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GIRLING THE GIRL: VISUAL CULTURE AND GIRL STUDIES

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by

Leisha Jones

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The dissertation of Leisha Jones was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Janet Lyon  
Associate Professor of English, Women’s Studies, and Science, Technology, and Society  
Chair of Committee, Dissertation Advisor

Richard Doyle  
Professor of English/Science, Technology, and Society/Information Science and Technology

Yvonne Gaudelius  
Professor of Art Education and Women’s Studies  
Assistant Vice President and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education

Susan Squier  
Brill Professor of Women’s Studies, English, and Science, Technology, and Society

Vincent Colapietro  
Professor of Philosophy

Mark Wardell  
Associate Professor of Labor Studies and Industrial Relations and Sociology  
Associate Dean of Graduate Student Affairs and Director of the Special Individualized Interdisciplinary Doctoral Major

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

Caught between lipstick and a field hockey stick, girls invent tactics for assembling themselves as performative multiplicities, individual hordes of desire that mutate as often as they change shoes. This dissertation offers a research model for feminism that addresses girls as positive categories of possibility, that revalues the status of girls as to-be subjects, and that develops a synthesis between Visual Culture, Women’s Studies, and the emerging field of Girl Studies. The analyses produced by this model are deliberately unhinged from the kind of psychological moorings that predetermine girl as a marker for woman-in-training. I explore and map the intensities of becoming-girl through performatives and events of gender as they appear in visual art, film, the internet, school, home, and the street, in order to demonstrate the pervasive effects girls have on the same impermeable culture that is supposedly killing them.

Girl begins as someone in the middle, the consummate apprentice, a liminal figure crossbreeding the innocence of childhood with the pollutants of womanhood. She bears a mark of the feminine that is not biologically determined. Girl as a sociological category is relatively new, following the birth of childhood itself in the eighteenth century and coming to life in the mid-twentieth century as a breakaway subset of the “teenager.” She occupies the odd position of being the most desirable of objects and being the most invisible of subjects. Girl is in fact not a Subject at all. She is locatable through the marks she makes. The girl marks with an X – whatever cultural signage that may be – and thus, a territory is established. This dissertation claims neither to define nor to transubstantiate girl as a modal Subject. Girl here functions as a conceptual persona, and as such is not necessarily a correlative or representative of actual girls. She coheres as a brand, a loose site of identity managed through others’ desires. I argue that girls can and do actively manage their own brands, and that Brand X has more to teach us than we have to teach her.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .............................................................................................................. v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .............................................................................................. vii

CHAPTER 1. Introduction ............................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER 2. Becoming-Rhythm: A Rhizomatics of the Girl ........................................ 10

CHAPTER 3. Mirrored Refrains and Ekphrastic Intonations: The Paintings of Su- en Wong.................................................................................................................. 36

CHAPTER 4. Girls on Film ............................................................................................. 54

CHAPTER 5. Scenes from the X Box .............................................................................. 83

CHAPTER 6. I Am Not What You Want: Gender Performativity, *Untitled Film Stills*, and Experiments in Girl Branding .......................................................... 118

WORKS CITED ............................................................................................................... 180

APPENDIX A. Syllabus Example ................................................................................... 186

APPENDIX B. Cindy Sherman Film Stills Catalogue......................................................... 192

APPENDIX C. Student Film Stills Catalogue ................................................................ 195
LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter Three

Chapter Five
1. Still from student film, *Screen, No Outlet*, 2002 93
2. Still from student film, *Street, No Outlet*, 2002 94
5. Still from student film, *Shoe, Escaped, True Stories*, 2002 103
8. Still from student film, *Back, Underneath It All*, 2003 112
10. Still from student film, *Middle Finger, Underneath It All*, 2003 115

Chapter Six
7. Student film still, *Shoe Envy*, 2006 146
10. Student film still, *Blinded by the Light*, 2006 152
19. Student film still, *Copy*, 2006      166
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beholden. To Jeff Nealon, mapmaker and agent provocateur, I owe the greatest of debts.

It is through his brute elegance and unflagging generosity that Girlness, for us, abounds.
To the extent that the naming of the “girl” is transitive, that is, initiates the process by which a certain “girling” is compelled, the term or, rather, its symbolic power, governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm. This is a “girl,” however, who is compelled to “cite” the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject. Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is dissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment.

Chapter 1
Introduction

Gentle and squishy and very nice. Girls have become a significant demographic in American culture. Girl begins as someone in the middle, the consummate apprentice, a liminal figure crossbreeding the innocence of childhood with the pollutants of womanhood. She bears a mark of the feminine that is not biologically determined. Girl as a sociological category is relatively new, following the birth of childhood itself in the eighteenth century and for the most part coming to life in the mid-twentieth century as a breakaway subset of the “teenager.” The histories of their everyday lives were of little importance until they became a demographic that marketers could recognize as little-women, or consumers-in training. According to Joan Brumberg, who traces their histories through diary records of ordinary girls, the category Girl emerged from the starchy collars of a Victorian culture in which girls offered their unpaid labor as “good works” for the betterment of society (1997), and in atonement for perceived transgressions. She traces their emergent experimentations in the sexual revolutions of the 1920s and 1960s, in which both looking good and feeling good triumphed over concerns for the spiritual well being of their brethren.

Girl as we currently know her embodies the better half of the teenage demographic as the primary target for coming-of-age products. In Some Wore Bobby Sox, Kelly Schrum successfully tracks the emergence of girl as coveted demographic from the 1920s to the 1940s (2004). From fashion to diets, and tampons to movies, girl increasingly garnered her own share of products made specifically for her (not her mom).
The divide between women and girls continued to accelerate after the Women’s Movement in the 1970s as “generation” became a marker for difference that required entirely separate consumer goods. Today, products such as Teen Spirit deodorant and party thong panty liners in black represent just two of a host of items marketed directly at girls, not women. Advertisers and marketing houses struggle to re-invent girls as product savvy consumers in markets that rely on their passive presence as incentive, decor, or prize. Likewise, girls struggle to re-produce themselves through hosts of contradictory directives such as “look sexy,” “don’t have sex,” and “be nice,” and “express yourself.”

Caught between some lipstick and a field hockey stick, Girls invent tactics for congregating themselves as performative multiplicities, individual hordes of desire that mutate as often as they change shoes. This claim is not meant to suggest that girls live outside of cultural mandates-- that they possess an autonomous agency free from the constraints that living as a to-be subject would require. Nor is this an aberrant deployment of Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, in which I might claim that girls are simply free to perform their genders like sideshow attractions in order to make a little gender trouble of their own. Girls do not get to choose the material constraints that this subcategory of gender binary affords them, such as gender assignment, pink (no matter your ethnicity); gender role, nurturer/connector; gender identity, feminine/womanly. The possibility that is Girl occurs through inherited tools of the feminine and other idioms begged, borrowed or stolen out of necessity, melded by the sheer force of positive desire.

My primary goal with this dissertation is to explore and map the intensities of Becoming-Girl through performances and events of gender. The visual is currently the
primary mode through which girls construct themselves and through which they appear. Though I am sure a study of current cell phone usage among teenage girls would reveal much about how they negotiate gender performativity every day, I am almost commanded to “revive Ophelia” by the eponymous best-selling book and its minions, so that she can really see her own reflection in the mirror through a study of the visual. The tools that Visual Culture Studies and feminism have to offer not only reflect Girls’ primary modes of engagement with themselves and others, but also reflect a reinvigoration of methodology. Exhausted disciplinary models used to address the “Subject” (still coded as male), his exploits and artifacts, are inadequate to address Girls, who are to-be subjects on the shorter end of the binary stick. Interdisciplinary methodologies, particularly feminist ones, allow researchers to use a constellation of perspectives and tactics customized for each star of the show. In other words, the power of interdisciplinary research stems from its capacity to address singularities using multiple lenses without shooting research subjects out of the skies that construct them. Gliding from planet to sun to black hole may be a difficult way of gathering and interpreting data, but it may be one of the only ways of obtaining a 3-D fully-fleshed image. The rubric of investigation and subject of this project falls properly under the emergent field of Girl Studies. It is my hope to contribute to its lively matrices of scholarship.

Who is this Girl in question? What does she do? Many of the Girls included here will be teenagers, somewhere between thirteen and nineteen. My mother also uses the term to refer to her female friends in their 50s. Girl is considered by some feminists to be a derogatory term, a kind of infantilizing curse, when applied to a full-
grown woman. Girl has been re-appropriated and reenergized by a number of third wave feminists as sometimes gurl, or grrl. Girl is difficult to study because she is in flux, not locatable as a discrete category. She occupies the odd position of being the most desirable of objects and being the most invisible of subjects. Girl is in fact not a Subject at all, and as a to-be subject – or, in the language of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, a “becoming” – she does not trade in the rights-bearing discourses that construct, demarcate, and limit men and women. She is locatable through the marks she makes. The Girl marks with an X – whatever cultural signage that may be – and thus, a territory is established. This dissertation claims neither to define nor to transubstantiate Girl as a modal Subject. Girl here functions as a conceptual persona, and as such is not necessarily a correlative or representative of actual girls. She coheres as a brand, which is to say a loose site of identity managed through others’ desires. I argue that Girls can and do actively manage their own brands, and that Brand X has more to teach us than we have to teach her.

Feminist Institutional Sites

My project on Girl arises from the nexus of interdisciplinary work I have undertaken in the arenas of Women’s Studies, Art Education and Visual Culture, Philosophy, Literary Theory, Art Production and Criticism, Film Studies, and Girl Studies. I have sought to locate feminist interventions in the production of these bodies of knowledge, particularly in relation to the Girl. My investigations in feminist theory have been of primary importance, particularly in encountering works by and about women as a starting point. Feminist theorists after the first wave locate and celebrate, challenge and
dismantle boundaries of the category that envelops woman. Feminist theorists examine the significance of "woman" as a regulatory category in relation to its binary, i.e. the "natural" differences between men and women, in part to unmask and revalue the importance of women's contributions as cultural producers. But contemporary academic feminism has reached an impasse. One of the major preoccupations of feminist theorists for the past 25 years has been “the question of woman”: is she a biologically determined entity, intrinsically different from a man? Or is she made by her culture, shaped by gender roles, history, and everyday practices? The social construction of gender seems to have triumphed as an answer in part because it offers greater possibility for changing

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1 A key strand of French feminist "essentialist" theory asserts a) women are totally different from men, and that gender is the foundational division of the social order (i.e., Irigaray's two-lipped desire of the one who is not-one); and b) a deconstruction and disavowal of woman as an identity because she appears strictly within the constituting realm of patriarchy (i.e., Wittig's critique of heterosexism through a topos of the lesbian subject as language-user).

American "essentialist" feminism picks up that strand with 2nd wave cultural feminisms, like Chodorow's object relations theory on the psychological differences between women and men, Gilligan's focus on how the differences between women and men affect moral maturity assessments, and Hardstock's standpoint theory in particular which posits women's experiences as a basis for liberatory vision. This essentialism involves in some measure the reclamation of the category woman by celebrating those characteristics and practices denigrated and devalued by patriarchal culture.

Black feminists, lesbian feminists and others, critique essentialist theories for propagating a privileged (white, middle-class, heterosexual) agenda that excludes their experiences and concerns. One of the effects of this strand of essentialist feminism is to reterritorialize or re-ghettoize "woman" as norm, but it is somehow supposed to be better because it is a woman-identified norm.

2 Social constructionism is articulated in opposition to essentialism. These feminist theories insist that essence itself is a historical construction. "Man" and "woman" are the effects of complicated discursive practices. Constructionists are engaged in the interrogation of regulatory processes of cultural force that create and organize gendered subjects. Haraway's cyborg and Sedgwick's axioms are among many an attempt to denaturalize the "natural" Freudian order of normative Oedipal configurations and practices. If "woman" is culturally constructed, she cannot be said to naturally lack. If she is constructed to be a signer of lack, she can be constructed otherwise. The phallic economy can be interrupted, reconfigured. However, unlike the Barbie Liberation Organization, who exchanged Barbie's taped voice box (Math is hard!) with Ken's (Mess with me & I'll blow your head off!), feminists have been unable to manufacture the proper dystopian scythe for below-the-belt interpellations. Social constructionism, like essentialism, is similarly constrained by gender norms. The claim that woman (and thus her lack) is constructed might free us rhetorically from the bounds of fatalistic essences. But that does not mean that one suddenly gets to choose a different construct, or set of codes, or disciplinary practices.
financial, political, and physical limitations that accrue to this half of a binary gender
system. After all, if woman is coded to be the “weaker” sex, but is not in fact naturally
inferior, she may be constructed differently. But, as essentialists and social
constructionists alike point out, woman does not get to choose the rubrics that determine
her capacities, no matter how forthright and compelling her convictions.

Of Women’s Studies, Visual Culture Studies, and the Girl

Feminist critiques of the objectification of women in dominant culture
inform the very foundations of Visual Culture Studies. Woman appears to be
victimized by her culture at every turn. Women as contemporary cultural
producers are sometimes celebrated for merely existing or for garnering some
kind of creative control in this glass-ceilinged sky. Others are criticized for
offering women’s images for sale to the highest bidder. Girl appears within the
fray as a topic in the Women’s Studies corpus most often as uber-victim, despite
well-intentioned sociological studies which try to identify the causes of girls’
disavowal of sports, science, and math as arenas of desire, abdicated for the
pleasures of bodily grooming and sculpting, social networking, and support-
staffing others’ desires. Unable to occupy the more exalted yet highly contested
space of cultural producer, girl is most often determined by what she buys, and
how she is bought and sold-out. According to Jean Kilborne, Susan Bordo, et. al.,
girl is awash in the same sea of advertisements that help deform the way women
conceive of and live in their bodies. Only girls are guileless, more in need of protection, less able to recognize the snake in the grass that feeds/eats them.

If according to feminist analyses man is “one”—the one—with more than his share of power, and woman derives meaning from being his opposite, then woman is not-one (which is to say less-than-one for foundationalists like Sigmund Freud, and more-than-one—multiple—for postmodernists like Luce Irigaray). It is precisely woman’s “abject” regime of constraint that allows her to become something other than one or minus one, engendering for her the very conditions of possibility or transformation necessary for action, movement, and becoming.

Philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari theorize through both Freud and Marx to forge a philosophy of intensities and movements in *A Thousand Plateaus*, a major work in the development of critical theory. In my feminist reading of their work, I am at pains to argue that the process of “becoming” removes woman from her regulatory domain of signification, so there is no longer a universal normative subject position that limits her capacity for action. A woman is a becoming, a series of actions that produce effects; not a cloning of the same again and again, but a process of contagion in which woman is materially affected by contact with others. Girl is likewise a becoming, on a different register and frequency than woman.

Feminist visual cultures recognize this kind of becoming through an examination of those abject spaces, modes, objects, and practices through which Girl becomes in order to rearticulate what she can do. The sites under investigation implicate what Julia Kristeva calls woman’s “powers of horror” by propagating the threat of the hyper-
feminine. My notion of the hyper-feminine refers to the co-optation, exploitation, and reiteration of zones traditionally associated with women as cultural producers, for the purpose of exposing restrictions and challenging assumptions about the disempowered status of the feminine. These two aspects of Visual Culture Studies proper, 1) the decentering of proper objects allowing for the breadth and breath of the transitory, the small, and the unrecognizable, in conjunction with 2) evaluative tools used to deconstruct and yet reinforce subjects' appearances along multiple axes, make Visual Culture Studies a most compelling interdisciplinary arena through which to encounter Girls. In addition, this study on Girls seeks to negotiate between top down and bottom up research methodologies. By this I mean the deployment of theoretically and philosophically driven questions at popular sites of Girl production, in combination with singularities of discourse and artifact that come from the girls themselves.

Idioms of Flow

The idioms deployed in this dissertation range from the poetic to expansions upon discipline-specific lexicons of discourse. While it may seem at times that I am channeling Girl, my modes of address are quite deliberate. The rhetoric of analysis alone is not capable of handling the flow that is Girl, particularly if one's objective is to do something other than to define her. Aside from a few certificate programs in the US, the study of Girl doesn't even have an academic home. My idioms are not mere aesthetic or rhetorical whims, but an attempt at a language of response that is adequate to its subject.
The following chapters explore multiple sites of Girl production in order to assemble and assess the contours of Brand X, or how girls practice, occupy, and manage the sign by which they are marked. Chapter Two explicates the theoretical framework for the dissertation’s arguments. I redeploy Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming and configurations of rhythm and the refrain toward a rhizomatics of Girl, and establish the terms of “Brand X.” The chapters that follow provide examples of Girl marks that comprise Brand X. Chapter Three uses ekphrasis as experimental feminist art criticism to address self-portrait refrains in the Girl paintings of Su-En Wong. Chapter Four offers an affect-based analysis of selected Girl gestures, practices, and products found in feature and independent films from the last three decades. I draw from film/texts ranging from Carrie (1976) and Foxes (1980) to Coming Soon (1999) and Thirteen (2003). In Chapters Five and Six, case studies from my undergraduate classroom projects made by girls about Girl test the pedagogical force of Girl-centered curriculum. Girls engage feminist visual and theoretical materials and become producers of content themselves. Chapter Five explores three examples of digital student films produced in this context. The dissertation concludes with Chapter Six, categorical analyses of Girl performatives in Cindy Sherman’s Untitled Film Stills (1977-1980) and I Am Not What You Want (2003), a film I constructed from selections of my students’ film stills project based on the Sherman original.
Chapter 2

Becoming-Rhythm: A Rhizomatics of the Girl

Most analyses of the girl categorize her either as a smaller version of woman, replete with a naturalized status as victim or at least victim-in-training, or else as a totally othered teenage beast whose hormones make her even more out of control than her grown-up counterpart. Either way, girls have as of late become hot research subjects in part because it is believed that they most readily and reverently reflect the mirrored cog of capitalist culture in its clean translucent state. In this chicken and egg scenario, girls learn to want objects and to be objects through media saturated templates, and those same templates absorb and re-commodify the girls’ affective responses to them. For example, playful fashion innovation: girls buy low rider pants, they also wear regular gym shorts, they combine the two by rolling the tops of their gym shorts down to reveal the tags as well as their bellies. Soon one can purchase gym shorts that are supposed to be rolled down.

In 1994, psychologist Mary Pipher’s best-selling book Reviving Ophelia, Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls sparked great interest in the current status of girl, her self-image, and the “girl-poisoning culture” that constructs her. “With puberty girls crash into junk culture. One way to think about all the pain and pathology of adolescence is to say that the culture is just too hard for most girls to understand and master at this point in their development” (13). Since this time, work on girls and girl culture has greatly
expanded. Parents, academics, and girls themselves want to know why girls become obsessed with their bodies, are disinterested in school and sports, and play war games with each other for popularity stakes and interpersonal trumps. As stated in the introduction, “Girl Studies” since the turn of the 21st century is a field genealogically related both to feminist historical reclamation projects (tracing and restoring the hidden histories of woman and girl) and to Body Studies/Media Studies’ attempts to answer the question of woman, thus Girl (if women are alienated from their true selves through the imprints of a misogynist culture, then this cycle might be interrupted if we can figure out how it happens to girls, or pre-women).

Girl Studies is inextricably linked to Women’s Studies, though a subcategory with legs of her own. What do girls and women have in common besides essentialized and mystified erogenous zones, and less money in their paychecks? Where do the contours of the Girl merge and diverge from the contours of woman? How might referencing and championing the mark of the Girl mean something more than an ageist erasure or backhanded compliment? In an attempt to map those legs as they walk, dance, and stomp through the “problem with no name,” I will deploy Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the refrain, and parse and explore its rhythms in order to map a feminist rhizomatics of the Girl. This chapter will take place in the playroom of the house of Girl Studies, a place where theoretical experimentation is having a pajama party in the basement, freezing bras and dangling fingers in bowls of warm water. In an attempt to generate a feminist analytical model for Girls in visual culture that does not reduce them to abject objects of study culturally constructed to the point of despair, this rhizomatics must begin with a teasing out of Girl from the rubric that surrounds her—woman.
But Deleuze and Guattari aren’t feminists

Deleuze and Guattari don’t spend much corpus time worrying over the question of molar woman, the one who is subject to structural devaluations of her cultural production. They spend even less time on the Girl, though she is configured as an appropriated Alice in *The Logic of Sense*, and as “the becoming-woman of each sex” in *A Thousand Plateaus* (277). They prefer to focus on the molecular, and use “woman” as one categorical outsider (among others) that has capacity to mutate, and to block the machinery that creates and maintains the subject (man). Molar woman, who has a body and functions and an assigned subjectivity, must disarticulate herself, enter into a microfemininity of particles that is becoming-woman in order to bypass the gifted lack of psychoanalysis. *Becoming-woman* is distinct from *being* a woman. Woman belongs to a category of subjects, a noun, with parameters, distinctions, pre-determined limits. Becoming-woman is a process, a verb, a shape-shifting capacity whose inception offers more possibility than the exemplar of feminism’s social constructions. In “1730: Becoming Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible…” a multi-leveled chain of becomings is outlined in which becoming-woman is followed by becoming-animal, to conclude with becoming-imperceptible—the immanent end of becoming (*ATP* 279). Woman herself is a mere phase on the way to some elsewhere.

There are many concerns feminists bring to bear upon Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophies regarding women. In *Volatile Bodies* (1994) Elizabeth Grosz lists the advantages and drawbacks of deploying Deleuze and Guattari for a feminist philosophy
of woman (173-183), cautiously weighing in favor of “selective reading and use of their work… to capture and put to work valuable methodologies, questions, insights that may lead in directions Deleuze and Guattari may not go or even may not accept” (180).

Tamsin Lorraine suggests becoming-girl and becoming-woman hold a privileged relation to the unconscious realm that might resonate with Irigaray’s notion of the feminine, but D&G’s failure to account for the risk in dissolution of an identity that is already in peril describes a masculine becoming with a masculine bias (Irigaray and Deleuze, *Experiments in Visceral Philosophy*, p. 186). Dorothea Olkowski devotes a whole chapter to these critiques, “Can a Feminist Read Deleuze and Guattari?” in which she explicates other feminists’ concerns before moving on “to what in Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari I can make use of in my own work” (*Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation*, p.58).

The primary feminist critiques of D&G’s configuration of woman and becoming-woman, infused throughout the essays of Buchanan and Colebrook’s edited collection *Deleuze and Feminist Theory* (2000), include (1) just when women finally obtain the status of the subject it is rejected as a viable category from which to conceptualize a framework for possibility, and (2) the appropriation of “woman” for a category of becoming not only situates woman once again in the service of man, but it renders her a vector one moves through and leaves behind on the way to becoming-elsewhere.

Deleuze and Guattari do give a nod to the matrix of power relations “real” women must negotiate in order to act in the world, with a strong warning against the weight of a subject congealing: "It is, of course, indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view to winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity: 'we as women...' makes its appearance as a subject of annunciation. But it
is dangerous to confine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow” (ATP 276). While I find their notions of becoming-girl and becoming-woman to be rich, problematic, and worthy of further attention, particularly as their rendering is one of positivity and possibility not grounded in psychoanalytical lacks, I’m not sure their work specifically on gender adds as much to my research in Feminist Theory, Girl Studies, and Visual Culture as some of their other iterations on sound, living creatures, habitats and habits. In advocating for the inclusion of Deleuze and Guattari in a contemporary feminist toolbox, Claire Colebrook suggests that “feminism has a different type of theoretical heritage, where questions have always been voiced in terms of what thought might become (rather than the correctness of this or that model)” (DFT 10). In an attempt to honor this feminist heritage, and instead of trying to instantiate the presence of feminist trajectories in Deleuzian thought or simply trying to get Deleuze and Guattari right, I am appropriating Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the refrain for a feminist analysis of the Girl because it offers more insight into the ways Girls construct themselves as performative networks than the death-by-culture model preferred by such feminists as Jean Kilborne, Catharine McKinnon, and even Susan Bordo.

As a feminist, this project offers me a tenable way to enter into the discourse of Girl Studies armed with a becomings-weapon that is not reliant upon a psychoanalytical configuration of woman. I believe it costs women everything to practice a politics of difference that is by definition reactionary, a reaction to the cultural refusal of leaky gendered bodies that must be overcome. By theorizing outside this overdetermined box, one begins with action, deploying the powerful force of flow. Girls exude tactics for
becoming, ways to hack cultural significatory regimes by learning to recognize, hover
upon, flow around and through the contours that will shape them into subjects. Their
liminal status allows for and assures their molecular configurations. Another important
interjection for this dissertation in the intersection between Girls Studies and feminism is
an intervention in the production of subjectivities-- the ways in which becoming troubles
the primacy of the subject as mode of being. Like Deleuze and Guattari, I am not
claiming that the modalities of the feminine be abandoned entirely. If the desire for
recognition as a female subject is the desideratum of feminism, then this project has little
to offer. However, if a project of feminism is to reconfigure embodiments of gender
through becoming something other than lack, practices of flow through contagions of
non-Oedipalized becomings may offer feminists more than a womb with a view.

Home on the Refrain

The musical refrain sutures its whole (song, piece, interlude) through the
repetition of specific notes, sounds, bars and words. The lives of Girls can become
recognizable to themselves and others if the sonorous repetitive acts that comprise them
are mapped. Before exploring Girl acts, an examination of the Deleuzian refrain will help
to inform and situate the borrowed and reformatted musical schemas of the feminine to
follow. Deleuze and Guattari begin their chapter on the refrain in *A Thousand Plateaus*
with three connected components of what I would call daily refrains. A daily refrain here
means something one does repeatedly, unreflectively, which structures the day, making it
comfortably recognizable and performable. In their first example of a refrain, a lost child
orients himself by humming a little tune, in an attempt to momentarily order chaos into
something stable and to territorialize the unlivable (ATP 311). When my son was an infant, he felt threatened by diaper changes in strange places, in front of odd folks and smells, accompanied by the echoing sounds of flushes and hand-drying machines. I hummed “Jingle Bells” on changing tables year round to stabilize the unfamiliar and to mark this territory as sonorously ours. The most abling effect produced by the humming of a tune is an importation of homey stability, bringing the comforts of familiarity to bear upon an unfamiliar and disruptive situation.

Does this always mean that when we find ourselves away from home distractedly humming a tune we are in a potentially alarming situation? In the grocery store check out line, at a boring party where you know no one but the host, waiting in offices to be seen by someone—these are not anomalous enough occasions to be psychically disruptive or physically dangerous. Yet these simple breaks from our everyday routines may invite a kind of reflective chaos in which the encounter with the pause or suspension of habituated turf produces a thoughtful dis-ease. Humming, mumbling to oneself, a cappella singing are all ways to drown out chaotic dins of “out there” encountering “in here.”

The second example D&G offer illuminates the home as protected organized space shored up by walls of sound. If home is defined in no small part by safety, habit, organization, and the elusive impermeability of this unity, then home appears in contrast to the ever threatening instability of the outside. “A housewife sings to herself, or listens to the radio, as she marshals the antichaos forces of her work” (ibid). It is of course the impossible and thankless job of the homemaker to demarcate zones and practices of stability for those in her family, to draw the same circle of interior forces every day—
both positive and negative. Ring around the roses, pocket full of poses, ashes, ashes, we all fall down. The silent buzz of one’s home can be a deafening reminder of the numbered intervals that comprise a life speeding toward dissolution through that white-hot tunneled hole of endless reverb. So we fill up the silence and turn it up loud with multiple TVs, radios, and streaming mp3s. We like to handle the remote control as if we could manufacture lines of flight as easily as pushing the button and dowsing our bodies in corporate sponsored landscapes perfected in HD surround-sound.

In an aging suburban home, where there are seven televisions, the wife has quit her job as peacemaker, scapegoat, and cook. The husband, who has always been the recipient of such gendered largess, can’t seem to figure out how to make a home for himself in the home he has shared with her for over thirty years. After a fend-for-yourself dinner he eats alone, he ignores snippets of conversation swirling around, one ear plugged up by an earphone connected to hot radio sports action, and the other ear snaked firmly over to the latest hall of fame replay from 1987 on ESPN Classics TV. This sensory over-stimulation provides a protective bubble, a home within a home too out of control to be comfortable. “A mistake in speed, rhythm, or harmony would be catastrophic because it would bring back the forces of chaos, destroying both creator and creation” (ibid). The bubble must be cultivated for his survival.

The television provides a comforting refrain for many who live alone and miss the sound of others’ voices. Silence has become noise, as noise offers us a comforting silence. Visual noise also fulfills a similar function. How often are televisions on even when no one is actively watching them? My neighbors across the street whom I have never really met have a gigantic flatscreen TV that is clearly viewable from my dining
room table. Their television is on continuously during non-workday hours, usually long after I have gone to bed. The comforting and silencing functions of their media hum become visual noise as it spills out onto the street. The predictable repetition of kinetic images broadcast through my window has become an unwitting member of my family’s own refrain squad.

These sonorous and visual bubbles of everyday practices become the recognizable safety zone spaces that are often identified as “home.” No, home is not just anywhere you hang your hat. Home is the temporary respite from the liminal, that fine line upon which inner and outer chaotic forces come together to shape the contours of subjectivity. When one is visiting friends or family for longer periods of time, say more than a week or so, we bring our daily refrains with us to make a home within someone else’s home. We may attempt to sync our refrains to those of the host house’s, or if we are particularly regimented or discombobulated, we may ignore the refrains in front of us in favor of the ones we brought. For example, my father-in-law eats the same breakfast every day at the same time, whether he resides with us or at his place.

Anywhere You Hang Your Head

It is the refrain that generates home, and the refrain that permits acting as subject. Home here refers to both physical and psychic spaces. In our culture, when one is homeless, i.e. when one lacks a physical space (with a postal address) in the private sector with a bed and other possessions that one comes from and retires to, one is neither recognized as nor permitted to act as a subject. If one has a physical home, but does not enter into the public sector on a regular basis, particularly to participate for remuneration,
one is neither recognized as nor permitted to act as a subject (unless perhaps wealth does the talking). Either you must generate your own refrains or be lucky enough to find someone to do it for you. You can make refrains together with your co-habitants, and borrow and share and gift them to one another. Refrains occur in time, and may be mapped.

The humming of a comforting tune makes a temporary home in the outside, as the home is made every day from the stabilizing and aesthetic forces of ritual inside. The third example D&G provide as a component of the daily refrain has to do with the membrane in-between the two. Unlike the forces of chaos that push up against the outsides of home, the circle that is home creates the space and possibility for movement away, an improvisation. I depart from and I return to. Improvisation cannot occur without the presence of the refrain. Capacity to “join forces with the future” is read off of the staff and through the embrace of refrains. Improvisation can overtake and subsume the refrain, driving it to dissolution. Improvisation all the time creates its own refrain.

If any of these three components short-circuit, the life refrain ceases to function and chaos abounds. Daily refrains that establish and maintain a center allow for the production of subjects and the continuation of recognizable life. Refrains that create home allow for tethers to elsewhere. A sense of order, even if it is the ordered chaos of crumpled papers and dirty dishes, is the ground one needs to walk upon. Songs that transport one to the stability of this solid ground are one form of tether we use to comfortably open our doors, walk outside, and return again. Our improvisations--breaks from refrains and new acts in the world—are possible only in so far as our tethers continue to be maintained. Completely uncharted experiences are made intelligible when
juxtaposed with the things we do everyday. What we do every day in many ways produces who we are, what we know, and our capacity to change these things.

If our daily refrains become disrupted or dissolve without the emergence and practice of new actions, we may no longer feel safe enough to improvise. Among the breakdowns in this life circuit are birth, death, illness, financial instability, abuse, and abandonment. Once the capacity for improvisation is diminished or lost, it becomes quite difficult to resurrect it. Not only may the dissolution of daily refrains affect the establishment of “home,” but our sonorous tethers may also be interrupted or morph into other kinds of strings. Not all ties to home help to produce improvisation. In some instances, refrains and improvisations may be staked more upon leashes or chains. If a tether to home actually functions as a leash, the subject emerges as one with limited capacity for improvisation. If one’s ties to what is safe disallow experimentation and bind one to a series of familiar repeatable acts outside as well as inside, the refrains produce a stable but stagnate subject. For some, tethers to the recognizable walls of the everyday environ become something more like the chains of a fence, barring the capacity to comfortably move to and from any unmarked space. Such is the life of the agoraphobe.

Milieus, Rhythms, and Territorial Refrains

Refrains make life livable, or at the very least visible. But how do they function within the electric hums of spaces and bodies? What is the role of the Girl in all that sound and fury? Deleuze and Guattari further explicate with intricate maps some connections between sound system formations and noise. Milieus and rhythms emerge out of the vibratory chaos of the everyday. Milieus, “block(s) of space-time constituted
by the periodic repetition of the component (ATP 313),” flow into and over each other, marking and destroying territories, loosed groupings and categorized resurgences. Each milieu is coded and recognizable by a periodic repetition, an aural dna/rna jam, with support-staff codes, exoskeletal codes, and membraned partitional codes in the middle that can transport energy and waste throughout. These codes are not fixed, and retain their capacity to affect other milieus through a transcoding or transducing contagion. Milieus may be built one on top of the other, or may expire or dissolve and mutate into each other. Codes that adhere to one milieu do not necessarily maintain the discreteness between that milieu and something else. Milieus are open to chaos, as they are permeable and transducible.

For Deleuze and Guattari, rhythm is the milieu’s answer to chaos. The Girl is our milieu’s answer to noise. She is marked as pop culture repository, absorbing and sorting bits of “trivial” data while she maps her place in the world. What to wear—that’s so last Tuesday—who’s seeing whom, foods that make you bloat, the effect of a raised eyebrow on your math teacher, the latest RAWA campaign on the internet. CNN’s news on news gel tries to hold viewers by offering the most information they can pack onto a screen in its top five categories that roll every 6 seconds along the bottom. Girls keep even more info balls in the air, juggling the contradictory everyday survival skill lists like shiny pink knives.

Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of sound/living systems and the refrain can help us better understand the presence and contribution of “Girl” in our own milieu(s). Girl occupies the same liminal status as rhythm—the in-between. In order to find the in-between, we need to look at the constituting territories produced by the refrain. For D&G,
the role of the refrain is territorial. The territorial refrain is comprised of forces—chaotic, earthbound, and cosmic—that engage and converge to form a sphere of action or assemblage. These three aspects of the refrain can occur or converge and occur simultaneously in response to chaos. The refrain fixes a point; it is focal and provides a space of respite in the primordial gape. Or the refrain may instead deploy a calm-inducing pace, a meter, to establish territory in the chasm. Either way, “the black hole has become a home” (ATP 312), and the refrain establishes a territory from which to act.

My rhizomatics of the Girl begins here, with woman. If Girl is rhythm, she exists as a vibratory assemblage engendered by a refrain. She is the exuberance of molecular immanence that gives shape and movement to and between milieus. Girl and woman share related contagions of femininity and vectors of desire. Woman is the actor; Girl is the action. But what is woman? Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the refrain does much to describe the shape of woman, her capacities to fix and flow, to straddle chaos as nutcracker, footprint, and bridge. It is her proclivity to touch the big black hole, join with it, break away, survive, and do it again that colors her not beautiful but contaminated. What bleeds but does not die? The Deleuzian refrain proper refers to animals in their habitats as well as the sounds of music. Woman as refrain is another name for force, a sonorous beast of possibility. I claim neither essential physical nor emotional characteristics for woman except for her ability to act and to engender.

If woman is refrain, then her role is territorial. She demarcates and assembles. Her landscapes are “amorous, professional or social, liturgical or cosmic” (ibid.). She builds tunnels, decorates bedrooms, opens gateways, locks boxes, connects structures, jettisons to elsewhere. She taps the forces of chaos, constructs deflectors and one-way
signs. She ties packages with ribbons and bows. She is Girl’s modal counterpart, recognizable in metered pace and measured step. Woman as refrain, generator of home and mitigator of chaos, occupies the privileged status of a Deleuzian becoming while negotiating the material concerns of an embodied subject.

Rhythms Are A Woman’s Best Friend

For D&G, milieus and rhythms are born out of chaos. Milieus are the vibratory constituting walls that comprise living things or territories. Exterior milieus make up flesh, surface and exoskeleton, interior milieus are generative materials such as blood and bile, intermediary milieus function as permeable membrane and annexed milieus host energy sources, impulse and stimulation. Milieus communicate, pass in and out of each other, and maintain contact with the chaos that is ever threatening.

One effect produced by milieus’ exposure to chaos is rhythm, the in-between-ness or liminal force of chaos becoming:

Between night and day, between that which is constructed and that which grows naturally, between mutations from the inorganic to the organic, from plant to animal, from animal to humankind, yet without this series constituting a progression…In this in-between, chaos becomes rhythm, not inexorably, but it has a chance to. Chaos is not the opposite of rhythm, but the milieu of all milieus. There is rhythm whenever there is a transcoded passage from one milieu to another, a communication of milieus, and coordination between heterogeneous space-times. Drying up, death, intrusion have rhythm… (R) Rhythm is the Unequal or the Incommensurable that is always undergoing transcoding. (ATP 313)

Rhythm is the Girl. She is found in the flow between constituents. The refrain of woman territorializes milieus that exist because they are performed again and again, milieus such as home, food, pleasure. As Judith Butler claims in Bodies That Matter, a
reiterated acting “is power in its persistence and instability…a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (9). For D&G “It is the difference that is rhythmic,” and here where one can find the Girl in every refrain (ATP 314). The productive repetition of the refrain is not re-productive, does not birth the Girl. Girl is the proper name for becoming, a “surplus value” of the territorializing or bridging role of the refrain. One most recognizable Girl rhythm is that of the hiccup, waiting as performative. Momentum stalling, running in place, gas and brake petals both floored, I explore this Girl rhythm in my Chapter Six analysis of Cindy Sherman’s *Untitled Film Stills*.

The rhythm of a refrain sometimes engages with something quite tangible, that of the Territory of a Body. From masochistic media accounts to protective sociologies of Girls and popular culture, the Girl body is defined as an exploited and contested territory precisely because it is read as malleable, controllable, decidable, and effectless. Why is this body so over-determined? How does one even locate the body of a Girl? The whole of the Girl body is built of milieus and marked by indexes referring to still more milieus. It becomes recognizable as a territory when its components change from being directionally constitutive (acting, responding, organizing) to dimensionally expansive (marking, signing, performing), “when they cease to be functional to become expressive” (ATP 315). With the becoming-territory of organs and desire, the body is readable to us as surface, as signature. The rhythm that is Girl performs this body as a feminine refrain, makes it Girl body through a transcoding of indexes both historically gifted and made up on the fly. This territory glistens with cultural residues-- thick smears of lubricating wax buffed to shine, to bind, to uniform, and to preserve that body which is ripening-fruit
perishable. We traverse the codes of her territory and read pink, smelly, delicious, vicious, in-flux. We are coated in Brittany, Beyonce, Mary Kate or Ashley.

The place where rhythm plays

The Girl marks; the territory is established. The refrain or territorialization that produces territory and expressiveness is an act of rhythm. Rhythm occurs on two planes, one of expressions and one of functions. The plane of functions is organized or created because it is territorialized, not territorialized because of its a priori existence. This plane of Girl bodies occurs because it is organized (territorializing refrain). Girl, Girl, Girl, Girl again produces possibility. Neither internal nor external forces organize the Girl body in response to its functions, or the possibilities created by them (Girl is not an originary unruly bloody mass of desire that must be corralled and sequestered). Girl functions as a result of the feminine refrain she performs for herself not as agent but as transient. This is important to note because hegemonic “societal” and familial forces are tapped as chief architects in the actual construction of Girls’ bodies. In my version of the chicken and the egg story, there is no Girl around which to found Rapunzel’s tower. She is not born as a clean slate, ready to actualize the desires written upon her verbatim. She functions because of her own rhythm and engages with desires of all kinds. It is her performance of the functions that spanks the nature/culture divide.

One example of how the plane of functions works on the literal body involves the arrival of the new. A “function” or capacity a Girl’s body may develop through puberty is the capacity to reproduce. If the Girl body reaches this moment through her own genetically and environmentally inflected hormonal clock, then she will most likely
experience menarche. She bleeds because she is an aggregate; she is not a girl because she bleeds. Menarche as a function occurs whether or not the girl has been informed about its nature, whether she has been taught to perform it as celebration or curse, whether she is nine or eighteen. Cultural cues about appropriate responses to menstruation do not alter the fact that she menstruates. The girl may choose to control this function using hormonal therapies engineered to suppress menstrual flow, she may use pads to avoid touching the insides of her body, or a cup to measure a day’s fluid output. We can read her performance of menstruation on the plane of expressions. The plane of expressions that constitutes Girl bodies marks that function.

A becoming-expressive of rhythm generates both planes, and the territorializing factor that organizes the plane of functions is expression. This is where, particularly in the realm of Girl Studies, the plane of expression runs rings around the functional. Girl marks are visible, tangible evidence of a presence. We have developed systems of codification for evaluating them, including why they are generated, what this evidence might mean, who is responsible for the variety of “unhealthy” marks Girls make, and how we can interfere with the repetition of sign productions that make us uncomfortable. I believe this vector to be currently so seductive to analysts because it is overwhelmingly comprised of practices that manifest themselves visually. In his comprehensive treatise on visuality, *Downcast Eyes, The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Funk*.

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3 Even though I had read books about menstrual events to come, as a pre-menstrual girl I hatched a plan to delay the inevitable array of changes that frightened me simply because I would be forced to perform them and didn’t get to choose their time or kind of arrival. I thought that somehow I would magically know when I was ovulating for the first time, and that I would simply become pregnant to avoid the whole bloody thing. I was not even kissing boys nor aware of the birthing, care, and maintenance of a baby. But somehow all this seemed more tenable because I could choose it and invent responses to it rather than having it simply occur at random.
Thought (1993), Martin Jay situates the dominance of the visual as primary conduit and receptor of information, including the complicated relationship between sight and language. “The remarkable ability of images originally construed as mimetic representations or aesthetic ornaments to be transformed into totemic objects of worship in their own right also bespeaks vision’s power to evoke hypnotic fascination” (11). Dissection, interpretation, and evaluation of Girl images de-centers the Girl, her desires, and her capacities from her own mark-making.

The 1960s and 1970s liberation movements in the U.S. affected pedagogical changes in the framework for conceptualizing public modes of expression. No longer limited to those with sanctioned rarified talent, self-expression became as easy as breathing, wearing your politics on your sleeve. We are all special, and are encouraged to reveal our uniqueness through consumer choices. 4 Does expressing oneself constitute the

4 Several years ago, I spent a few classroom sessions with young teen girls who had volunteered for Roberta Hammett’s fieldwork on girls and computing for her dissertation Adolescent Women, Identity, and Hypermedia Composing (1997). She was helping them to develop websites for themselves as part of her computer literacy practicum. While their computer skills needed some tooling up, it seems the girls had already learned a lot about advertising, marketing, and consolidating a brand name. They all used corporate logos from their favorite products as a way to articulate who they “really are” and to mark their “unique” styles through trademarked moods and experiences. “I’m a Nike, Old Navy, Diet Coke with a little Sporty Spice on the side.” “I am more Punky Brewster Crispy Crème meets Volkswagen Beetle.” I asked them why they used product logos (literally on the webpage, hierarchically organized in a field of black space) as descriptions of themselves they made for others to see. They claimed that “everyone knows what kind of girl shops at Benetton’s”, and by appropriating and consolidating trademarks most teens (their target audience I suppose) could read the surface of the marks together to form a more articulated portrait of themselves than anything they could say or draw. While this seems to be a potentially scary failure of Art Education, and some might be inclined to read the girls as brainwashed corporate whores for the man in need of some enlightened self-discovery, these constituting rhythms express a savvy business acumen currently so hot in business literature’s self-help section such as Tom Peters’s The Brand You, or Fifty Ways to Transform Yourself from an “Employee” into a Brand that Shouts Distinction, Commitment, and Passion! They have harnessed the cultural capital of big budget advertising as a nuanced way of marking the surface of Girl. They did not believe themselves to actually be a pair of Nike shoes, or that Nike shoes came with specially advertised powers like a pair of Dorothy’s ruby slippers gone “street.” They clearly recognized the presence of the sign as cultural icon, its seductiveness as desirable object, and the practice of the signature as expressive production. I offer this as evidence of and testament to Girl’s capacity to produce her own rhythmic surface through a transcoding of other’s marks. According to her very own self-
practice of art making? If the becoming-expressive of rhythm is art, that would mean the territory, or for our purposes the Girl body, occurs as a result of art. Deleuze and Guattari write of this phenomenon in the context of coral fish:

The expressive is primary in relation to the possessive; expressive qualities, or matters of expression, are necessarily appropriative and constitute a having more profound than being. Not in the sense that these qualities belong to a subject, but in the sense that they delineate a territory that will belong to the subject that carries or produces them. These qualities are signatures, but the signature, the proper name, is not the constituted mark of the subject, but the constituting mark of a domain, an abode. (ATP 316)

For all living creatures, including Girls, becoming expressive marks the territory that is an aggregate body. If art creates the body, the functioning unit comprised of planes and milieus, then the body is a signature of affect—appropriation, bricolage, sheddings, and flow. One can read the effects of engagement with the world upon its surface, its construction, like flashing neon atop a building.5

representational construction, there is no actual girl beneath an image, nor is she available in “authentic” representations. She is found in the surface play across marks. She becomes a signature brand.

5 The refrain provides another way to look at the phenomenon of branding that is not unique to this group of girls only. The insidious forces of popular culture are often blamed for damaging girls’ self-esteem by flaunting impossible supermodel bodies in ad campaigns that turn girls away from important practices, such as studying, playing sports, and eating/eating well, in favor of body maintenance and self-objectification. As girls willingly and unwillingly submit themselves to thousands of ads each year, they produce ways of critically engaging the content. For example, young teen girls in the 2000 documentary What a Girl Wants claim to distinguish between Brittany Spears as marketing creation from an actual girl. They are critical of her image as girl diva and suggest that it might be dangerous to affix “girl” so tightly to “sex object.” Most of them aren’t yet interested in having sex or revealing their bodies in similar ways. However, they also say she is pretty, has money and power, and these things are very attractive—what girl doesn’t want money, power, and recognition? The Brittany brand has taken quite a hit since this time. After her “bad mommy” photos, heavily reported underpantless romps, and shaved head breakdown, she is no longer considered a teen role model. The brand is currently at an all-time low, with Salon reporting on a website that offers a DIY Brittany Halloween costume for 2007, “Choose your ‘Britney character,’ decide what to buy or what to use from your closet. People with small budgets can easily find a skirt and an Oxford shirt that they can “crop” by tying ends together to be ‘One More Time Britney.’ A short blue dress with a few additions can be turned into ‘Toxic Britney.’ More money and more creativity may be involved to make ‘Slave Britney’ or ‘Oops Britney’ . . . Avoid ‘Crazy Britney.’ It's probably not the best idea to go trick-or-treating with a
Postmodern artists use such processes to create art in a time when everything has already been done before, and the sign of innovation is the capacity to de-contextualize ready-mades and generate endlessly iterable “fakes” in order to make them sign differently. The most famous examples include Duchamp’s “Fountain” and Warhol’s soup cans. Sherrie Levine’s feminist approach is to appropriate paintings, photographs, and sculptures created by contemporary blockbuster artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Walker Evans, and Constantin Brancusi to question the status of art object as rarified fetish and artist as master/genius/male. "I try to make art which celebrates doubt and uncertainty. Which provokes answers but doesn't give them. Which withholds absolute meaning by incorporating parasite meanings. Which suspends meaning while perpetually dispatching you toward interpretation, urging you beyond dogmatism, beyond doctrine, beyond ideology, beyond authority" (Walker Art Center Collections, 1991).

The Girl marks her territory in similar ways. Expressiveness makes her body visible, functional, readable. She is not merely responding to seductive ploys from advertisers, parental imperatives, or peer pressure. Responses to these external stimuli more often take an emotional, subjective form that does not inspire action. She cannot sign as if she were a mirror or saturated and leaking sponge. Her expressive qualities, those that so capture what we have come to define as Girl, are “auto-objective.”

shaved head and a baseball bat.” (http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Britney-Spears-Costume-for-Halloween)

It seems instead of being awash and drowning in an impenetrable pool of images, these Girls recognize advertising brands such as “Brittany” as generated for them but not reflective of them, and they can critically negotiate the tensions between “real life” and “imagined life,” while acknowledging the seductiveness of the image. They record brand loyalties as bodily refrains, torquing through gesture rather than reproducing through mimicry.
According to Deleuze and Guattari, they “find an objectivity in the territory they draw” (ATP 317). In other words, art as a generative process cannibalizes, reorders, and produces a sign that is “objectively” recognizable and repeatable for the artist. The toddler draws a circle. “Pig,” she says. Twenty minutes later she draws another circle, “Ball.” A day later she makes another, “Sun.” She finds difference in the same gesture with each performance. This is the auto-objective act of territorialization. It does not matter that all you see is circle. As for Girl, she comes to know her territory as she draws it, using what appears to be the same closed set of readable marks as signs whose referents remain in flux.

Style and Space

When does the signature affect of Girl body become style? Shifts between the inner milieu of “impulses” and the exterior milieu of “circumstances” elaborate a style that is independent within its own relations of production. Just like the desire to draw and name connects up with a geometry of bodies and objects for the toddler to produce her own landscape of circle creatures, so do internal impulses or drives intersect with external prescriptive and experimental engagements to produce a personalized surface for the Girl. Expressions function as posters, establishing the territory in flat saturated color like coming attractions on a theatre marquee. We recognize Girl most often here as an amalgam of parts. Style emerges as an expression of engagement between the territory and its outer and inner stimuli. Girl style is a complicated topography that reflectively changes shape as the becoming-expressive of rhythm runs through and out, not simply around, the Girl body. Girl style is the very capacity to sign in three dimensions, much
like the mutable children’s sculpture that appears when one presses a face or finger into the palate of shifting pins, pulls back and gapes at the imprint—my finger—only to turn it over, erase, and begin again.

The territorialization of Girl bodies creates a distance between bodies, demarcates the differences between Girls, and keeps the forces of chaos at bay. When threatened, Girls may strap on prefabulated territorial refrains to protect themselves from dissolution like homeless hermit crabs crawling into abandoned shells during a thunderstorm. “Slut” or “Jock” may become more comfortable to wear than something nameless or something one must invent. The parameters for such categories are well established and knowable, at least from the surface. Girls may mark their territories with actual symbols such as tattoos in an attempt to measure and elaborate differences in signatures, the distance between two indistinguishable bodies.

The territory of one Girl body makes possible the territory of another. For Deleuze and Guattari, the territory “not only ensures and regulates the coexistence of members of the same species by keeping them apart, but makes possible the coexistence of a maximum number of different species in the same milieu by specializing them” (ATP 320). Take the demarcation of Girl body-territories in a high school milieu as an example. In Rosalind Wiseman’s groundbreaking guide for parents *Queenbees and Wannabes, Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescence* (2002), she claims that most girls aggregate in packs or cliques—families of peers they construct and maintain for themselves as a way to ensure their survival through the turbulent waters of adolescence. A becoming-rhythm of a territorialized group generates its sign, a poster, and in Girl World it reads:
“plastics/populars,” “band geeks,” “cheerleaders,” “stoners,” “goths/punks/artists,” “jocks,” “anorexics,” etc.

The poster is one effect produced by this process of territorialized grouping as a way to distinguish one particular group’s attributes from other groups comprised of very similar members, i.e., we are all sexually active girls, but our girls are intercourse-havers and those girls are born-again virgins and those other girls are blow-jobbers only, etc. Each group not only makes space for itself to function as a sub-group within a group, its very existence is predicated on the presence of the others. The separation of Girl group sub-territories makes possible the widest array of Girl group territories.

The whole of each Girl group territory is comprised of the interior, intermediary, and exterior milieus that make it function. Girls as milieus within the territories often perform territorial refrains that are labeled in Wiseman’s rubric as Queen Bee, Sidekick, Banker, and Floater (25). Performing these refrains properly ensures the success of the group as a functional unit or body. (1) The Queen Bee acts as a central organizing force through which all other refrains are possible. She performs an unspeakable charismatic power, persuading others in her group to offer their allegiance and homage. She must continually feed off of their gifted energies while proving her superior status in order to maintain her position. (2) The Sidekick fashions herself in the image of her beloved. At the group’s core, the interior milieu, the sidekick shores up the power of the queen bee by backing her unconditionally. Her refrain is one of mimicry that functions to elaborate and expand upon the power of the one. Successful mimicry produces a contagion of power that may ebb and flow depending upon the proximity of relations. (3) The intermediary milieu in a Girl group territory is occupied by the Banker. She squirrels
away gossip-nuts obtained from group members and others both to eat because they’re tasty and to trade on the open market. This innocuous-appearing intermediary seduces information out of girls under the guise of friendship, offers nuggets to the queen bee in exchange for the goods of the hive, but retains the juiciest ones for herself. Because she controls the group’s currency, she has almost as much power as the queen bee. As milieu, the banker is its immune system, ready to dispatch info-troops to annihilate any invaders, interlopers, or other members who might threaten her status within the unit. (4) The Floater circles the surface of the territory like a dancer. The inner core holds little attraction for her—she is most interested in the placard. Her primary function as intergroup emissary is to maintain the distances in-between the different Girl group territories. She absorves what she wants from each group as she moves along the perimeters, distributing a little chaos in her wake. The presence of one or more floaters suggests that the group’s refrain is tight and productive enough to invite improvisation.

The interaction between milieus produces the group’s style. Unlike the style that is performed through becoming-expressive of Girl, which is readable off the surface of her body, group style is private. You have to earn your secret-decoder ring before gaining access to the codes generated between the milieus. But the distance between these territories may be charted through the groups’ attenuating rhythms.

The rhythms between bodies oscillate and respond to the advances and retreats of others. A territory opens up a little; the courting for the arrival of an Other begins. For example, in the movie *Mean Girls* (2004), based on Wiseman’s *Queen Bees*, Cady has just returned from growing up on the African plains to attend a suburban high school. She encounters for the first time the animal-pack behaviors of the students, how they
travel to protect themselves, wear specific clothes to demarcate difference of species, how they court, eat, and play. She visualizes this through a series of wide-focus shots in which the teens behave like animals in trendy pants, morphing at one instance from a hang-out session at the mall to a romp in the jungle—they scratch, sniff, nibble, and smack each other while making jungle animal sounds. Teenage pack behaviors are dependant upon rhythmic interactions between territories bearing posters that read “Desiring-Machine A,” “Desiring-Machine B,” and “We’re No.1!”

*Mean Girls* Cady trades outsider misfit codes for cool as she tries to infiltrate the Girl group territory of the Plastics, not to belong but to unmask its codes and the girls who produce them as mere puffery. She proves herself worthy by replicating the group poster marks as best as she can until she is permitted access to the group’s style. Once in possession of this highly coveted array of gestures, the seduction of Plastic group style overcomes her “true authentic self” and she *becomes* popular, here equated with soulless puff. No longer on her way to elsewhere, she is disquieted by the territory she now creates. Cady takes the most obvious line of flight away from the vertigo of Girl group style by joining the Mathletes (geek boys). This film shows us that the only way Girls make vibratory space for becomings-other is to exit the territory of Girl brands entirely. The regulatory end-game gesture of individualism may provide closure for viewers who find Girl territories and styles distasteful, impenetrable or even immoral. *Mean Girls* isn’t mean enough to showcase the intricate rhythms of Girls without incorporating cultural imperatives for niceness.

My conception of Girl as the positive difference that drives territorial refrains is just one offshoot among others in the construction of a rhizomatics of the Girl. This
mapping of her territories will include sensorial improvisations, wide screen desires, little red hoods, shudders of multiplicities, and belly laughs. In the following chapters, I will not apply a theoretical matrix on top of Girl to test its merits, making Girl once again subject to and object of someone else’s privileged machinations. Instead, I will examine sites and practices of Girl’s becoming in an attempt to learn from her, and to demonstrate the pervasive effects Girls have on the same impermeable culture that is supposedly killing them.
Mirrored Refrains and Ekphrastic Intonations: The Paintings of Su-en Wong

Brand X encounters and manages the surface of Girl as commodity fetish, whether she wants it to or not. She appears as a tasty and easily assimilated other whom one does not fear to encounter because she can mirror your desire right back to you. In light of these interpolative forces, how might Girl choose to mark the territory of her self as mirroring other? What happens when she moves this daily refrain into the arena of the gallery? One such artist, Su-en Wong, innovates Brand X through the mirrored refraining of one or several selves in her Girl-paintings. Wong’s work interrogates the status of girl as unvoiced other not only through the replicant selves she creates on the surface of canvas, but also through her not so subtle critique of the infantilizing construction of “Oriental” women by the West. Like Cindy Sherman and Hanna Wilke (or maybe even Nikki Lee), she uses her own image as the template for building an iconography of desire. This time it is not porn’s most tired trope, “naughty Asian schoolgirls hot for you,” but intricate repetitions of Girls who dare you to appropriate them. They appear in canonical pornographic poses, from the odalisque to stripper’s pole.

Su-en Wong received an MFA in 1997 from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, an MA in 1995 from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a BA in 1993 from the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington. She also holds piano performance degrees from The Royal School of Music, London, and The Trinity College of London. She has had a number of solo exhibitions, and has been reviewed in NY Arts Magazine, ArtNews, The Wall Street Journal, and elsewhere.

Nikki Lee is a Korean American artist whose infamous Projects (1997-2001) series (part performance art, part snapshot photography) features her infiltrating and performing as an array of ethnic and subcultural American groups. At its best, Projects exposes a kind of cross-cultural pollination and malleability of sociologically identifiable mark-makings of interpersonal groups. At its worst, it is a one-liner run amok, dangerously collapsing and equating such disparate identity groups as yuppies, Hispanics, lesbians, seniors and punks.
En mass, they become something more than narcissistic tributes to Wong’s beauty or cleverness. They disquiet, disrupt, and still our scopophilic encounter with the Girl.

In the following chapter, I attempt to construct an experimental feminist art criticism based upon ekphrasis. In *Museum of Words*, James A. W. Heffernan defines *ekphrasis* as "the literary representation of visual art." Ekphrasis in shorthand is an exploration of “seeing” through “saying,” of giving voice to the mute object of interest. It has a long history as a minor poetic genre. In "Ekphrasis and the Other,” W. J. T. Mitchell articulates the hope of ekphrasis as the utopian attempt to overcome the image/text division, the fear of ekphrasis as the successful erasure of differences between the verbal and the visual, and the indifference of ekphrasis as the recognition of the impossibility of its project. I argue that ekphrasis is a most salient way to engage and critique all Girl-works, and in particular the works of Su-en Wong, because a) it starts with the premise that the object alone is mute, offering itself to the spectator to be looked at and consumed, b) that the transmutation between sign-systems produces an excess of meaning, and c) that the ménage a trios between the artworks, myself as critic, and the reader/audience is highlighted as an awkward but sought-after encounter.

Wong’s Girl-selves call out our assumptions about the supplicant feminine, and challenge projected desires toward her fleshly form. Sometimes they simply court us with

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8 Composed from the Greek words *ek* (out) and *phrazein* (tell, declare, pronounce), *ekphrasis* originally meant "telling in full." It has been variously defined. First employed as a rhetorical term in the second century A.D. to denote simply a vivid description, it was then (in the third century) made to designate the description of visual art (Bartsch 9, 32n). But it has not been confined to that meaning. In its first recorded appearance in English (1715), it was defined as "a plain declaration or interpretation of a thing" (cited *OED*), and in a recent handbook of rhetorical terms it is called simply "a self-contained description, often on a commonplace subject, which can be inserted at a fitting place in a discourse" (Lanham 39). My own definition of ekphrasis follows the lead of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, which defines it as "the rhetorical description of a work of art." Heffernen, 191
the force of the multiple whose many selves mark the comfortable expansiveness of their own desires. Because Wong both exploits and expounds upon the gendered nature of spectatorship, the role of the art critic cannot merely be one of omniscient observation and judgment. One could argue that much of feminist art criticism is already ekphrastic, because it attempts to provide space for the voice of the other, or at least the possibility of an encounter with the other that has more to do with the work itself than the mastery of the diviner who astutely identifies it as brilliant or woefully inadequate. There is a productive tension I would like to trouble between a traditional art criticism that seeks to determine the timelessness of the work’s genius as one important measure of success, and feminist art criticism’s commitment to “challenging the representation of women’s work in a culture which continues to devalue, denigrate and ignore it” (Deepwell, 5). Because Su-en Wong’s Girl-works already occupy the space of specular reflection, my job as feminist art critic would seem to have more to do with spotlighting them as Brand X exemplars than to offer the mute other a voice. However, I do not turn here to ekphrasis merely to champion or foster an encounter with the other, anymore than I do to provide the mute object a voice or to conjure a space of comfortable communion between myself as White western woman art critic and the works of an Asian Singapore native. The practice of ekphrasis proper is not quite adequate to the idiom of the Girl.

Specular Reflections and Mutations

Every woman who paints a self-portrait, or sculpts a likeness, or places herself in front of the lens of a camera whose shutter she controls,
challenges in some way the complex relationship that exists between masculine agency and feminine passivity in Western art history. I like to think that in taking up brush or pen, chisel or camera, women assert a claim to the representation of women (as opposed to Woman) that Western culture long ago ceded to male genius and patriarchal perspectives, and that in turning to the image in the mirror they take another step towards the elaboration of a sexualized subjective female identity.

Whitney Chadwick, “How do I look?” 9

In the pages that follow, I experiment with a form of feminist art criticism based on ekphrasis by shifting both its form and function to accommodate the interstices of Girl branding. I will not offer the exchange of “saying” for “seeing,” as I cannot consider the Girl-works as mute appropriable objects. Unlike proper ekphrastic poems, I offer images reproduced from the works themselves in a same-page interplay of image and text, instead of an exchange of sign-systems. In addition, the rhetorical function of my responses to the works is not merely aesthetic or poetic. They attempt to offer both a roadmap of strategies readable off of the works’ surfaces, as well as a critique of their effectiveness. I have selected 14 works from the small Wong corpus.
You’re Gonna Make It After All

Washed out egg yolk. Self-contained in superhero drag, she serves up sibilance, thighs alive against the chill of metal. Fighting cold comfort crimes and service industry misdemeanors after school leave her stoic in the city. Since the last phone booth has been added to the historic register of communications gone by, she morphs in the street, Mary Tyler Moore style. Spinning round and round until her plaid miniskirt and breakaway scanties fly high into the air like a tossed hat. A glowing red triangle with the scarlet letter “S” seeps its way through her chest cavity over her breasts and lungs. Working on perfecting her name brand, she tries out Scapegrace, Scofflaw, Scrumptious, Scrape. Unleashing her superpowers only with her pants off, she practices late nights on top of the covers. Her kryptonite is glue.

(Figure 1, Buttercup, 1999)
Wallpaper Odalisque

A beaming Laura Mulvey pulls back the drapes. Our host passes out opera glasses. The loveseat is full. A swell from the orchestra pit drowns out all but the spotlight. “No time for rhinestones or strap-ons!” she screams. The small screen pulses with life. “Look! She’s got a knife, and is heading for the family jewels.” But he can’t look. He gets vertigo when caught looking from above. “Coward,” say Lisa, Judy, and Laura simultaneously. He wanders over to the window at the rear of their living room, leisurely eyeing the tattered edges of wallpaper peeping out from under a new coat of paint. The girls murmur with glee. “She’s so hot,” says Laura. The reflection of the screen in the window keeps multiplying. “Television has brought murder back into the home—who belongs,” says Alfred.

(Figure 2, Perky Peach, 2001)
Carousel
Um pa-pa, um pa-pa. The endangered species carousel spins you round, a minuet in bare feet. Forest masks with a native lush. Up and down, up and down, um pa-pa-pa. Money back guarantee if the ride breaks down. Choose the braided mane, the gilded saddle. They all go around. Um pa-pa. A javan peafowl with its plumes spread wide--chariot is handicapped-accessible. Giddy-up, cowboy!! Too fast, pa-pa. Proceeds to benefit local tribes and starving artists make this a feel-good ride. Don’t worry about stampedes. “Retaining the realism of the live animals gives each figure a gentle, kind expression. The trick," he says, "is in their closed mouths." Pa-pa-pa.

(Figure 3, Fairy Gold, 2000)
Speed of the Pinafore

Fibrous and hearty as burgeoning tumors, the lace sprouts and takes hold. Molding a white outside to the surface, surface molds. Waiting takes time. Toes curl and pulsate to the deafening rhythms of the writhing lace. Angels on roller skates hum a backbeat hymn to the glories of clipped wing tips and legs crossed at the ankles. They fly only along the surface. The air is thinned with fairy dust up there, and goes on forever. Derby winds click heels three times, scattering “there’s no place like home” over hair and cheek. Practice wields its unknowable duration.

(Figure 4, Galaxy, 1999)
Peppermint Patties
Determined to take head butting to the next level in the what-goes-where dance. They know it has something to do with noise, fur, and standoffs. Everything you always wanted to know about sex but were afraid to ask. Socks removed for better traction. Pretend pillow kisses and water-balloon fights evaporate in the hot nostril snort and pant. Shadow-soiled pink circles the pair, ready to pounce. This is progress.

(Figure 5, *Ballet Pink*, 2000)
The Little Train

Choo-choo chain schoolgirls chatter in the line-up. How much time is spent standing in lines. Dresses pleated and pressed up against each other. Peter-pan collars force-frame faces into uniform smiles, not personalized by the intimacy of teeth and gum. All aboard. Lifesaver halos in tropical flavors smolder in the coal bin, behind the eyes. Sparks fly from fingertips as they lay joined across the tracks. Too bright, even Dudley Do-Right averts his eyes from their trilling whistles and honey-suckle steam. Crossing lights flash warning red over the passengers. Cars in bobby socks blur in transition. The girls pass the engineer’s red lipstick down the line.

(Figure 6, Lime Sorbet, 2001)
Thumbelina

Siren frogs laze on lily pads stewing in mulled apricot soup. Tongues dart in and out, searching for anything sticky or grooved. Looking for a good time and a few stray princesses—they are ready for a smooch. At least a ship-in-the-bottle rescue. Alice doesn’t live here anymore. She’s all grown up and got her own show. Rabbit holes are for suckers, anyway. Pink flowers glowing like studio lights irradiate the night. No one sleeps. They know it is happening while they watch, though they can’t see it. There are no crags through which to fight, just a soft green landing.

(Figure 7, Carrot Stick, 2002)
At Home

I bake low sugar tarts for the queen of hearts who has developed adult-onset diabetes. She came out of her coma on the first episode of the new season. She should have been under at least two more weeks. How cheap. Her kids glue colored macaronis onto paper plates while from the couch I locate household hums: furnace, lamp, computer, cat. Silence seems impossible. Stop, drop, and shop. The bathroom floor smells of urine and crushed beetles. This time I pour wine down the sink along with the baking soda. Church bells across the street chime again, marking time with a pre-recorded Jesus. I carefully pop hearts out of the metal tin, and put them on the rack to cool.

(Figure 8, Empire Yellow, 1999)
Zip-lock Seals

Bullet-hole nipples pierce the static, rippling vapor into water. Things are heavier here than they appear. Muscles branded and bound beneath the skin hold it all in. Bubbles of air leak out through the surface. After all, nothing except Tupperware keeps in the freshness. She won’t burp it open, can’t break open the seal. Permeability is tantamount to dissolution, and she feels solid for the first time. No matter. The bubbles keep leaking, inviting unknowable particles in through the gaps between. Solid, liquid, and gas comprise the mutiny of this mass.

(Figure 9, Hale Navy, 2000)
The Beast About to Strike

Dance team girls do a Michael Jackson twirl to his old hit “Thriller,” a perennial favorite with the drill team set. They are supposed to look like zombie crypt-chicks up for a trick, but can’t manage the costume change. Why would anyone take off that skirt, that mutable sign of snowy lust --slutty virgins do it better— to don the rags of rot? Death doesn’t sell well without the short skirt and dirty white sneakers. “Cause I can thrill you more than any ghost would dare to try/Girl, this is thriller, thriller night/So let me hold you tight and share a killer, chiller/Thriller here tonight.” Boy is always more monstrous than he appears, the handbook clearly states. Let him rescue you anyway. Pivot and turn, the girls offer up their bored but hot for you pouts to the empty bleachers.

(Figure 10, Bunny Nose Pink, 2002)
Dog Days Meet Result

The clean-shaven pool courts an anointing dip of sparrowed feet, chipping nail polish and pecking about for worms. Exercising lane etiquette, she keeps her multitudes to herself during the circle swim. High on chlorine and self-tanner, a breath in the deep end expands the comforting smell of upper lip. Lap and stroke bark in the distance, their shiny rhinestone collars blinding even themselves. “If it takes you 50 seconds, you will get 10 seconds rest.” She can’t remember graduating from kick board to zoomer, and the years’ caress of buoyancy has become a leaded boot. Smiles like chalk sticks stay slippery when wet.

(Figure 11, Mellow Yellow/American Cheese, 2001)
You’re a Knockout

Red and puffy and coated with fur, she enters. It takes a while, but her reflection in the mirror beckons a toddling forth, a wet kiss with tongue. She learns the word “good,” which doesn’t hurt too much. Hammer, blender, sponge. The pencil case fills with flowered no.2s. She is granted a turtle shell for each breast, like Botticelli’s Venus in plastic with no-foul protector hot pants. Winds from the hours strike a mean punch, a botox forehead in the making. Squatting on the half-shell like a pearl in heat, she spars once, twice, three times a lady. Super bag gloves prepped for love dampen but do not mold.

(Figure 12, Butter-and-Egg, 2000)
Solitaire

Power park girls drink chamomile swirls through the hurl of wood and chip. Fire starting is an art not yet lost upon them. They round mounds of shavings into hamster hideaways with exercise wheels and Barbie townhouse cast-offs. The three-story elevator takes the hamsters over the top. A game of old maid and the sparks fly. Badges earned in badger games mark the stakes between them: minivan, med school, monogamy, mice. The dealer folds--her cards predict a future of futures. Players whittle soap sculptures and calculate bets. The deck appears to be stacked. Tossing your cookies is its own reward. That patch is the sweetest. Tiring of the hamsters, they eat cakes and build tree houses of cards. Embers scar hatchets like great diamond rings. There’s a girl in every pot, a chamber for each maiden.

(Figure 13, *Tulsa Twilight*, 2000)
Let Them Eat Cake, or False Idols

Sitting atop this rebel chocolate yell, content to watch the stir their presence creates. Girls together demure. This pastel confection poses a delicious challenge to our nice day for a white wedding by replacing the plastic bride and groom dolls with girl flesh. The sisters, lovers, or friends share a different kind of union, one that is not made explicit, but nonetheless celebrated in high style. Vaginas and butts sutured directly to flowers and icing, not popping up and through some bachelor party wet dream, further contaminate the scene, the seeing. Cake renders the girls edible delicacies, tasty morsels of hair and bone washed clean in the champagne baths of mouths. You are hungry but scorn snacks that bring out your cannibal side. We enjoy our rituals of contiguity, slave to slave. The flower girl plunges a swiped-icing finger between her lips. She cries “more, more, more.” The dowry is drunk, blowing bubbles from the bottom of the punch bowl. Bells ring a hundred knowing giggles into the wind.

(Figure 14, Twilight Chimes, 2002)
Chapter 4

Girls on Film

The standard teen Hollywood chick flick formula includes some kind of girl-centered melodrama plus a little something extra for the guys who show up on dates. The extra bits range from fight scenes (two guys beating each other up over a babe, or two girls cat-fighting over a dude), to softened soft-core (girls getting dressed and undressed, foreplay sequences with or without partners, etc.). As the current fascination with Girls that comprises the nodes in Girl Studies has grown, so has a comparable market of teen girl genre films developed since about the beginning of the eighties. Girls are willing to shell out some cash to see themselves on the screen, and moreover, may often control date movie selections. Although the majority of “teen” films are marketed to boys, there is a burgeoning teen girl film-going demographic that is best described as chic-flick light. Studios target and attract white middle class mall girls with the usual hetero premises: problems with boys, popularity, parental involvement, and physical and emotional transitions. Girls of color grace the screen usually in supportive roles, if at all. Almost without exception, independent narrative and documentary films are the only places to find them.

In this rhizome, I highlight and trace emergent rhythmic strands found in films about girls. The vibratory in-betweenness of the Girl in these films produces a number of effects that illuminate who Girls are and what they can do. My dissertation features films in which Girls are not simply landscapes, clothes hangers, virgins or sluts, victims or victors. These Girls are born out of chaos, inhabit the liminal, and practice the graft and
art of the refrain. Many of these examples resonate in flawed but compelling films, freshman efforts made by women directors. This is not a gesture toward an authentic version of Girl (i.e. the directors were girls so their renderings must contain more Girl-truth particles). As I have said before, Girl is more verb than set of body parts. Many women directors who nuance “Girl” on film have admitted to years of back-breaking breaking-in work on guy films with guys, and films they were interested in making for professional rather than personal reasons. Their first solo-directed films, like many first books, are often packed with everything they have ever wanted to do splattered out in one energetic expulsion. The danger here is that films in which a point is being made often come across as preachy or didactic. The following affect-based analysis bypasses the thumbs up/thumbs down psychoanalytically inflected feminist film criticism that would leave some of these films on the cutting room floor.

The following analysis is culled from interesting moments in the recent history of girl-centered film. There is no hierarchy or chronology to the selections; they do not represent the most successful girl films from the past three decades. They do, however, offer a range of iconic gestures associated with Brand X. The affect nodes or girl rhythms begin with “Refrain” as the predominant gesture of girl territories, and conclude with “Scream,” the primal dissonant sound of the brand. With a giant nod to Steven Shaviro’s Stranded in the Jungle, I construct a map of girl made visible on screen. She coats our senses in the perils and delights of the not-yet subject, teaching us pathways of response to chaos and blockage. She offers us tactics for unlearning and derailing the subject, for becoming-elsewhere.
Refrain

In Adrian Lyne’s *Foxes* (1980), Jeanie plays den mother Girl to a pack of Girl friends. She drives them where they need to go in her truck, advises them about pills, booze, sex, and running away, hatches a plan to make a home for them by pooling child support payments. The pack and their escapades involve four girls coming together, for solace, support, and salacity, mostly from divorced or dysfunctional families (i.e. parents are stereotypical sots who are too busy or disapproving to discipline properly): Annie (Cherie Currie of the Runaways), launches herself headfirst into all matter of teenage excess in response to her beaten-down mother and stick-wielding cop father whom, we are told, handcuffs her sister to the bed when she gets pregnant to keep her from having a abortion; Madge picks a “much older man” to “de-viginize” her after her prying intact nuclear family announces her status as virgin to her friends; Deirdre plays siren and only mentions “Mommy” when things get rough with her friends; and Jeanie parents a traveling music executive daddy and divorced 40 year old mommy who actually says “I don't like your friends. Are there any nice people left in the world? Maybe the whole bunch of you is sick. You booze, you dope, you sleep with whomever. You look like kids, but you don't act like them. You're short 40 year olds… You’re too beautiful, all of you. You make me hate my hips!”

Men fair no better than parents in this world. The two standout supporting male cast members include Scott Baio as their mainstay good guy friend who at one point *outruns some thugs on his skateboard*, and Randy Quaid, Madge’s supportive “older” boyfriend (probably about 26) who spends screen time sleeping with a minor.
While the surface of the film seems Girl friendly and celebratory, including moments of raucous laughter and silly hijinx, *Foxes*’s plot is in part driven by the attempt to constrain or punish excesses of scary Girl energy: Annie dies after a hitched ride with some swingers plows into a truck, Deirdre is permitted no character growth at all, Madge actually marries her man boyfriend perhaps to keep him out of jail. Jeanie, who always deploys proper constraints, gets the happy ending—a nice goodbye with mommy and it’s off to futurity alone in a truck bound for college, with a brief stop-off at Annie’s grave. This narrative is neither noteworthy for innovation nor feminist in execution save its subject matter at a time when few films about girls were even being made. Adrian Lyne’s smarmy blockbusters that follow get progressively worse, such as *Flashdance* (1983), *Nine 1/2 Weeks* (1986), *Fatal Attraction* (1987), and *Indecent Proposal* (1993), and do not endow him with any feminist credentials. Nonetheless, *Foxes* provides an excellent example of the Refrain in action, from the dawn of the film’s opening credit theme song through its anomalous repetitions to its graveyard conclusion.

A map of the refrain “On the Radio” sung by Donna Summer places versions of it at six intervals. It both opens and closes the film, and occurs at insignificant and dramatic transitions. Like other Donna Summer songs, “On the Radio” begins with a ballad-like piano-heavy instrumental overture, followed by Summer’s earnest sentimental drag-on which transitions itself into danceable surface beats that palpate bodies with an understated electronic sensuality heightened by the sound of her voice. This is also the sound of disco dying (1980), an in-betweeness all its own bridging the gap between decades and political regimes.
“On the Radio” draws a parenthetical half-circle to inaugurate the film. A slow gauzed pan creeps up teenage Jeanie’s (Jodie Foster) sleeping form. The camera pulls back to reveal girly room things, displayed for our inspection: hair curlers, Arby’s sandwich box, uncapped tube of Clearasil, half-eaten Twinkies, mascara, deodorant, sleeping friends’ forms.

Someone found a letter you wrote me on the radio and they told the world just how you felt
It must have fallen out of a hole in your old brown overcoat
They never said your name but I knew just who they meant.

I was so surprised and shocked and I wondered too if by chance you’d heard it for yourself
I never told a soul just how I’ve been feeling over you but they said it really loud, they said it on the air on the radio on the radio...

Not exactly an empowerment song for loud pupa Girls binge eating and body-wrapping themselves into tube top cocoons, “On the Radio” is technically about a break-up and reunion between two lovers over the man’s inability to express his feelings. She “loses” him over it, and takes him back when his feelings are anonymously shared “on the radio,” i.e. when she figures out even random guys distance themselves from intimacy—that’s what guys do.

What does the film’s theme song about female desire and other-directedness, male blockages and withholdings, and mass media broadcasts have to do with the film’s dramatic premise? Not much, really. This is what makes its choice and recurrence so interesting. The role of the theme song in Foxes is much more about what effects it produces in the film than about what it means and how it echoes thematic concerns. The recurrence of “On the Radio” provides a territorializing refrain that 1) situates the in-
between status of the girl, 2) structures the pace and texture of the film, and 3) sutures plot elements and scenes together like chipped layers of polish on a toenail. It is primarily tied to Jeanie, the film’s protagonist, and shifts to elaborate her changes in mood and plot circumstance.

The status of the girl as a becoming is refrained throughout the film in its liminal moments. “On the Radio” is next used as background music to accompany movement from outside to inside, from interpersonal fast forward to introspective pause as Jeanie comes home from her friend’s canceled party. The music takes her through the door of her house to the bathroom, where she gazes enigmatically at her reflection in the mirror before entering her mother’s bedroom. This moment functions structurally as a bridge between scenes, as well as a signpost for the viewer: song is connected to the voyeuristic opening up for us of girl emerging on the screen which begins the film, continuing like the first dot in an ellipse—she pauses to remind us that she is always in flux and that the moments withheld in-between are hers, not ours to peruse.

The third deployment of “On the Radio” happens diagnostically at a teen party. A wide crane shot frames a space of gyrating bodies. They are presumably dancing to the theme song. Jeanie is not dancing but tending to their spilled drinks and burning embers on the carpet. She frets. They pulsate. The shot contracts and expands to reveal their respectable teen debaucheries within its surface frame of bodies. This scene marks the film’s center, providing an overview not unlike one would find on a National Geographic special. Drunken boy party crashers instigate a fight, and the music shifts. Jeanie as specimen here performs both the exuberance of the teen and the motherliness of the woman. Primarily functioning as spectacle, “On the Radio” drives a grander scale of
tensions and releases to form a writhing backdrop for explosive body energies. The viewer has no more access here to teenage jouissance than we did to Jeanie’s private musings in front of the mirror.

The refrain occurs next to support a reflective transition, much like it did in its second occurrence with Jeanie shifting spaces from outside with her friends to inside with her mother. It follows her exit from the truck to the scene of last night’s crime—the trashed “older boyfriend’s” house, where her friend waits amidst broken bottles, windows, tables and framed Kiss posters. Her gate is slow but determined. There are no dancing bodies in the light of day. Sunshine and footsteps ground her movement between two spaces. In the scene that split these two refrains, her mother accuses Jeanie and her friends of being short forty year olds. “On the Radio” provides connective tissue between thoughtless acts and introspection, suturing dissimilarities for the audience in a way that is not possible for Jeanie’s mom.

At last, upbeat rhythms and sexy vocals falter in the film’s precipitating climax, with an instrumental version of the theme song bouncing off of the walls of a phone booth. Tinny synthesized base rhythms accompany Annie’s last-ditch effort to save herself by calling Jeanie for help. The lonely caw of an unanswered ring adds melancholic sap to our peppy disco love song. Annie’s desperate plea shrieks from Jeanie’s answering machine. There is no one at home to pick up the line. Crosscut between shots of the phone booth S.O.S. is a shot of Jeanie looking for Annie in her truck. “Annie!! Annie!!” Ring. Ring. In the final shot of the scene, Annie hangs up the phone. A wide shot frames Annie, or as the shot’s distance implies, anygirl, walking away from the phone booth, out of the frame, toward certain disaster. The instrumental
conversion of the refrain marks this as difference in the same, a sonic Girl tag—garrulous, exuberant, relentless – irrevocably forced to grow up.

Instrumental “On the Radio” is all we have left. Annie dies in a car wreck. The next scene places people at a church, some of them weeping. In the film’s most didactic but fun moment, the church funeral is revealed to be its equivalent— the wedding of Madge to her man boyfriend. “On the Radio” accompanies Jeanie as she drives away from the wedding and her mother toward her future. A wide shot of the truck moving through town and countryside frames her travel as directional, as progress. The song fades as she parks, gets out, and walks over to Annie’s grave with a bouquet. “On the Radio” highlights the rhythm of pathos that carries this Girl and the film to its denouement.

Jeanie delivers the film’s first voice-over, a soliloquy about death and rebirth through the guise of a pear tree, for the film’s final scene. Lyne makes both a structural and narrative misstep here. All refrain moments prior to this accentuate the distance between Girl and intentionality, between Girl and audience. “On the Radio” is like a red flashing authorization refusal—Access Denied. Instead of closing the film as it began, inviting the voyeur while thwarting projective identification with the protagonist and her psyche, we are treated to Jeanie’s private and poetic musings. Perhaps this is an attempt to reassure the audience that everything is all right, girls do in fact have the rich, flowery, cathectable and life-affirming inner landscapes we knew they did before we watched the first 99% of this film. This attempt to normalize the girl towards some happily ever after ending eviscerates her strength. A close-up freeze frame of Jeanie’s face with a stoic half-smile highlights her gaze off screen, up and out of this story toward futurity. The last
instrumental “On the Radio” undercoats the suspended frame, closing the refrain’s parenthetical loop in easy-listening muzak. As an on-hold loop designed to distract us from the infuriating wait of nothing happening, the rhythm of the refrain fades to black way before the credits roll.

“On the Radio” as refrain drives a circle around Girl, permitting us plenty of stations to scan and denying us access to her transistors. Girl is marked most distinctly in between the channels through connective scenes framed by distancing wide shots. She enters, she pauses, she moves on. This refrain constructs topography of transition, the tinny rhythms of flux. In this dying light of disco and feathered -hair foxes, Girl becomes a tape loop blushing.

Drive

The drive marks the subject’s attempt to realize itself in the field of the Other and to find in that field the object that is eternally lacking. Satisfaction of the drive is consequently open to question, so much so that one could argue that the entire Freudian theory of the drives is designed to point to our state of uncertainty on the function of satisfaction.

Jaques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, 112

First-time writer and director Karen Moncrieff retells the Lolita story with a deliberate nod to the seductions of the symbolic in her coming-of-age saga *Blue Car* (2003). Meg is a teenage girl traumatized by the disintegration of her family. Daddy has driven away in his blue 1967 Summer-of-Love Grand Prix, leaving Mom, Meg, and her younger sister Lily economically downsized in their new little apartment. Mom works twelve hours a day, goes to school at night, and suffers from requisite bouts of
depression. Meg has no social life, and Lila has no caregiver. Enter Mr. Auster, her aging high school poetry teacher cum failed writer who keeps encouraging her to “go deeper.”

The film begins with a voice-over of Meg reading a poem. Teenage poor-me poetry is difficult to stomach, especially as an opener. But the blue car driving, slices of face in the rear-view mirror, hands on the wheel, provokes a study of driving and drives about a girl who is a passenger. Meg never actually drives once in this film. Her father, mother, Auster, and her friend’s brother drive the cars she rides in. Driving implies vehicle, direction, and destination, hooking up something to your body to get from one place to another. The machinic quality of Meg’s Deleuzian drive careens between the plane of functions and the plane of expressions. She has been abandoned by her father and is alienated from her mother, who despite some sympathetic gestures predictably gets most of the blame here. Language—the word— in the guise of Auster becomes her big daddy love-object. She courts him with freshness of phrase and the energizing angst of the particular. Cutting across the planes, one can see desire marked in word-machines: car, rust, leaves, blood. Auster demands a “map of nerve centers,” a training to refrain as woman. Meg cracks open her chest and invites the scalpel; her only demand is a steady hand.

Their relationship intensifies as poetry workshop pas de deux heads toward the homestretch, first prize in a poetry contest Auster judges in which the prize is a slot in the finals in Florida, with him. Her home life is abandoned after the death of her sister and a fight with her mom lands her on the street with no cash. She pawns a ring and takes a bus to Florida with her prize-winning poem and her mother’s silk blouse in her backpack.
After spending the night on the beach, she wakes up and wanders right over to Auster and his family. He takes her to a cheap hotel, and asks “Is this okay?” again and again as he proceeds to kiss her, lie her down on the bed, and have sex with her. Though she does not resist, her face betrays the shift in their relation as lethal. Searching for the Auster formerly known as mentor to comfort her, she opens his leather-bound journaled “novel” while he hides his shame in the bathroom. Instead of finding erudite musings about life, love, and the meaning of existence as anticipated, she finds doodles of a squirrel, white space, and an excerpt from Rilke’s *Letters to a Young Poet* he had read to her as his own verse.

She weeps before an audience of hundreds as she reads her new poem dedicated to Mr. Auster, “Now that I’ve read your book.” The “Blue Car” that has taken her on a trip through desire and transference, a line of flight away from the site of originary familial trauma, is abandoned on the side of the road. “The leaving is a gift I will always hang on to…” She frees herself from a relation more sycophantic than illuminating, but still manages to take with her a becoming-expressive that is actually useful. I am not suggesting she can now earn a living writing poetry. As a sanctioned negotiator of extra-curricular activity, she does have a much better shot at getting into a college that will offer her the financial aid she so desperately needs. Unfortunately, becoming-expressive does not propel her to uncharted drive-ways. She chooses to return to the scene of the original crime, and calls her father to come pick her up.

“Blue Car” is a film made for girls, which, to its credit, offers practical help for girls driven to find replacements for absent or neglectful fathers. Other films of its genre, like *Thirteen*, show girls unable to resolve conflicts with their fathers, doomed to
circulate an escalation of destructive behaviors. The familiar narrative in which a
daughter, injured by a broken or highly dysfunctional family, acts out and secures a
father-figure replacement who inevitably fails to deliver what she is seeking, most often
serves more as a warning to parents than as a possible line of flight for the girls
themselves. Mothers, keep your daddy-men at home and happily engaged or your
daughter will be forced to replicate cycles of unattainable objects, neglect, or abuse—and
it will be your fault. While not exactly a condemnation of the nuclear family that creates
the problem in the first place, this narrative is written for girls, not their parents. Girls
appear more as territories in progress than as chaos to be managed and cordoned off.

However the film might offer practical solutions to girls in trouble, it is
nonetheless an allegory for the Oedipalization of Meg. She rejects and blames mom for
the absence of father and phallus, and cathects on to a wordsmith who is the
quintessential transference object. Weak Oedipalization in girls often produces desire for
authority. Power is contagious. When attained, that elusive object of desire becomes an
everyday trunk of tricks where phallic goods are realized, shared, multiplied and
disappeared or stolen with the wave of a wand and a few magic words. It seems the
magician, Auster in this case, drives a clown car packed with daddys: Available,
Supportive, Alluring, Friendly, Governing, Using, Failing, Appropriating. Meg’s
attraction to Auster answers her drive for recognition and phallic goods. She ultimately
rejects the daddy of words for her actual daddy of flesh in a doubling of Oedipal irony.

*Blue Car* showcases the failure of Oedipal discourse to describe processes of
Becoming-Girl that create lines away from originary trauma toward other possibilities of
engagement in the world. If girl must first and always prioritize her relationship to the
symbolic and its progenitors, experimental pathways and improvisations will be blocked. Meg’s choice to address the “real” source of her problems, a stalled relation with her actual father, as a means toward refraining desire differently may seem smart, smarter than years of bad object choices. But Moncrieff never puts Meg in the driver’s seat. Meg traces a becoming-expressive with her pen. Who knows what kinds of territories she might draw off of the map if given a different set of tools? 

Tattoo

Warm red light piercing a bared teenage breast. Instead of marking the distance between Girl bodies, the tattoo scene in Foxfire (1996) is an attempt to unify dissimilar girls into one powerful pack through a territory-establishing brand of flame. The most intimate tattoo scene I have ever encountered offers us a voyeuristic peep into Girl style emerging. Foxfire, Annette Haywood-Carter’s first feature film as a director, shows girls banding together to oust a molesting coach after a drifter named “Legs,” played by a young Angelina Jolie, drops in on their school and into their lives to instigate grrl rioting. They beat up the coach actually caught in the act, are suspended for two weeks, and weave a new Girl pack territory for themselves.

A pile of candles burnishes a room of the abandoned house the girls conscript for a daytime/nightplay house. Legs takes out her box of inks, vials, swabs, and needles. She removes first her jacket, and then her shirt, to sit topless next to the flames. The girls circle her like earnest moths. Legs wants to “commemorate tonight,” to make visible what is already imprinted on her skin. Mazzy Starr’s “Into Dust” coats the room in hypnotic foam and paces the shots, smooth but weighted. She holds the needle to the
flame, producing a sizzle and a little smoke, before piercing the top of her right breast again and again. She says, “Fire, ‘cause it nourishes but destroys if you don’t respect it. That’s how we were tonight.” A cartoonish flame emerges on her skin.

Maddie, Leg’s companion lead and partner in intensity, insists “Do it to me.” She removes her sweater and is also braless. She takes a drag off of a bottle of booze. Legs gazes at Maddie like the big bad wolf, “Hold still… Don’t be scared,” she taunts. The camera pans in a slow circle to the left as we see Legs working first on Maddie, then on Goldie (also topless) in a compressed duration that chains the girls to each other in process, one becoming the other. They pass a joint between them to the right as the camera completes the circle to the left with Violet and then Red, the group’s most introverted member. She is wearing both bra and overalls as Legs scores the top of her breast. Exhilarated, she laughs and says, “We are like those girls who run with foxes.” The girls giggle as they chide her but appreciate the reference, squealing and piling on top of each other like wildebeests cavorting over a carcass.

Though this pile of skin on skin seems more primal than sexual, the presence of teenage breasts in a chick flick still makes reviewers uneasy. There are of course gratuitous moments of girl flesh in most boy/adult movies in which girls exist as desirable objects or fantasy props for masturbation jokes. But in the forty or so films about girls made primarily in the 90s that I reviewed for this dissertation, the presence of naked girl breasts in the context of their own desires is simply not allowed for the

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9 Except for Sadie Benning’s autobiographical videoscapes which she made as a teenager in the process of coming out, the only films that I encountered in which Girl desire was permitted a naked body were foreign: *Xiu Xiu, The Sent Down Girl* was made in Tibet and China (Joan Chen), *Holy Smoke* in Australia (Jane Campion), *Under the Skin* in Britain (Carine Adler), and all the works about Girls by Catherine Breillat in France.
Hollywood film. This is in fact the only chick flick I viewed that exhibited naked girl breasts. Since the presence of Girl desire on the screen is highly controlled and censored (see “Moan” later in the chapter), I believe breasts are permitted here because the context is not an overtly sexual one.

Girl breasts in the tattoo scene may produce discomfort in viewers because 1) Girls are “defacing” that most highly over-determined symbol of gender distinction and object-desire on the screen, potentially disrupting typical semiotic consumption of tasty flesh morsel; 2) Actual teenage girl breasts are usually shielded from girl viewers in some misguided, homophobic and/or paternalistic move to interfere with the mechanics of desire production that surround the breast as symbol, less so that girls won’t objectify their own breasts than that they come to recognize the desirability of other girl breasts (like they haven’t already figured this one out). The presence of the breasts in the tattoo scene makes possible a refrain of desire that is not territorialized around sex but an intensity of bodies in-relation. 3) Girl actors are “children” after all, even when they portray sexual acts on the screen, and most directors are loathe to cross that blurry kiddy-core line. Women directors I believe are acutely aware that no matter the film’s intention or judiciousness, consumers can always chew girlie flesh up like multi-colored Chiclets. When Haywood-Carter chose to include breasts in the scene, she risked being accused of exploiting girl bodies to win over male audiences.\footnote{Laura Miller of Salon.com responds quite negatively to the nudity: “…(T)he movie's intermittent forays into soft-core titillation (are) especially annoying. As the vagabond Legs, Jolie -- with her pouty lips and suspiciously flattering haircut -- looks like a slumming French starlet and about as dangerous as a kitten. Legs is supposed to be a lesbian, which provides the occasion for that particular brand of gooey, ambient sapphism so popular with male viewers and so exasperating to lesbians themselves. A jaw-droppingly
titillated (there are no come hither looks inviting them, no hot girl on girl action here),
these girl bodies revel in the bounds of nudity and friendship. Their exposure strengthens
rather than diminishes the powerful territorial group refrain, and reveals the physical
dimension of feminine relationality in action.

I suspect teenage girls get tattoos in attempts to personalize turf, revealing
uniqueness through their own chosen brands. Or perhaps she marks herself because
others do it to her anyway, and at least she is control of her own mark. More than likely,
the young tattooess is in fact making herself more similar in her “uniqueness,” part of a
tribal brand that reads “authentic teenage rebel,” than if she had no mark at all. The desire
to make permanent some congealed manifestation of territory always fails because the
mark, a 2-D poster that screams “I’m special,” cannot fix the 3-D rhythm in flux and
cannot demarcate the space between bodies all baring a similar mark. The practice of
tattooing in Foxfire functions differently, not as signatures of Girls becoming-expressive,
but as the surface of skin on a friendship refrain. Are they arsonists trying to burn down
some version of nice girl who doesn’t fight back? Perhaps. They are not interested in
distinguishing themselves from each other, but in making visible and tangible the
unifying territory they perform as pack—their private Girl style.

Urinate

Urination marking is a form of chemical communication for rats and other mammals.

One can find information about “species, sex, age, reproductive status, sexual

gratuitous tattoo scene -- in which several of the leads shed their shirts and wince under Legs’ insistent
needle -- had the mostly female audience at a recent screening snickering derisively.”
availability, social status, individual identity, and current stress level” contained in one purposeful drop of urine. Urine marking serves several functions, including sexual attractant and advertisement, habitat labeling system, or potential territorial defense. Females may mark males days before ovulation to help them remember a chosen mate, but they most often mark the night before they ovulate. “Juvenile males mark adult males a great deal, but this declines as they enter puberty. Female adults and juveniles mark each other at low, steady rates” (A. Hanson, www.ratbehavior.org).

Most people mark status, territory, and sexual availability with indexible signs: car, house, security codes, perimeter alarm, wedding ring, sitting alone on a barstool at closing time, etc. However, much like rats, people also send and receive chemical signals that can be detected both by the olfactory and the vomeronasal organs. Culturally sanctioned markings from a becoming-expressive of Girl coat our eyes in a cotton candy smear so sweet and airy and deficient of nutrients we are tempted to dismiss it as fluff. A becoming-functional of rhythm in the context of Girl bodies may produce marks that do not refer in this semiotic sense but rather exist on a practical or primal plane. Female urination is a function not often seen, smelled, heard, or talked about as an everyday mark of the Girl. Its performance in the film Holy Smoke (1999) situates urination as both intoxicating brush with chaos and an improvisation on a mundane refrain. This chemical

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11 According to Annick Le Guerer, the vomeronasal organ is present in the early stages of fetal development, and often “disappears” as the fetus matures. “Located at the base of the nasal septum and consisting of a pair of long, narrow sacs lined with an epithelium similar to that of the olfactory apparatus, the vomeronasal organ is much smaller and was long believed (incorrectly, as it turns out) to be an additional and secondary olfactory organ in human beings. In fact, the organ may play a role in affecting a wide range of animal behaviors” (Scent 8). It seems that the vestige of the vomeronasal organ may house a highly articulated interpretive machine for the decoding of chemical messages emitted through such carriers as pheromones.
marking too complicated to be contained in mere expression suggests a becoming-
functional of the territory of the Girl.

Day two at the Half Way Hut, Somewhere in the Outback, Australia: Aging
American urban cowboy deprogrammer PJ (Harvey Keitel) has made some inroads with
his charge, Ruth (Kate Winslet), a girl “under the influence” of an Indian guru Bahba.
Using what he calls a “Socratic” method, PJ presses her to relinquish Bahba as her source
of light by initiating a Fact vs. Faith showdown that includes a video screening about
cults replete with dead bodies. It seems as if “fact” wins the day as she runs weeping into
the bathroom.

Pee Scene: A red moon hovers on an endless horizon truncated and constrained
in the box of window. The soundtrack’s spare flute and guitar round the night air up in a
delicate sandy noose. Shadowy flames startle PJ who has fallen asleep in his bed with a
book on his chest. The camera slowly pans and stills on the window frame to show the
motionless dark and the frantic glow of burning bits of cloth as PJ is heard yelling
“Ruth!! Ruth!!” from the outside. The sari he took from her and hung mockingly out of
reach the night before is ablaze.

A cut takes the viewer from the window-framed inferno outside into the heat.
“Don’t you talk,” she says advancing toward him naked and round, holding up a hand in
defense. “My god, I feel as if I’m going to split into pieces. My head is busting. I’m so
confused… Hold it!” She offers him her head, which he hugs between two hands. She
tells him that all the love is gone. She feels adrift without her connection to the “truth,” to
Bahba, and looks to P.J. for comfort. “Nobody loves me… you don’t love me.” She
insists he prove his love to her with a kiss, which he says he cannot do. “I’m scared.” “I
know you are but kissing you won’t change that.” Of course, she kisses him anyway. He pulls away and says “No!” She smiles and rubs his hand on her face. He walks away toward the Hut.

A slow-motion pan down the front of her fire-lit body is accompanied by the sound of a slowed spray, a faint drizzle amplified beyond cushions of flesh and porosity of sand. A reverse shot weaves their power struggles together in a call and response of the sensual as P.J. turns and pauses, transfixed. Once again, the slow motion pan is resumed where it left off: a shot of Ruth’s wet legs and feet, urine dripping down and flying off with each step as she advances toward him. She kisses him again and this time he does not stop her. He says, “I think we should phone your mother.” “Yes, let’s phone mum,” between kisses. The last shot of this scene is a cut back to the bedroom, long and widely framed so we cannot quite see what is going on. P.J.’s naked form (his highlighted butt is reminiscent of a similar shot he did for Campion’s *The Piano*) is on top of Ruth, with voiceovers “Don’t come!! Don’t come!!” and “Ughrhhhhhhhhhh” sounding out the new bonds between them.

Urination restructures their power relations such that the esoteric machinations of the mind are abandoned for the slippery ground of the flesh. Like hot dishwasher jets on a crusty dish, urine saturates, dissolves, and washes away the mind/body split P.J. has deployed as a deprogrammer/psychologist. This performance demonstrates more than the triumph of nature over culture. In the becoming-functional of Girl, a fluid reminder of the pathways of contact that circumvent the symbolic and destabilize Oedipal structures, rattling the cage of desire where the rats are kept. P.J. as disciplinarian, teacher, and aging stud comes undone. He does not possess the tools to handle a becoming-functional of the
Girl territory he sought to invade and destroy. A crucial effect of the urination is a permanent inversion of their dynamic for the remainder of the film. P.J. comes to see his belief in fact-based structures as portals of engagement that resemble locked doors. He prostrates himself at the foot of Girl in an attempt to learn what she knows and to gain access to her temple, one and the same territory. He even allows Ruth to costume him in a slinky red dress and lipstick, a drag he performs as macho hysteric for the remainder of the film’s proper narrative.\(^{12}\)

The details of this scene are important for discerning just what kind of mark Ruth is making when she urinates. Urine is the product of a bodily function, that of eliminating wastes. It is flushed, screened, and fetishized, and for Girl marks the functionality of “invisible” organs. In this scene, it seems less likely that Ruth has an overfull bladder and cannot make it to the toilet, nor does she seem to be initiating a golden shower a deux. One cannot assume Ruth’s marking is a mere becoming-expressive of rhythm. Her outpouring is not flat; it has volume and is molecularly readable as something more than fear or a “shattering of selves.” Note her smile as she holds his hand to her cheek right before she urinates. Though her performance seems a spontaneous response to his refusal to engage her fully, and a becoming-functional is not a commandable performance, Ruth later tempers it with a joking disavowal “You don’t think I was faking, do you?” She urinates as part of a grand scheme to outwit him, or as a reflex response of emptying and

\(^{12}\) The film ends nicely, with P.J. dehydrated and hallucinating in the back of a truck—Ruth having gone from captive to liberator as she finally learns to “be kind” with her disheveled charge and with the power she wields as a Girl. The film offers an add-on postscript that must be ignored if it is to be taken seriously. Their righted lives are shown a year later, having been emotionally affected by their experience together but not enough to forage different pathways. They gleefully strap on the structures of propriety with suitably aged-partners, families, etc. The prowess of the Girl is apparently too scary as an endnote to be successfully marketed to focus groups. A massive disappointment.
giving over everything (becoming-molecular), or both. Perhaps she tries to take back the gift by introducing doubt into the veracity of her performance. Perhaps she wants him to know he is beaten by a combined mastery of her tools with his. No matter, the end effect remains the same. She overflows and he is drowning. The viscosity of chemical chatter in this becoming-functional of Girl subtends its territory. Unlike Meg, whose refrains restrict her to backseat driving, this Girl’s improvisation produces a body capable of flowing around the confines of language. She dismantles the subject by teaching it to spray and wear a pretty red dress.

Bleed

The power of female blood in its double valence feral and vital, and by extension, of woman, seen under the bivalent aspect of fecundator and sterilizer…with her hot moist womb—the incubator of life that so resembles the juicy, heavy watermelon, or a pumpkin with its reddish belly, swelling with voluptuous moist pulp—can, in her reversed image, printed in negative, seem a force hostile to that very life of which she is so generous a distributor: foemina necans, slaughtering woman, malicious, murderous presence, with a curse and the evil eye emanating from her glance. Piero Camporesi, Juice of Life, 113-114

Umm…I felt kind of I mean…I wanted to keep taking showers. Yeah, and it still does make me feel dirty sometimes. Jo, interview excerpt from J. Lee and J. Sasser-Coen’s Blood Stories, 73

Girls frolic in slow motion amidst steam and white towels. Young perky breasts and wide smiles bounce toward the camera. Unshaven pubic mounds authenticate a 1970s body aesthetic. Is this a locker room scene from Debbie Does Dallas? No, it is the shower scene that opens the Carrie (1976) reign of seismic terror. This scene is perhaps the most memorable menstrual moment in Hollywood cinema.
The gentle awakening of piano and strings belies the soft-core visuals. We first see Carrie alone with her steam and showerhead. A variety of close-ups showcase her nubile body: head thrown back—lips parted to the spray, the bar of blue soap, her hands on her face and then cupping her breasts. The money shot: a triangle formed between thigh, bent knee, shin and arm moving up and down, in and out of the tight frame, mimics unrepresentable vaginal space and activity. This pleasant masturbatory fantasy is interrupted by a horror-show drip of blood down the fertile triangle. Quick isolated parts accentuate the disturbance in disbelief—eyes, blood, hand, eyes. Carrie wanders zombie-like out of the shower screaming, “Help me!” touching the girls with outstretched hands, marking them with her blood.

Carrie lurches about screaming as the girls immediately recognize her ignorance/innocence and proceed to initiate her into the world of the curse. They chant “Plug it up!! Plug it up!!” They dangle tampons by loosened strings, and fire rounds of sanitary pads like bullets from the disemboweled machine on the wall. Their gym teacher finally arrives, pushing through the pack to comfort Carrie, cowering naked and shrieking, a cornered animal in a puddle of soggy pads. The light above the shower shatters in a shock of glass and requisite “eek, eek, eek” sound effects. Carrie’s menarche inaugurates a telekinetic power of the blood, a becoming-functional of Girl revealed in her “powers of horror.”

In *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993), Barbara Creed offers an astute summary of the critical response to Carrie as the “child monster” whose genesis is blamed upon the repressions and dysfunctions of the family. Alternatively, Creed argues that Carrie is both witch and menstrual monster, monstrous because she bleeds: “Significantly, Carrie only
develops the powers of telekinesis when she first bleeds; the suggestion is that her blood is both powerful and magical. Ultimately, woman’s blood is represented in the film as an abject substance and helps to construct Carrie as monstrous” (81). Instead of Carrie’s blood becoming the Girl mark that initiates her into the Girl-pack of her peers, she literally marks herself and others with it in the ultimate gesture of disavowal. If becoming a woman involves bloodletting and disciplinary strictures, new arenas of flow and fixity one does not get to choose, this Girl wants nothing to do with it and cannot even understand the terms of its practice. The ravages of the Girl-pack on display indicate an antagonism toward and profound discomfort with its own relation to the practice of menstruation, over-coded as a defining feature of the territory of woman. The encounter between the territory of the Girl and the territory of the woman rendered here is so horrifying; it consumes almost everyone it touches in a pyre of flames.

Moan

In Coming Soon, a fun romp through the social machinations of rich white teenage Manhattan girls in pursuit of the “elusive orgasm,” the main character Stream is all flow. She admonishes her boyfriend for lying to her when he insists she has orgasms and claims he is the one who skillfully provides them. She researches in Cosmo magazines and sex books such as the Hite Report to unlock its secrets. Her friends claim
they have them, pity her, and speculate about the potential causes of her blockage. Nonetheless, Stream rushes on.

Despite the fact that there are no nude scenes, the film gets a rating of NC-17 twice before the director Colette Burson trims some scenes in order to garner an R. The topic of girls in pursuit of sexual satisfaction is still so controversial. The film was eventually released in small venues around the same time as *American Pie* (1999) (whose tagline is “There’s something about your first piece”), a film that easily garnered an R rating and was widely distributed because it was about teenage boys exploring their heterosexual desires, and in which a boy masturbates with a literal vaginal stand in – a piece of pie. In an interview with *Salon*’s Rachel Lehmann-Haupt, *Coming Soon*’s Burson offers her perspective:

> What kept coming back to us time and time again is that there is no market for this movie. Nobody ever came back and said the acting was bad, or the movie doesn't work. All those things came back extremely positive. I think what that really meant was that it was a little scary to market. It's so easy to market guys wanting to get laid and girls getting talked into it, but the idea of teenage girls actively looking for it is unusual. There is a demographic that doesn't respond to this theme, and that's 40-year-old men with teenage daughters. It makes them very uncomfortable, and that was most saliently represented by a production designer who went up to my editor and said, "this movie really gets to me, it's as if these girls think that they have the right to have an orgasm." I think what is scaring them is just what is attracting teenage girls to the movie.

The “o” of orgasm is a moan very much a part of the Girl territory. Heterosexual pornography throbs to its rhythms, Girls court its roundness. Of course Stream discovers hers in water. Jenny and Stream sip cocktails in a bubbling Jacuzzi, and discuss the

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13 Later in the film, Stream’s friend Nell confesses to never having had an orgasm with a guy and later comes out as a lesbian. Her other friend Jenny suggests her orgasms might be not be what they could be given her diffident relation to the casual sex she has. Sweet as it is, the film ends in a close-up of Stream moan as she explores her pleasures zones with her trustworthy and handsome new boyfriend Henry.
stigma of masturbation. They both agree it is “for losers.” The phone rings and Jenny goes to the adjoining bedroom to answer the call. Scream leans over the side of the tub to see Jenny. Stream’s facial expression changes from one of inquiry to one that seems at once startled and puzzled. Cue the soundtrack music as we watch but do not hear Stream’s pleasured engagements with the pulsing Jacuzzi jet. The music is generically big bandish, with the voice of a woman heartily singing something like “Whoa, oh” to accompany the horn section. This substitute moan is sonorous and not pornographic. As the music swells and the camera zooms in (not too closely), we watch Stream mouthing “o.” In a gesture reminiscent of the old film code days when much had to be hinted at and not shown, the film cuts to an extreme close-up of water shooting out of one of the Jacuzzi jets over the tub bubbles. Stream’s face remerges in slow motion, eyes closed and mouth open. We never hear her moan.

The Girl-moan as gesture produces more dissonance than a scream. As over-coded signifier for heterosexual desire, the moan plays like a practiced orchestration Girl inherits from elsewhere rather than something she signs for herself. I suggest that it is not just the censors who keep us away from the throaty vibrations of Girl desire. The Girl-moan remains a private becomings-rhythm unless the Girl extends an invitation to her symphony.

Scream

The dissonant hum of Becoming-Girl pounds deafeningly through parents viewing the highly acclaimed film Thirteen. The most visible and disturbing of a spate of large and small screen offerings about teenage girls, Thirteen (2003) purports to show
what is really happening in today’s consumer-based playground of identity roulette where the house rules are never strict enough to prevent girls going for broke from breaking.

According to this film, your sincere, engaged, in-the-school-band-but-cute-anyway geeky kid can become infected with an evil urban Girl virus and turn overnight into a disaffected, drug-using/dealing, sex-having, flunky hater of you. The delivery system of this virus is double-pronged and comes with a pedagogical imperative. Prong one coats her eyes with a Madison Avenue smear of Girl-body as commodity, i.e. the right accessory for a car, a drink, a shoe, and says “Learn to be an object and a world of sexy goods will open up for you.” Prong two brushes up against her in the hallway, taut and newly-breasted and shining in the glow of a hundred projected desires, and says “Learn to be an object and a world of sexy people will open up to you.” The virus mutates desires, desired objects escalate and stumble, until your daughter as an aggregate appears only occasionally to you and even less often to herself. She is unchartable rhythm; her vibratory nodes shoot past her and you and are unfollowable. This is the good news, the guts of the film.

Co-Writer/Director Catherine Hardwicke took on this project to help her ex-boyfriend’s daughter Nikki Reed get into acting. They wrote the script together in a weekend about Reed’s own personal experiences as a teenage Girl. “Real-life” becoming “reel-life” is supposed to impart enough of an authentic bite to satisfy both girl viewers looking for their slice on the screen, as well as parents looking for a window though which to glimpse what their daughters are really doing while not under a watchful eye. There is too much life here and not enough art. Though Hardwicke says she spent extra time fleshing out the character of the mother after Holly Hunter signed on and made the
project viable, the mother functions primarily as a Freudian refrain of lack and fault despite being characterized as “good.” Blaming “the media,” peer pressure and most resoundingly the mother for all things bad produces several effects that make this film a fatally flawed attempt to demonstrate the powerful voracity of Girls’ desire: 1) if Girls only want what they are told to want by advertisers, which is both to have sexy products and to be a sexy product, then they are indeed mindless victims, and 2) if Girls really just need more structured discipline and daddy-driven repression, then they are nothing more than mounds of chaos in tight jeans waiting for the right man to give them form.  

Despite all evidence to the contrary, Hardwicke still seems to delight in the moments when the girls bust out of their dreary predetermined scenarios of doom—with a scream. They scream often, evidence of an everyday jouissance that infuses this refrain of Girl. Given that the film seems more like a speeded-up version of Refer Madness than an “authentic slice of girl life,” the girls’ screams also serve to mock the authority of the audience. Girl bursts out screaming and laughing in response to a variety of situations. The sound is shrill and electric, and pierces the eardrum like a shiny jewel in a belly button.

14 Though the film seems more parental warning than anything else, the poignant moments reveal it to be more of a love story between the girls, a heady negotiation between friendship and desire. Tracy is proud that she scores the “hottest girl in school” to be her best fiend. Evie wants what Tracy has, a mom who is around and concerned about how often she eats, and if she is doing her homework. Evie lives with her actress/bartender guardian whose most salient advice is to restrict her beer consumption to one if she has homework to do. The most compelling scene between the girls involves some practice French-kissing before the boys arrive, and a mirroring of amorous moves on their boys as they stare at each other’s foreplay activities while sitting on the same couch.  

15 In the “Making of” portion of extras included on the DVD, the main cast members and the director all describe this film as an attempt to capture the “energy” that is Girl emerging. They seem not at all reflective about the smashing of it by a script that calls out for more and more repression of that same energy they seem so committed to celebrating.
The film begins with Tracy and Evie huffing aerosol furniture cleaner, smacking each other in the face, and screaming with exhilaration. They scream as they run down Melrose Avenue with armfuls of shoes bought with freshly “jacked” cash. They scream and twirl in the park sprinklers after dark, dropping acid with hot guys. They scream in a manic cell phone tango when Have calls to arrange a “hook up” with Tracy. She drapes angry screams over her brother and mostly her mother. Tracy screams in the climax of the film, when an intervention orchestrated by Evie’s desire to punish her reveals a stash of drugs and cash and an arm scarred from late night cuttings. Tracy and her mom reach out to one another with screams.

After the last rolling around on the floor, hugging-tight showdown that marks the climax, the film offers one last look at Girl—the scream. A fade in from white shows Tracy in a purple midriff and jeans on a playground going round and round on top of a circular platform. The pace is slow then fast motion, deploying their shaky handheld realism over a zippy Liz Phair tune. Tracy stares at the camera directly addressing the audience tilts her head back, and screams. The film ends in a freeze frame of scream. Given the variety of screams in the film, the closing scream does not have to be restricted to the obvious contextual reading—a girl’s cry for help. The closing scream encapsulates an everyday affect, the bittersweet refrain of a Girly jouissance. It taunts and mocks and frightens an audience of parents who may read it more as becoming-chaos than becoming-expressive. A scream is the sound of Becoming-Girl, the uncharitable rhythm of Girl running a chipped nail along her territory—the border between self and chaos.
The gestures of Brand X highlighted in this chapter—refrain, drive, tattoo, urinate, bleed, moan and scream—are but a few of the ways Girl territorializes herself and sometimes her pack. I argue that these actions become iconic moments in our map of Becoming-Girl. When encountered in a visual culture lexicon of the feminine, their significatory functions slip intermittently from the playground of the Girl to prescriptives of the woman. This is fertile ground for future study.
Chapter 5

Scenes from the X-Box

This feminist rhizomatics of Girl traces her visual refrains at sites territorialized by both friend and foe, in artworks and films. But what of the territory she marks herself? How do Girls engage feminist visual materials? What can we learn (or unlearn) about the pedagogies of the feminine through the “becoming-expressive” of Girl? For the last two chapters of this dissertation, I will examine the visual marks girls generate in response to and engagement with introductory Women’s Studies course assignments I have designed specifically for them. This chapter reviews and explores selected digital video projects from the first incarnations of a Women’s Studies introductory course in which the primary topic was coming-of-age films about girls. I make no sweeping claims for my sample group of PSU Women’s Studies girl works. Instead, I argue that it is in the specificity of the works themselves that we can add to our map of Girl tides and tools. I also argue here that the art mark is paramount to encompassing the drift that occurs between intention and result, between the gesture of the mark and the mark itself.

Tracing the rhizomes from project to project produces her visual refrain, realized through gurgles and pitches that remain highly desirable though slightly out of range. The sites examined in the dissertation so far have come primarily from visual culture. This
chapter marks a turn not away from visual culture but towards the pedagogies of the Visual Culture and Women’s Studies classroom. It also makes room on our Girl-map for the marks of the modal girl, i.e. the girl in real life “coming of age” and struggling with the “woman” on her horizon. The productions of the modal girl do not trump the machinations of our Girl in question. She is already part of Girl’s rhythms.

In order to position Girl in the world of Women’s Studies, I will construct a window into the composition and conflict that comprises the Women’s Studies undergraduate classroom. The Women’s Studies introductory classroom in particular provides an important site to find and practice pedagogies of Girl because girls attend the courses with at least a passing interest in gender relations, as they are personally affected by them. These girls no longer see themselves as children, and most are not eager to occupy the molar entity of woman (my students even refer to guys they are dating as “kids”). The thoughtful ones are actively engaged in examining the doxa that has up until this point given a comfortable structure to their lives. Gender is a key lens through which to re-examine everyday practices that may have been unreflectively performed. As young college students experiencing a time of exhilarating discomfort, students are more than willing to generate projects designed to facilitate this dis-ease through mark-making about their own practices. They pause, interrogate, reflect, and most importantly synthesize, experiment and produce something about doing things as a girl in the 21st century.

Another compelling reason to examine the works produced by girls in Women’s Studies is the pedagogical interface created between the girls and the course materials. One feeds into and off of the other, generating a reverberating feedback loop that allows...
for pedagogical interventions from multiple fronts. While the course is neither an empowerment seminar nor an encounter group, the centrality of Girl as a subject worthy of inquiry for perhaps the first time in her life can be a provocative and revelatory experience for the girl student. In return, the students agree to use course materials in combination with strategies they have already developed for acting in the world, above and below the radar of cultural imperatives, to forge a set of dynamic and malleable tools they share with me and the “boys” in our class. Lovely moments arise when the occasional boy contributes something to our Girly maelstrom with a feminist strategy of his own, reminding us that anatomy cannot contain or occupy the force of the Girl.

The consumption of feminist materials in a Women’s Studies class is for the most part a given. The objective of most introductory WS courses is to familiarize students with the history of feminism through its waves or movements, and to inspire local and global activisms that students export into their daily lives. Many classes also strive to enliven contemporary debates about feminist practices with effective but familiar Second Wave strategies that bring “the personal is political” back home to roost in the classroom. While I applaud the liveliness of confessional discourse as a pedagogical sledgehammer “rock of the real,” I have found that some students mistake dialogue driven by opinion/personal narrative as the only content Women’s Studies has to offer. Curricular materials that deliver actual content (philosophical, theoretical, etc.) are not only reflective of the rigorous contours of a theoretically informed interdisciplinary site, encounters with feminist theory offer the “whys” and “hows” of a feminist corpus a student’s peer group usually cannot provide on its own. Sabina Sawheny addresses these
tensions in her essay “Strangers in the Classroom” by pointing out the contradictory expectations between students and faculty:

Students’ need for validation is coupled with implicit solicitations for affection, nurturing, a sense of solidarity, and maybe even some informal therapy. Just as we initially conceived of Women’s Studies as promising a radical departure from traditional institutional structures, so do some of the students. They aspire toward an intimate pedagogical scene that would counter the impersonal, distant, and detached academic instruction in which they have hitherto been engaged. Although both the students and the teachers participate in this desire for a learning that is personally supportive, this desire places enormous burdens on faculty who have not necessarily been trained or may not have the requisite resources to fulfill these functions. (361)

Assessment strategies that involve rote learning and repetitive regurgitations comprising much of the undergraduate curricula as a whole are inadequate to address the demands of the interdisciplinary feminist classroom. I strongly argue for a feminist praxis that hosts the experimental as conduit to “woman’s ways of knowing.” The course materials are already marked as different because they place woman in the center of a curricular web. Yet many students are reluctant to interrogate what they have come to “know” as woman (I am a woman or my mom is a woman and I already know what that is) because it is the “same,” not rarified enough for academic study. One important task of the introductory WS class is to remove “woman” from the realm of the familiar to the “modalities of subjection that produce gender as an effect, sexuality as an effect, or race as an effect” (Lee 90). If the WS introductory class is to have Girl, not woman, behind the wheel, must it drive to the same guilt-laden locales, parking in just the right spots for subjects and bodies to snug into, revere, or ignore? Can Girl merely subsume the center, insisting upon the plenitude of Women’s Studies to include her, or does she require a new pedagogical rubric?
Evolution of a Course: Women’s Studies Hosts the Girl

The Women’s Studies classroom offers girls a safe and fertile space to play and to explore. In Chapter One I mention the interconnectedness and distinctions between Girl Studies and Women’s Studies. I decided to test these boundaries in my own pedagogical practice not merely because I am a Women’s Studies instructor, but primarily because I noticed the great enthusiasm any “Girl” segments had generated in introductory courses with wider breadth. I also wanted to see first hand how feminist pedagogical strategies could be brought to bear on topics my students suggested were quite vital. Perhaps we could make something exciting together, turn something academic into something Girly.

In order to design the course, I kept at the forefront what I learned about the subjects and objects at hand, and the specificity of my target audience.

More Than Beavis or Beavis’s Girlfriend

The general education student who takes the course to fulfill a Humanities requirement makes up 80% or more of these classes, usually containing about 60 students each from majors ranging from the arts, to engineering, to criminal justice, and to “undecided.” A small percentage of these students view Women’s Studies as leftist dogma masquerading as an academic concentration, or merely a band of anointed man-haters charged with the task of emasculating and lesbianizing at will. They show up to make trouble and attempt to thwart classroom discussions with such witty banter as “I thought there was nudity in this class--Where are the naked babes?” and “Slavery really
didn’t exist—and if it did it was a humanitarian effort to feed and house people who were incapable of taking care of themselves, in exchange for work.” Many Gen Ed students exhibit signs of resentment at having to be in the room at all, at being forced to encounter a multi-culti curriculum about women, particularly because they already know what women are. The average introductory class member, a good student looking for a good grade through modest efforts, seems relieved after a point that Women’s Studies is more than a space for victims and opinions to be validated, and settles into the practice of interrogating texts and cultural objects with an enthusiasm slightly elevated above that which they bring to bear on their required math class. I draw this portrait based on almost six years of instruction in Women’s Studies introductory courses.

One charge of the introductory WS class is to get students to think critically about their gendered practices and the conditions under which we all live. Historical markers of events and precedents help them to see, for example, why women today earn less than men (Carole Pateman’s The Sexual Contract is great on this). This issue is the only one they unanimously agree is important and worthy of interrogation because they see the wage disparity as unfair, unwarranted, puzzling, and something that affects them today. Other status quo gender and racial disparities perceived to belong to “women” remain at a distance and often produce a mass shoulder shrug. Many come in thinking WS is about facilely denouncing popular instantiations of the feminine—make-up bad, advertising bad, music videos bad, Hooter’s bad—and that such ideological pronouncements are all that is required to be a “feminist” and earn an A for the class.

In order to push beyond these assumptions, I have jettisoned denunciation in favor of critique and production. After all, once you establish that something is bad, like
rape or the Holocaust, then what do you do? Students seriously engage introductory
course materials only when they perceive some payouts that go beyond the grade. They
need to walk away having learned more than how it sucks to be a woman—this and
“supermodels are evil” they already know. So I exchange this masculinist refrain for
something molecular and modal, using visual artifacts as samples of feminine mark-
making to produce contagions of connectivity and response.

For this practicum, I developed and taught versions of an introductory course on
girls from Summer Session 2002-Spring 2004 (see Appendix A). In the first incarnation
of the course, called “Welcome to the Dollhouse: Coming of Age Films About Girls,”
we interrogated a series of films directed mostly by women about the Becoming-Girl
(with the exception of Welcome to the Dollhouse by Todd Solodnz who gets honorary
chick status here). The course objectives were as follows:

In this course we will examine channels of adolescent desire in
contemporary films made primarily by women about girls. What is a girl?
What can girls do? What do girls want? Our main objectives include 1) to
articulate the conditions through which “girl” is produced; 2) to construct
a “microfemininity” that is girl becoming woman—a charting of what
girls do to come of age; 3) to define and question the notion of a
“feminine” aesthetic (advantages and disadvantages of all things “girly”);
4) to develop a critical vocabulary necessary to assess films of different
genres; 5) to produce videos about this “girl” in question; 6) to reveal why
everyone should want to become a girl. (Appendix A)

The instructional, documentary, independent, and feature films included the title
film about the struggles of 13 year old Dawn Weiner, Girl Stuff (1994), Period Piece
(1996) by Jennifer Frame and Jay Rosenblatt, selections from Sadie Benning’s collected
videos made when she was a teenage girl (1989-90), Girltalk (1988) by Kate Davis, Girls
Another Girl on the IRT (1992) by Leslie Harris, Girlfight (2000) by Karyn Kusama, All Over Me (1997) by Alex and Sylvia Sichel, and Coming Soon (1999) by Colette Burson. The topics addressed through our gendered film lenses included puberty, menstruation, depression, poverty, friendship, school, aggression, gangs, violence, pregnancy, racism, queerness, sexual practices, privilege, and orgasms. The big project for the semester was to make small group digital videos about girls that incorporated course content materials (reading, films, discussions, etc.) and used them as springboards for students’ own explorations.

I have selected one video example from each Girl course section with the film emphasis, for a total of three. The film genres run the gamut, from personal narrative to music video. The one thing they all have in common is the sign of the feminine, the mark of the Girl. These marks are not like arguments written in a paper, where pared-down evidence is included to support one claim. Art may not be argument driven, often emerging by putting disparate things together, intentional and random, working a concept through affect of materials, a congealing into object then release and response that exceeds its origins. I argue that art projects by non-art majors may be more productive than argumentative essays because the significatory daisy-chain that is built in to their visual lexicon trumps their facility with the written word. Through these projects they can craft a visual language of the feminine we can read. Some of the marks Girls make here disturb with a complicitous hand wringing, delineate bodies into consumable editorialized tidbits, disrupt with experimental (predictable) marginalities, and disaggregate my “object” of study. The parameters of the assignment include the elements of synthesis and critique, and function not only to engender objects for
assessment of engagement with course content, but also as stand-alone gender experiments. Incorporating the practice of art production into a general education course produces very uneven results. These are not art students. Some of the marks they make using the gendered lens they create through this process are nonetheless arresting and provocative gifts of invention.

Sample One: Hell is Other People

The writers with the most striking, most nakedly accessible sense of time are those who use long sentences: the exaggeration of the rhythms of normal breathing yields a kind of time whose texture is gross and easily perceived. And among these sentences long enough to let us listen to the beat of time, short sentences, expletives, recover some of their original shock, enjoy new and jarring force.

Fredric Jameson, “The Rhythm of Time,” *Sartre: The Origins of a Style*

Garcin: Your eyelids. We move ours up and down. Blinking, we call it. It’s like a small black shutter that clicks down and makes a break. Everything goes black; one’s eyes are moistened. You can’t imagine how restful, refreshing it is. Four thousand little rests per hour… So that’s the idea. I’m to live without eyelids.

J.P. Sartre, *No Exit*

Alexandra S.’s video, *No Outlet* (2002, 6 minutes), explores just how experimental Girl marks get read. The elements of the film are minimal: shots of blacktop and yellow road lines captured by a hand-held walking camera are juxtaposed with shots of a computer screen, letters appearing as case notes occasionally interrupted by the black of screen roll and throb of cursor. The Girl in question is locatable in the video’s rhythm of time: back and forth, quickenings and lengths of breath, the methodical hum of letters becoming words. The student crafts dual realms: the surveyor and the surveilled, the stationary and the uncaged, the computer and the camera lens. However, both the off-screen camera and the on-screen computer function as eyes in this video, with two major
distinctions. The camera’s shutter or lid reflects all it sees back onto a recordable surface with eyes-lens wide open. It cannot blink or look away unless you turn it off. The scopophillic gaze is here transformed as a prosthetic for the Girl. She is more than the camera that cannot blink, which opens shutters wide for imprinting. Her rhythm constructs the shots, framing surfaces in motion. The computer screen seems an innocuous enough presence, a stationary black box receptacle of data entry, a diagnostic prosthetic. The glare of Girl lens disquiets the seamless hum by revealing the screen roll or rhythmic blink (shutter speed collision) invisible to the naked orb (Figure 1). If the screen blinks, it means the computer does indeed have an eye—“everything goes black”—and the comforts of respite grant to stasis of pronouncement rather than movement in time. In foregrounding tools for the capture and display of information, S. highlights the mechanics of a gendered visual language we take for granted while pushing on the parameters of the omniscient veracities of “I” and “eye.”

We have no information about the protagonist other than what is defined and filtered for us through a psychiatrist’s notes, except interruptive movements of the “subject” at hand. The video is a personal narrative even though we encounter Alex only through the semiotics of clinical pathologies, in tandem with her tremulous gait as she walks over roads. Alex claims the protagonist as herself in the identifying doctor’s notes by using her own name. She suggests that there is a real girl here. However, Girl as Subject with a capital S does not exist; she has no rights and cannot make her own decisions about her future or where she will even be allowed to sleep.
The psychiatrist’s notes begin with descriptive observations: 14 year-old girl dressed in black with many piercings, black lipstick. She exhibits no evidence of obvious psychological disorders. She just looks weird (but it is NYC after all). After the description is interrupted by the camera traveling on a yellow double line, the anonymous psychiatrist offers a list of reasons for the examination of the girl: truancy, volatility at home and school, running away for days, taking drugs and cash with no precipitating event, and a forced hospitalization which leads to a rehab facility (Figure 2). The slow pace along double yellows briefly intervenes. The “subject” exhibits a nihilistic dysphoria. “Of her relationship with her mother, she stated ‘I love her and she knows that, but her general manner annoys me.’” More walking down double yellows.
After listing what she looks like and what she does, the psychiatrist offers an interpretation. Impression: girl at risk. Chronic subclinical mood disorder, identity diffusion, chronic sense of boredom and ennui. “Subject’s dress, bearing, self-report, and even her choice of name (Alex) suggest deep anxiety around sexual matters and a failure of gender-identity consolidation.” “Subject is grossly uneducable in anything other than a highly structured residential setting, i.e. a psychiatric hospital or therapeutic residential school. She is at extreme risk for self-endangering behavior, and should not be discharged home.” Quick pan at yellow no exit sign. DSM-IV Diagnosis: Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Gender Identity Disorder, Dysthymia, Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Polysubstance Abuse. The video ends as the camera keeps walking up the yellow lines, fade to black.
One easy reading of this video: there is no exit, no outside to gender (Figure 3). Whatever her rhythms, Girl is named and categorized by others. Girl here is only a series of actions, performatives turned to performance through diagnostic gazes (hell is other people). By forcing the viewer to occupy the position of authoritative judge, S. reveals not only the limitations of gender performance as a to-be subject, and but also the limitations of psychological assessment, professional and otherwise. The cadence or rhythm of this Girl sutures both the narrative actions (typing and walking), performatives punctuated with the crunch of gravel and hint of breath, and the viewer’s uneasy entrance into her mediated space, without faces or dialogue or hipster soundtrack. She meticulously avoids all familiar gender cues that might prove to be comforting or distracting, like the sound of a voice or curve of a hip.

![Figure 3, No Outlet](image)

There is a live Girl behind the camera we surmise because of the referent “she” in the notes, but we are provided no other evidence of an actual she. One effect of this is to reduce “her” to a checklist of attributes and crimes, a Foucaultian “dividing practice” that
makes the Girl appear to us as a subject. This effect creates a dissonance for the viewer: as we force her to appear out of discourse laid on top of her, we must also acknowledge that girl as a gender binary subset is more than a sum of her parts. We only find her as we name her marks—she merely makes them. So the category “girl” as the proper name for un- or pre-categorized feminine acts pops open precisely through the stifling contours of gender prescription. The viewer is left to wonder how much about this girl, any girl, is knowable. So much of her still exceeds the diagnostics of the screen. If the girl in the video is condemned because of improperly signing her gender, is she still a girl? If everything is socially constructed, and there is no exit, “no outlet” to gender, are we trapped into performing the same scripted gestures without blinking or crying or batting an eye? I argue that girl here shows us the way through this “hell” to moments outside and around via aesthetics-- the object, the mark. Perhaps Lyn Hejinian describes it best in the opening to her book *My Life* as “a pause, a rose, something on paper.” (7)

Sample Two: Little Red Fights Back

Because the students professed difficulty with such an open-ended assignment, the second time I taught the course I tweaked the syllabus to take on the schematics of a theme, a place to hang one’s hat. We addressed similar film texts and foundational theoretical works in the first half of the semester, moving on to focus on the narrative of Little Red Riding Hood and her adventures with wolves and men. This narrative provides a malleable framework through which to work out a little gender trouble, with its cultural ubiquity as coming-of-age cautionary tale, its cardboard portrayals of gender roles, and the over-determined aesthetics of fur and blood.
Little Red Riding Hood has a rich history as the quintessential figure for girlhood naiveté and defenselessness. She sports the exuberant trusting nature and short-term memory of a pet poodle, and embodies the horror-show consequences of unchecked desire. Little Red Riding Hood gives shape to the specter of missing and abducted girls and women in the popular imaginary. This section explores and invokes her function as sensual scapegoat to spur feminist re-workings of the narrative. It concludes with a contribution from the girls themselves, in response to the haunting presence of Little Red in the figure of still-missing classmate Cindy Song.

A thorough log of Red incarnations is archived in the Little Red Riding Hood Project, an on-line text and image database sponsored by the University of Southern Mississippi, that contains sixteen English language versions of the story from 1729-1916.¹⁶ In the frequently cited authoritative version, Charles Perrault’s *Histories: or, Tales of Times Past with Morals* 1729, translated from the French, Little Red is set up to fail not only because she is too pretty and her mother and grandmother love her too much, but also because she is taking on the limitations of woman through the prescriptives of menses (symbolized by the red cloak). She is duped by the wolf in her naiveté, and condemned to lose the race with him to Grandmother’s house because she does not take the logical straightaway, instead “diverting her self in gathering nuts, running after butterflies, and making nose-gays of all the little flowers she met with.” The wolf’s falsetto tricks Granny into inviting him in, whereupon he commences to snack her

¹⁶ There are of course many versions of the story adapted for children, as well as some comparative studies such as Catherine Orenstein’s *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality, and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale* and *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* edited by Jack Zipes. A search for Little Red Riding Hood on Amazon yields 628 hits (31 January 2006).
up. As with the vampire who must be invited in before he can drink your blood and turn you into the undead, this politeness and culpability is evidenced in the wolf’s request for access and the grandmother’s misguided invitation. When Little Red arrives at her grandmother’s door she also requests to be let in. The wolf disguises his voice as best he can to welcome her, and despite an intuitive hesitation she enters and obeys his request to take off her clothes and climb into bed with him. What follows is the question and response relay that proves to be Little Red’s undoing: “Grandmamma, what great eyes you have got” and “All the better to see you with my child,” etc. It seems she is not so much seduced by the wiles of the wolf, but that with each question she strips away for herself the sensorial evidence of the presence of the other and that this gender-coded openness is what “does her in.” After asking about the greatness of Grandmamma’s teeth, Little Red is snacked up herself by the wolf-in-drag. The addition of the woodcutter who saves Little Red does not come along until the Victorian era.

This ends the narrative part of the story. Not wanting the nuances of gender prescription to go undetected by those dazzled by the story, Perrault reveals the moral in a postscript addendum titled fittingly enough “The Moral.” In it he admonishes readers to take his tale as a warning to all young people, but primarily to “the growing ladies fair, / Whose orient rosy Blooms begin t’appear.” He goes on to characterize girls as weak because they are open to the voices of others rather than being self-reliant. He also suggests that because they are beautiful, it is no fault but their own when a man follows a girl to her bedside. Even though there are all different kinds of wolves (i.e. men), most wolves are dangerous and have untoward intentions when it comes to encounters with the buds of femininity. In today’s parlance, the warning goes a bit beyond “Don’t talk to
strangers” to become something more like “As you are the most tempting of desirable objects, you are asking for it if you even so much as talk to a man.” Wolves are after all mere animals who cannot control their behaviors, so it is up to the girl to dictate the terms of encounter by withdrawing from them altogether.

Leaping ahead two hundred fifty years, countless incarnations, and two women’s movements later, Angela Carter appropriates and refigures Little Red into a feminist heroine who is strong, smart, and unwilling to passively sublimate her own sexual desires in the service of mankind and high moral order. Her short stories “The Werewolf” and “The Company of Wolves” (1979) provide visceral antidotes to Freud’s devastatingly convincing configuration of femininity as passive and masochistic. The dis-ease with which unbranded virginity is met with in Perrault’s version reverses itself into fearlessness as Carter’s heroines both own it for themselves and decide to shed it.

She stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity. She is an unbroken egg; she is a sealed vessel; she has inside her a magic space the entrance to which is shut tight with a plug of membrane; she is a closed system; she does not know how to shiver. She has her knife and is afraid of nothing. (113-114)

In “The Werewolf,” the lycanthrope who lasciviously attacks the child in the vulva-like forest is in fact the grandmother (intonations of feminine sexual bonds as well as the threat of the crone abound). Red, who never goes anywhere without her trusty knife, chops the wolf’s hand right off. As she perches bedside the dying body, she finds a bloody stump, the souvenir hand nestled in her basket has turned into her grandmother’s. Instead of coming to her grandmother’s aid like a proper feminine subject, she alerts the
neighbors, and together they stone the grandmother to death. Little Red lives happily ever after alone in Grandmother’s woodsy abode.

In “The Company of Wolves” Little Red finds a wolf disguised as a man as she walks through the woods. She is attracted to him, and gladly accepts his proposition to race along different paths in order to see who might arrive first at grandmother’s house. The prize for the winner is a kiss. Little Red purposely dawdles in the hope of losing the bet. She also allows the lycanthrope to carry away her basket that contains a concealed knife (she chooses to give it away; it is not taken from her). When she enters her grandmother’s house she sees the wolf-man and instinctively wants her knife but his big eyes watch her too closely to approach the basket.

(S)he knew the worst wolves are hairy on the inside and she shivered, in spite of the scarlet shawl she pulled more closely round herself as if it could protect her although it was as red as the blood she must spill… She closed the window on the wolves’ threnody and took off her scarlet shawl, the colour of poppies, the colour of sacrifices, the colour of her menses, and since her fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid. (117)

Little Red takes the wolf’s clothes off herself, and lies naked with him in Granny’s bed. In this version of the story, she is victim to no one and when she perceives the inevitability of her own spilt blood as rupture/rapture, she initiates the encounter. She doesn’t need the woodcutter to guard her virginity as national treasure, nor granny as default virgin for camaraderie inside the furry belly. These feminist revisions offer bold correctives to the traditional cautionary tale; instead of jeopardizing her most precious gift and becoming victim to the sexual beastliness of others’ desires (be it man’s or woman’s), Carter’s heroines recognize the disadvantages to maintaining the bubble that surrounds their own desires and they decide not only to give it away for free and to stoke
the beast within (with the screams of destruction as well as the inarticulate moans of
pleasure), but they also destroy impediments to the pathways of desire (the granny and
the hymen).

Carter’s stories exemplify the force of a feminist ax cutting through patriarchal
flesh. Much like the literary re-workings of the tired but pervasive icon of abducted
innocence, and the necessity of its presence in the popular imaginary as safeguard against
the infectious lure of unchecked feminine desire, the feature films Carrie, In the
Company of Wolves, and Freeway introduce feminist Riding Hoods into the visual
lexicon of popular culture. Carrie (1976), encountered here in the previous chapter, is
perhaps the most iconic of the new Reds, standing in the gym shower cloaked in
menstrual blood and pelted with tampons. Her classmates torture and scorn Carrie
because she makes visible an unpalatably unfettered femininity. Though this film is by no
means feminist, it does allow the victim to fight back with a telekinetic power so intense
it burns everything around it before extinguishing the girl herself. Carrie, like her
traditional Little Red sisters, must be punished and purged to maintain the pernicious
masculine/active feminine/passive dichotomy that continues to gird contemporary gender
relations.

In the Company of Wolves (1984), based on Angela Carter’s short story and her
own screenplay credit, could not be saved from the ravages of dated special effects and
one too many a lycanthropic folk tale. Hilarious in a campy Dungeons and Dragons kind
of way, it does quite a disservice to the original stories. An array of Little Reds, sutured
to symbols, signs, and riddles ripe for Trekkie decoders, obfuscate the simple but
powerful gestures of Carter’s heroines as they unmask the taint of responsibility and
accompanying shame, guilt, and blame directed at abducted, raped, and murdered women. If nothing else, it provides a salient example of what happens when the material exceeds one’s capacity to realize it within a set of technical and diagetic limitations.

Freeway (1996) updates the traditional Riding Hood story by setting it in the ‘hood. Little Red is a street-wise illiterate castoff, sexually abused by her snarky junkie stepfather and neglected by her hooker mom. She skirts foster care by leaving town in a stolen ride on a search for her Granny’s, sporting a red jacket and picnic basket with a gun inside gifted by her boyfriend. After her ride breaks down, she encounters the wolf/serial killer in shrink’s clothing who gets her to trust him. The wolf then accuses her of inviting, deserving, and desiring the sexual abuse (all familiar accusations for such victims), giving a modern voice to the implications of the traditional story. But this Little Red is fierce; she not only defends herself against the tirades of both a misogynist psycho and a misogynist culture, her fearlessness allows her to cackle as she guns down the wolf-man for the last time.

What is the significance of the ready-made red-cloaked victim for Girls? How might her specter haunt Girls as they comport themselves and their relations to (O)thers? I posed these questions to my undergraduate Women’s Studies class in a digital video assignment. After interrogating the incarnations outlined above, the students produced thematically variable narrative and non-narrative responses, including films parodying dating shows, a silent film in true 20s style including titles, a film about embracing the “red cloak” of menstruation, and a fascinating reverse drag in which the monotone headshot of a wolf monologuing his plight slowly morphs into the girl, revealing both to be on one molecular continuum. The most compelling response takes on the girl’s status
as victim, imprint, object—and the tools she has learned that help her fight the big bad wolves. These Little Reds appear only through the force of their actions as realized through film/text.

Figure 5, Escaped, True Stories

_Escaped, True Stories_ (2002), made by a group of six students, begins in the woods, feminine symbol of fecundity and the dangers of a nature untamed. As the metaphoristics imply, girl is at risk by virtue of her very own nature; if she is confronted by the untoward but righteous aggression of the wolf, she has only herself to blame. How else must he find his way through the woods? Oddly reminiscent of _No Outlet_ in form,
the primary action in the film is a hand-held camera guided walk through the barren woods. A narrator or guide is never in view. The soundtrack drives hard and loud, ambient with a haunting vocal edge (a song by Kittie), making the woods seem more menacing than comforting. Our first clue that something is awry-- a shred of red cloth dangling from a tree limb. The camera walks on, pauses, and zooms in on the trunk of a tree where a “Missing” flyer has been posted about a girl who was abducted outside her house (Figure 4). Her real name, age, and picture detail the specifics of her case. A girl’s hand rips the flyer down. The image fades to black and scrolling titles reveal the abduction’s details and closure. Our first Little Red, only 7 years old, chewed through duct tape, broke through a basement door, and shattered a window to call for help. This Girl does not passively wait inside the wolf’s belly for rescue—she rescues herself.

Figure 4, Escaped, True Stories
The film goes on to detail the escape stories of four more Little Red Riding Hoods: one abandoned red shoe introduces us to Tamara and Jacque, who, bound back to back, hatch and scratch an escape plan to each other on the palms of their hands, free themselves and use the kidnapper’s own knife to stab him. A red scarf dangling out of the trunk of a moving sedan sets up Amy’s story—thrown in the trunk of her boyfriend’s car and driven over 170 miles before passing motorists saw her fingers and small pieces of paper she busted through the taillights. A lone red sweatshirt rolling around inside a dryer prefaces the abduction from a laundromat and attempted rape of a 34 year-old woman who turns this wolf’s own knife on him in order to escape (Figures 5 and 6).
The final Little Red Riding Hood appears on a campus bulletin board. Cindy Song, a Penn State University undergraduate, disappeared on Halloween night 2001. According to the FBI’s website, she is still listed as a missing person. Her case has never been solved. Her “Missing” flyer closes the film with the following dedication: “For the thousands of girls and women who are abducted ever year—there’s still hope…” The viewers are left with the specter of Girl interrupted, spirited away on the night of the werewolves. As a feminist adaptation of the original precautionary tale, it both resuscitates the general warning about the predatory wolfiness of man by showcasing the horrors of his violence toward girls and women, and challenges his brute dominance through stories featuring crafty victims who miss-behave. These Girls are not siren crumpets; they shatter the passive prescriptions of femininity to save themselves by breaking, stabbing, screaming, and scratching a determined hieroglyphics—Girl marks—readable only by each other.

A hand rips down a flyer duct taped to a tree; the gesture is then repeated with the second poster but elongated—the camera zooms out to reveal a girl ripping down and crumpling the paper, and throwing it in a stream to be carried away on the water; the arm returns in scene three to light the poster on fire; the arm rips down the poster taped to the inside of a dryer; and in the final scene the girl’s arm rips down a solid red sheet of paper on a bulletin board, and replaces it with Cindy Song’s “Missing” flyer (Figure 7). The arm of the girl reminds us of the flesh behind the paper, and signifies Girl’s presence not only as object of interest in the film but also as one who gives structure to the overall narrative. The arm reaches out to other girls in a gesture of anger and of comfort, the
solidarity of marks made visible through the violent embrace of nature turned in upon itself and multiplied. This arm belongs to one Girl helping another.

The Little Reds featured here offer moments of hope against a backdrop of despair. The subordination of victim for the inspiration of victor is a directive that emerges from a collision between fact and fiction, between the violence lurking within a contained but unmapped space and the very object that contains it. Girls and women appear as 2D images on signs denoting their absence. Real girls provide escape hatches for other Girls as they mark themselves present, appearing to initiate and control actions.
These new faces of survival may be powerful enough to challenge the stereotypes of the old Red Riding Hood that linger in the popular imaginary. The gnash of teeth and snarl of fang is no longer the providence of the big bad wolf. Little Red Riding Hood bites, bites back.

Sample Three: Skin Deep

After tackling the fairy tale, I decided to see what would happen if the students were charged with interrogating something very familiar to them. The students were instructed to appropriate a television genre, and populate it with girls and their concerns—Girl TV. How do girls watch TV? If girls produced their own content for this medium, what would it look like? Student responses varied from a Degrassi-like diary-driven account of a first kiss, a dating show with popcycle-stick figures and voice-overs designed to give girls tips on how to interact with boys they don’t already know, a boys’ take on a girl’s take of “Girl’s Gone Wild,” a live-action Barbie extravaganza about how misunderstood pretty girls are demonized as stupid sluts that ends with a resounding chorus of “Be Yourself” as the main character takes off her blond wig to reveal a shorn noggin, and boys in drag doing a super-plus tampon commercial. It seems programming

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17 The students tried to imagine what Girl TV would look like. Although the place for girl controlled and implemented content is the web and not the TV, here is a small picture of their TV viewing practices. Toni Fitzgerald reports that teen girls watch TV fewer hours per week than boys. According to a Gallup Tuesday Briefing in 2003, 2 percent of girls watch no TV, 7 percent watch less than 1 hour, 37 percent watch 1-5 hours, 29 percent watch 5-10 hours, 17 percent watch 10-20 hours, and 8 percent watch 20 or more hours of TV per week. As for the boys, the highest percentage (32) watch 5-10 hours, and 14 percent watch 20 or more hours per week. According to Pamela Paul in *American Demographic*, 68 percent of girls ages 12-15 say they go to the TV websites of their favorite shows to get more information about show plots and characters. They also play on-line games driven by the shows’ content. As for girls’ current favorite show, it is American Idol. The New York Times reports that “(a)mong teenage girls, the show had an extraordinary 49 share — meaning that of every girl in the country watching television for those two hours, with about 100 channels to choose from in most homes, half were watching Fox.”
Girl TV is more difficult than I had imagined. Most projects parodied television genres without really critiquing them, offering up stereotypical correctives that stayed well within the nuts and bolts or Twinkies and acne cream of the thing itself, currently configured by the students as their terrain.

If the students were unable to make innovative inroads in this project, I suspect it has more to do with their everyday familiarity with the genre. I have argued earlier in the chapter that aesthetic production of art objects visual and otherwise is a key pedagogical strategy for the feminist Women’s Studies classroom because it offers students an opportunity to produce some content and invent new “critical thinking” tools, become active participants in a learning collective, and take ownership of the materials at hand. The results of this pedagogical experiment, as well as others like it, suggest that not just any old aesthetic object will do. I argue that it is in fact the avant-garde object that provides the most efficacious striation of aesthetic practice toward a practical feminist pedagogy. If one is committed to the duplication and generation of feminist tools to build and work through everyday life in a patriarchal system (something of keen importance in an introductory course which might be the student’s first and only encounter with feminism in the academy), then one must step outside the everyday modes of cultural production and transmission and turn to the extraordinary in order to provide the space and means to interrogate the ordinary.

The three students call the video exemplar from this section Underneath It All (2003). It is a music video for Le Tigre’s “Fake French.” LeTigre is an electo-punk feminist band started by Kathleen Hannah, famous for her Riot Grrl days in Bikini Kill. The band consists of Hannah, Johanna Fateman, and JD Samson, who founded the band
because “the notion of ‘community’ had been so problematized by postmodern theory and identity politics gone haywire, that it was easier to retreat to irony or purely oppositional self-definitions. Instead we wanted to be sincere and take risks.” (Band Website) They haven’t made a lot of videos themselves and don’t get much commercial play. The students were inspired by their song, and decided to tackle the overwrought genre of music video. Le Tigre is perhaps technically and chronologically post-punk. Their sound is informed by women punksters of the 1970s and 1980s in what Shelia Whitely calls “a ‘do-it-yourself’ spontaneity” that established “individualism, discovery, change and outrage as crucial ingredients in style and image.”(97)

What should or could a music video for girls look like? According to Nancy Signorelli’s Kaiser Family Foundation study, music videos predominantly for girls only would look decidedly different. The presence of women in music videos is only 22 percent (Report Part One). The presence of girls is probably much lower. These students made something of an adaptation, pulling together the feminist anthem song with their own experiences at the university in combination with the music video genre and avant-garde film. The lyrics drive the visuals but don’t determine them. “Fake French” is about Girl as the ultimate multiplicity. It is more Girl power anthem than the Spice Girls’ producer could ever dream up. Performing femininity as joke, dance move, or collective assault grounds this art object roundly in the third wave. The lyrics lay bare the contradictions of performing the feminine in the 21st century:

I've got - the new sincerity.
I've got - a secret vocabulary.
I've got - MIDI in, out, thru.
I've got - dialectical Sprechstimme.
I've got - herm choreography.
I've got - a conceptual stunt double.
I've got - a deviant scene, I mean.
I've got - multiple alliances...

I've got to move... whoa oh oh
I've got to move... whoa oh oh
I've got to move... whoa oh oh
I've got to move... whoa oh oh

I've got - The Gift of Fear.
I've got - The Courage to Heal.
I've got - site specificity.
I've got - plan "B" ability.

I've got to move... whoa oh oh
I've got to move... whoa oh oh
I've got to move... whoa oh oh
I've got to move... whoa oh oh

I've got - extensive bibliographies.
I've got - flow disruption.
I've got - wildlife metaphors.
I've got - post-binary gender chores.
My Fake French is hot.
You can't make me stop.
Got nowhere to run to baby.
Come on turn it up...

“Fake French,” Feminist Sweepstakes, LP 2001

Now for the visuals. The film opens with a medium shot of a girl’s back. She wears only a black bra (Figure 8). One hand reaches around, undoes the bra, and slides it down off of an arm to her fingers where it drops to the sound of a beat. The screen fades to black and the title Underneath It All in a typewriter font glides across the screen. This film purports to tell you what girls really are, pink and placid stereotype be damned. No need for us to wonder about cues and codes because the text is literally written on the body parts of the girls and their stuff, close-up and personal for you to see. The in-
between textual bridges rankle with didactic sentiment, but oh the images! These Girls’
marks far exceed any controllable messages the girls attempted to put out there.

Figure 8, Underneath It All

In earlier chapters on Girl branding, I noted some branding strategies girls use to
mark/market themselves as aggregates -most notably, the borrowing of corporate brand
identities for personal “individual” cache, and personal branding as post-modern aesthetic
practice. In this film, what is really underneath it all is Penn State (see Figure 9), a
corporate identity that so saturates the lives of these college girls that almost all the
objects that appear alongside them and on top of them come with the logo emblazoned
(lipstick and condom not withstanding). What is the corporate identity of PSU so many students are eager to consume, display, become? How does it appeal specifically to these girls? Why is it that in my typical classroom of 60 students 40 or more on any given day wear the logo on their chests and elsewhere?

In order to address the questions posed in the above paragraph, I turn first to Penn State’s Mission Statement: “Penn State is a multi-campus public land-grant university that improves the lives of the people of Pennsylvania, the nation, and the world through integrated, high-quality programs in teaching, research, and service.” (PSU Website). If the students are heavily invested in making “improvements” by being part of the PSU team, perhaps they proudly sport the shirts to let others know they are caring citizens of the world. I suspect however that the corporate logo has more to do with a) the saturation of PSU products both on and off campus, and b) the desire to affirm the most compelling node of identity branding—that of belonging to the category “college student.” They mark themselves this way moreover to play multiple aggregates, from the small (one girl) to the large (student body). The PSU logo appeals specifically to girls as a sign of the most obvious line of flight, as an outward marker of something more than a sum of girl parts waiting to be recognized. “Penn State” denotes a collectivity that one doesn’t have to work hard to own. Wear your blue and white hoody to become large and invulnerable, stand out in your hometown as one of the chosen or blend right into the thousand hoody sea whose currents are there to sweep you along.
The PSU logo or mark is not the only imprint we see underneath. As a strategy for alerting the viewers to the “real” truths about Girls, they used text directly on body parts and girl-related objects to get their points across. These shots are juxtaposed with unnecessary text bridges in an attempt to make the film cohere. The most interesting moments occur in the tattooing of parts: “Innocent” scrawled under a neck hicky, “In Control” written on bound arms whose hands cradle a football, “Weak” on an eyelid that opens to weep, “Strong” written on a naked flexed bicep, “Flirt” on a tube of lipstick, “Pure” on a bottle whose water is being poured into a glass, “Tainted” on the lipstick imprinted used water glass, “Tease” on the inside of a lollypop wrapper wallpapered to
fill the screen, “Independent” on the outside of a wrapped tampon totem, “Dyke” along one thumb whose hand clutches another’s, “Bitch” on the flip-off middle finger, “Flirt” again on a fingernail file rubbing back and forth along a nail’s surface, and “Rebel” penned on top of a Trojan condom wrapper (Figure 10). These tattoos are marks that delineate the objects and parts as theirs, while also referring to or borrowing from the history of tattooing as a subversive act. I suggest that both countercultural--if we can even still say that about tattoos as they have become so mainstream--and dominant practices of marking collide here as the Girl brands herself and her things, claiming them, repackaging them, and offering them out to the viewers to be consumed. The language produced is a visual one, not dependent upon the semiotics of literal texts but more on the gesture of marking.
Does the appearance of Girls on screen as parts only produce any dissonance? In the context of the course, the girls encountered women photographers such as Lorna Simpson and Jeanne Dunning and video artists such as Sadie Benning who deploy a restriction of the gaze in order to interrupt the scopophilia associated with the technology of the camera. We have become comfortable with languages of the visual that reproduce the ubiquitous roving eye of the mediated image. Even sound is used to replicate the experience of placing oneself inside the frame, with iPods providing individual life soundtracks to intensify the scenes of your own movie. Can girls using strap-on technology interrupt the phallic gesture by making the camera misbehave? Evidence here suggests yes and no. I argue the strategy was successfully used in an attempt to remind the viewers that they do not and cannot have access to the entire underneath; the whole Girl remains elusive. At the same time, the close-up shots invite an intimate perusal of the Girl and her world. Even I note here with a kind of prurient glee my favorite shot, a close-up of nose tip and full mouth with the “Flirt” lipstick rounding the lips (Figure 11). Since this is a film done by “real girls” it lacks the Hollywood chimera of perfection. Our eyes lap up each pore and freckle as if we are seeing such things for the first time. The mouth opens round as the tube arcs, revealing the inside—a set of tender creamish teeth haloed by the metal pearls of concealed braces. She does seem raw as she has made her inside available, less in command of the gesture and what it implies. Yet the expansive gesture of revelation and invitation is what distinguishes the mark of the Girl from the mark of the woman.

Sadie Benning has actually produced a video for Le Tigre.
Scenes from the X Box reveal the becomings-expressive of modal girl with a pedagogical imperative. Her marks charted here interface and reverberate with Girl as conceptual persona. Brand X expands to include: oppositionally defiant, disorderly gendered, unbroken egg, matrilineal destroyer, blood-hued beast, survivor, student, bitch, and flirt. The Women’s Studies classroom can successfully host Girl as long as she isn’t deployed in the service of woman or reduced to the status of little-woman. It is with generosity of mission and a commitment to feminist praxis that Women’s Studies offers Girl a safe place to play.
Chapter 6

I Am Not What You Want: Gender Performativity, Untitled Film Stills, and Experiments in Girl Branding

Social constructionism has shown essentialism to be one important tactic among many for negotiating the production and reproduction of gender. Girls live this as branding strategy. Brittany’s hair plus Jessica’s pastry smell + Avril’s naughty wink with a little Mandy More demure makes me my own unique special person. The production of gender is highlighted through this consumer model of choice. Undergraduate students already seem to understand the nature of the performative in gender production as they negotiate the daily tweakings of their brands. However, the formal introduction to Judith Butler’s notion of gender performativity arms them with some critical skills to use as they encounter the performative in their daily lives, both in performative screen presences and in the performative aggregates of their peers. Part One of the chapter explores the critical bounds of performativity. I explore the notion of performativity and how it helps to theorize Girls and their practices of the feminine. Included in Part One is a couple of strategies for making performativity intelligible to undergraduates despite Judith Butler’s idiom. Part Two offers a critical examination of Cindy Sherman’s Untitled Film Stills as it proves to be a key pedagogical site for exploring Butler’s notion of gender performativity. I argue here that performativity (i.e. something emergent and readable from the girls, not something conceptual slapped upon their actions) is paramount to my study of girls as to-be subjects whose marks are readable as trace, action congealed and
signed like jello warmed to liquefy. After a careful exploration and exegesis of Sherman’s complete film stills project as it was exhibited and then published as a collection by MOMA, Part Three formulates the conditions of possibility produced through the mimicry and contagion that is the performative assignment itself—a self-portrait film still project called “I am not what you want.” I examine and chart the results produced by the girls, in which the students showcase with their own bodies their lexicon of gender performativity while negotiating the desire to perform.

Part One: Performing and Performativity

If gender is performative, then it follows that the reality of gender is itself produced as an effect of the performance. Although there are norms that govern what will and will not be real, and what will and will not be intelligible, they are called into question and reiterated at the moment in which performativity begins its citational practice.

Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*

Performativity is one notion students are intimately familiar with even though they may not have a name for it. I cited evidence for this earlier when positing their branding strategies. Branding is one umbrella effect of performativity, links of nuanced acts adaptable for multiple sites and events, in which the Girl never appears before her brand. Formally introducing the notion to students allows them to interrogate their practices along lines of gender. Many students suggest that gender is something they possess (primarily biologically) but its appearance is not ownable or controllable. While I encourage them to rethink such biological determinism, this notion of how one acquires
and exhibits human characteristics encapsulates a widespread understanding of how norms work to produce the shapes of things like gender.

In terms of gender, one is or is not recognizable as a Girl by an other’s reading of projected codes, much like the surface of a mirror reflects what and how we see into it. The shape of something like Girl is managed from the outside through the participation and interaction of cultural forces on her margins. The notion of performativity can become a powerful tool for configuring the unexamined yet ubiquitous surface of gender constituting their brands. What makes a brand a “Girl’ brand? How do you know? Are there limitations associated with “Girl” that adhere to the Girl brand? Are there things Girl brands can do that other kinds of brands cannot? What are the connections between performances of identity-based brands and the constructions of gendered identities?

Judith Butler offers us a way to reconfigure constructions of gender and identity in her oft-cited *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*. Like other social constructionists, she critiques the notion of a "universal woman," or a woman who pre-exists hegemonic formations and representations. She attempts to de-privilege the subject as an essential self-identified "being" through an exploration of the constitutive forces (codes, laws, languages, etc.) deployed to render the gendered subject visible and intelligible. "Woman" for Butler is not a unified aggregate, but an identity produced from and constituted by performances of gender. Gender is a congealing of repeated acts and stylish machinations that produce over time the appearance of a cohesive recognizable subject. Butler claims that the category of sex (linked to an apparently persuasive biological determinism) is a construction produced by gender. There is no access to an ahistorical pure "sex" before or after the intervention of the social. "Gender," a social
construct and category, produces "sex," shapes our bodies and modes of embodiment, restricts and disciplines practices and configurations.

There is no ontological status to categories of gender, no "being" to gender. Butler appropriates Nietzsche's claim from *The Genealogy of Morals*, that there is no doer behind the deed--the deed is everything. In other words, there is no man or woman behind the curtain of Oz running the show. What we have instead is a social tableau or gender play that insists on a precise following of script. Formative and acculturative programmatics produce the characters that the play necessitates. Among other things, our Oedipal script calls for a) "boys" to reject their primary love object, the mother, through fear of the castrating power of the father (a rejection of the maternal for the symbolic) in order to produce exogamical cathections elsewhere; and b) "Girls" to reject their primary love object, the mother, through resentment over penis envy or blame over undeliverable phallic goods, in order to produce exogamical cathections elsewhere. Butler indicts this process for its repetition of heterosexual constructs, the constitutive force of a norm that produces an outside to gender (abjection). She encourages a "subversive" repetition or performance of gender, a deliberate misreading of direction, disruption of cues, an improvisational stage coup where the actors juggle and reverse their lines like so many droppable balls, inevitably changing the signification of the play with each performance.

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19 When quizzed about the ontological status of performativity, Judith Butler states

So what I’m trying to do is think about performativity as *that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names*. Then I take it a step further, through the Derridian rewriting of Austin, and suggest that this production actually always happens through a certain kind of repetition and recitation. So if you want the ontology of this, I guess performativity is the vehicle through which ontological effects are established. Performativity is the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed. (“Gender as Performance,” 112)
Again, for Judith Butler, the difference between performance and performativity is that the former implies a pre-existing subject who gets to choose actions that fall along a gendered continuum of behaviors no matter how they are performed and that are supposed to emanate from a gendered being, while performativity is a series of never-identical actions that others congeal into a gendered identity.

Butler has accused her critics of misreading these performative productions as gender significations from the closet, variable with mood and intonation or the right accessory. She claims that (mis)performing gender offers subjects a means to socially (de)construct what these categories can do, consequently changing what they mean. One problem with this theory is that it positions actions as potentially free-floating from the strictures of gendered categories, while down-playing the power of these categories to sweep such transgressions under its appropriative rug, re-codifying as intelligible and categorizable or rejecting as unintelligible waste. Butler is invested in "the outside of gender" as a transgressive category, but is disturbed by the effect of invisibility such practices produce. She does not want transgressive gender practices to be named, controlled, and recodified, yet she rejects the space of the abject, the unnamable, as a potential space for practices of becoming. Another problem with Butler's theory of performativity is that it operates in response to the norm. In order to subvert the "beings" of gender with the "doings" of gender, the beings must be pre-existent. She relies on the presence of the norm in order to propel constitutive response as critique and potential revolution. Unfortunately, this means for women that performativity is generated in response to and predicated by the given of woman's lack. Lack as norm performed differently does not safeguard it from reterritorializing anything but itself.
Being anchored to the normative ship of fools does weigh down the possibilities prescribed by performativity. However, I seek to unmoor it for Girls by reconfiguring performativity as buoy (instead of fun house mirror), a series of bobbing markers that demarcate peripheries and hail uncharted zones. Gender performativity for Girls involves repetitions of the feminine that don’t have to add up to anything in particular yet even as they are marked. There is simply more play space allotted to and taken up by Girls. I am not claiming that there aren’t categorical prescriptives at work in the kinds of choices girls even recognize. The key here is that it is not about choice at all. A performing of femininity in flux is a becoming not on its way to something like “woman” but in essence the actual crux of flux Girl aggregates.

Performativity and Identity

One cogent way to ground this theoretical concept for the students is to run it through their most readily available engines. While Butler’s philosophical idiom might be a little off-putting, performativity is an almost transparent concept to most students who are active branders and brandees. The trail of consumer purchasing habits and the fixing of identities is readily accomplished and encountered on-line, where ads target activity and invent exacting profiles of users by following our every move. There are few objections from those who use this surveillance as a personal shopper (also the same demographic who purchase magazines like *Lucky*, “The magazine about shopping” I suspect). On the performative front, “I buy therefore I am” can be quickly flipped into “I do therefore I am” with little if any dissonance. This example of performativity is the most resonant among students who understand that biological performances of gender
matter not one whit in an environment in which your spending power is far more relevant than your genitals. “Affirmative Customization” of ads specifically targeted at users is based solely on their habits and happens almost invisibly through data mining programs designed to scoop up “mouse droppings.” The only control users have in the construction of their online identities lies in the participation itself. We become online subjects when hailed, “You’ve got mail,” and “Recommendations based on 45 things you own and more.”

Identity theft is the ultimate example of online performativity. If your “identity” is stolen, is it the case that the thief actually becomes you, living in your house and sleeping with your wife? Despite the sexy TV commercials in which elderly women wax poetic in Isaac Hayes tones about getting an HDTV to impress the ladies in a becoming-other of credit portfolios, identity theft does not involve an actual habitation or cohabitation with its host/donor. Gender matters only insofar as it can cash out, literally. I am not talking about actual cash, where gender does inflect for many the amount of earning potential and dollars on hand, but credit—or the capacity to accrue debit that adheres to a number and a name. Credit is now your on-line “identity.” So having your identity stolen amounts to loosing your capacity to spend.20

20 “Identity theft” itself is a blanket term that refers to anything from the taking and using of account numbers and lines of credit, to numbers more directly connected to individuals and how they are recognized (branded) as such—like Social Security numbers. It is the metonymical gesture that I find most fascinating here. I am either a set of numbers that stand in as the authentic me to my government and other officiates, or another set of numbers that authenticate my to-the-minute capacity for participation in the marketplace of capital. Either way, the identity that accrues to me is based on the reading of capacities. My “numerical” identity is strictly performative and liquid even as it adheres to codes that are probably outside my reach. So my “virtual” identity is recognized by and comprised of a series of places I visit (mouse droppings and embedded cookies), email I send and receive (services such as Gmail offer free email accounts in exchange for data-mining your mail and direct marketing goods and services they select based
While the processes of acquiring an online identity and having it stolen are great templates for how performativity works in the life of the everyday student (yes, most students do have credit cards), the realm of image identity production is perhaps a more captivating, though seemingly less transparent, zone of performative constructs. Movie and TV stars with their sine-qua-non packages of spun intrigue and candid everyday snapshots in fan mags and tabloids teach the students how to perform themselves as images. I think it is important to turn on the high beam fluorescents, even if they are a buzz kill, to interrogate the performances of gender they buy wholesale and file away with the ticket stubs if only to graft a performative response. The most perfectly sutured example of performativity as gendered cinematic apparition stripped bare of distracting special effects may be found in Cindy Sherman’s *Untitled Film Stills*.

Part Two: Ambiguity and Repetition: Cindy Sherman’s *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980)

I suppose unconsciously, or semiconsciously at best, I was wrestling with some sort of turmoil of my own about understanding women. The characters weren’t dummies; they weren’t just airhead actresses. They were women struggling with something but I didn’t know what. The clothes make them seem a certain way, but then you look at their expression, however slight it may be, and wonder if maybe “they” are not what the clothes are communicating. I wasn’t working with a raised “awareness,” but I definitely felt that the characters were questioning something—perhaps being forced into a certain role. At the same time, those roles are in a film: the women aren’t being lifelike -- they’re acting.

on the contents of your mail), numbers that refer to credit capacities I demonstrate as I buy, and avatars I construct that refer to any or all of the above.
There are so many levels of artifice. I liked that whole jumble of ambiguity.

Cindy Sherman

“The Making of Untitled,” 9

Cindy Sherman’s film stills series began as an attempt to circumvent the monolithic presence of painting as most marketable medium for art star narratives, by torquing it through its own history of portraiture (which includes the hijacking of painting’s mandate to reproduce images as the eye sees them by the invention of photography in the 19th century). Sherman’s alchemy is wrought from an inheritance of Minimalism and Conceptual Art of the 1960s, run through the feminist art practices of the 1970s such as performance and body art. The intensely personal wing of the “personal is political” bird, as evidenced in the performative works of Faith Wilding, Martha Rosler, and Suzanne Lacy, flies with the help of the more aggregate and anonymous “mass-woman,” found in works such as Hannah Wilke’s *S.O.S. Starification Object Series* 1974-1980, which features a topless Wilke in pin-up poses sporting splotchy wads of chewing gum like so may sloppy vaginas, Eleanor Antin’s *100 Boots* series documenting tall black women’s boots in narrative vignettes that gesture toward the invisible dramas in the absent women’s lives, and Lynda Bengalis’s sculptures and videos, including the controversial 1974 *Artforum* two-page ad which featured her naked stroking a giant dildo. The latter wing sought to define itself against what it took to be

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21 Artists associated with the Women’s Liberation Movement in the early seventies mentioned above, especially those associated with *Woman House* such as Judy Chicago, made great strides in opening up the everyday personal concerns of women to the art world. For the first time en masse, woman’s “voice” is
feminism’s morbid fascination with and celebration of victimhood. As such, these proto-third wave women artists rejected the term “feminist” as a descriptor for the works they were producing, despite the rigorously feminist engines that drove them.

If Sherman’s work is a dot on a continuum of women artists working in the 1970s, it falls somewhere to the mid right, connected to gyno-centric work on the far left while keeping a safe distance from its totalizing moniker, at the same time maintaining a vigilant spotlight on gender that is absent in the works on the far right, works in which women appear in their familiar casts as pretty consumable objects. I argue that the Film Stills are decidedly feminist despite the rejection of that category by the artist herself. As Amelia Jones suggests in her essay “Tracing the subject with Cindy Sherman,” “I begin from the assumption that a body of work produced in and around a subject marked as feminine, within the context of the feminist-inflected postmodern scene, necessarily relates intimately to what I conceive of as a feminist problematics of the subject” (33).

Sherman cites a need for total control over the art object as the main reason for occupying the performative space in front of the camera. So it is more a matter of

viscerally articulated on the art market stage. What makes this moment particularly significant is that many of these early feminist works were not commodifiable, i.e., they were not object-based and could not be bought or sold. Much of the work was performance, installation, and conceptual. It is important to note that the majority of this work, as it embodies the visual front of the second wave, is produced by, about, and for middle-class white women. Artists of color such as Howardina Pindel, Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar, and Adrian Piper challenged this essentialist strategy of one-for-all through their performance, video, installation, and mixed-media projects.

Hannah Wilke, Eleanor Antin, and Lynda Bengalis, all cited by Sherman as “artist role models” in her introductory essay to The Complete Untitled Film Stills, interrogate reproductive devices of mass mediums to explore Woman, and the framing of the framed. Wilke and Bengalis approached the realms of film and advertising directly using their own bodies as conduits and reflectors of the gaze. Antin’s famous 100 Boots series of mail art postcards documenting over the past thirty years the adventures of a group of 100 pairs of black boots, allude to the fetishized bodies of women as absent from the frame as they have been from the means of cultural production.
practicality than narcissism that she appears in every one of the film stills. Inspired by the
European heroines of noir and cinema verite, Sherman gathers costumes and wigs from
thrift shops, spots ambiguously detailed locales, and turns her own studio into a number
of bedrooms, cafes, and kitchens hued in high contrast blacks and whites. She enlisted
her friend artist Robert Longo among others to shoot her performing genre-types of
femininity from categories past (and present): housewife, secretary, socialite, servant,
whore, actress, hysterical, wallflower, waif. The narrative vignettes in which the characters
appear titillate the viewers with off-screen action referenced but never clearly defined.
We get an overall surface sense of femininity without plunging into the prescriptions of
stereotype. They hint at emotional planes while denying us access to a readily
consumable feminine psyche.

The film stills are organized non-chronologically into exhibitions and now a book.
Sherman is committed to interrupting any continuity that might emerge between images
with similar characters, or between images shot on the same roll. As such, a more
productive way of working through them might be to negotiate their surface
characteristics. Because the power of Sherman’s narrative vignettes comes in part from
their expansiveness, how they open out past the specificities of narrative to interrogate
something more cinematically archetypal and flat, the refraining of gender as
performance appearing again and again through Sherman’s own body renders it as the
ultimate plane of consistency. She is always and never Cindy. She is visible only as
performative or artifact of performance.

Because these photos are conceived of and framed as film stills, molecular
extracts of a mediated assemblage, the Girl who appears is not a discrete object for sale.
She is always already multiple (one image of the Girl as composed of many stills, each still composed of numerous dots per inch). Sherman’s body becomes Luce Irigaray’s dreamgirl from *This sex which is not one*, as it posits a femininity emerging through practices of contiguity—touching frame to frame—whose essence disperses difference within the same form. Girl in the stills reiterates a visual language completed by the presence of the spectator but reduces film’s capacity to refer to or signify anything but code. The “still” suggests a moment, or stilling of Girl in motion. As such, she is never passively displayed for an audience to consume-- a major distinction between the film still and the advertisement or traditional narrative painting. The image of the stilled Girl interrupts the spectral space the spectator occupies in psychoanalytic film theory. She can neither be a reminder of the absent phallus nor a vacuous object for projection because she highlights and references gender as a mere performance of codes, a flat plane with lines of flight away from and not toward the presumed spectator. While film-going audiences can examine the performance of Girl archetypes through codes that exceed their narrative origins to allow microscopic encounters, eye to gender-smeared slide, the stilled Girl rearranges her particles between the shots.

And the beat goes on: major and minor notes on the refrain

The current configuration of film stills as MOMA book peaks and ebbs along the tonal refrains of gender performance. The backbeat of this Sherman song staccatos a

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22. “She’ is indefinitely other in herself… What she says is never identical with anything, moreover; rather, it is contiguous. *It touches( upon.*)” 28-29

23. See Laura Mulvey’s groundbreaking work on women, the gaze, and spectatorship outlined in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. 
stillness of paused Girls: waiting, leaning, thinking, smoking, looking, weeping. They appear composed and focused, as if they are in the middle of something. Waiting as feminine performative highlights the structural device upon which other actions rest, creating a rhythmic hiccup in my Deleuzian configuration of Girl. She plays out a Freudian passivity as she interrupts her own flow to accommodate the action (or non-action) of others. Perhaps she takes a masochistic pleasure from this pausing, the gasping for air in between each constriction, an interruptive practice that reconfigures “automatic” patterns of behavior. The clicks of the camera shutter like a throat opening and closing upon these stark tableaux of Girls-in-waiting (re)produce the mechanics of this subverted drive. The parenthetical breath holding of stillness looping through the images reveals the force of activity behind the masochism of femininity.

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24 The characters Sherman creates and performs are designated as “Girls” and not “women” because: 1) throughout this dissertation and elsewhere, Girl is in large part a term for an active performance of the feminine regardless of chronological age, and 2) Sherman’s characters are derived from film epochs in which the term Girl is used to refer to women—His Girl Friday (1940), The Time, the Place, and the Girl (1946), The Girl in Room 20 (1946), The Fuller Brush Girl (1950), Tarzan and the Slave Girl (1950), The Girl Can’t Help It (1956), Sex and the Single Girl (1964), etc. I attempt here to reclaim it from its infantilizing origins.
For example, the opening shot of the film stills is of a blonde in a 50s style suit leaning on a closed door in a hallway (Figure 1, Still #4, 1978). Her right arm is raised as if she were knocking. Her eyes are closed, head tilted down slightly indicating she has been at it for a while. Still #4 is a brilliant choice for opening image because it immediately sets the tone for the whole group, the imagined entreaty of a rap on a door: knock, knock, knock. She pauses to gain access; she does not barge in. Of course Sherman here is knocking on our doors, providing a rhythm for our encounter with her work, a working through of the performatives of femininity. This rhythm continues regularly throughout the series in almost half of the stills (31 out of 70, see Appendix B.)
for complete catalogue). If one wanted to read a meta-narrative off of the rhythms of waiting, one might conclude that a) women do an awful lot of it, and b) because it is difficult to wait women have by necessity developed tactics for this performative of femininity. I suggest that two of the tactics evidenced through the film stills are a courting of and traversing through lines of flight produced by the very real blockage of desire involved in waiting, and an asynchronous relationship to “time” and its constraints.

Sherman’s motion shots provide a contrasting riff track lain across the gasp and wheeze of waiting. This chorus of Girls arrested in mid-step walk: walk away, walk up, walk down, and walk toward. The intersection of the staccato hiccups of wait and pause help to amplify the simple glides of step and flow which suture up the backbeat. Sixteen stills of Girls walking appear scattered throughout the series. Girls seem to move randomly from apartment buildings and houses, and through city streets. However, a pattern may be traced around the spheres in which they travel. The public sphere here is a heavily traversed zone of motion, as opposed to the private sphere, where Girls walk away from but never toward.
The most ubiquitous of catalogued street shots contain young confident girls in motion who buoy an urban landscape of brownstones, archways, and properly contained shrubbery. They seem most informed by the television icon for single working girl of the day, Mary Richards, from the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977). Walking briskly between high-rises on their ways to and from city-life events, these Marys could also turn the world on with their smiles. But Sherman’s women don’t smile; they appear more focused and nonplused than enchanted. In *Still #58*, a medium shot of a Girl gazing upward framed from underneath projects and lengthens her body along the lines of its backdrop strips of bricks and windows shooting past on all sides (Figure 2, #58, 1980). She wears a long black net scarf around her head and neck jutting up into the air over her shoulder. The scarf flies up in a reverse of the famous MTM intro shot of Mary spinning...
around and tossing her jaunty pom-pomed cap in the air (Figure 3). Only there is no hat toss, just a steady knowing gaze of a Girl who presumes “mak(ing) it after all” as a given.

Figure 3 (1970)

In addition to the walking stills, I have grouped together other motion shots that run throughout the series but are less homogenous. They fall under the categories of activity, interruption, and surveillance. In the first category there are just a few mundane actions caught in mid motion (swimming, reaching for a book on a shelf, reading a letter, changing clothes). They imply a voyeuristic peek at an unwitting subject performing routinized activities. The second category takes the first one (sometimes literally) a step further. Much like the waiting shots, performative of the feminine in/as action articulates

25 Mary tossing her hat was voted #2 in the top 100 greatest moments in television by Entertainment Weekly (after John F. Kennedy’s assassination and funeral, and before “Who shot J.R.?“)
itself through the specter of interruption. These action shots reveal the every day practices of the feminine through the stutter of shutter click, producing a self-aware reaction or response moment. An off-frame presence is always implied, with each Girl’s stare (and glare) addressing the interruptive force of specific others directly to the periphery of the viewer. The interpellation of a body in motion is the proper mark of femininity realized through this stutter (see Figure 4, #10, 1978).

Figure 4, Still #10

The third category imbricates several prototypical moments of surveillance that capture Girls interrogating their own reflections. The mirror as a territorializing force of objectification allows these Girls to confront a 2D surface of skin lived in, the moment in which her experience of exo-surface collides with the gazed-upon static status of an
imagined other. There is a cold resoluteness in the gazes the Girls train upon themselves. These shots are motion shots because the performative of becoming-object is revealed to be quite active. Although mirror gazing involves one of the most overdetermined sites of feminine-passivity and masochistic surveillance, Sherman is able to open this up for interrogation with new eyes. Film Stills 2, 81, and 8 showcase the intense activity of surface scrutiny through a variety of facial expressions and gestures. Still #56, a closely-cropped head shot of an attractive bouffanted blonde, implies psychological turmoil through the hairs-breathe distance between her surface of skin and the mirrored flatness of outside, with the direct focus of pupil on pupil (Figure 5). The wide-screen crop of the image and the conflation of the “real” and reflected Girl (reminiscent of a cross-dissolve splice) encourage reading her as a Hitchcock leading lady transmuted from one celluloid plane to another. Like many of Sherman’s characters, this one seems more self-aware and in control than any of Hitchcock’s fetish objects. My larger claim here is again that Sherman’s film stills showcase the category of the feminine as a performative. Thus, her renderings of Girls are active on multiple levels, and challenge the binary construct upon which traditional notions of gender rest (masculine/active, feminine/passive).
In addition to the backbeat hiccup of waiting and cross-riffs of motion that suture Sherman’s still song together, the final image category is the hook, an audible lure of draining pathos in the guise of a chanteuse’s warbling call. The Girls in the film stills that inhabit this category emote a heightened affect of one kind or another. They occupy a stance between waiting and action, riffing an elemental rhythmic performative of the feminine like a high-pitched moan associated with the diagnostics of hysteria. They zombie around in nightgowns, slackjaw, stagger and shuffle, and occasionally exhibit bruises and running mascara. This performative of the feminine is replete with Girl trapped in narratives not of her choosing.
In Still #27 (Figure 6), a teary-eyed Girl in a black suit with wide leopard lapels holds both cigarette and cocktail glass in one hand. She gazes off to the side, lips open to reveal top and bottom teeth. The photo is cropped, cutting her head off right above the eyes, rendering the focal point her deep v of neck, throat, and chest revealed at the top of the suit. This arrow of skin gestures down toward her hands and moisture beads on the surface of the bar. Sherman writes specifically about this image, suggesting that the more emotional the still, the more likely the viewer is to associate the performative with some imagined autobiographical event.
The one I call the “crying girl” (#27) is one of the few that has real strong emotion, although her face is blank. It’s as though she’d just finished crying, were so cried out that she had no tears left. Neither this image or any other was related to things happening in my personal life—I wasn’t upset. I think it goes back to a silent film I made in college, just a little thing, where I set up a one-way mirror in front of the camera so that I was facing the camera but looking into a mirror. I was looking at my reflection saying, “I hate you, I hate you,” while crying. It looked so cool on screen, this crying face. I’ve always liked that piece but it was totally staged… (8)

One effect of this show of emotion is to inspire the viewer to go beneath the surface of the image. Unlike the other categories, the hook insists upon a foregrounding of narrative. We care more about the story of each character as we are confronted by codes of distress. The familiar image of emoting Girl is oddly comforting (not disquieting) because it is recognizable, and allows us to slow down and hum along just when the pounding thump of waiting becomes unbearable. Unfortunately, this hook teeters on the edge of performing-stereotype. Sherman herself suggested “if the emotional quotient was too high—the photograph would seem campy” (8). Another consequence of this re-investment in narrative is that the performative of the feminine takes on soap opera stylings producing viewers who reterritorialize preconceived notions of Girl as hysteric onto a slick aesthetic register, rendering pain and confusion beautiful again.

Part Three: The Film Stills Experiment

Cindy Sherman’s *Film Stills* make explicit the relationship between performativity and the feminine. More precisely, they catalogue a series of Girl performatives into a readable refrain of surface most readily associated with masochistic
acts of waiting. The students’ responses to the Film Stills ranged from bemusement to awe. Some felt the “old-timey” icons were unintelligible and even stereotypical portrayals of unenlightened housewives of yore ensnared in soap opera dramas because they had too much time on their hands. Others were struck by the affectless nature of their presentations. They wondered how Sherman could be all of the Girls, and how connected Sherman felt to their surfaces. Was Sherman a diagnostician or merely a film looping in a projector?

As a way for the students to take on the force of the *Film Stills* for themselves, I designed a film stills assignment of their own. Using Cindy Sherman’s work as a jumping off point, the students were instructed to construct five self-portraits as a series of related or unrelated film stills. The film stills might be black and white or color, and drawn from any historical period (including imaginary landscapes). The images should have something to do with the student, but should not look like her in her everyday environment. In other words, the class was not supposed to construct film stills about being traditional college students. This would be cheating, even though the student might feel as if she were already starring in her own film about college life. I wanted them to get outside of their everyday performatives so that they could take on the task of isolating and examining a performative that may not be part of their current refrain. The students were encouraged to invent their own movies, or play one or several roles in a movie that they had seen. One important node of the assignment was to interrogate the differences between “film stills” and “snapshots,” and learn to produce the aesthetic differences that distinguish them. It is here that you may find the aesthetically reproducible difference between a performance (the snapshot) and a performative (the film still). Finally, they
needed to figure out how Sherman constructed the shots to imply a narrative without
necessitating the expense of explanation. I encouraged them to give their leading ladies
histories as well as narrative sequences, and to pluck out the best realized shots—no
matter their sequential order—to turn in for the assignment. The final two sections of this
chapter explore the results.


The first time I deployed this assignment I received over five hundred images
from two sections of my Women in the Arts and Humanities course. In order for them to
really encounter each other’s performative gestures, I selected the most interesting of the
works submitted, removed them from their own narrative contexts, and compiled them
into a slideshow movie with a soundtrack all its own (see the catalogue of included shots
in Appendix C). The students first objected to the stripping away of narratives they had
worked so hard to convey. “How is anyone going to know that my film still is from the
movie “Grease” without the other shots of Frenchie and Rizzo”—its surrounding narrative
cues? They didn’t understand the necessity of co-mingling until they saw the finished
film. As the individual narrative moves were broken, partial, and rearticulated, pathways
for new performative refrains emerged.

In order to offer our new film coherence I added a soundtrack, Cat Power’s
basement track “Not what you want.” The song has few lyrics and most succinctly
encapsulates the failure of the desired object to properly occupy the space of desire. Chan
Marshall’s haunting monotones remind us that Girls, like giant electronic billboards, emit
signs only partially received by those driving too fast down the highway. Marshall herself
has legendary stage fright and plays, when she can muster up the courage, either facing
the back of the stage or with her hair covering her face. Finding it unbearable to be the
object of unknown desire for countless unknowable fans, she sings over and over “I am
not what you want:”

I am not what you want
There's no telling how long I'll be here
I am not what you want
There's no telling how long
I've checked
I've checked to find
I am not for you
There's no telling how long
Go figure that out

I am not what you want
There's no telling how long I'll be here
I am not what you want
There's no eyes in your head
In your head
At least I cannot see them
In your head
I'm not what you want
I'll get
Like Marshall chanting her mantra, the students themselves thwart invasive peering by desire projects they can occupy without claiming to own. There is a heightened level of artifice here because each Girl is an action not necessarily reflective of her familiar refrain of performatives. As she tries gestures on for size, she generates both positive and negative relations to her predetermined gender script. The song “Not what you want” amplifies the dissonance of the performatives in relation to viewer projections and gender prescriptions, and also mirrors the slip between the photograph and its referent. The photograph as film still implies a narrative while always referring to something happening out of the frame. For the most part, the film still does not hail an implied viewer. It is never going to be “what you want,” a catalogue of readable Girl tropes intimately displayed for the pleasure of your perusal despite my attempts to map them. I am not trying to claim that the works are unreadable. These film stills do have two referents, 1) the single frame captured from a film for the purposes of promotion or study, and 2) the now canonical Sherman Stills that directly inform the content and structure of the project. In addition to the referents, the use by the students of familiar tropes render anew some of the most tired and crippling narratives of the feminine.
Despite my dismay at the reproduction of narratives I’d like to see die terrible bloody deaths, I argue the project as a whole was immensely successful. The images are startlingly lovely, and offer a range of ways in which Girls play with, interrogate, embrace, and trample upon the same roles Sherman addressed decades ago. Because the girls are college students and neither artists nor actresses, the stuff of their lives spills across the images. Dorm rooms, campus locales, aesthetically challenged apartments, and college-girl apparel provide the scenes, backdrops, and props used to complete the assignment. I was at first disappointed by the bounded nature of most of their submissions. I had some idea that they could get beyond their everyday acts to try something else, anything else. But when I came back to the stills, watched them over and over, and organized them myself into a film all their own, I became quite excited by the coherence of the surface I had at first treated with disdain. The film stills reveal the performative strategies deployed in the everyday lives of the girls. Girl brands are on exhibit, full frontal. They don’t look polished or convincing in any commercially viable sense. The Girls don’t/can’t really control the semiotics of the just-outside-the-frame. This is the works’ greatest strength. In parallel to the cataloguing of Sherman Girl performatives, I offer the following selections as representative of five different Girl brands I identified through my analysis of the projects. Each brand is catalogued and articulated as groups or amalgams of comparable gestures. I am not trying to determine what the images mean, to me or to the students, but rather how they refer more as archetypal brands. Because the works don’t exist outside of the collective, and because the students asked to remain anonymous authors of this art-text, I will not be identifying their names.
Cinderella Sins

The chokehold of the Cinderella story is ubiquitous, encountered in countless examples of everything from general wedding shots, to fairy tale reenactments, to the “Pretty Woman” prostitute whose john will buy her a new life because he has a heart of gold and, well, she’s hot. The sway this narrative has over the actions girls see as available to them is thorough and pervasive. Referents to this brand were the most prevalent of all. Images in this category include performing propositions in miniskirts, entrances and exits in white gowns and veils (complete with a run-away bride), the prettying up of the salable object, and the inevitable waiting for prince charming. The stills don’t have individual titles per say, but I will name them for the purposes of identification. The three most striking representatives of this brand are Shoe Envy, Striking Midnight in Daylight, and Divots.
Shoe Envy (Figure 7) articulates a contest of desire. Instead of the typical portrayal of the right shoe fitting the right foot leading to a life transformation, the shoe seems to offer its own gaze back at the Girl. Is the shoe a vehicle for desire, or has it become an object of desire totally divorced from the guy? Shoe Envy shorn from its contextual spin elevates the shoe to an object of importance in the everyday realm of the Girl. According to this narrative, there is something magical that adheres to the right pair of shoes. Not just any accessory, new shoes have the power to transport its wearer to a state of fashionable warm-hearted bliss. Global market research firm NDP’s chief
industry analyst Marshall Cohen found that most women keep nearly two dozen pairs of shoes in their closets, with fourteen pairs in rotation. "Anyone can go in and buy an outfit off a mannequin," says Cohen, whose mother owned "a thousand pairs of shoes.” "It takes a unique individual to have the right pair of shoes. It's an unwritten law when it comes to fashion" (Howard, 1). The Girl tries on this sexual/commodity fetish as she conduits the forces surrounding the shoe, becoming hot, spiky, and ballroom-ready. The materiality of the Cinderella Sins brand is enacted.

The well-kept lawn and winding stone path provide a suburban background to the next Cinderella Sin in *Striking Midnight in Daylight* (Figure 8). Girl has dolled herself up in the bride-prize gown of choice, and thrust herself into the naked morning sun. The Halloween pumpkin bucket adds a choice bit of whimsy, shading the “walk-of-shame” moment with an eerie reprise of “make-believe.” This image adds disquiet to the brand. What happens when the prince has buyer's remorse and expels his lovely jewel for other conquests? The consequences of putting herself on the auction block are dramatic, and eventually Girl learns to take solace in the familiarity of failure and embrace the refrain of the cycle. With each performance, the plot deviates from the script in studied increments. A “chick” does cross the road to get to the other side. The prostitution of this brand invites punishment for its sins so the opportunity for redemption (in the form of a three-garage Tudor) will continue to arise.
Figure 8, Striking Midnight in Daylight
The incongruity of the cocktail dress and newly falling snow on the green grounds lends some levity to this over-determined performative (Figure 9). I’ve learned that it is hard to look sexy wearing an overcoat. At least that is the conclusion I have drawn upon encountering hosts of undergraduates who repeatedly go out in freezing weather without coats. Some of the girls have told me that you can’t wear a coat to the bar because someone might steal it. But I offer this image as evidence that you can’t wear a coat because it really interferes with the experiments of Cinderella Sins. Toddling around in
the snow and muck may look a little silly, and probably feels a little silly, but loyalty to
your brand will impel others to believe you really are the princess they see before them,
and you are bound to reap the promised benefits. There is also something very charming
about the Girl in this image. She sports the Sandra Bullock/Terri Hatcher goofiness that
geeky guys are supposed to find so endearing—a kind of clumsy sexy that renders her
“available” in the average guy’s imaginary. This quirk of the brand imbibes it with an
almost salvageable playfulness, but the expression on her face suggests a different story.

The Cinderella Sins performative mandates that Girls must do both naughty and
nice, and somehow manage to negotiate the parameters and circumstances required for
each iteration. She determines the nature of this performative by compiling and accessing
a huge map of gendered prescriptives, narratives, and gestures all in the blink of an eye
(or turn of the heel). Cinderella Sins is fatally flawed; this is the only brand that relies
upon the constancy of a pre-determined script (i.e. norms) to cogently market itself. This
brand is a complicated amalgam of third wave feminism and first wave demure. When
successfully negotiated Cinderella Sins promises to provide Girls what they really
want—be it security of not having to wonder what happens next, nameless sex, a husband
and what comes with him, or a delicious pair of shoes. Depending upon the amount of
time one spends perfecting this brand (more or less), it seems to accrue the disturbing
tendency to congeal into a deadly refrain, a lifetime of “Lifetime” performance.

The Lifetime Network’s motto is “Television for women.” When Cinderella Sins grows up, she gets her
own network, replete with this triumphant Cinderella narrative in movie after made-for-TV movie. One of
the consequences and comforts for woman in losing her performative Girl to the performances subjects
initiate and own is that she may become so cathected onto this narrative as THE one of possibility that she
cesses inventing others, even when she continues to demonstrate its futility to herself (as actor and viewer).
The successful conversion of this brand into a lifestyle is evidence of the pleasures of its performance.
Victim

Girls learn early on that the space of the victim is something they unwittingly and unwillingly occupy at one time or another. They become familiar with the contours of its warehouse early on. The film stills falling into this brand’s rubric subdivide into two main categories: a) my culture is killing me, including images of Girls snuggled up to scales and chocolate bars and toilets with the ever-present magazine filled with super model bodies strewn casually about, and b) violence in the domestic sphere is killing me, including images of Girls startled, stalked, bruised and battered by their partners and other unknown intruders. The images are mostly didactic; it seems important to the girls that the viewers know the source of their oppressions. I will briefly address four selections that situate the Victim Brand.

Selection one, which I’m calling Blinded by the Light (Figure 10), at first glance seems quite a didactic “my culture is killing me” performative. Bathing suit and clothing catalogues flank a blindfolded Girl on a bed, arms raised in submission. She seems powerless to defend herself against the onslaught of body shape trends and the fashions that dictate them, and/or she seeks solace in the protections afforded her by turning a blind eye to the lot that surrounds her even in her sleep. Her biggest problem now is that she can’t see anything else. Two important elements that trouble a seamless didactic encounter with the image include her gesture and expression. The arms of the Girl are raised over her head, palms actively spread and wrists unbound. The gesture is familiar, most often performed after the command “Put your hands up” uttered countless times in cop shows. Girl is being hailed by the media and beauty industries as budding consumer
for hosts of products ranging from diet pills to push-up smash down bikinis. Excerpted from the visual lexicon of pornography, the blindfolded Girl on a bed with her hands up and away from her body also denotes the sexual subjection of a masochist. Combined with her facial expression, lips parted with teeth showing, the gesture reveals pleasure in her abandonment to the cultural apparatuses of the feminine. Victim is a complication of feminine forces and products interpolated as a breathlessly pleasurable onslaught. Half the fun is not knowing what will happen next.

Figure 10, *Blinded by the Light*
Figure 11, *Faced*

*Faced* (Figure 11) lies somewhere between subcategories a and b, a victim performative with both cultural and physical effects. The entirety of the gesture is cropped, leaving only the face and hair as planes for action. A hand grabs and arrests the girl with an interruptive force indicated by the flight and movement of her hair. The face grab is not a familiar one to our visual lexicon, except perhaps in football or wrestling. It is an unexpected and aggressive assault on the body’s most sensate of receptors. The action in the film still is obscured, but we can decipher that a hand grabs and a face responds. The flying hair and blurry aesthetics lend it live-action horror, while the glare of the one free eye challenges the viewer’s status as impartial onlooker. Is this the hand
of a stranger, friend, or lover, or possibly the hand of the viewer herself? Faced indicts us all as willing participants in the show. The Victim performative enacts as it accuses.

Though one doesn’t need to know this in order for the Victim performative to wield its force, Smash (Figure 12) is originally conceived as a shot from Tina Turner’s life story in What’s Love Got To Do With It. Turner was battered for years by her drunk and controlling spouse, before she left him to become massively successful on her own. This still takes place in a dining room, its spare white walls adorned with the momentary bursts of anomalous color in two pictures hung for a tall person’s eyes. The Girl wears
white and pink indicating she is fresh and innocent, Girly even. Leaning back against the table on the disquieting side of the frame, she offers us the gaze of a mug shot, staring ahead with resignation as we take our best shot. The viewer can detect a black right eye if she stares long enough. The major difference between *Faced* and *Smash* is that *Faced* places the viewer as the actor and at the action of a violent incident, whereas the performative in *Smash* is one solely of exposure. She allows us to look at the mark of violence left by someone else. Her presence in the dining room situates this victim squarely in the domestic sphere. Smash bruises the Girl Victim as she displays her vulnerability. Her performative reams fortitude with survival.

The final selection is perhaps the most disturbing of the category. *Gag* (Figure 13) is a film still of a beaten and subdued Girl in her underwear whose smile is affixed to her face with packing tape. Though we can clearly see the smile, it is oddly not a grimace. Her brow is furrowed in a wince. She appears to be clawing at her own chest, and lies prone next to some strewn pills and a pair of handcuffs. This Victim performative goes all out, taking upon herself Girl’s greatest nightmare of violation. More like *Smash* then the similarly actioned *Blinded by the Light*, *Gag* invites us to look at the graphically rendered residue of violence through Girl averting her gaze away from us, allowing us to gape in horror without accusation or confrontation. Why would a student invent and stage with her own body this ultimate act of victimization? I suggest there are two clues or cues to be found here only in this performative act of the feminine: 1) if you examine the origin of the scrape marks on her chest, their shape and direction indicate that they were made by her own hand, and 2) the parted lips taped up across her face conjure a tattooed smile, much like the one she must wear everyday. The logic of the image inaugurates a
Freudian femininity to bring us around full circle. She harms herself (scratches and possibly the tape), in response to the harm inflicted upon her (bruises and probably the tape). The Victim performative is something she does to herself as a result of a masochist subversion of desire she has learned from her culture. The damage she endures every time she smiles when she needs to scream gets written literally on her skin. Girl as Victim bleeds.

Figure 13, *Gag*
The Victim performative may not be a range of gestures we wish to affirm or even contemplate. I argue that despite the physical and emotional risk the Girls put themselves in to embody and act through this category, it is a far superior tool set then that offered by Cinderella Sins. Victim finds the surface of her body and learns its capacities through her encounters with an outside she cannot control. She is vulnerable, assailable, abjected, and yet hospitable. Cinderella Sins only experiences her contours as an affect of someone else’s desire. She walls herself up in a repetition of gestures scripted by other hands. As Cinderella’s gestures are designed to attain one predetermined object, their force circles around her larger plains of desire, producing static instead of the intense reverberations experienced by the objectless desire of the Victim.

The Private

The Private brand opens a vista upon the everyday world of Girl-by-herself. The film stills in this category reveal intimate performatives typically actioned without an audience. However, the stills do not reveal an authentic Girl-self ripe for our cherry picking. These shots are staged, intimacies are chosen and exploited, boundaries however loosened are maintained. Girls enacting the Private brand put on dazzling shows of the mundane, including stills of walking, reading, studying, drinking, eating, talking on the phone, and smirking. These film stills provide a great contrast to both Cinderella Sins and Victim because they are virtually drama-free. Stripping the Girl down to an “essential” act gives the Private the clarity of an unambiguous mark. Why might Girl
choose to brand herself Private? How exactly does the brand consolidate around acts that expose the banal without inaugurating the peep show? The following selections aestheticize the temporal gestures of the everyday Girl.

*Tile* (Figure 14) walls up the most private area of the household—the bathroom. Girl spends a lot of time in there, *doing things*. One of the most ubiquitous inquires about the places Girls go and the duration of their stays involves bathroom visits with or without friends. This film still is gridded floor to ceiling in linear white. In contrast, the toilet and the Girl round out the foreground in respective white, black, and diagonal stripes. She faces the toilet and is in the process of sliding her skirt down below her hips, with her back to the viewer. Her approach to the toilet is more like a man’s; she faces it head on and drops her skirt instead of lifting it and sitting down. Again, we must ask, what is she doing in there? The still does not indicate what her intentions are, i.e. a shower or bath, a vomit, a weigh-in, etc. *Tile* doesn’t map much, as the ambiguous nature of the still leaves a great deal to the imagination. The exposure of this Private does not reveal intimate Girl acts reserved for her eyes only. I suggest instead that the unmappable, the vulnerable moment in the still actually occurs in the interaction between line and curve. The roundness of her Girl-belly blending and bending across lines of tile shows us the very thing we are unaccustomed to seeing. The relaxed curve of flesh is most often muscled up, obfuscated in wardrobe, or cringed small in embarrassment for its lack of flatness. Girl is not championing her belly here, is probably unaware that its tenderness dilutes the chill of the porcelain like butter on a blade. Her actions don’t refer, don’t mean anything in particular to the viewer. It is her body that takes over the force of the line. Her belly is where action resides.
Grass (Figure 15) morphs an inverted Vetruvian man into a topsy-turvy Girl, sporting a white t-shirt, jeans, and Birkenstocks instead of nakedness. She offers her version of beauty and perfection without the double bind of the nature/culture divide. The crosshatch bleach lines of her jeans radiating from her center stand for DaVinci’s extra limbs. Not particularly interested in that stalemate, she energizes and grounds herself through the grass without being of the grass. Girl exposes her proximity to nature without fear of retribution. Instead, she claims her turf—commodified, processed, stylized—as the upside-down brand of Private beauty, enacting just-in-timeness instead of the timeless, common instead of the rarified, and mass-produced instead of the one-of-a-kind. Grass makes explicit the mechanisms of Private branding in the guise of a sunny afternoon.
Perhaps the most intimate of the Private brand stills, *Fiberglass* (Figure 16) anchors this category with the wet heat of pleasure. A white Girl soaks in a white tub, modestly but sexily adorned in white bubbles. One can almost smell the vanilla permeating the dampened room from two glowing white candles. Whiteness here purifies/sanitizes her acts of pleasure, be they the retreat and rejuvenation of a quiet soak, the warm reverberations of aquatic masturbation, both or neither. As I first did with the still *Gag*, I pause to wonder again why a student makes an image that reproduces her role in a visual lexicon (*Fiberglass* echoes a soft-core that goes beyond the bounds even of daytime drama) that she does not control. And there is my answer. If Girl does not control the mechanisms that narrate and visualize her own Private pleasures, when she has the opportunity to claim that authority to please herself and to frame it as she chooses, she seizes the opportunity to do so. *Fiberglass* attempts to reclaim a visual language of sensuality for Girl, exclaiming, “I love my body” despite most mediated evidence to the contrary. Private here is less of a catcall than an admonition against the bankruptcy of Girl’s fleshly image.

This brand is problematically enacted because 1) its revelatory posture implies a kind of authenticity of doer rather than collection of deeds, as if we’re getting a real chunk of a real girl here, and 2) making the private public robs the stills of the very privacy they assert. The Private performative creates an illusion of intimacy that Girls can exploit. The reason the most sought after money shot in heterosexual pornography is the visualization of the female orgasm is because it is supposed to be proof positive documentation of the physical invisibility and mysteriousness of female pleasure (women ejaculates notwithstanding). The Private capitalizes on this in multiple registers, giving us
an all-access pass to a host of Girls doing things that Girls do. As a brand, the Private disarms the viewer with a striptease of the real without ever having to proffer a pound of flesh. Girls known as Private recognize raw and available as salable performatives that allow them to toy with the notions of truth and representation for their greatest advantage.

**Echo**

The fourth brand borrows its name from Ovid’s story of Echo, a nymph who loves the sound of her own voice. Hera takes her voice for assisting Zeus in his philanderings. She later falls in love with Narcissus, who could not return her love because of his obsession with his own beauty. In response to her despondent prayer for death, Aphrodite allows her to die but returns the sound of her voice to live on without her. Our Echo brand is a visual reverberation that mirrors its own surfaces and the traces of others in its own reflection. Echo Girl is not a mere reflection who reproduces things around her with the accuracy of a copy. The image she finds in the mirror is never the same one twice. She is at once entranced by her physical shape shiftings and startled by their otherness reflected back upon her. Echo evidences Irigaraian plenitude with a Deleuzian refrain—“look at the sultry curve of my eyebrow; look at the small hairs bristling between the brows; wait, does it really look that thin; look at its jaunty arch.” This performative encompasses the contagion of the outside with mimetic gestures of

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27 Evidence for the efficacy of this brand is its naughty sister *Girls Gone Wild*, invented by guys to sell videos that purport to show real college girls flashing real college breasts to guys who would otherwise never see real college breasts. *Amazon* currently sells over 100 selections from this popular DVD series (<http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=ss_nr_i_1/002-4579870-4110458?ie=UTF8&keywords=girls%20gone%20wild&rh=i%3Aaps%2Ck%3Agirls%20gone%20wild%2Ci%3Advd&page=1>, 31 July 2006).
incorporation and projection. Echo suffers a bit from her taint with Narcissus, but her self-love is constitutive and differs from his because she sees and incorporates others into herself with each gaze into the glass.

Clad in a sports bra and dark eyeliner, the Wave Girl readies herself for the surf outside. She stares intently out of the mirror; her focus seems at once directed at the body from whence she came and inward through her double’s eyes (Figure 17). One hand touches its copy in solidarity, an acknowledgement of the otherness of the projected image, the life it has on its own, and the desire to maintain contact. Aside from half of the
back of the Girl, the viewer has access only to the mirrored image. It is the projection/reflection that is on display, one of many Echos produced by Girl throughout her day. This *Wave* performative carries a neutralized femininity along in its wake, leaving a trail of intense physicality to dominate the bound curves. *Wave* Girl pushes on, up against, and back, Echoing past the tomboy before washing into something else entirely.

Oddly framed among posted notes, propped papers, closet items, and sidelined photos, *Vestige* Girl (Figure 18) wraps up the far left of the still. Is she a replicant of
some originary girl who no longer exists? In a calculated reversal, the “real” becomes the imaginary remnant subsisting as a projection to complete the logic of the image. For Vestige Girl, all has become smoke and mirrors. Her gaze appears blank, inviting further viewer narrative inventions to ground the incompleteness of the image. She wears a robe and towel, preparatory tools for other projections. This Echo resounds with the fullness of a fleshy apparition. She doesn’t make waves; she anoints her missing doppelganger as remnant of one of several selves she sheds along the way, floating back to haunt her.

Aesthetically framed and saturated with bursts of color, this film still Girl carefully coaxes her eyelashes into wings of sooty fringe as she coats them with mascara.
Copy is perhaps the performative most associated with Girl (Figure 19). Here, Girl applies herself with plastic prosthetics to dramatize her features and to hide her flaws. A feminist backlash hangs in the air as she authors a copy of herself. Does she subconsciously alter her features according to the whims of fashion and aesthetically dominant paradigms of beauty? Is her face one of several masks she eagerly straps on to get things done? Second-wave feminists who support a return to the natural as a strategy to throw off patriarchal reign over women’s bodies argue that women who wear make-up are dupes for the man, or that they don’t recognize their acts as duplicitous with the very system that seeks to dominate them through wholesaling women as marketplace commodities, trophies and wives to the guys with the most cash. The association between the wearing of make-up and violence against global women was made explicit in a Chicago Women’s Liberation Union poster that had a white woman applying lipstick juxtaposed with a Vietnamese woman with blood coming out of her nose.28

28
The evolution of radical feminist response to the trappings of femininity may be seen in the differences between the Redstockings of the 60s and the Riot Grrrls of the 90s. Rita Alfonso and Jo Trigilio claim that “(u)nlke the Redstockings, who protested by throwing items used in the oppression of women into the "freedom trashcan" at the 1968 Miss America Beauty Pageant, the riot grrrls donned and reclaimed, in a perverse manner, the accoutrements of femininity. They made a display of the power that these accoutrements brought to them, and simultaneously mocked this power through parody. More than about performing music, the riot grrrls were about performing their gender” (Sec 9). Copy reveals the application of makeup to be a performative, an action that has everything to do with the comportment of the feminine but which cannot, by its very nature, be considered a performance of objectification. The Girl-face becomes a canvas upon which to play, her paints laid out before her. In order for the girls to be objectifying themselves by making themselves more attractive commodities, they would have to exist as bounded subjects before an act could be completed or read. As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, this cannot be the case because the film stills show us the performative strategies of Girls we may only glimpse as actions or aggregates of actions, not girls performing acts like trained circus dogs.

The Echo ripples with the fluid disparateness of the waves. She looks in the mirror and sees so much more than just an isolated self. Echo may be as popular a brand as Cinderella Sins. However, the actual hospitality to the other, disguised as self-policing or self-love, that embodies the acts of Echo make it a more malleable and desirable brand than Cinderella Sins, which is really the brand that appears to be entirely other-directed and self-less. Echo Girls appear at times confident and quixotic, haughty and neurotic.
Their performative belies the stranglehold of Lacan’s mirror stage, in which the girl’s mirror image provides the security of a coherent identity she spies as she looks for cues of a correctly visualized femininity (Feminine Sexuality, 30). Echo views her image not as a stabilizing force upon which the “I” is mistakenly founded, but as one of many waves that contain the residues of gestures past and yet to come. Echo is replicant, an aura-less Benjaminian copy devalued for its openness to and incorporation of the other, even when the other is a mark made by one of many projected selves.

Feminist

The feminist brand is the least clearly articulated of all the brands in I Am Not What You Want. As part of the aegis of the course, the students themselves explore concepts and practices of feminism, and their experiments yield variable results. The stills included in this rubric fall loosely into three categories: 1) The Stepford Wife, a pre-women’s lib fossil they find fun to explore because they are not mandated to occupy her, 2) The Supermom, caught between the rigors of career and the challenges of child-rearing, and 3) The Bitch, a positive incarnation of any Girl viewed as strong, smart, and unapologetic. The Stepford Wife reigns in 50s garb, ready to serve with vacuums, cookbooks and birthday cakes on hand. I will leave this category to your imagination because the students consider her a remnant and don’t concern themselves with her contemporary incarnations. She exists merely as a scapegoat for Girls’ nascent fears produced by the lingering middle-aged housewife ever present in commercials for quilted toilet papers and counter top sanitizers. Instead, I will focus on the Supermom and the Bitch as primary icons of the Feminist performative.
Supermom is a term coined by media outlets to describe a working middle-class white woman with children. It refers primarily to married women despite the obvious supermom quality of single moms who do it all by themselves. I use it here to elicit the tensions evidenced in the film stills about living in the world as a woman, occupying a number of socially prescribed roles, and trying to maintain the Girl in the day-to-day existence of the woman. Many students who are already chronologically adults express ambivalence about “growing up.” It does not at all seem clear how one can integrate the fostering of a career (all about you) with the servicing of others’ lives (not about you). And rightly so, this remains a ridiculously difficult co-mingling of roles that hasn’t changed much since more women in the US work outside the home for pay than those who can afford to offer free labor at home. Many students feel free labor is for chumps, as evidenced in their mockery of the Stepford Wife. At the same time, they exhibit a kind of nostalgic attachment to traditional notions of home and family life that cannot happily co-exist alongside their dreams of future jobs. One example of the Supermom is Betty (Figure 20), a working Girl with a penchant for housework. You can tell she works in an office of some kind by her jaunty bun, secretary glasses, and two-button sports coat. This performative is Feminist because the Girl has not given herself over entirely to the home. She vacuums and reads a book at the same time. While this may look like a parody from the Helen Reddy 70s anthem, I argue that it is moreover an attempt by Girl to take on what she sees as the outer bounds of a feminist performative, incorporating work for others with work for cash and work for pleasure. Perhaps the film still offers an implied critique, that to be feminist means *having* to have it all.
The most interesting and variable film stills of the Feminist are to be found in the Bitch breakaway brand. There are two subdivisions of the Bitch category: 1) The strong, invincible, in-your-face version, and 2) the more theoretically inflected icons who aren’t afraid to attempt to situate the Feminist in terms all her own. These Bitches also have great props. Because the Bitch brand covers a lot of turf, I will offer five selections that cover the span. Out of all the work submitted for this experimental project, the first Bitch selection best captures Sherman’s *Films Stills* spirit. *Wilma* is all sky and thigh as she towers above the apartment complex in the distance (Figure 21). Her hands planted firmly on her hips, she surveys the landscape with an eye both confident and wary. Her actions are stilled and composed without a hint of fashion photography’s awkward aestheticization of blonde blowing hair. Though she appears quite motionless, one can sense the dynamic tension circuiting between the ground and her erect body. *Wilma* enacts Bitch through unquestioningly standing tall in a backdoor land shot through with the overgrowth of weeds.
Figure 20, Betty
Maggie crawls in the space between iconic tough Girl and theoretical assertion. She dares the viewer to judge her masochism as mere Freudian lip service (Figure 22). Her performative shakes the notion that Girls must reject masochistic practices and refuse any service contact with “the man” in order to become feminists. How can offering or carrying a letter on all fours like a dog be good for Girls or even pleasurable? This film still is almost an exact rendering of an actual film still you may recognize from the film Secretary, starring Maggie Gyllenhaal. The Girl in the film cuts herself in response to the strictures of femininity. Her new boss, aware of her practice of self-mutilation, helps her reterritorialize the masochistic onto the pleasures of service. In their master-slave relation that develops into something recognizable as love and caring, she liberates and enraptures herself by submission to spanking, while remaining in control of its frequency and duration. Maggie turns the notion of Feminist on its head, and learns to survive by playing Bitch.
The final two selections from the Feminist Bitch brand use props to dissect Girls’ relationship with feminism. Lulu wears black heart-shaped blinders and pushes away imagined trysts or stable but distracting and compromising loving relations in favor of something she does not share or name (Figure 23). This performative enacts a feminist separatism, a kind of priestly (or nunly?) subversion of pleasure for the greater good of a cause or purity of action and direction. At the same time, it demonstrates a kind of radical feminism rarely embraced by Third Wave feminists. Perhaps Lulu, like the Stepford Wives surrounding her in this brand of Feminist, is offered in effigy to a feminism long since past its prime. Second-wave radical feminist and gyno-queen Mary Daly champions the “theory and actions of Radical Feminists who choose separation from the Dissociated State of patriarchy in order to release the flow of elemental energy and Gynophilic
communication;” and argues for the “radical withdrawal of energy from warring patriarchy and transferal of this energy to women’s Selves” (96). In any case, the viewer cannot be certain whether the performative is a celebration, a struggle, or a critique. All we know is this-- Lulu pushes romantic love away to get things done. That makes her a Bitch.

One way of encountering feminism in the course is by collecting and sharing strategies for survival. Girl deploys these strategies, and moreover, is herself an intrinsic verb under the handle of feminism’s toolbox.  *Grace* enacts this quite literally by incorporating a frame as both gesture and reference to the function of feminism in her life (Figure 24). *Grace* sees feminism as an act, a framework one puts on to understand and dissect the world around her. Feminist here is not some embodied identity and cannot exist as such. Girl encloses herself within the frame not only to identify what is precious, but also to demarcate and intensify zones of interest (or what lies inside the frame). She frames and is also framed by feminism. *Grace* is a Feminist Bitch precisely because she is smart, smart enough to borrow a tired aesthetic trope and appropriate it for performative critique. Her meta move portends the theoretical framework for the entire film stills project.
Figure 23, Lulu
The Feminist brand encompasses a wide variety of actions ranging from mockery to celebration. It fits quite nicely in our overall film of film stills *I Am Not What You Want* because students, feminists, and media outlets alike contest the brand. The Feminist is never “what you want” because she occupies the space of undesirability, whether it is through a lived gender separatism, the high moral ground of denouncing all as patriarchal collusionists (same thing?), the requisite spinster or lesbian furry man-hater, or for the Girl especially it is a brand that is difficult to swallow because it still means loud and unreasonable, getting what you want or what is rightfully coming to you through the shrill of protest and insistence. The Stepford Wife and the Supermom are icons worthy of
scorn and consternation. Almost all of the other brand types fall under the rubric of Bitch. As the students work their ways through acts of the Feminist, they find much comfort in its most nebulous and refreshing incarnations that fall under the sign of the Bitch. Almost all of the Girls claim some feminist practices for themselves despite their almost universal rejection of the term Feminist. However, Bitch is a brand they happily take on because they see it more as a term of respect than denigration. Wilma, Lulu, and Grace are not only able to challenge their own perceptions of the Feminist by becoming Bitches, their actions dare feminist and non-feminist viewers alike to take another look at what a Girl Feminist can do.

*I Am Not What You Want* reminds the viewer of all the ways in which Girls elude identity schemas and complete materializations through their appearances as performative acts. Their collective actions, a.k.a. Girl brands fostered by the Girls in this project including Cinderella Sins, Victim, Private, Echo, and Feminist, serve as key sites on the map of Girl I have built throughout this dissertation. Not one strategy among others for the not-yet-subject, performativity is the perfect concept to describe how Girls already engage the world and each other, and this experiment proves a successful showcase for the many performatives Girls enact every day.
Works Cited


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<http://www.cdt.org/>


APPENDIX A

SYLLABUS EXAMPLE FROM THE FIRST VERSION OF THE COURSE ON GIRLS.
WOMEN’S STUDIES 003
Summer 2002

WELCOME TO THE DOLLHOUSE:

Coming of Age Films about Girls

SADIE BENNING

SECTION 201

INSTRUCTOR: LEISHA JONES

Office Hours: M 10am-11am, W 2:00-3:00pm, 117 Willard

Office Phone: 865-7093 Email: ljj4@psu.edu

Credits: 3


TA: Alex S. ars211@psu.edu
COURSE MATERIALS
Films comprise the majority of texts for this course. Feature films can be purchased (half.ebay.com, alldirect.com, or Video Universe are cheap) or rented. You will be required to view the following films outside of class: Welcome to the Dollhouse, Just Another Girl on the IRT, Girlfight, and Foxfire. Required essays will be available for you in a coursepack and on-line. Please copy them and bring them to class with notes and questions in order to facilitate discussion. The other materials that you will need to purchase may include Mini D/V tape, VHS tape, etc.

STUDENT REQUIREMENTS
1) Come to each class having read the assigned readings and watched assigned films. Be prepared to contribute to class discussions.

2) Pop Quizzes: You will take a short unannounced quiz once a week, for a total of 6 quizzes.

3) Digital Video: Each student will be required to participate in the making of a 3-5 minute digital video about girls. Using the course content as a starting point, you will get to choose your film genre and sign up for a group (you can make a video by yourself if you prefer). Due dates throughout the semester will serve as checkpoints for treatments/scripts, video footage, editing, postproduction, and final film viewings. This project will comprise half of your grade for the semester.

4) Final Exam: On August 2nd, you will be given an in-class final exam covering the content from the entire semester.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
20%--Participation
10%--Quizzes
50%--Final Video
20%--Final Exam
Grading Scale

100-93  A
92-90   A-
89-87   B+
86-84   B
83-81   B-
80-78   C+
77-74   C
73-70   D
69-     F

Academic Integrity

I expect that each of you will generate your own videos, and will reference any idea, information, images, and wording that is not your own. Representing someone else's thoughts as your own constitutes plagiarism. See Penn State's Student Guide to University Policies and Rules, 2001-2002.

Classroom Discourse

We will make a commitment to each other to encourage the expression of critique and dialogue about course materials. In this forum, intimidating remarks, particularly of sexist, racist, or homophobic natures, will not be tolerated. You must treat each other with respect. Failure to do so is a failure to complete this course successfully.

Disclaimer

Some of the materials covered in this course may be considered challenging or "offensive." Our classroom will remain an open space for the exchange of ideas. You have been warned.

The Pennsylvania State University encourages persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have any questions about physical access, please contact the instructor as soon as possible.
ASSIGNMENTS FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES 003.201

Week 1
June 24 Introduction; In-class video: Girl Stuff (1994); On-line: gURL.com
June 25 In-class video: Period Piece (1996) by Jennifer Frame and Jay Rosenblatt;
On-Line: Museum of Menstruation and Women's Health
June 26 Reading: On-line--Freud, “Femininity" (1965); Background Info
June 27 Discussion: Welcome to the Dollhouse (1996) by Todd Solondz
June 28 iMovie tutorial----Meet in 302 Patterson Bldg. On-line: iMovie2
Official Site, Technical Links for DV Moviemakers

Week 2
July 1 Reading: Luce Irigaray, "The sex which is not one" (1977); On-line: bio info
July 2 In-class video: Sadie Benning Vol. 1 (1989-90); On-line: Behind the Mask;
Benning in LeTigre
July 3 Reading: On-line--Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975)
July 4 Holiday
July 5 No Class--Work on treatment

Week 3
July 8 Treatment Due; In-class video: Girltalk by Kate Davis (1988)
July 9 Begin writing script/storyboard. Reading: Rachel Simmons, "The hidden culture of aggression in girls" (2002)
July 10 In-class video: Girls Like Us (1997) by Jane Wagner
July 11 Reading: Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the female spectator" (1982)
July 12 Discussion: Foxfire by Annette Haywood-Carter (1996); On-line: Film Review

Week 4
July 15 Little Red Riding hood--Reading: Angela Carter, "The Werewolf" and "The Company of Wolves" (1979); On-line: Little Red Riding hood by Donna Leishman, Interview with Leishman
July 16 Script/Storyboard Due; In-class viewing: Freeway by Matthew Bright (1996); On-line: Film Review
July 17 Begin shooting video; In-class viewing: Freeway Pt. 2
July 18 Reading: Kaja Silverman, "Lost Objects and Mistaken Subjects" (1988)
July 19 Discussion: Just Another Girl on the IRT by Leslie Harris (1992); On-line: Film Review
**Week 5**

July 22 Reading: Linda Williams, "Film bodies: gender, genre and excess" (1991)
July 23 Discussion: *Girlfight* (2000) by Karyn Kusama
July 24 **Editing your video--Meet in 302 Patterson Bldg.** Please try to digitize your footage before class so that we can spend class time editing and addressing any other technological problems you may have encountered.
July 25 In-class viewing: *All Over Me* (1997) by Alex and Sylvia Sichel
July 26 In-class viewing: *All Over Me* part 2

**Week 6**

July 29 In-class viewing: *Coming Soon* (1999) by Colette Burson; On-line: Interview
July 30 In-class viewing: *Coming Soon* part 2
July 31 **Final Video and 1 page analysis due:** Present it to the class
August 1 Final Presentations
August 2 **Final Exam**
APPENDIX B

CINDY SHERMAN FILM STILLS CATALOGUE

WALKING
20 walking out of a doorway of a house
21 angled-c-up, MTM city shot w/ skyscraper background
59 walking away w/ suitcase
55 spotlighted walking toward camera on city street
83 walk w/ newspaper in city block, pushing up sunglasses in trench coat
42 walking away from church, figure is dwarfed by architecture
18 walking toward camera in front of apt building
38 gauzy robed figure walking in a glen
17 more MTM walking c-up
23 medium shot on bricked pavement
53 headshot standing by lamp, implies motion
19 walking along the side of a bldg
54 blond at night walking toward holding trench collar
58 super MTM up shot w/ up eyes, strength of girl aligned w/ high-rises, scarf juts out behind
51 walking up dark staircase in negligee and frilly robe, but gaze is down toward first floor object
22 walking down steps, eyes down

ACTIONS/RESPONSES
7 martini & sliding glass door
10 part 2 of broken sack of groceries, squatted down, hand on egg carton
46 swimming with goggles
60 servant fixing hair under arches
5 reading air mail letter c-up
14 hand holding sheathed object w/ bruised arm in front of mirror
36 changing silhouette
2 in towel in front of bathroom sink mirror, could be a pause walking through
49 approaching glasses at home bar (glass in hand not found in bar)
63 pause on landing of steps
39 in front of bathroom sink in underwear, hands and eyes on tummy
1 turn in doorway w/ glasses in hand, grainy
84 part 1, the beginning of a bend, arm outstretched toward a broken sack of groceries on floor
45 swimming2, pause with goggles up
81 girl at bathroom mirror, waiting to be old, waiting to be beautiful
8 walking along grassy pat of beach w/ blanket, turned back pause about to speak or mid sentence
13 medium shot reaching for book on shelf (Sherman’s shelf)
EMOTIVES

30  anomalous bridge-beaten gaze
28  crazy chick in bathrobe in hallway
26  nightgowned in darkened stairwell, hands under chin, distraught
12  eyes closed, mouth open, leaning dramatically against wall, packing/unpacking suitcase
29  med shot of gowned distraught leaning zombie-like against marred wall under fluorescents
27b  crazy robe chick wandering hallways
27  pause/wait, emoting?

WAITING

4  leaning on door as if knocking
32  lighting a cigarette dwarfed by black backdrop w/black clothes
15  tight sweater and underpants looking out window
41  empty apt, hands on hips, small figure
11  upside down incline on made bed, lace dress w/ shoes on, hankie in hand
56  head shot gazing into mirror w/ reflection
9  reclining in armchair on deck at beach, glancing away
47  watering scrappy patches of backyard in hat, sunglasses, & short cover-up
82  sitting in chair through two doorways, looking down
52  in slip on pillow, unmade bed, transfixed gaze obscured by crop at top
61  grainy full-body shot in touching open doorway, woods are viewable, lighting cig
25  med shot by ledge of peer, stares off, might be about to sit on ledge
3  med shot at sink wearing apron, sidelong glance over shoulder off screen almost accusatory, waiting for more dirty dishes, waiting on others
16  sitting in studio, nice chair, cig in one hand, ashtray in other
44  leaning outside “Falstaff” bldg, figure dwarfed by architecture
57  50s outfit sitting on/surrounded by groundcover, looking down
24  med shot, sitting in front of city water, contemplating
34  odalisque reading self-help book on black backdrop
37  smoking, studied, elbow on fireplace mantle
33  perched on side of bed, staring blankly at open letter at foot of the bed
60  full shot of girl staring at urban ruins, lit match in hand, cigarette in mouth
43  postcard pose, in dress dangling one foot off a tree, sw background
35  at doorway w/ hand on hip, she pauses for someone else’s comings and goings—waiting upon the actions of others
50  frozen-stiff socialite sitting on sofa edge in apt w/ sculptures
31  black backdrop dwarfing in black dress, white of arms, side of face & eye highlighted, gazes off-camera
40  sitting on ledge, waiting for someone to arrive or to be picked up
6  med shot of odalisque on tousled sheets, robe open to bra and girdle, gazes dreamily upward, stare unreadable, looking glass in one hand
65  waitress waits on steps, taking a break
62  model pose, pause w/ overexposed lights
48  side of the rode, looking out at it w/ back to camera, suitcase beside her
APPENDIX C

STUDENT FILM STILLS CATALOGUE

Black and Whites

1. pulling skirt down in front of toilet (no face)
2. walking away on grass holding pointy stick and letter (back)
3. med shot of hand covering mouth, looking away (toward)
4. med shot of girl at stove dabbing face with makeup (down)
5. sitting on floor next to disheveled bed holding teddy, eyes address camera
6. c-up side of the head against a book pillow (side)
7. party girl putting on one shoe, other is not in shot (down)
8. boy with sports equipment (viewer)
9. push gesture wearing black double heart mask
10. blond looking furtively through window or open door (side)
11. angry boy snapping belt loop (viewer)
12. top of head shot, watch on arm facing up
13. blonde holding shoe in one hand, head in other, look of distress (down)
14. gazing at shoulder while pulling down one sleeve (down)
15. upright odalisque in bathrobe, pearls, and heels, drink in one hand, cigarette in other (side)
16. wide shot up leap in a field (smile viewer)
17. med shot of blindfolded girl on catalogues
18. wide-toothed grin (smile viewer)
19. girl on bed with shower cap holding nail polish and tissue (side)
20. bruised girl on floor in front of baking pans (viewer)
21. suited girl vacuuming while reading a book (viewer)
22. sun glasses, leather jacket and a dog smiling in front of a car (smile viewer)
23. med shot soccer uniform up against a wall (down)
24. upside down wide shot on grass (up)
25. boy with papers flying (viewer)
26. med shot of girl in paisley shawl addressing viewer (viewer)
27. staring out of window which mirrors scene (side)
28. suit and folder against skyscrapers lit up (viewer, half smile)
29. girl with tools in workshop (viewer)
30. girl feeding baby in rocking chair (down)
31. med shot of girl in sunglasses with drink looking away (side)
32. repairing toes at bathroom tub (down)
33. reading letter at lamp, hand in front of mouth (down)
34. med shot of girl holding framing face in front of door (viewer)
35. back shot of miniskirt, fishnets and cigarette leaning into car window (back)
36. boy reaching out of the shower to grab deodorant (back)
37. up shot of girl with disheveled hair and creeping eyeliner gazing blankly upward (up)
38. multiple bathroom mirror shot of girl in bra putting on lipstick (front)
39 girl in trench gazing up
40 c-up of girl, eyes closed, mouth open, clutching microphone
41 on stoop with cigarette (side)
42 boy on ground with blood on his face (closed)
43 nude girl asleep in bed with “eye” mask on
44 hand reaching into jar of coins (down)
45 in one leg of large pair of pants with one finger on lips and eye roll
46 cropped night-time shot of girl on grass as if fallen or stuck (out)
47 girl on swing in jeans and high heels
48 athletic girl with splayed legs in folding chair
49 skewed shot of girl holding a still camera
50 odalisque girl in thigh highs and corset top vacuously drinking a martini on a sofa
51 pregnant girl looking at camera
52 boy entering clinic

Color shots
53 girl in white minidress cradling an apple in her up stretched arm under a tree
54 wide shot of apartment and suitcase packing
55 c-up of spot lit girl with red cheeks and big blue eyes
56 black dress girl confronting white dress mannequin
57 wide shot of “hooker” girl leaning on telephone pole
58 boy with glowing heels lifting up keg
59 medium shot of smiling girl with braces hanging onto tree
60 medium shot of blonde lying on bench reading a book
61 risky business boy in sunglasses and boxers under fluorescent industrial light
62 veiled girl in black under tree
63 welder nurse soldering hospital mannequin
64 happy jumping girl with shadow in front of driveway and house
65 pink draped girl biting lip
66 blue band boy doing push-up
67 risky business girl in oxford shirt smiling into trophy microphone
68 blonde solemnly gazing into window reflection
69 girl picking through waffles with her hands
70 girl on hands and knees washing floor
71 wide shot of girl sitting on log looking at sea, back of body
72 trying on clothes in three way mirror, smiling
73 medium shot of girl with red lips and grease smears leaning into a car engine
74 hooded in black crouched on top of spilled purse contents
75 girl in che tee gazing up with finger aside mouth in front of door
76 black ballet outfit with pink pointe shoes at the window
77 girl on bed with plush and Easter basket
78 side shot of girl with earphones
79 girl in rollers on foufou bed
thumb holding lighter’s flame next to heart
med shot of girl by grate with white foamy stuff dribbling from her mouth
wedding dress and black sport socks sitting on steps
blue shot of fear girl
girl looking at high heeled shoe on table
towel-headed girl staring into mirror by closet	
two-way mirror blonde in conservative suit (fingerprints)
handheld and wall mirrors, a girl lipsticks half of her lips
night shot of short shorts, bra, and tank top with cigarette, “sexy object” awareness
girl in stairwell with hairbrush mic singing
mountain climber with equipment in snow (unisex)
blur shot of girl in jams on the phone
crouched over toilet with skinny girl ad conspicuously on floor
girl in stacks staring at carol
on bed with red bear staring dreamily into space
black figure with overexposed trees
girl through window with lace curtains, trees are reflected on her face (Maya Derenish)
girl in pea coat holding video camera
shot from top of stairs, girl waiting at screen door
hallway shot of girl’s back and rolling suitcase
med shot of blonde puckering behind a tree branch
lifeless girl reflected in closely cropped guitar
side view of girl absentely fingering pearls around her neck
c-up of wide-eyed girl with hand over mouth
arial view of smiling girl in bed
girl touching tree and its bark
back of head with hand reaching through open door
towel-headed girl putting on mascara—double mirror
side view of runaway bride in sneakers
girl clutching hair as she looks into bathroom mirror
girl in halter dress and heels on the green with snow flying
odalisque in bra and underpants on unmade bed, sultry stare addresses someone off-screen
girl in black with hands on hips dominates the landscape
girl with huge part on the grass
long night shot of girl at crosswalk in minidress
smiling blonde with dog in doorway
girl in ripped housedress stuffing garbage bag into trash
low angle shot of girl in white dress on staircase with chandelier
girl in football shirt with pads in ball hike position
back of boy walking out the door
circus girl in overexposed balloons
looking out window on seat with earphones
toweled girl in shower stall doorway gazing upward
med shot of girl meditating with closed eyes
running up stairwell
sweatered girl in rain, arms outstretched, mouth open
laughing girl with brown smears on face and hands
tank top girl leaning up against OPP van
white dress girl reaching back for one shoe on stairs
med shot of girl touching black rose
girl in basketball uniform smiling as she pretend dunks
girl in nylon holds basketball in one hand and baby doll in other
welder nurse checks hospital mannequin’s heart rate
prairie girl in sideways angle blue shot face almost down in the grass
blue band boy med shot with hat in hand
c-up of girl taking clothes out of the dryer
girl with eyes closed in bubble bath
girl leaning back in desk chair smiling
infidelity shot of girl in oversized trench holding boom box above her head smiling
eat to live and bitten choc bar on the bathroom scale, girl’s face lying on tip
business blonde raises arm as if to hail a taxi
nude girl draped in Argentinean flag beats her breast and gazes imploringly upward
boy in bathrobe walking out of bedroom with towel over one shoulder
dark monster shot of blonde arching a knowing eyebrow sideways at camera
high angle shot of girl with mouth open grabbing the wrist of someone else who angles a knife down upon her
shopping girl sideways in front of long nude torso of guy
girl in flip-flops sitting in windowsill of crumbly industrial bathroom
home alone boy at bedroom mirror
wide shot of girl walking toward building entrance
hooded girl staring through her reflection at the window
viewer is guest at table set for her, behind it is a girl wearing a party hat and holding out a present and a pizza
70s girl staring at mirror reflection, holding Vulcan fingers in the air
girl head locking guy on grass in front of wooden fence, one arm fisted and ready to punch
wide shot handstand on bridge
girl in overcoat and umbrella at night, posed but not smiling
wide shot arabesque leap at sea
bent over girl on bed with mouth open
motion shot of flying hair and another’s hand over face, except for one eye
explorer girl in tent with laptop and lantern
girl at bathroom mirror putting on eye shadow
blonde in black dress looks into image in mirror
boy playing with bike
hockey girl with hands on knees

girl hiding behind v of tree trunks

red haired girl in glasses smiling at camera

girl in distress beside a table loaded with junk food

horizontal shot of nude girl under sheets, arm of bedmate flung over her hip, empty booze bottle along her leg

wide shot of girl doing homework at night under a basketball hoop

girl in kitchen blandly holding sack of groceries

50s girl vacuuming and smiling

smiling girl with cleavage holding doll

med shot of blonde holding coffee cup

looking off balcony at skyline

drag sailor with bouquet

black eye in white on the edge of a table

girl in shorts with cowboy hat

low angle of girl drinking from straw smiling

stirring a pot while holding an open cookbook and smiling

snapshot with legs crossed at table

bride in veil descending staircase with bouquet

laundry folding on kitchen table

med shot singing-in-the-rainish

girl on floor in pigtails with plusses and popsicles

walking girl reading a book

dancer incline in legwarmers

girl in red coat on ground with clenched fists

crouching girl in gown shielding her face next to a pumpkin basket

side angle of girl in black on white sheet

girl hiding in crevice between locker and wall

motion shot of girl ecstatic

dragged guy as dead Cleopatra

girl toasting with martini

secretary shot on knees with letter in mouth

girl reading menu holding knife

girl glancing over at bikini poster

girl on bed with laptop, startled

girl in strapless dress with balloons around her head

gagged and beaten with clothes ripped open

girl in empty restaurant gesticulating

girl holding teddy wearing dog tags

med shot of girl hanging upside down from a tree

girl in sports bra pushing n mirror

girl draped between two train cars

textured swim girl
Curriculum Vitae

Office: 117-A Willard Bldg., Women’s Studies Program, University Park, PA 16802
814.865-5480 Email: lj4@psu.edu

Home: 804 N. Allen Street, State College, PA 16803
814.231.2610

Leisha J. Jones

Education
1998-present
Pennsylvania State University
Ph.D. Candidate in Women’s Studies and Visual Culture. University Park, PA.

1997
Pennsylvania State University
M.S. in Art Education with concentrations in Art Criticism and New Media. University Park, PA.

1992
University of Michigan
A.B. with honors: dual degree in Film/Video Studies and English. Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Publications


“Tear Off Your Own Head: Girl-Centered Artworks Inaugurate The Doll Revolt Virtual Gallery,” NWSAction, Fall 2006.


Curator

Doll Revolt Virtual Gallery, sponsored by the National Women’s Studies Association
http://www.dollrevolt.org/
Bonnie MacDonald, Co-Curator

Teaching Experience

2007-ongoing; 2004-2006
Women’s Studies Department
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA.
Lecturer