity in these aspects. Butler and Brassett show that resistance can be joyful and humorous, while Scott and Lilja show that it may be mundane and uneventful. All this starkly contrasts traditional images of political struggle as the angered masses taking to the streets (Brassett 2016, 170). Yet, WITCH, while they cannot be conceptualised as "the masses," did take their joy, humour, *and* anger onto their streets. Somewhere in between a subversive cultural performance and a mass political movement lies WITCH. To better appreciate this aspect, literature analysing resistance within performative protest will now be discussed.

WITCH is not unique in operationalising light-hearted theatricality or "play" as a protest tactic. Møller Ølgaard (2015) documents how the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, Reclaim the Streets, and Occupy Wall Street have "acted out" an emancipatory politics of play. Using "techniques of performing, clowning, mimicking, and mocking," these groups can be seen to resist a neoliberal governmentality that seeks to engender the subject as an object of control. Through comic appropriation, guerrilla theatre, and prefigurative action, these groups relocate "politics at the site of the subject," exerting political agency through "critique, reflection, and creative desiring-production." Møller Ølgaard argues that play is particularly well suited to "open-ended explorations of new social and political possibilities" as "a *free* practice" with "no defined outcome or sacramental function, no set rules of conduct." Focusing on the historic playful figure of "the clown-fool" and playful environment of the carnival, Amoore and Hall (2013) have studied the former as a method of border-camp activism, while Bogad (2010) has studied the "protestivals"

of the alter-globalization movement. The clown is given a special status "to speak truth to power," and the carnival is a social environment of inversion and transgression, hence both disrupt and disavow the normal order in a similar way to the act of play. Much like with a joke, what occurs during play is a process of denaturalisation or "making strange" that which "is normally accepted, ignored or settled" (De Goede 2005; Amoore and Hall 2013, 103). For this reason, De Goede (2005) argues that comedy and carnival are important methods of criticism that help create a "space for imagining […] alternatives." These studies of playful politics highlight instances of activism where humour, reflexive theatre, and liminality have been combined as a tactic of performative resistance that engenders political alternatives. Such strategies will later be shown to be employed by WITCH, but these studies also demonstrate how an expanded conceptualisation of resistance can be applied to protest, continuing to deprioritise the political centre and assessments of instrumentality.

Finally, returning the focus to women, Cooper-Cunningham (2019) and Richards (2019) offer two examples of the deployment of a performative concept of resistance to the history of feminism. Cooper-Cunningham studies the British suffrage movement but seeks to document suffragette resistance to the state's attempts to produce them as silenced, non-political subjects, rather than chart the rise and achievement of the campaign for suffrage. In this, he highlights hunger striking as an important tool of suffrage resistance as it enabled suffragettes to visually and bodily "speak" their message when vocal articulation proved impossible or insufficient. Further, it demanded the "audience" (the British public, notified through an accompanying poster campaign) to either interpret its practitioner as a "witness to injustice" or a "criminal." In this sense, it was performative of new subject positions. Richards (2019) also seeks to study suffrage as an "ongoing process and practice," rather than an end result. In her "alternative history" of late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century avant-garde feminists, she seeks to uncover how individual women *lived* as citizens—in all their arsonist, insurgent, cross-dressing, and queer forms—undertaking "world making" actions that were constitutive of a reality in which they had political rights. Rather than taking citizenship as a static identity imbued with certain rights by the state, Richards also conceptualised it as performative. Cooper-Cunningham and Richards demonstrate how studies of feminist resistance do not need to forward narratives of progress and political success. Instead, moments of resistance can be studied within their context as will now be pursued with WITCH.

Chapter 3: WITCH in Their Context

WITCH was formed in 1968, a flashpoint of turbulence within a generally tumultuous decade. Governments at the helm of growing and stagnant economies, authoritarian and democratic regimes, communist and capitalist states, stretching from Indonesia and Japan to France and Spain, found their authority challenged by the infamous "1968 generation" (Lipset 1969; Evans 2009). Domestically in the U.S., this phenomenon manifested as "the Movement": a loose coalition of student, Black, anti-war, and radically countercultural activists. None of these groups were exclusively male, yet their male members showed hostility when women within their ranks challenged intra-Movement gender hierarchies. The U.S. WLM and WITCH were a response to this hostility, formed by women who gained the political consciousness and practical capability to organise on their own behalf through their Movement experience. As the Movement in the U.S. both contributed to and acted on a new global sensibility, it is important to consider domestic developments in relation to the international sphere (Klimke 2010). As such, what will follow is the historic development of the Movement out of Cold War politics, and the WLM out of the Movement to better understand why WITCH was formed, what socio-political environment they existed within, and why specific repertoires of activism were employed. This will provide a base on which we can take WITCH "seriously, on their own terms" (Abraham 2019, 25).

The Cold War Consensus and Domestic Discontent

Following the end of World War II, a "cold war consensus" was established in the U.S., actively cultivated through a policy of domestic containment that negatively discouraged certain practices through suspicion and punishment, and actively endorsed others through nationalist propaganda. To protect not only the U.S. as a nation-state, but the "American way of life," private individual behaviour within the nuclear family home became a national security concern and conformity to traditional gender roles—domesticity for women, and economic productivity for men—was re-interpreted as an act of patriotism (Campbell 1989; Rogers-Cooper 2015). The material reality of this is evident; contrasting long-term trends, the 1950s experienced an increase in both marriage and birth rates (May 1988, 8). Sustained levels of economic growth and high employment facilitated this demographic trend, providing economic comfort to single-income middle class families (Marglin and Schor 1989). Consensus was, thus, not only ideological, but socio-economic.

Beneath this "consensus," however, lay disillusionment and discontent. Cold War ideology had minimised opportunities for material redistribution (suspiciously communist) and limited civil

liberties while evoking "equality" and "freedom" as cornerstone values of American liberal democracy (Dudziak 2011). Facing continued racial prejudice within such hypocritical conditions, the civil rights movement underwent a period of radicalisation during the 1960s (Lahav 2004; Hall 2003). Another discontented demographic were women, leading to the resurgence of a broad base women's movement around the same time. Sparked by Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and documented evidence of widespread employment, education, and legal discrimination collated by the President's Commission on the Status of Women, women mobilised around the issue of sex-based discrimination within groups like the National Organisation of Women (May 1988; Evans 2015). Beyond this, post-war demographic trends produced a substantial generational cohort "with unprecedented access to education and affluence," but also unprecedented expectations about what constituted the "American dream," engendering unmet desires (Evans 2009, 331).

Greater domestic diversion from the cold war consensus could be unleashed in the 1960s due to an altered international situation. Decolonisation, the rise of the Non-Aligned Movement, and greater strategic parity between the U.S. and USSR all threatened a bipolar configuration of global politics and the U.S.'s position as the world's most dominant power. Midway through the decade, the situation in Vietnam further delegitimised the U.S.'s moral authority and practical ability to lead even the "free world." Moreover, it deprioritised domestic politics as the defining issue of "U.S. prestige" (Chaplin and Mooney 2017; Campbell 1998; Dudziak 2011, 251). As containment shifted to détente, greater divergence from the domestic consensus could be demonstrated, creating a window of opportunity seized by the maturing, dissatisfied post-war generation.

The Movement

Driven by generational frustration and utopian possibility, both of which were heightened by the hypocrisy and failures of the Vietnam War, the Movement is typically characterised by a triad of groups: the civil rights movement; the student movement or New Left; and the youth or counter-cultural movement (Echols 1989; Klimke 2010). The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and the Youth International Party (Yippies) stand out as significant organisations within the Movement, emblematic of each strand and possessing direct connections to WITCH. These groups desired a fundamental restructuring of the "American System" and society, and in this way, they differed from other political groups who advocated for political and legal reform. By 1967, these groups operated in direct collaboration within the National Conference for New Politics (NCNP) with a shared commitment to ending poverty, racism, and the war in Vietnam (Echols 1989; Hall 2003).

Such coalitions, however, were not tension free, nor long lasting. Notions of "Black Power" and "Black nationalism," emphasising self-segregation over cooperation, were gaining popularity within African American activist circles (Echols 1989; Dudziak 2011; Hall 2003). Yet, while the Black Caucus received their demand for fifty per cent of convention votes at the NCNP, the same degree of sympathy was not extended to female attendees; a similar proposal drafted by Shulamith Firestone and Jo Freeman was intentionally excluded from the conference's agenda. This was a trigger moment for the formation of the first group dedicated to "women's liberation," set up in Chicago by a group of women who had organised a side workshop under the term at the conference (Echols 1989, 48, 53, 65).

Women and Their Movement

Women had been present "in every facet of the 1960s freedom movement" (Evans 2015, 142). They shared the central concerns of the SNCC, SDS, and Yippies not only by being black, students, or young themselves, but also from experiencing life within a society that limited their economic, intellectual, and social opportunities based on their womanhood (Mitchell 1971). Women within the Movement started to realise that their visions for liberation would never be a priority for Movement men, yet they also disagreed with liberal feminists who limited their political programme to one of reform. In response, Movement women began to organise on their own behalf.

The Movement facilitated the development of the WLM in two regards: it essentially provided a crash course in revolutionary political mobilisation, while it simultaneously highlighted the need for women to mobilise for their own liberation. Though the Movement had challenged traditional ideas of manhood—defying tropes of militarism when burning draft cards, and the idea of the "breadwinner husband" through a prioritisation of pleasure over productivity—hierarchies of gender, notions of femininity, and the sexual division of (political) labour remained unchallenged (Abraham 2019; Echols 1989; Evans 2009). Consequently, women found themselves side-lined from decision-making and leadership positions, justified by familiar narratives of female domesticity (Morgan 1977, 107-108; Mitchell 1971). Providing first-hand evidence of the ongoing pervasiveness of sexism, the Movement inspired women to begin articulating direct challenges to this in the same breath that it taught them about the possibility of self-definition and the practicalities of political organising (Evans 2009). Discourses of Black Power, as segregationist doctrines, were particularly influential in this regard. It is within this context that the NCNP acted as trigger, pushing women towards the establishment of their own movement within which they could discuss their desired societal changes without being dismissed as going "too far" (Morgan

1977). Following the Chicagoan women's example, other groups, like the New York Radical Women (NYRW), were quickly established around the country and the first National Women's Liberation Conference was held in August 1968 (Echols 1989). The WLM remained committed to Movement values of anti-racism, anti-militarism, and anti-capitalism, but added an appreciation of oppression under patriarchy to such critical analyses.

The Politics of Protest

Before moving onto WITCH, it is worth considering how the Movement and the WLM operationalised new protest techniques, and how these were geared towards their context. Echols (1989) argues that beyond ideology, a tendency towards expressive rather than strategic politics differentiated Movement groups from other political organisations, making them the "shock troops" of other movements who shared their political goals. The prioritisation of sensationalism and mass media attention can be seen as a response to the rise of new communication technologies which internationalised various forms of media (Klimke 2010). Yet, adaptation, rather than wholesale overthrow, of previous protest techniques is a more accurate description; legacies of 1950s sit-ins, boycotts, and marches remained visible in 1960s yip-ins, draft dodging, and grand scale demonstrations. Emblematic of the latter was the protests outside the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Chicago, 1968. Attended by "anyone who opposed 'politics as usual'," thus attracting ten thousand attendees, the DNC protests demonstrated that discontent had become more visible, but not necessarily more tolerated. Demonstrators faced police brutality and arrest during the event, with eight prominent leaders subsequently indicted for incitement to riot (Lahav 2004). Coming a month after this event, the WLM's first major protest at the 1968 Miss America pageant adopted and adapted techniques from the DNC. Both protest events shared an aim of raising public consciousness through media attention, which the WLM achieved by unfurling a "Women's Liberation" banner in front of national television cameras, and the DNC protest gained through mass attendance. Beyond this, the most notable similarity was the use of a live animal to undermine culturally and politically important figures.[7] Learning from the Convention, however, the Miss America event aimed to minimise confrontation with the police to avoid negative publicity, bodily harm, and legal expenses (Echols 1989). In the Miss America protest and at the DNC, legacies of 1950s domestic containment policies are still visible, fostering satirical rather than direct critique as a method of minimalizing state repression. WITCH would operationalise similar tactics in their later protests.

[7] While the Yippies' had nominated a pig for president at Chicago, a sheep was crowned "Miss America" outside the pageant (Echols 1989, 93).

From a Movement to a Conspiracy: Origins of WITCH

The Miss America protest led directly to the establishment of WITCH. Out of the two hundred women in attendance, some of those most prominently involved—including Peggy Dobbins who ran the mock auction of a giant Miss America puppet, Beverly Grant and Naomi Jaffe who were part of the "inside squad" that infiltrated the event, and Robin Morgan who was the protest's chief organiser—would go on to form the original WITCH group in New York. Grant notes that a joke on the way home from the event, that "if they kept this up, they'd be burned at the stake," inspired the group's name (Beverly Grant, quoted in Jewish Women's Archives 2023). Thus, as underlying tensions within the WLM and NYRW heightened, with opinions differing on whether women's oppression should be tackled in isolation or alliance with other Movement objectives and through activism or consciousness raising sessions, the WITCH "mother coven" was formed in New York (Morgan 1977; Echols 1989). Other covens were later established across the country, from Boston and Chicago to San Francisco and Portland (Oregon), as well as several cities in between.

Chapter 4: The Performance and Performativity of WITCH Resistance

WITCH's "mother coven" loudly proclaimed its existence on Halloween, 1968, with a specific style of protest that would become their signature: dressing up as witches and casting hexes. This was a prefigurative performance of another political reality undertaken in a style that other covens across the country would later copy. Their performance of hexes parodied practices of democratic citizenship, prefiguratively acting out a world where citizens can directly alter politics if only through magical means, while their performance of a witch identity both engendered and made visible the inherently rebellious subjecthood of a woman making public political demands. To expand on this understanding of WITCH's protest, a small selection of specific protest events will be focused on: the Halloween Wall Street action; a Bridal Fair event; and two protests undertaken in Washington D.C. These protests have been chosen as exemplary of three thematic strands within WITCH resistance: economic, political, and socio-cultural. While intertwined, each of these themes strongly correlated to one of the (also intertwined) three structural forces of oppression that WITCH opposed: capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy. Firstly, an awareness of these protests, and their critical intent will be established, exposing WITCH resistance as opposition. Following this, elements of performance and performativity within these protests will be analysed to explore how WITCH produced a politics of resistance that was constructive of an alternative to dominant ways of thinking, doing, and being. To begin, however, an elaboration of the historic figure of the witch will be provided

Witches: "the original guerrilla and resistance fighters"

A woman was not meant to identify with witches: the predominantly female category of heretic that had to be destroyed via burning across Europe and North America during the fifteenth to eighteenth century. History typically portrays witches as either "malevolent old women" or a non-fact that "never existed," according to the Chicago coven (Chicago WITCH, n.d.). Such a narrative created the stereotype of the witch as a bitter undesirable or a passive victim. Yet, WITCH saw the conception of witches as "malevolent" as "distorted," and the notion that their trials were "isolated incidents" as wrong, claiming that a total nine million witches were executed. Re-interpreting witches as active and heroic required a different interpretation of the history of witch-hunts, as will now be explored.

WITCH articulated a distinctively feminist interpretation of witch-hunting that understands this as a gendered mechanism for instituting fundamental aspects of modern,

Western, Judeo-Christian culture—private property, monogamous marriage, and female domesticity. This originates to the writings of American suffragist, Matilda Joselyn Gage, who was the first to articulate the (now disproved) figure of nine million witches burnt (Griffin 2005; Scheurich 2022). Federici offers a more recent and elaborated analysis of this gendered historical reality. For Federici (2004, 11; 2018), the witch is the embodied female subject—"the heretic, the healer, the disobedient wife, the woman who dared to live alone,"—that had to be "destroyed" to institute the social reconfiguration necessary for a transition from early modern to modern society. Existing contemporaneously with the shift from feudalism to capitalism in Europe, and then the global exportation of this new economic system, witch-hunts instituted the necessary sexual division of labour for the production and maintenance of a sizeable (and contented) male workforce for future capitalist production (Federici 2004, 17). This was achieved through the specific targeting of "lewd," "quarrelsome," and financially independent women as witches, which not only eradicated these women, but conditioned other women into a new model of femininity that was sexless, submissive, and subordinate to men (Federici 2018, 20).

Understanding a witch as anyone who did not conform to new standards of femininity re-asserts agency since it makes a witch identity performative, engendered through action. Further, the targeting of these women suggests that they were a powerful subversive threat to the new regime of church and state, hence the need for suppression; this re-asserts witch's power, not as supernatural, but as political. Combining these interpretive strands, the witch is re-interpreted as "a bold, brave, empowered woman standing up against the absurdity and violence of the patriarchy" (Scheurich 2022, 61-62). WITCH clearly promoted this view, arguing that early modern witches were "agitators" who "fought to retain their rights" and "former freedom" against the Church and state's attempts to undermine their previous societal position. If not enacting direct opposition to the establishment of Christianity and private property within their communities, these women "refused to accept the [new role] which society deemed for their sex" and became "targets" of "the political suppression of an alternative culture, […] social and economic structure" (Chicago WITCH, n.d.).

Yet, the witch is not uniformly or inherently liberating. WITCH adopted a witch identity without problematising the racialised perception of witchcraft which engendered a reality in which non-white races were considered to practice real witchcraft, while white women dressing as witches were not.[8] The figure of the witch is accompanied by a complex racial and gendered politics due

[8] Federici (2018, 50) documents how women continue to be "demonized, expelled from their communities, cut to pieces, or burned alive" as witches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

to the charge of witchcraft and devil-worshiping being a historic strategy of colonial domination. The Salem witch-trials, the pinnacle of the North American witch-hunt, epitomised this complexity, for they were originally sparked by suspicions towards a West Indian slave woman (Federici 2004, 220, 237). The white women of WITCH failed to address these racial politics, while they also relied on racial privilege to enable them to dress as witches without being deemed dangerous enough to warrant punishment or stigmatisation.

However, Brassett (2016, 170, 187) argues that resistance is "neither essentially conservative nor essentially radical," but something "unstable" that has the potential to both "uphold or undermine patterns of hierarchy." Resistance that does the former is not illegitimate, but unethical. WITCH's conception of the witch can be considered resistant to the extent that it articulates an alternative historical narrative, even if this fails to challenge hierarchies of race. Yet, WITCH's resistance practices were not limited to this. How WITCH enacted and embodied the witch within their protests, employing her for wider ends, will now be discussed through the exploration of three avenues of resistance: resistance to capitalism, to patriarchy, and to imperialism.

The Performance of Opposition

The Halloween Wall Street action was where WITCH first debuted its political and stylistic commitments, undertaking a guerrilla street performance directed towards the centre-point of the U.S.'s "Imperialist Phallic Society": New York's Financial District (WITCH 1968). The women involved caricatured the traditional image of a witch with their costumes and curses, which they utilised this to disrupt the everydayness of the financial district by making a "scene"—an attention-grabbing public disturbance—with a political message. During the protest, WITCH attracted the attention of two hundred bemused and confused bystanders, while the event later captured a wider public's imagination through national news reports. As the most memorialised protest event of WITCH, the "Up Against the Wall Street" action will be used, along with another infamous protest event by the New York coven and then two lesser reported protests undertaken by the Washington D.C. coven, to expose the meanings and messages behind WITCH's performance protests. In doing this, it will become clear how WITCH operationalised resistance as critique and opposition, as is typical of protest.

On October 31st, 1968, a small coven of thirteen "heretical" women, "costumed, masked, and made up" as witches with capes, wands, and broomsticks, put on a demonstration throughout

New York's Financial District, travelling from the Federal Reserve Treasury Bank to the investment bank, Bache & Co. They chanted as they went: "Wall Street, Wall Street, Crookedest Street of All Street/ Foreign Exchange/ Student Exchange/ Wife Exchange/ Stock Exchange/ Trick or Treat/ Up Against the Wall Street!" Along with this general condemnation of the epicentre of capitalism, distinct curses were uttered outside Chase Bank's Manhattan headquarters and the Federal Reserve, condemning the buildings to future burglaries and a devaluation of stored gold. At the New York Stock Exchange, the women demanded to be let in for their meeting with Satan, the "Chief Executor of Wall Street," before letting out a "Berber Yell (sacred to Algerian witches)" to bring about the demise of various stocks (Morgan 1968b). According to the myth surrounding the event, now propagated by the *New York Times*, the Dow Jones indeed fell the following morning (Bennet 2019). Throughout the protest, WITCH combined strategies of nuisance, annoyance, vandalism, and humour to disrupt the normal functioning of the district, "leaving behind a trail of zapped stocks and bonds, brooms straws, and torn Humphrey/Wallace/Nixon and Nudie posters" (Morgan 1968b).

The clearest message of this protest was that capitalism was evil, hence under the dominion of Satan, but to only view it as such ignores the aspect of gender. WITCH saw capitalism as a root cause of gender inequality, a unique brand of class oppression experienced within the imperialist, phallocentric, and capitalist society that constituted the United States. For them, capitalism facilitated women's objectification by positioning them as commodities that could be "exchanged." Alongside its iteration within their chant, this sentiment was expressed when the Wall Street procession entered a restaurant and insisted that the women dining there with men were "selling themselves like pieces of meat for the price of a dinner" (Morgan, 1968b). This scenario elucidates the two levels at which the "wife exchange" operated. Firstly, a man could indirectly exchange money for a women's service: the service being her mere presence at a dinner table, her sexually channelled gratitude later that night, or her extended romantic companionship; with the money exchange at hand being either dinner and drinks, or more elaboratively, a family home and financial stability. Concomitantly to this exchange, women had to exchange their personhood for a subordinate womanhood—undertaking the role of "wife" whether legally, as codified by the institution of marriage, or socially, as was societally expected—to inhabit the world of heterosexual relations. In this way, they were "selling *themselves*" on "the marriage market" to a life of financial dependency and limited autonomy in line with conventions of marriage (WITCH 1969). This could come off as accusatory towards women, and Morgan (1968b) notes that they prompted one woman in the diner to cry. Yet, this encouragement of self-reflexivity was not intended to instil

shame; thus, Morgan sought to transfer the connotation of sex work that the notion of "selling yourself" generated onto the woman's male companion, referring to him as "her escort."

The other major protest action undertaken by WITCH's mother coven, the infamous "Bridal Un-Fair" in February of 1969, continued this notion of "selling" women. Within Bridal Fairs, corporations effectively sell to women—through a fashion show of wedding dresses and displays of "appliances and a matched bedroom set"—the idea of selling themselves. WITCH attended the fair with signs proclaiming, "Here Comes the Bribe," arguing that the wedding industry bribes women into surrendering their pre-marital autonomy in exchange for the products that will allegedly make a life of domesticity blissful. These products become a women's identity, selected on the criteria of "what shade of flowered toilet paper is most *you*" (Morgan 1969; WITCH 1969, emphasis in original). Another slogan, "Always a Bride, Never a Person," again emphasised that WITCH perceived a dichotomy to exist between personhood and wifehood. Simultaneously, however, it showed that the exchange of personhood for wifehood had never really been an option for women; in the face of society's rejection of the spinster as "a species of sub-human," and their lack of an identity except "as an appendage to a man," not to mention the limited employment options available to women, the allusive choice had only ever been to "marry or die."

Yet, WITCH attacked American society as not only "Phallic," but also "Imperialist." Consequently, within both events Chase Bank became the central "fiend" of WITCH for its investments in apartheid South Africa (Morgan 1968b, 1969; WITCH 1969). Further, in their "Confront the Whoremakers" leaflet for the Bridal Un-Fair, WITCH (1969, emphasis in original) argued that "*imperialism begins at home*," connecting other "Big Boys" of business and finance to the "enslaving and murdering of our sisters and brothers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America." This included the coffee company International Coffee, the airline Aeronaves de Mexico, and the fabric supplier (of the U.S. Army) J.P Stevens.

The Washington D.C. group of WITCH went further, making neo-colonialism the main target of their protest actions. Firstly, the United Fruit Company was attacked for its collaboration with the CIA to establish military dictatorships in several Latin American nations. To do this, the women performed a catchy curse outside the company's headquarters that called attention to the corporation's trades in "bananas and rifles, sugar and death" (Morgan 1970, 1977). An anti-neo-colonial stand was again taken at the Senate Panel on Population Control, in February 1970. An *off our backs* report notes that the coven acted out a scene of President Richard Nixon beating away "Third World" women with birth control pills, before they "brewed" their own contraception for "the white western male." This was distributed along with leaflets advocating for a redistribution

of resources as a strategy of international development. WITCH did not oppose the use of contraceptive pills by women, a recent medical innovation; their issue with the panel was its existence as a forum where white men discussed the pill without consultation or concern for the women that would (be forced to) use them. To the panel, the pill's benefits were conceptualised in terms of "economic development," while to WITCH, the pill meant personal emancipation (Hutchinson 1970). Nonetheless, maintaining a witchy theatricality through the performance of brews and curses, these events by the Washington D.C. coven expand and solidify our understanding of WITCH protests, elaborating on their critical relation to hegemonic American culture, and preparing the ground for a discussion of the performative aspects and constructive strategies of resistance within them.

The Performance of Alternatives

Within these protest WITCH was highlighting, critiquing, and taking a direct stand against the forces of oppression that they believed to exist within and without "the American system," in the words of their forefather group, the SNCC (Hall 2003, 61). But they went beyond this, following the Yippie maxim: "You are your own alternative" (Abraham 2019, 25). It needs to be interrogated, therefore, how WITCH not only acted in opposition to, but also differently from the forces that they resisted. How did they "create, […], cultivate and experiment with" an alternative to the marriage market, to a non-identity, to "bananas and rifles," to the "Imperialist Phallic Society"? Taking each protest event in turn, how WITCH constructed new ways of thinking, being, and doing will be analysed, exploring how they not only presented these alternatives in the form of a play-act, but how they were actively embodying them to blur the lines of reality and fantasy.

A Different Political Reality in Washington

At the Senate panel, the alternative was offered to those in power on a plate, or, more literally, out of a cauldron; the alternative was a programme of global economic redistribution. Within this, WITCH was presenting an conception of development that was not economic, but social, taking into consideration the needs of people in other nations, rather than seeking to subdue them with force and contraceptive pills. The literal acting out of this latter neo-imperialist technique by WITCH was intended to highlight the absurdity of using the contraceptive pill to deal with the supposed problem of underdevelopment. WITCH were "mimicking and mocking" development strategies much like the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army satirically imitate policing strategies, comedically appropriating them for their own ends. Through a combined use

of "difference and repetition," (for contraceptive pills would never be dispensed with such force by U.S. agents in reality) WITCH could re-contextualise the power relations within which development policies were taking place and re-signify the meanings behind development practices, engendering a process of questioning that resisted the hegemonic (Møller Ølgaard 2015, 133-135). Yet, the alternative that WITCH presented did not involve *not* offering the contraceptive pill to women in the Third World. Instead, it sought to transform the world within which they received the pill. Within this world, neo-colonial corporations that profit off war, death, and the general misery of others would not exist. WITCH performed their part in helping to engender this kind of a world by cursing the United Fruit Company into non-existence. While they lacked the magical powers to make this curse a reality, the action created a space, however momentarily and phantasmic, in which such an outcome could be or could start to be *imagined*. The event, thus, produced "a consciousness of contingency," or an awareness of a possible alternative reality in which there were other ways of thinking and doing international development and business (Critchley 2002, 10).

The absurdity of reality that WITCH's playful performance sought to highlight was twofold: it lay in the methodology of international development and the logic behind it, a logic that saw underdevelopment as an illness to be minimised in the absence of a cure, rather than an injustice to be corrected. This was not only a logic of development, but of the state, and WITCH was also making a comment about how the state should act for, not onto, its citizens. When underdevelopment is considered an "ill," the state becomes the paternalistic doctor who dispenses knowledge and treatment onto its patients (Hutchinson 1970). Alternatively, as a court of arbitration, the state would be a forum in which individuals could bring claims of injury, offence, and discrimination to demand due compensation; the direction of knowledge transfer is reversed.

Enacting this alternative logic of governance at the panel, WITCH acted out a reality in which individuals could alter government policy directly through the supernatural force of a hex and a brew, circumventing elected representatives and so-called "population experts" to institute a regime of participatory, if not direct, democracy (Hutchinson 1970). WITCH members had gained experienced with ideas and practices of participatory democracy during their time as SDS members (Hall 2003; Echols 1989). They applied these principles of decentralised and horizontal decision-making to their own organisational structure, ensuring that each coven was autonomous and non-hierarchical (Morgan 1970). At the panel, WITCH applied these principles to the structure of the state, acting out a scene in which they experimented with what this could look like in practice, undertaking an instance of "practical abstraction, [of] socially embedded philosophizing" (Critchley 2002, 10). Beyond the use of witchcraft to influence policymaking, another act was more

directly performative of a world in which citizens directed the agenda of a senatorial session. At the start of their demonstration, WITCH seized the microphone from the Texan Senator Ralph Yarborough, interrupting him mid-speech (Hutchinson 1970). Here, the lines between fiction and reality were blurred as WITCH was challenging, at both a literal and symbolic level, the legitimacy of the U.S. government to speak for/to its domestic citizens. Instead, they as citizens, using Richards' (2019) understanding of citizenship as "the subject of action," claimed the moral authority to speak. Further, since WITCH members were dressed as "the poor women of the world" when they carried out their interruption, and these "poor women" made claims against the U.S. government within the performance, WITCH articulated a vision of citizenship entirely disconnected from residency within the confines of the nation-state (Fletcher 2009). WITCH's performance did not engender this alternative democratic reality indefinitely, for it can be assumed that order was at some point restored to the panel discussion; however, performance intends to be a temporary act, portraying a scene or narrative with certain temporal and spatial boundaries. Within the boundaries of the scene, WITCH was questioning, resisting, and redefining the bounds and mechanisms of state sovereignty, producing an alternative logic of governance and citizenship to that offered within the tradition of liberal political theory (Richards 2019). In this, they produced new ways of thinking and doing politics more generally, particularly contrasting the usual seriousness and order-natured of political proceedings in terms of the latter.

Divorcing Marriage and the Bridal Industry

At the Bridal Un-Fair, WITCH again offered a clear alternative through their performance of an "un-wedding ceremony." The ceremony was a satirical parody of a traditional wedding, made apparent by the wording used. "In the name of the Revolution," WITCH (1969) pronounced themselves "Free Human Beings," vowing to remain as such through "highs and bummers." The un-wedding ceremony employed a tactic of "subversive repetition" similar to drag performances, combining mimesis with playful and transgressive creativity. In this case, the combined and simultaneous presentation of elements of reality and fantasy, "truth and falsity," raised questions about the sanctity and legality of the original copy: the actual, heterosexual wedding (Butler 1990 175, 200; Pullen and Rhodes 2013, 518). In contrasting the status of husband and wife with that of "Free Human Being," WITCH also undermined the desirability of marriage. Yet, WITCH most directly challenged the constructed and imitative nature of marriage, in their use of the phrase "until choice do us part" (Butler 1990, 175; WITCH 1969). The replacement of death with choice provided a stark contrast that highlighted the rigidity of norms of marriage, on the wedding day and beyond. Within the un-wedding, WITCH was flipping one of the most common examples of

a speech act on its head for their own ends.[9] Yet the un-wedding was not only a critique of marriage, but an attempt to create an option that was distinctly "*not* "not marrying"" (WITCH 1969, emphasis in original). As such, it was an "act of refusal" that did more than refuse, for it produced the possibility of existence outside of the married/unmarried binary (Brassett 2016). In this way, the un-wedding was performative of a possibility of living otherwise, in a world where love was free from possession and rigid codes of conduct, where romantic partnership involved intentionality and life. WITCH was, thus, engaging in an exploration of alternative ways of loving and being within this action.

That the un-wedding was an alternative to remaining unmarried was important for WITCH since this latter nonaction would leave the institution of marriage intact. To counter this, the un-wedding ceremony contained a distinct call to action to not only oppose the institution of marriage but dismantle it. Within their un-wedding vows, participants made promises of "not to obey" and to actively "smash the alienated family unit." Through binding individuals (in word, not legal contract) to take further action against hegemonic American culture, WITCH sought to transform their individual alternative to marriage into a societal one. Further, this highlights how the alternative they espoused went beyond the creation of a new relationship status; WITCH not only wanted to change marriage and weddings, but the social and economic world that they took place within.

The un-wedding formed part of the wider "Bridle Un-Fair" action within which it was not only the institution of marriage that WITCH sought to resist, but the Bridal Industry and "the patriarchal structure and the profit-oriented society" that materially and ideationally funded weddings (WITCH 1969; Morgan 1969). The need to proclaim oneself as a "free human being" demonstrated that "the simple act of living" had been polluted with a logic of commercialisation and legality that made people objects, not subjects. At the Bridal Fair, WITCH (1969) attempted to institute the reversal of this by providing "shoplifting bags" to attendees. This act re-inscribed a new meaning to the products on display during the Fair and their relation to those in attendance. Rather than samples appearing as a generous gift or simulacrum of the real thing, either way encouraging a later purchase, these could be seen as goods available to be taken, goods that one might, in fact, be entitled to take. Thus, instead of a world where "corporations transform our self-doubts and emotional needs into commodities and sell them to us for a profit," WITCH (1969) sought to engender one where the profit incentive, and with that the incentive to support and the

[9] The utterance of "I pronounce you husband and wife," within the right setting, has the power to produce a married couple (Butler 2015, 28).

ability to invest in "enslaving and murdering" abroad, ceases to exist. They did so by living in the present with an awareness that "riches and objects are totally available through socialism or theft." This, however, only applied in theory; the shoplifting bags were a fantasy made into a material, but not practical, reality as there would have been legal consequences if WITCH attempted to implement socialism and/or theft in real life. In this regard, Morgan (1969) notes that no protestors were arrested but fifteen women (SDS rather than WITCH members, since the protest had been publicised to encourage other WLM group attendance) were violently removed from the event. They reframed this situation, however, crying "I won't get married, no, no I won't" as they were ejected, re-asserting their agency and agenda in a context that sought to diminish these. Even without instituting an economic regime of theft, WITCH prompted attendees to imagine such a reality, generating questions as to what kept them from acting in this way. Attendees had to re-justify premises of capitalism to themselves as these had been "made strange" and contingent, rather than presumed to be evident. Exposing such contingency, WITCH had flirted with the premise of an alternative economic logic.

Here For a Good Time, Not a Profitable Time

Building on this aspect of the Bridal Un-fair, on Wall Street WITCH offered alternative conceptions of value and fulfilment than that posited by capitalist consumerism. Focusing on the latter, WITCH agreed with the Yippies that corporate capitalism was antithetical to, rather than facilitating of, pleasure (Abraham 2018). The financial district was, thus, considered "the enemy of […] grooves," the bodily expression of enjoyment (Morgan 1968b). To contrast this, enjoying oneself was crucial to WITCH activities, visible in their carnivalesque theatricality and satirical elements like the mock reference to Satan as the CEO of Wall Street. Such an act, clearly made in jest, produced subversive questions around the validity of financial practices. Not only was Satan not the CEO, the position does not exist, thus, highlighting that humans had rendered themselves at the mercy of some supra-human, in some ways supernatural, force. While WITCH actions appeared illogical, most evidently in the fact that witchcraft is considered beyond reasoned scientific understanding, at their core these actions highlighted how fulfilment in relation to human desire rather monetary gain was a more logical premise to base an economic system on, for this was something naturally occurring within the earthly realm.

Intertwined with fulfilment is value, for what fulfils us tends to be considered valuable, and/or possibly vice versa. Home to the New York Stock Exhange (NYSE), Wall Street operates to calculate and distribute conceptions of value, assessing on a criterion of future profitability. By introducing elements of magic and mysticism to this arena, WITCH demonstrated that "the

market" should not necessarily be taken as authoritative on these matters, suggesting vulnerability to corruption through magical means. Without saying that the hex on the NYSE was real in the sense that supernatural forces caused the market to fall, it created a situation where it was possible to imagine that this was the reality. Morgan's (1968b) report on the event in fact notes that an unidentified businessman credited "the witches" for the fall in an interview, despite the question being loaded in favour of the culprit being a cessation of bombing in Vietnam. The hex, thus, exposed the contingency of the stock market, how it often operated in ways that were mysterious to even a trained eye. It also "made strange" its daily fluctuations, offering a new interpretation of causality. Beyond attacking the NYSE's infallibility, the curse against the Treasury Bank to devalue stored gold "except for casting through windows," addressed the abstracted nature of value within capitalism (Morgan 1968b); in its place, WITCH offered a utilitarian measure of worth. Again, WITCH was contrasting rationality with irrationality in multiple ways, for while money is considered a rational method of calculating value, it lacks any inherent value, yet witchcraft was used as the means to highlight this contradiction.

De Goede (2005) explains why the strategy of "making strange" through comedy is particularly fruitful as a practice of financial criticism. Modern finance practices are embedded in scientific objectivity and calculative rationality as a conscious political move to shore up moral and legal legitimacy, distinguishing credit lending from the emotive, popular, and frivolous practice of gambling. While we usually take the graphical and statistical methods of finance to be "a logical corollary of its practices," financial trading is *made* logical or given a logic through these methods. Comedy, as emotional and popular, is antithetical to rationality. In this way, it serves as a perfect medium for not only a critique, but a disavowal of the fundamental logic of finance. Beyond comedy, WITCH utilised another tactic that rationality explicitly could not comprehend: the supernatural. Using these two tools, WITCH questioned hegemonic claims of "truth and falsity" in relation to financial practices, rendered them absurd, and thus diminished their authoritative status. Altogether, WITCH exposed capitalism as "less than completely inevitable," engendering the possibility of imagining economic alternatives (De Goede 2005, 389).

Another Way of Being: Becoming a WITCH

Finally, within the all the aforementioned protests, WITCH's actions constructed the resistance figure of the WITCH, who's subjecthood or "witch-hood" was an alternative to that of womanhood. When women, as women, chose to defy their subservient societal role as "wife and mother of male heirs," they faced being labelled "a freak—a lesbian, or a castrating career girl, a fallen woman, a bitch." The barrage is so strong that "she begins to believe these innuendos

herself," hence a tendency among WLM groups to eschew the title of feminist due to its associations with these derogatory terms, favouring the phrase "radical women" instead (WITCH 1969; Echols 1989, 53-54). WITCH, however, offered an alternative through the new identity of a WITCH. The WITCH, as a joyous and theatrical re-enactment of a historically ostracised female, demonstrated how a women could be non-conforming without stigma or shame. In reclaiming a witch identity, WITCH was engaging in the practice of resistance as "self-making," which Butler notes cannot take place "outside of the norms that orchestrate the possible forms that a subject may take" (Butler 2005, quoted in Brassett 2016). WITCH, therefore, used norms of female subjectivity but also re-defined them. In a society that condemned women for undertaking the kind of actions that WITCH did, WITCH resisted the logic that these were shameful acts for women. In this, they produced not only an alternative way of thinking about women, but of inhabiting a female subjectivity.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In her work, Richards (2019, 269, emphasis in original) cautions against a "sense of *only*" for its ability to belittle demands to "*only* that," enabling ignorance of the "maximalist imagination of a different social world" that lay behind such demands. WITCH clearly possessed a maximalist vision of "a different social world"; a world of participatory democracy, global economic redistribution, freedom and love, and gender and racial equality.

By taking WITCH seriously, this study has been able to evaluate WITCH's performance of resistance for what it was, rather than what it was not. Contrasting dominant conceptions of protest as a politics of demand, WITCH's protests were a prefigurative performance, performative of alternatives, and in this way a practice of both oppositional and constructive resistance. Blurring boundaries of reality and fantasy, politics and personal life, future and present, WITCH attempted to implement "revolution"—complete socio-cultural, political, and economic transformation—in the here and now by acting it out. Understanding their acting as not only a performance, but performative, it becomes clear that their protests extended beyond descriptive critique to an act of constitution. By interrupting a Senate hearing session and brewing a concoction to "control the white western male," WITCH *enacted* new methods of political participation. When performing an un-wedding ceremony, they *engendered* a new form of romantic partnership. Through the performance of women being beaten with contraceptive pills, the encouragement of shoplifting, and the demonstration of "joie-de-vivre," in Morgan's words (1977, 119), on Wall Street, WITCH *embodied* an ethical programme that deprioritised monetary profit and reprioritised human need and desire. Within all this, WITCH reversed contemporaneous societal expectations for women—that they should be submissive, domesticated, depoliticised, and, further, ashamed and ostracised if they behaved otherwise. WITCH was disruptive, out in public, and deeply political, all the while being proud and joyful. While these alternatives may not have been permanently instituted into actuality, WITCH's performance of other ways of thinking, doing, and being engendered "a consciousness of contingency," where an awareness that current conditions were "less than completely inevitable" had been instilled, and the limits of what was comprehensible had been expanded (Brassett 2016; De Goede 2005). This does not entirely absolve WITCH from potential charges of ineffectiveness or insignificance as the degree to which such a consciousness was embraced can be criticised, and further its material impact was minimal. Yet, W.I.T.C.H.'s revival of the group demonstrates that this consciousness of a possibility of living otherwise can extend

to the present. Further, re-engaging with their alternatives, as this study does, can also revive their resistance potential.

W.I.T.C.H. continue to unite under the figure of the witch in support of issues like indigenous rights and environmental justice, and against forces of fascism, racism, and rape culture. With greater awareness of intersectionality, they have adapted the WITCH identity to incorporate "all marginalized people" through gender and racial anonymity via veiling (W.I.T.C.H. Boston, quoted in Bess 2017). Yet they continue to use magic and costumes as methods of political resistance, recognising that such practices generate a stark contrast between themselves and the realm of "serious politics" (Brasset 2016, 169). W.I.T.C.H. remains a U.S. phenomenon, and arguably the tactic of magic as a force for political change is best suited to a Western context; its productive comedic contrast depends on a dominant logic of rationality which became embedded in the core of Western culture during the Enlightenment period. The relevance that WITCH has for a wider range of activist groups is less direct, but resides in its creativity, standing as one example of how norms of protest and society can be transgressed.

Context is important for how protest is received and, thus, its effectiveness. Bruner (2005) argues that the state's sense of humour is proportionate to the strength of citizens' rights and freedoms, engendering the carnivalesque as an effective method of protest within the strict, "humorless state." Furthering this, Rowe (2013) notes that carnivalesque protest has been a particularly effective and popular protest strategy in the U.S. in the wake of 9/11, where norms of society and politics are more "strictly defined," and transgression is accompanied with "heightened risk" and anxiety. In essence, the carnivalesque is a response to reduced civil liberties as a strategy to avoid political suppression, evident both post-2001 and in the Cold War context of WITCH. This received limited attention within this study, but has a clear relevance. Beyond periods of reduced civil liberties, future research might also consider how humorous protest occurs in times of crisis, since the revival of W.I.T.C.H occurred in the context of a U.S. democratic crisis; is this a necessary form of cathartic relief, or also a productive appreciation of altered circumstances? With increasing limitations being placed on protests in nations like the UK and France, curtailing citizens' rights, there will surely be more instances of creative and non-traditional protest to come (UN News 2023; Henry 2019). Non-traditional protest is a sorely understudied topic, despite clear contemporary relevance; this study of WITCH illuminates one historic example of such protest, with important gendered dimensions.

This study exists within a particular subsection of literature on resistance, uniting the realm of protest with the realm of cultural practices, exploring the use of visual, embodied, affective, and aesthetic mediums to further a transformation of values, rather than explicit policy. An implication

of this for IR is the continued expansion of the concept of resistance, documenting more of its possible materialisations. Further, Eschle and Maiguashca (2006) argue that feminist theory and feminist practice together encourage us "to be more open-minded about what [political action] looks like and where to find it" (Maiguashca 2011, 536). While feminist theorising has produced insights into how the personal is political, feminist practice, as actualised by WITCH, demonstrates how other forms of the personal and the political can be lived. In this, activism can inform academia, inspiring critical thinking that furthers normative values as well as our understanding of the world. The politics of resistance is, therefore, an important and growing genre of literature that re-politicises the discipline of IR, positioning the international as a topic of debate, rather than description.

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