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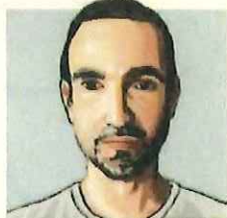
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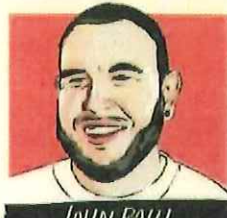
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ACTIVISM AND HOPE
— FOR A —
NEW GENERATION



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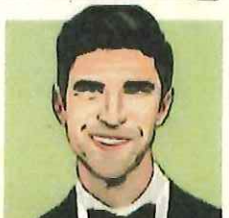
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JONNY SUN

Jonathan Sun is the author behind @jonnysun and Everyone's a Liebn When Ur a Liebn Too (HarperPerennial, 2017). He is currently a doctoral student at MIT, an affiliate at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard, and a creative researcher at the Harvard metaLAB, where he studies social media and online community. He is also a playwright, artist, illustrator, and previously studied as an architect and engineer. He is the creator of @tinycarebot, and his comedic work has appeared on NPR and in McSweeney's. In 2017, he was named one of Time magazine's 25 Most Influential People on the Internet.

MEDIA-CONSCIOUSNESS AS PART OF RESISTANCE!

Media exists because people will it into the world. It is conscious and active. It is important to think about media when thinking about resistance because **media works by shaping what we see, and how we see it.**

I often spend time wondering how I have come to my understanding of the world, and where I have gotten all my views, ideas, and biases from. Some of this is a combination of my own experiences and the experiences of others as they are directly passed on to me. These are things that shape me directly: through personal relationships, shared in one-on-one conversations, or from within small groups. But media is something else, and does something else.

Media is created and then transmitted, distributed, or shared in one direction, along a platform for mass communication, from a source to an audience. Media is fundamentally different than a one-on-one experience being shared between you and someone else: a friend, a family member. Media is a piece of information broadcast from one to many. The methods of mass communication, the ways of spreading media these days, are vast and diverse. There is what is now “traditional” media: TV, film, radio, newspapers. There is what we call “new” media—the internet, and all it encompasses, lately: YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Vine (RIP). Increasingly, we spend more and more time on social media, and therefore get more and more of our media from these online platforms.

By being shared on all platforms of mass viewership, media is essentially what we all—as a culture and a society—see. In a way, media purports to be what we all—as “the general public”—believe, too. This is, or should be, a little troubling. Media dictates our norms, our culture. It dictates what we as a collective society should think is important and where to focus our attention on. It decides what, to an extent, is “real” in our world, what values are “true,” what biases are “fact.” This is especially troubling when we understand that media is not created *by* its mass viewers; rather, it is created *for* a mass viewership. Because it’s everywhere, and so ubiquitous in our lives, media has an enormous amount of control over the way we think and the way we see the world.

Social media may be a space where we as viewers have more agency. Whereas “traditional” media (TV, film, and the like) runs on a hierarchical system, with plenty of gatekeepers and Old Rich People in power and control, perhaps social media can be different. Perhaps here, on social media, on the internet, we don’t have to rely on the gatekeepers of traditional media to determine what should be represented and how it should be represented. Work created on social media is a step toward a greater range of voices all over, and I believe that all of us, not as creators but as viewers and consumers, have power in this equation. Social media is far from perfect, but it’s perhaps a more direct form of media (and it’s dangerous for this same reason, too). It’s also powerful in the sense that it is for so many of us our default place where we spend our time, where we see things, where we get our news and entertainment from.

Social media is different from traditional media, too, in the sense that we, as viewers, as followers, as users, play a more active role in the ability for media to get distributed. We play this role by actively sharing, retweeting, liking, reblogging. Each of those becomes a “vote” that this is what we believe is important to be shared; that this is the viewpoint, the opinion, the art, that we stand for. And each share literally spreads the media one

more link down the chain. The fact that we are able to actively share media through retweeting means we have a more active role in helping good things get seen.

Media is not inherently good or bad—it is the product of those who create it and how we see it. But it is inherently active. The better we are at understanding that all media is a conscious act of creation, and understanding that we as viewers and *sharers* play an active role in spreading certain viewpoints and voices, the better we can get understanding media's role, and our role, in shaping our views on the world.

In the past few years, I've become more and more aware of my role not as a creator or a writer, but as a viewer and as a sharer. I wanted to share with you the questions I try to ask myself when looking at media, both online and off, in an effort to try to consume and share media more positively and constructively. As viewers, resistance begins with us! Together, we can create a more conscious media ecosystem!

Jonny's notes for consuming and reacting to media!*

10 THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN CONSUMING MEDIA:

1. Who created the work? And why?

Every piece of media has an author (or a group of authors). We need to think about who the author is, what their intentions were behind creating

* I want to stress that this is just as important when looking at anything from traditional "big" media down to anything you see on social media! This is also in no way complete—but they are my current working notes when I spend all day online, and hope they help you. I fully expect these questions to morph and grow and change as our world and our media change. I know this is a lot to keep in mind when looking at memes all day, but memes are media, too! And they shape our perspectives and worldviews. It's important to think about this stuff! Also, I made these listicles so they'd be easier to go through.

the work, if they are informed enough to contribute to the discourse that the work is part of, the message behind the work, and how the politics of the author influence or appear within the work.

2. What is the underlying message of the piece of media?

Sometimes it's difficult to spot the takeaway message. Often, messages either reinforce or try to combat norms and biases. They hold worldviews and opinions of "how the world is" or "how the world should be." For me, I often try to get to the heart of it by completing a sentence like: "It's funny because . . ." or "It's sad because . . ." or "It's inspiring because . . ." This may help.

3. What assumptions do you and the author have to agree on to understand this piece of media?

In engaging with media, it's helpful, too, to think about where your own worldviews and the worldviews of the work align or conflict. This should create an internal dialogue between yourself and the piece. I ask myself how I react to the work and think about why I respond to it the way that I do—which parts of my own worldviews react to the worldviews of the piece. I think about what the author is trying to say, and if they achieve that. And when you do identify it, is the message constructive? Is it toxic? Does it normalize biases or toxic worldviews? If it's funny—*why* is it funny?—and what do you have to agree with in the joke for it to be funny to you? Do you agree with it? Why or why not? What do you wish to learn from the piece, or what do you wish not to learn from the piece? Does this viewpoint reinforce your existing viewpoints? Can you find ones that expand or challenge your viewpoints?

4. Where did this piece of media come from? Who is distributing the work? What is the motive of the distributor to distribute this work?

Just as there is an author to every piece of media, there is also a distributor, someone who shares the piece so that you see it. In traditional media, this may be a network, a studio, a channel. In social media or online media, this may be a crowd, your friends, a celebrity, a content aggregator. Just as an author has a specific message they want to embed in the piece, distributors have reasons for sharing the piece, too. Is it to generate views and clicks? Is it to appeal to a certain group of people—and if so, why? Is it to generate controversy? Is it to signal that they align with the message in the piece? Asking questions like these help to understand why certain media gets shared and why it may go viral—the intentions for sharing may not always be clear or pure.

5. Does the piece of media *tell* a truth or *sell* a truth?

That is, is the work authentic and honest? Are the authors of the work able to make the work honest—or are they “qualified” to create this piece? Is the work telling a truth about the world? Or is the work trying to sell you on a message that may not be true about the world? Is it manipulating you into believing something? All media is emotionally manipulative by nature—but trying to get to the underlying intention of that manipulation is important. Does it manipulate you into empathizing with a truth you wouldn’t otherwise be aware of? Or does it manipulate you into buying a lie? What is truth anyway? What is your truth?

6. Does the media come from a perspective that is different from your own?

What can you learn from it? Or, what do you actively wish to refute from it? Which perspectives are you missing from your own worldview that would help to learn from and understand? Which perspectives are harmful against others, are used by those in power to oppress?

7. Does the piece of media confirm existing stereotypes? Does it upend them? Does it upend them without relying on other stereotypes?

Stereotypes have existed forever as “shortcuts” to bigotry and oppression. They say, “We didn’t want to—or we weren’t able to—put in the time and effort to understand a whole group of people, so instead here are some sweeping generalizations that allow us to feel better about not putting in the time and effort to get to know members of that group.” Stereotypes are bred from willful ignorance and malicious intent. In media, reinforcing biases and stereotypes become dangerous and harmful. Does this piece of media play into this? Does it avoid it without playing into other stereotypes? Is the piece taking the time to tell honest, complicated, complex stories?

8. Is the creator someone who might not have been given access to a creative voice and platform traditionally?

One power of social media is the emergence of traditionally underrepresented voices and perspectives. While far from perfect, we are gradually being able to hear from more and more different voices, different artists, coming from different experiences and worldviews. Does the piece of media come from new perspectives? Or does it come from existing ones? In this way, does it reinforce existing perspectives within media, or does it in-

roduce new ones? And, are these new perspectives constructive ones that deserve a platform, or harmful ones that don't?

9. Is the piece of media original? Is it derivative? Is it stolen?

In traditional and new media, there is a lot of profit to be made from taking the work of others. Usually, this is in the form of taking the work of already marginalized or underrepresented voices. The ones who benefit from stealing the works of others are those already in positions of power, or those with enough privilege to do this and not face consequences. The ones being stolen from are those without (or perceived to be without) enough of a voice or platform to call them out on it in any way that will impact the aggressor. Stealing takes many forms. It can be direct plagiarism—someone lifting someone else's work and claiming it as their own. It can be derivative—someone, instead of sharing the work and celebrating the original, decides they want the credit or profit from it and creates something very similar, profiting from the work of the original. If the piece of media you see has been taken from another source, can you find (and share) the original source instead?

10. Is this media harmful?

Ultimately, we need to ask if the piece of media is harmful, if it's toxic, if it propagates stereotypes, if it is being used to hurt or oppress. Some of this is blatant (and increasingly, harmful media is *shockingly* blatant). Some of this is more hidden and, in a way, more dangerous.

6 WAYS TO REACT TO MEDIA:

1. Call out BS, engage in media, have tough conversations.

Make your voice heard—it is one of the most important tools you have.

2. But also . . . realize when it's not your turn to talk.

We are going through a time of Extreme Discourse. When your voice has power, use it. But also recognize when it is more constructive to listen, to sit back, to learn. Make room for people with constructive and relevant experiences and perspectives to share them. Sometimes, making room for this looks like not saying anything yourself, or taking a step back. Don't mistake this as passive—this is an active step, too, when done consciously.

3. Think about what media, and from what perspectives, you are not seeing—and see if there are ways to find it and share it.

Usually, this means looking for media being created by people who are traditionally erased or underrepresented in media. When you do find more work created by marginalized voices, what can you do to help support, share, and amplify their voices?

4. Share and engage in work you believe in.

Ultimately, your power as a viewer—especially in social media—comes from being part of a vast network of people spreading media across the internet. Sharing and engaging is an active part of social media today. By doing so, you are helping voices get heard, you are helping combat existing

norms and introducing your world and your networks to new perspectives. Every little bit counts.

5. Create your own work!

Finally, when you are ready, make your own work! Make your voice heard! Create what only you, with your unique sets of experiences, worldviews, and perspectives, can make! All the points I've listed here are necessary for consuming and sharing media responsibly, but are also necessary to think of when creating media responsibly, too.

6. Recognize media has the power to create change.

Whether you are sharing media or creating it, the point I want to drive home the most is that media is powerful. Media exists constantly, in the background of all of our lives. It slowly shapes our narratives, it slowly sets our norms. To make change, to resist, we need to have the immediate and direct forms of resistance, but we also need to play the long game. Resisting through media is one way to influence the background, the underlying perspectives and worldviews in our lives. This, in turn, helps bring change to the foreground, and helps guide what we all choose to do here on this earth.

Thanks for listening.