"Girl, if you make the movie, I promise you somebody will see it"

DIY, Grrrl Power, and Miranda July.

BY

CARA SMULEVITZ

B.A. University of Illinois at Chicago, 2000.

M.A. School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2004.

THESIS

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Defense Committee:

Hannah Higgins, Chair and Adviser
Elise Archias
Judith Kegan Gardiner, English, Gender and Women's Studies
Jennifer Reeder, Moving Image Arts
Judith Kirshner, Art Institute of Chicago

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INTRODUCTION

In Miranda July's 2005 film *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, a curator in a sleek contemporary art museum receives a VHS tape in the mail, carefully decorated with pink stickers. Watching it distractedly in a lonely moment late at night, she's jolted into attention when the artist—a wild-eyed, intense young woman—breaks into the tape's narrative and addresses the curator by name, begging for a sign that the other woman is really out there. "If you are watching this" the artist pleads "then just call this number and say Macaroni. Ok? That's all you have to do. Just Macaroni and hang up. No questions asked."[1] The curator responds to the young woman's strange plea—she calls, whispers the code word, and slams down the phone—a moment of unlikely connection in a contemporary art world with lots of rules, and little room for eager amateurs.

Miranda July wrote and directed *Me and You and Everyone We Know,* her first widely distributed feature length movie, and she also played Christine, the artist on the tape who hopes against hope that she can break through and make a connection. The scene I've been describing is just a few short moments in a complicated 90 minute film, but it highlights some of the qualities that make July an atypical and important presence in contemporary art. Like her character Christine, July has been a kind of eager amateur for most of her career: making due with borrowed, stolen, and sub-par materials, finding her audience in unorthodox places like punk clubs and networks of pen-pals, and ignoring the conventions of art institutions in favor of direct personal appeals to her viewers. Christine's tape (as it is shown in the film) also reproduces tropes that are strongly associated with the intersecting histories of do-it-yourself

[1] *Me and You and Everyone we Know,* Miranda July, (IFC films, 2005).

(DIY) and feminist art, and those histories are felt in myriad ways throughout the movie and in all of July's work, even when the politics of sex and gender don't figure into her content.

July's feature-length films have been fairly recent additions to a body of work that is conceptually cohesive but extremely diverse in its materials, ranging from live performances and spoken word albums to fiction, sculpture, video, installation, and internet art. Over the past two decades she has developed a difficult to pin down, multi-hyphenate artistic practice that has become a model for interdisciplinary culture-makers in the present. "I have a gigantic plan," she explained in a 2005 interview:

> …and it involves performance, and fiction, and radio, and the WWW, and TV and features that are both 'conventional' and totally not. And when I am done with my plan, when I am very old, hopefully there will be a little more space for people living with profound doubt to tell their stories in all different mediums. Also Hollywood won't be so sexist.[2]

July's "gigantic plan," and her ability to slip easily from medium to medium as suits the project or the moment, builds on some fifty years of intermedia experimentation in Avant-Garde art. And while she is sometimes represented in articles or reviews as strictly a fiction writer, strictly a performer, or strictly a movie director, it seems to me that contemporary visual art has the capaciousness—developed over decades of interdisciplinarity—to accommodate the range of her work and to set it within its deeper historical context. My analyses draw, then, on a range of cross-disciplinary theories and histories, but work overall to illuminate the webs of connection and influence that support July's complex presence as a visual artist in both the art world and the popular culture.

July's work has been featured in major art exhibitions and her books and films have been widely discussed in a range of publications, but there has yet to be any in-depth consideration of

[2] Rachel Kushner and Miranda July, "Miranda July," *Bomb* 92 (New Art Publications, 2005), 65.

how all of these varied forms work together, or what they amount to in terms of a lasting contribution to art history. This project seeks to address that lack, and argues that July's singular voice, consistent throughout her work in every medium, registers a set of important shifts in contemporary art; shifts that were mobilized alongside an explicitly feminist aesthetics as it emerged in the late 1960s and reemerged (somewhat transformed) in the early 1990s. The qualities that make her work compelling: an ability to be simultaneously radical and accessible, to model and encourage DIY production, to mobilize self-portraiture in a way that complicates assumptions about the self, and to consistently deploy finely tuned, emotionally rich narrative, all bear the imprint of two distinct but interconnected moments of feminist focus in American art.[3]

In 1995, ten years before the release of *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, July launched a project called *Big Miss Moviola*: a simple, generous, participatory structure designed to encourage women to make movies and to guarantee that other women would see them. "She," July wrote of *Big Miss Moviola*, "is a challenge and a promise."[4] All an aspiring movie maker had to do was accept the challenge and make something—anything that could be played on a VHS tape—and mail it to July. Once she did, *Big Miss Moviola* would make good on her promise, sending each participant a "chainletter" that featured their own movie alongside nine or so others. The bulky video tapes (sometimes carefully decorated with pink stickers) were sent back and forth across the country, accompanied by hand-folded, copied-and-stapled zines with sweetly personal messages from July or her collaborators, offering affirmation, practical advice, information about important women artists from the past, and declarations of female solidarity.

Portland Oregon, where *Big Miss Moviola* was founded, was a city in which Riot Grrrl (a feminist activist subculture) had a strong influence throughout the 1990s. Riot Grrrl began in

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[3] I am referring here to the visual art associated with 2nd wave feminism in the late 1960s and 70s. A clear feminist movement in the arts appeared again in the early 1990s and is commonly associated with 3rd wave feminism.
[4] Miranda July, *Underwater Chainletter*, Zine, 1996 (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

1990 within the previously male-dominated punk music scenes in the Pacific Northwest. As the movement matured it developed a strong culture of zine production and exchange, spread to dozens of other cities and towns, and began to attract younger and younger women, women who could participate from their bedrooms and local post-offices without ever needing to attend a punk show. Riot Grrrl grew and became more accessible as the 1990s progressed and as its initial bands broke up, and it continued to expand beyond the participation of many of its founders (some of whom had declared it dead by as early as 1993).

This expansion and broadening of Riot Grrrl culture throughout the 1990s facilitated important and far-reaching creative networks at a moment in art history when 1980s conservatism and a strong anti-feminist backlash had pushed the contributions of earlier feminist artists deep into the background. The newly reactivated and richly productive environment for feminist art that was developing through Riot Grrrl inspired July to drop out of her sophomore year in a mostly male film program in California, relocate to Portland, join a punk band, and begin making her first narrative performances and videos. When she struggled to find a peer group of other women who made movies, she constructed her own via *Big Miss Moviola*.

The past several years have seen a surge of interest in historicizing Riot Grrrl, including several major publications, a documentary, and the founding of a substantial archive dedicated to preserving the movement's ephemera. Riot Grrrl's transformation into history is underway, but the narrative of the movement's impact that has begun to emerge is rather narrow, focusing on its role in post-punk music and its quick cooptation by the commercial forces that packaged and sold it as a set of lucrative late 1990s "girl power" products. I contend that the lasting impact of Riot Grrrl is broader than has been noted in these initial studies: its influence is deeply felt at the intersections of visual art, musical performance, and writing, the same intersections at which Miranda July has made her career.

Throughout this dissertation I argue that the familiar narrative of capitalist cooptation (in which creative efforts at the cultural margins are commodified and thereby emptied of their real artistic and political value) too strongly shapes most discussions of Riot Grrrl's legacy. My discussions of that legacy demonstrate how Riot Grrrl's afterlives in popular and commercial culture have served to undermine and complicate longstanding assumptions about the relationship between cultural authenticity and the mass media. My analyses of July's fiction, film, and visual art provide evidence of these shifts, and offer a means to broaden the historical narrative of Riot Grrrl's legacy in a moment—right now—when that history is still being shaped.

July's most recent projects—those that she's created in the ten years since the release of *Me, You, and Everyone We Know*—have demonstrated a rare ability to glide from subculture to mainstream and back again, vacillating between the production of one-of-a-kind objects and experiences to mass-production and mass-media spectacle. Her apparently easy transitions between mainstream culture and independent, experimental art are informed by an important and long-standing discourse within art history, a discourse that centers on what Andreas Huyssen has called the "great divide." This "great divide" constructs mass culture as the eternal "other" of the Avant-Garde, offering an appearance of binary opposition despite a relationship that has, in truth, been dialectical from the start.[5] The conversations about cultural authenticity, subcultural purity, and mass media that occurred within and around Riot Grrrl are an iteration of the "great divide" discourse, and July's work with *Big Miss Moviola*—a project that was both thoroughly DIY *and* dependent on mainstream and mass media institutions—provides an early example of her gray-area-embracing approach.

Close consideration of *Big Miss Moviola*—its Riot Grrrl milieu, its deep roots in the feminisms of the 1960s and 1970s, and its legacy for contemporary art—is one of this

[5] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism.* 1986, 39-50.

dissertation's central foci; examples drawn from the *Big Miss Moviola* project appear regularly in my first three chapters, as do discussion of later works by several of that network's alumnae. In 2005, the year the final chainletter was produced, aspiring video artists everywhere were given a huge, ambiguous gift : Youtube, the now-ubiquitous video sharing site, went live for the first time in February of that year. The kinds of content circulated through *Big Miss Moviola* anticipate some of the themes and techniques that have since become Youtube standards, especially among that site's younger female contributors. Watching the *Big Miss Moviola* tapes and reading their accompanying zines helps to illuminate something of what is missing in the kind of artistic sharing that is most commonly accomplished online: the supportive, safe, and validating conditions that the chainletter system insured for young women don't translate to the internet, where contributing on sites like Youtube and tumblr is easy and fast, but virtually guarantees stalkers, harsh judgments, and cruel attacks from anonymous strangers.

The sense of dislocation and alienation that creative sharing on the internet can engender became a reoccurring theme in July's post-*Big Miss Moviola* work. Her strong interest in the ways that people can connect to one another—and the pleasures and anxieties that such connections can catalyze—is present across her writing, web projects and movies. Her 2012 book *It Chooses You*, for example, seeks an anecdote for our internet-connected reality, documenting a year of interviews with people that the artist got to know through classified ads in the *Penny Saver* (a weekly newsprint circular that is fully obsolete for all but the exotic, rapidly shrinking population of Americans who don't regularly access the internet).[6] *Learning To Love You More*, a web-based interactive art project July launched in collaboration with Harrell Fletcher in 2002, takes the opposite approach. The two artists created assignments (like assignment #62: "Make an educational public plaque" or assignment #52 "Write the phone call

[6] Miranda July and Brigitte Sire, *It Chooses You*. San Francisco, Ca.: McSweeneys Books, 2011.

you wish you could have") and displayed the results they collected on their site. Participants were encouraged to document their lives, intervene in their surroundings, and otherwise interact in the non-internet world, but with the end goal of having their experiments enshrined on the popular website. In these and other ways, July—an artist who can speak with authority on connections forged through creative networks—urges her audience to dwell on the multi-mediated platforms through which so many of us try, nowadays, to reach out.

Feminist theory and history provide key frameworks for my research and shape my analyses of July's work. Drawing on a wide range of feminist scholars and cultural theorists, each thematically organized chapter is informed by a different set of critical voices. While (second wave) feminist art that is rooted in the 1960s and 1970s has been clearly mapped and situated within both art and activist histories, the parameters of third-wave art (understood by most to have emerged in the early 1990s) are not as well established. Though I discuss the third wave as a specific movement with unique characteristics it is clear that the split between second and third wave feminist goals and attitudes is often exaggerated, pitting women against one another within an unproductive generational divide.[7] Though I use the terminology of "second" and "third" wave feminisms in art, I do so with some trepidation, working to establish continuities between the third wave artists I discuss and their second-wave forbears.

That July is in a position to shape her work in relation to an earlier generation of feminists is, as artist and art historian Mira Schor has noted, a possibility unique to artists from July's generation forward. In her 1991 essay "Patrilineage," Schor explains how women artists are regularly legitimized within art's histories through their alignment with various "fathers:" respectable male artists whose patrilineage assures that the female artist will be "subsumed to

[7] Deborah Siegel, *Sisterhood, Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrrls Gone Wild,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 19-20.

male history."[8] July, who was at the very beginning of her career in 1991, could choose (and *has* chosen) to understand herself within a genuine art historical *matrilineage*: she had the whole of feminist art and theory from the 1960s, 70s, and 80s on which to draw—a wealth of potential "mothers"— and this is an ability that manifests itself in her work.

As Riot Grrrl was in many ways July's artistic training ground, the movement itself is an important element of my historical research. Because it is a youth subculture I draw on the theories of culture studies specialists, such as Dick Hebdige, who proposes a way of understanding style, in subculture, as a means of political speech, and Mary Celeste Kearney, who expands on Hebdige's work and includes an analysis of gender, independent media, and girl culture. My discussions of Riot Grrrl's attitudes towards cultural consumption draw on the social theories of Michel de Certeau, Greil Marcus's analyses of punk consumerism, and Jack Halberstam's theorizations of queer cultural production. Recent studies that closely engage with Riot Grrrl music have also been crucial guides and resources, and archives of primary materials at Bard College, as well as New York University's Fales Library and Duke University's Sallie Bingham Center, have provided the zines, videotapes, and other documentation on which much of this dissertation is focused.

The first two chapters each discuss aspects of Do-It-Yourself (or DIY) culture in which "do" refers mostly to the production of communicative media, "it" refers to the circulation of those media, and "yourself" refers to women working independently of established institutions. Chapter one, "A Challenge and a Promise: Big Miss Moviola and the DIY 1990s," focuses on connection-making and access: goals that drove July's establishment of her video-art network and which persist as central themes in her work in the 21st century. A significant portion of this chapter engages with the overlapping networks of production and exchange that Riot Grrrl

[8] Mira Schor, "Patrilineage," *Art Journal,* (1991, 50.2.), 288.

encouraged in the 1990s, contextualizing these networks' structures and techniques with related impulses in the histories of punk, feminism, and avant-garde visual art. Through discussions of Riot Grrrl zines, selections from *Big Miss Moviola* videos and writing, and July's 2011 film *The Future*, I detail the ways that Riot Grrrl—and the DIY spirit of the 1990s that it captured—influence July's persistent focus on mobilizing creativity through artistic networks. The culture of intimacy established within and around Riot Grrrl, the pleasures and pitfalls of its girl-culture aesthetics, and the future of zine culture as it reckons with the internet, are also key subthemes in this opening chapter.

Chapter two—"Consumption as production within and around Riot Grrrl"—extends my discussion of the overlapping histories of punk, avant-garde visual art, and Riot Grrrl, focusing on the ways that DIY attitudes and techniques transformed the consumption of popular culture into a platform for production and action. Many of my central examples in this chapter come from July's Riot Grrrl and post-Riot Grrrl peers, including influential contemporary artist Tammi Rae Carland and musician/writer/activist Kathleen Hanna, among others. The gendered history of fan culture, the relationship between second and third wave feminisms, and July's approach to popular and commercial culture are some of the threads that intertwine around my central examples in this chapter.

Chapter three—"'She's been watching it all go down with Reel Eyes since she was a babygirl'"[9] —focuses on July's work with moving images. I track the development of her theories about feminist video through her writing in *Big Miss Moviola,* contextualize those theories within the broader history of video art, and track the ways that her style developed in two of her earliest short movies: *Altanta* and *The Amateurist.* Examples from the history of feminist video—including, most centrally, Martha Rosler's 1977 tape *Vital Statistics of a*

[9] Miranda July, *U Matic Chainletter*, zine, 1997 (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

Citizen, Simply Obtained—feature prominently in this chapter, as do video-related paper media projects like July's *Missing Movie Report* and a variety of 1990s zines dedicated to feminist film.

In my fourth chapter—"Feminist Performance Art: the Musical"—I focus on the overlapping worlds of performance art and musical performance, especially in the context of the so-called "culture wars" in the early 1990s. July's semi-musical spoken-word performances—staged, mostly, from 1995-97—feature prominently in my discussions. Performance art, feminist art, and musical performance have overlapped in various ways from the 1970s forward, and so examples from feminist punk acts like *The Slits,* multi-media performance artist-musicians like Laurie Anderson and Karen Finley, and contemporary riot grrrl-influenced artists like Wynne Greenwood are all central examples. Discussions of the role of the voice in feminist art, the influence of punk in visual art performance, and the ways that music-art hybrids have consistently traversed the boundaries between fine art and popular culture are other prominent themes that support my arguments in this chapter.

Chapter five—"'You Are Enough' Self-Help, Therapeutic Culture, and the Belabored Personae of Miranda July"—tracks Miranda July's career-long engagement with self-help, new age, and therapeutic cultures. July grew up in a home that was also the site of a prominent self-help and new-age publishing house called *North Atlantic Books* (a press that was founded by the artist's parents in 1974, the same year that she was born). I discuss her deployment and critique of language and themes drawn from self-help culture in her short stories, her 2015 novel, and several of her participatory multi-media web projects, performances, and installations. The history of feminist art's engagement with the therapeutic—an engagement that has been both productive and fraught—informs my arguments throughout this chapter. The influence of consciousness-raising practices on feminist visual art, the art/life experiments of Linda Montano, and the impact of a commodified self-help industry on Riot Grrrl production in the 1990s are

also important sub-themes as I work through the persistent presence of self-help and therapeutic culture in July's varied projects.

My final chapter and conclusion—"Girl Power, Subculture, the Mainstream, and *The Miranda*—brings together two of this study's ongoing central themes, examining the ways that Riot Grrrl's relationship to the commodity-oriented "girl-power" culture of the late 1990s has shaped July's position as a cultural figure who regularly traverses the boundaries between commercial, popular, and experimental contemporary art contexts. July's most commodity-like works—mass-produced pillow-cases, a high-end handbag, and other related objects—provide my central examples in this chapter, supported by discussions of visual culture phenomena ranging from Fluxus art experiments of the mid-20th century to the influence of British pop act the *Spice Girls* in the late 1990s.

As I've examined and considered July's art, influences, and varied contexts over the past several years of work on this project, I've come to realize that this study is, in some ways, a kind of biography. Despite her role-playing, her collaborations, and her participatory experimentation, July is ultimately an author in the traditional sense; her work is almost always expressive of her distinct sensibility and personality. And it is July's personality—or her public persona—that I most often find myself discussing when friends or family ask me about my research; her particular role in the popular culture has few art-world precedents.

July has scores of dedicated fans in and outside of the art world: fans who document her every outfit on their *Pintrest* pages, quote her stories and movies in their blogs, and even compose love-songs in her honor (as *Mike Writes and the Epperson Airplane* did in 2012).[10] At the same time, she is regularly criticized for what some perceive as her work's lightweight

[10] A live version of this love song, entitled, simply, "Miranda July," is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUMzILLwNTk Accessed 10-20-15.

preciousness and sentimentality. Her books and movies are often described as whimsical or quirky: gendered terms designed to dismiss their referents as childish and unserious.[11] That criticism has often become pointedly personal, and people who dislike July seem to dislike her passionately: for every love-song there is a hate-song. Journalist and musician Michael Idov's "Miranda July," for example, is a "mocking disco number" that calls July "infantile," "like a battered child," and "a sweet anomaly," making fun of what he perceives of as "the tremulous defenselessness of her persona."[12] The song is clearly a self-aware joke, but it goes so far as to describe an imagined assault on the artist: "I hurt Miranda July/I wounded her like a fawn/ I watched the pain in her eyes."[13]

Beyond the attentive fans and the derisive haters, July's presence in the popular culture mostly seems to inspire confusion. She is better known than is typical for contemporary art world figures, but many of those who know her name or have a passing sense of her work don't really know what to make of her. The widely circulated satirical newspaper *The Onion* played on this confusion in a January 2012 fake news story entitled "Miranda July is Called Before Congress to Explain Exactly What her Whole Thing Is," perfectly capturing the way that July's work, and her persona, consistently refuse categorization. The (fake version of) Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer in the article expresses that confusion well:

> We know that you're an actress, in a manner of speaking, and that you're also some kind of performance artist or something, but to be quite honest, no one can quite put a finger on what your whole deal is, so to speak…. If, for example, I wanted to buy something

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[11] See Lauren Groff's "The First Bad Man, By Miranda July," *New York Times* January 16th, 2015 for a discussion of this tendency in reviews of July's fiction. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/18/books/review/the-first-bad-man-by-miranda-july.html?_r=0 Accessed 10-28-15.

[12] My quotes here come from both the song's lyrics and from Idov's explanation of them. Both are available in "Project Miranda July," *New York Magazine*, Summer Guide, June 2011. http://nymag.com/guides/summer/2011/miranda-july/ Accessed 10-28-15.

[13] Idov, who is a New-York based journalist, later apologized to July, chalking up his meanness to misunderstanding and jealousy. The two collaborated on a less-unkind remix of the song in 2011.

> from you, how would I do it?...And what would it be? Would it be something I could hold in my hands?[14]

The article eventually concludes that the hearings were a failure: after nine hours of unsuccessful questioning July's "whole thing" remained a mystery.

The nuances of July's reception in the popular culture don't figure into my arguments in this dissertation, but they have nonetheless strongly influenced my experience of writing about her work. The way that her presence as a public figure has consistently inspired, confused, and annoyed her audience has reinforced the belief that initially drew me to this subject: that July is an artist both especially relevant to our contemporary moment and especially deserving of a more sustained and detailed kind of attention than her work has so far been afforded. That kind of sustained and detailed attention to her work in every media—and to the varied contexts that support it—is what I've tried to provide in the chapters that follow.

[14] "Miranda July is Called Before Congress to Explain Exactly What her Whole Thing is," *The Onion*, January 2012, (volume 48, issue 3). http://www.theonion.com/article/miranda-july-called-before-congress-to-explain-exa-27104 Accessed 10-21-15.

CHAPTER 2:

A CHALLENGE AND A PROMISE: BIG MISS MOVIOLA AND THE D.I.Y. 1990s.

Sophie, the central character of Miranda July's 2011 film *The Future*, is a pale, messy-haired dancer in her middle thirties, unfulfilled by her job teaching kids' dance classes at a community center.[1] In one of the first scenes in the film, Sophie (who is played by July) turns to Youtube for distraction, surreptitiously watching a video her co-worker has posted: a self-portrait showing the co-worker in exercise clothes, dancing to a techno beat in her bedroom. Later, we see Sophie longingly, borderline obsessively, watching and re-watching that and other similar homemade videos: women dancing to pop songs inside of Youtube's tiny viewing window, with lists of links and viewer comments scrolling underneath. Her ambivalence about stepping into that internet world of video-makers and comment-posters is clear: we see that she badly wants to participate, but when the co-worker asks if Sophie has seen her video she lies and flatly denies it. A later scene has her back on Youtube again for a moment, and we see her turn her head away from the dancing women in her laptop to gaze into her neighbor's house at a live, non-dancing woman, framed in a real-world window, stoically folding laundry.

Sophie's awareness of the absurdity of the videos, of the false intimacy of all those dancers' webcammed living rooms, coexists with her desire to be watched and connected in that same strange way. When she catches the eye of her laundry-folding

[1] *The Future,* directed by Miranda July, (2011; Park City Utah: Roadside Attractions, 2011), DVD.

neighbor she flinches away, embarrassed, but the women in the youtube videos can be watched more boldly, risk-free. Before long she gathers her courage and vows to choreograph and perform a new dance every day for a month, posting her recordings online as she goes. Energized by her plan, she e-mails her friends, eliminates potential distractions, and even scrawls her hopes out on a poster: "Thirty Days, Thirty Dances." But this confidence is short-lived. Within hours of obligating herself to her plan—to that internet community of dancing women and their mysterious, anonymous, online audience—Sophie freezes up. In one shot she stands stock-still between her webcam and her window, wrapped in a shawl like a mummy, with wide eyes full of panic. She doesn't end up posting anything, not even day one, dance one.

Sophie experiences the internet as a potential creative outlet, as a place to connect to other dancers and to an audience, *and* as a source of significant anxiety. The character's fraught interactions with her laptop and her webcam speak to the promise that our contemporary styles of connectivity hold for an accessible, participatory creative culture, and speak just as clearly to the *limits* of that culture, and to the occasional failure of participation to engender the equitable, engaged, and meaningful interactions that so many of us seek. The set of interconnected themes that these scenes from *The Future* lay out—a strong interest in the ways that people can connect to one another, the pleasures and anxieties that such connections can engender, the artistic potential in networks of amateur creators, and the implications of all of these for artistic autonomy—feature strongly in July's work throughout her career, and are key, as I will argue, to her importance for contemporary art.

July's career began in the mid 1990s in Portland Oregon, a time and place in which Riot Grrrl exerted a strong influence. Riot Grrrl served, for July and many others, as an introduction to feminist experimentation in visual art, and to the possibilities of an artistic practice built around collaboration, the deconstruction of gender roles, and the explicit melding of political and personal concerns. Sophie's reckoning with the emotional complexities involved in connecting with other cultural producers (the dancers in the videos), of working outside of established institutions, and of risking highly personal, vulnerable representations of self, are part of the legacy of Riot Grrrl for visual art in the present.

A central element of that legacy has to do with connection: with an aesthetics of intimacy and access forged between and around established cultural institutions. Many creators associated with Riot Grrrl deliberately avoided major record labels and mainstream media coverage, and the movement's glue was intimacy achieved through letters, small-group meetings, and the circulation of handmade pamphlets called zines. That such intimacy was politically productive (or genuinely inclusive) is not to be taken for granted, but it was central nonetheless.[2] A 1991 issue of the *Bikini Kill* zine announced: "This society doesn't want us girls to feel happy and powerful in any way. My girlfriends help me stop crying and start looking towards what's important (revolution)."[3] And in an early 90s flier laying out some of Riot Grrrl's aims, the authors

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[2] Mimi Thi Nguyen, "Riot Grrrl, Race, and Revival," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, November 2012. Vol. 22, Nos 2-3. 173-196. Nguyen draws attention to the importance of intimacy to Riot Grrrl, and argues that the movement's rhetoric of intimacy helped to both reinforce and mask the alienation of women of color within the movement.

[3] Molly Neuman, A. Wolfe, et al. "Bikini Kill no. 1," July 1991. The Kathleen Hanna Papers, Riot Grrrl Collection, Fales Library, New York University.

list building "lines of communication so we can be more open and accessible to one another" among the reasons for the movement's existence, an attitude that eventually allowed Riot Grrrl to develop a much larger geographical reach.[4] As zine writer Madhu Krishnan explained in a 1998 interview: "I think the main thing about riot grrrl that I find so attractive is how it made me feel connected with all these girls from hundreds of miles away."[5]

July's work as a visual artist, performer, filmmaker and fiction writer over the past two decades has consistently found novel ways to enact and dwell on the types of intimate—if often long-distance—connection that were, in Mimi Thi Nguyen's words, "the semi-secret heart of riot grrrl's resonance."[6] July's earliest projects reproduce the tone of hopeful confidence in open communication and collaboration that is so common in Riot Grrrl, and her later works both build on and question those ideals, probing the pleasures, discomfort, and ever-present possibility of failure involved in attempts to build intimate connections through creative exchange. Her consistent focus on issues around connection in and through art are, as I will show, important sites from which to reflect on a set of intersecting areas of pressing concern for contemporary art: the thorny but promising possibilities of networked collaboration and exchange, issues of access and intimacy and their remaking by contemporary technology, and the increasingly complicated transformation of consumers into producers and artworks into structures for participation.

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[4] Flyer (Bikini Kill tour), undated. The Kathleen Hannah Papers. Riot Grrrl Collection, Fales Library, New York University.
[5] Jessica Rosenberg, Gitana Garofalo, "Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from within," *Signs* 23.3.1998, 815.
[6] Nguyen, "Riot Grrrl, Race, and Revival," 174.

"One girl's thumb, wherever it points, is worth more than 12 years of report cards."

Miranda July, *2001 Chainletter Zine*, 2001.

The title of this dissertation: "Girl, if you make the movie, I promise you somebody will see it," is a quote drawn from *Big Miss Moviola*, July's first major project to engage with the issues I've been discussing.[7] Founded in 1995 in July's Portland Oregon apartment, *Big Miss Moviola* was a video art distribution system designed to encourage women and girls to make movies, and to connect with and support one another. The project was, as July has often described it, "a challenge and a promise."[8] Women and girls, many with no formal film training, were challenged to make a movie, and were promised that if they made it, somebody would see it. With that challenge and promise as her motivating principles, July solicited "lady-made" amateur videos and short films from all over the country, edited them into compilations, and then re-distributed them to participants—a VHS (and later DVD) chain-letter that showcased more than 100 original films and videos and lithely sidestepped most of visual art's traditional institutions.[9]

The movies that combined to make each of the *Big Miss Moviola* chainletter tapes varied widely in style, content and level of technical expertise. A very short clip, usually by July, introduces each compilation, and provides some sort of a visual theme (VHS tapes being hit with baseball bats, for example) that recurs to mark the transitions from

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[7] *Big Miss Moviola*'s name was changed to *Joanie 4 Jackie* around 1998, due to the threat of a law suit from the estate of the Moviola machine's inventors. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the project as *Big Miss Moviola* throughout this dissertation.
[8] This phrase appeared in nearly all of *Big Miss Moviola*'s ads and zines from 1996 forward.
[9] Though July's network operated mostly outside of established art institutions, there are art-world precedents for its structure in the mid 20th century Mail Art and Situationist movements.

one segment to the next. The ten or so main movies (which are usually no more than fifteen minutes each) are often wonderful, though they are often, at the same time, amateur to the point of being tough to watch. Each segment benefits from the company of its neighbors, and the overall impression is that of a lively, diverse, but not disjointed conversation in which even the least expert of efforts is able to hold its own.

In one typical such juxtaposition, a polished, carefully edited 16mm film by Amanda Christie—an Antioch graduate who praises her professors and her college's film department in the *Break My Chainletter* zine—occupies a space on the tape directly next to a video by New Jersey high-school sophomore Gabrielle Starace. Starace's contribution is an earnest, unsophisticated montage in which photos of the artist, her best friend, and her cousins flip by as Cyndi Lauper's *Girls Just Want to Have Fun* plays in the background.[10] The Antioch grad's film provides a wealth of visual techniques that the high school sophomore might learn from, while the younger artist's honest, simple presentation of friendship, girls, and fun, cogently expresses what her elder buries in the twists and turns of her narrative.

As compilations and as individual films, the chainletter tapes consistently attest to the power of July's "challenge" and "promise" to illicit heartfelt and hopeful response. Because any movie submitted to July was guaranteed inclusion, and every participant would receive the compilation tape featuring their own movie along with nine or so others, the system worked to make every artist into an invested audience member for her tape-mates. It was also possible to buy a chainletter tape even if you did not contribute to the project, and when you did you'd be issued a pamphlet with personal notes from each

[10] *Break My Chainletter*, VHS Tape, 1999, (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

of the contributors along with PO Box addresses where you could send them questions or comments about their work. July's writing in the tapes' accompanying zines strongly urged this sort of communication: "Write one letter to the nine other lady-moviemakers who you will be sharing the tape with," July writes in the *Cherry Cherry Chainletter* zine. "You can do no wrong… the chances are very high that at least one of these ladies will know what you're talking about."[11] And though an outsider could potentially buy a tape and comment on one of the contributor's videos, it is clear in July's instructions that the feedback shared between participants was to be treated as the most important kind.

Big Miss Moviola was contemporary with the emergence of the internet, but it predated the widespread ease of file sharing that eventually enabled open access video sites of the type that July's Sophie was drawn to in *The Future*. Youtube, for example, wasn't launched until 2005: ten years after July's project began. *Big Miss Moviola* was structured in a way that made nearly every audience member into an artist, and insured that every artist still wanted to be an audience member: they were to be invested in the process and the composite final product, rather than simply sending off their tapes and ending their participation there.

Oklahoma high school student Erica Hill's entry in her chain letter's accompanying zine communicates the desire for genuine engagement that was typical for *Big Miss Moviola* participants:

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[11] Miranda July, *Cherry Cherry Chainletter*, zine, 1998. (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive). This expectation of personal feedback is typical in Riot Grrrl zine exchanges as well. Most zines arrive in the mail along with a note from the author encouraging the reader to respond with comments. Marion Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 140.

> Yeah…so, i guess, that's me, and you now know me better than anyone i've talked to face to face, but you still don't know all of me…i still don't know all of me… please write and let me know how you're making it through life honestly with or without fear, or to say i'm a dumb teenager.[12]

Hill's vulnerability and openness here are especially impressive because the video she'd contributed to this chainletter was probably terrifying for her to put in the mail. It is a short and simple monologue entitled *All I Can Be*, in which the artist sits on her bed, faces her camera, and explains very frankly that she is gay, that her environment is hostile to gay people, and that no one around her knows. The tone of the video is intimate, and the viewer is made aware of their role as a stand-in friend for a woman who can't risk talking to someone she actually knows. Her fears about her safety and her future are made explicit in the recording, but so is the relief she finds in getting this secret off her chest.

The Big Miss Moviola format allowed Hill to provide some context, communicate some of her doubts through her letter in the zine, and put her faith in a supportive community, even though (or especially because) she'd never met them. Miranda July's Sophie character from *The Future* (a film released a decade later than *All I Can* Be) might not have panicked about sharing her dance recordings if she was mailing a tape off to a small group of (probably) kindly strangers like Erika Hill. Instead, Sophie faced the enormous, largely anonymous audience for youtube videos—the majority of whom are not themselves contributors to the site—and where the potential for alienation, misunderstanding and cruelty is vast. When the main consumers of an artwork are also its producers (as would generally be the case with a *Big Miss Moviola* chainletter tape) a more generous, supportive dynamic obtains. The network was, July explained in a 2004

[12] Erica Hill, in M. July, *2001: A Chainletter*, zine, 2001 (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

interview, "really built to help me create a space for myself, for other women too, but most urgently for myself, that was filled with warmth."[13]

"Participatory art," as art historian Claire Bishop reminds us, "forecloses the traditional idea of spectatorship and suggests a new understanding of art without audiences, one in which everyone is a producer."[14] That understanding of the role of the spectator is built into *Big Miss Moviola'*s chainletter structure, and it is something that July made an effort to expand beyond the individual tapes and into the production of the project as a whole.[15] In the pamphlet that accompanied the project's very first tape, for example, July writes to her tape-mates, asking them to take more control:

> I kind of have this idea that we are co-workers. Me and you the movie-maker and/or viewer… And if your movie is on this tape then you too can be a Big Miss Moviola Publicist. Call your local newspaper and ask them to interview you today. Really."[16]

The sense that every audience member is a potential producer is also supported by *Big Miss Moviola*'s most basic material: VHS tapes. Movies can often seem to be the kinds of artworks that render an audience most passive (you sit across from a screen for a pre-set amount of time, probably in the dark, probably quietly) but the introduction of videotape shook up the expectation of that kind of docile spectatorship. In his 2009 book on the history of home video, Lucas Hilderbrand points out that from the very beginning videotapes enabled audiences to participate in what they watched, interacting with their recordings by erasing and combining, or reworking pace and duration by fast forwarding

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[13] Julia Bryan Wilson, "Some Kind of Grace: An Interview with Miranda July," *Camera Obscura* 19, no. 1, 188.
[14] Claire Bishop, "Participation and Spectacle: Where are we now?" in *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*, New York: Creative Time Books, 2012.
[15] Though it was also possible to purchase a Chainletter tape and zine without participating, you wouldn't know it from reading the zines; the contributors all address their letters to one another.
[16] *Velvet Chainletter*, VHS Tape, 1996, (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

through some things and dwelling on others.[17] Many of home video's earliest uses (like doing an exercise routine every day, for example, or recording a favorite TV show so you can fast-forward through the commercials) were explicitly interactive.

The first *Big Miss Moviola* chainletter tapes were produced a decade after home video became common, and they preserve that interactive potential: the transitions between segments are sometimes sloppy, with bits of intervening static, and this makes them feel labile and foregrounds their sense of being homemade.[18] Many of the movies also refer to home video's interactive uses: there are mock cooking and exercise videos, a spoof on a call-in talk show, and several participants who speak directly to the viewer and ask them for something. In *1.2.3.this.is.me*, Wynne Ryan's short video on the 1998 *Cherry Cherry Chainletter*, the artist performs as multiple characters who interact, in various ways, with telephones. One, a switchboard operator called Lisa, looks out at the viewer, stares intensely into our eyes, and offers to teach us how to properly talk on the telephone; a moment that points both to *Big Miss Moviola*'s overall interest in communication and engagement, and to the participatory nature of videotape itself. [19]

July herself references this interactive quality of videotape as a medium in the *Underwater Chainletter* compilation from 1996. This tape opens with a shot of July, sitting alone on her couch and staring into the static that buzzes across a small,

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[17] Lucas Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice : Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2009, 7.

[18] Hal Foster's reading of the "pops" and streaks in Warhol's *Death in America* images as the *punctum* that "breaks through the screen and allow the real to poke through," applies here: the moments of static or overlap break through the illusion of the video and expose its interactive, changeable qualities. Foster, *The Return of the Real*, pp 134-136.

[19] *Cherry Cherry Chainletter*, VHS Tape, 1998, (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive). "123.thisisme" was made by Wynne Ryan, the same person as Wynne Greenwood, whose performance work as *Tracy and the Plastics* is discussed in chapter four of this dissertation.

inexpensive looking television screen. She is startled to see herself (and her couch) mirrored on the screen, and she leans forward to flip the channel, after which the tape's first short movie plays. We see her appear for a few seconds in between each new movie to flip the station again, and when all ten have played, we see her lean forward and pretend to write with marker on the surface of the television screen: it is the address where you can send your tape to be included on the next compilation. She is suggesting here that her role as curator of the tape amounts to that of a consumer with a remote control, and she treats the television's surface like an interactive object, made to transmit personal messages out to the other participants (or potential participants) in the same way as the tapes themselves.

Each *Big Miss Moviola* tape was accompanied by a handmade, photocopied-and-stapled zine that usually included writing and drawings from all of the contributors, a letter or two from July, and the occasional short article or interview. In the zine that accompanied *U-Matic Chainletter* from 1997, July chats about the potential for interactivity that is inherent in the videotape medium, noting that some of the first ¾ inch video tapes were called "U-Matic" as a brand name. She jokes that the meaning of the name has changed, and now it means "U want it, U make it : It's Automatic U."[20]

Like the compilation tapes themselves, these zines (which July called "directories" or "readers' digests") have a collage aesthetic: the seams and glue drips between layers of paper materials are visually preserved though the photocopy process, just as bad dubs, static, and accidental overlap make the tapes' method of video compilation visible. This mode of highlighting the handmade quality of both the tapes and the pamphlets is a

[20] Miranda July, *U-Matic Chainletter* zine, 1997, (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

technique that, as Alison Piepmeier argues in her 2009 study of feminist zines, "has political effects, encouraging readers to participate in their culture as creators rather than merely consumers."[21] The suggestion here is that the look of these objects remind viewers that they can make one too; that the materials of cultural production can be cheap and plentiful, and that energy and effort can upstage training and traditional skill.

Piepmeier's claim about the power of this aesthetic to activate consumers as producers and encourage meaningful participation in the culture is central to the ethos of Do-It-Yourself (or DIY). The phrase Do-It-Yourself first appeared in a 1912 magazine article about home décor, and by the 1940s it had become a common way to refer to the kinds of amateur home-improvement projects commonly undertaken in suburban households and associated with American masculinity.[22] As the term evolved into the 1960s and 70s it was regularly shortened to the acronym DIY and it became associated with the first iterations of punk culture. [23] It came to denote both an aesthetic sensibility (collagey, raw, deliberately amateur) and an overall attitude in which creativity is understood to be an option for anyone, not just the minority of well-equipped and officially designated culture-makers.

Photomontage and collage were visual techniques deployed within some early 20th century Dada circles in a way that anticipated punk's version of DIY. Dada often sought to subvert the art-world's parameters for aesthetic interest and importance, and

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[21] Alison Piepmeier, *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 169.
[22] Steven M. Gelber, "Do-It-Yourself: Constructing, Repairing, and Maintaining Domestic Masculinity," *American Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1997): 66-68.
[23] Brent Adam Luvaas, *DIY Style: Fashion, Music and Global Digital Cultures*, English ed. (New York; London: Berg, 2012), 115.

worked, at the same time, to challenge the messages circulated by commercial forces within the popular culture. Collage and photomontage were techniques well suited to both of these goals. German artist Hannah Höch (1889-1978) was associated early on with the Berlin iteration of Dada, and she worked with photomontage and collage throughout her long and varied career.

Though her work in these media was precise and skilled—far removed from the raw amateurism associated with DIY—Höch's deployment of reworked mass culture materials anticipates certain elements of Riot Grrrl collage, particularly when it comes to the deconstruction and critique of popular representations of femininity. In an untitled photomontage from 1921, for example, Höch appropriates a photograph of Claudia Pawlowa—a Russian ballet dancer on tour in Germany in 1921—from an issue of a women's magazine called *Die Dame*. The original image depicts Pawlowa as happy and expressive, striking a joyful pose on the beach: she is an exemplar of the so called "New Woman," a trend in popular femininity that was heavily promoted in the German 1920s. In Höch's image, the dancer's smiling face is replaced by a different woman's more serious, troubled expression, and this new composite body is cut away from the cheerful beach setting and layered onto a background packed with sewing patterns, diagrams of car engines, and illustrations of kitchen tools clipped from advertisements.

Art historian Maria Makela explains, in a 1996 essay on Höch, that the "New Woman" archetype (as deployed in the popular media of the period) was meant to symbolize greater social and professional freedom for women, but it was also a means by which dramatic and persistent gender inequalities could be disguised. Höch's transfigured Pawlowa becomes a kind of household machine in this photomontage, sandwiched

between the sewing patterns of the base layer and the image pushed furthest into the foreground: a pipe-smoking man with a cockroach for a toupee and an extended finger pointing purposefully towards the woman's lips. Makela interprets this photomontage as an allusion to the "underbelly of the New Woman phenomenon," and a testament to "Höch's acute awareness of the limited roles women could play in early Weimar-era Germany."[24] And indeed, the references to sewing and cooking that crowd the space of the collage suggest the shallowness of the progress that the "New Woman" was meant to represent.

This photomontage can, at the same time, suggest something of the way that the modern subject (the woman depicted in the artwork, but also its viewer) can become a kind of composite of the visual culture that she consumes. The image of the woman, and the environment of collaged objects in which she stands, is an assembly of fragments drawn from mass media reproductions, including some that were marketed specifically to women (the sewing patterns, the photograph from *Die Dame*). In this, the artist points beyond the initial critique of representations of women in Weimar-era Germany and implicates the viewer herself, whose identity—like the composite woman in the image—is altered and recombined by the social and commercial forces that she lives within.[25]

Feminist zines from the 1990s—including those produced to accompany *Big Miss Moviola* chainletter tapes—regularly integrated imagery appropriated from mass media sources that were marketed to women, like fashion magazines and ads for beauty

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[24] Maria Makela "By Design: The Early Work of Hannah Hoch in Context" Maria Makela "By Design: The Early Work of Hannah Hoch in Context," in *The Photomontages of Hannah Hoch*, eds Peter W. Boswell, Maria Makela, Carolyn Lanchner, Kristin Makholm. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1996), 65.

[25] Peter Boswell "Hannah Hoch: Through the Looking Glass" in *The Photomontages of Hannah Hoch*, 12.

products.[26] Like Höch's untitled 1921 photomontage, these works can be interpreted as critiques of the culture's representations of women, but they often speak, at the same time, to women's integration of such cultural representations into their lives and personalities. A cover collage from the zine that accompanied a *Big Miss Moviola* chainletter from 2000, for example, features another woman on a beach who was, like Höch's image of Pawlowa, likely clipped from within a women's magazine. This woman, wearing a bathing suit and smilingly tossing a beach ball, has been cut away from her original setting and pasted down onto a different beach scene. The dark waves and ominous sky of her new background are incongruous with the woman's carefree expression; under their influence, her wide grin transforms into something more like a scream. That feeling of discord is emphasized by the halo of white paper surrounding the woman's arms and fingers (indications that the original figure was not cut from its source exactly along its contours). The phrase on the ball—"PERFECT 10"—in combination with the presence of a young woman in a bathing suit, evokes the numeric ratings systems that are often applied to women's bodies in American popular culture (calling a woman a "10," for example, is meant to indicate a high level of sexual appeal). The tumultuous seascape in which the smiling woman in the bathing suit is posed speaks to the hostility of social and media environments that would impose such dehumanizing systems, but the collage also announces the title of the compilation tape. By appending a colon and the words "the chainletter" after "PERFECT 10," the phrase is made to refer to the 10 "perfect" videos that comprise this particular chainletter (and the 10 "perfect" women who made them).

[26] See Marion Leonard *Gender in the Music Industry,* for examples from UK zines that commonly included such "detourned images." My visit to the Riot Grrrl Collection archive held by Fales Library at New York University confirmed the ubiquity of this theme in zine source imagery from USA zines.

DIY, as expressed through the cut-and-paste aesthetic I've been discussing, has also been identified, at times, as particularly resonant with the history of women artists, not simply because of the woman-focused subject matter of works like my last two examples, but because of the nature of the techniques themselves. Writing in 1977, second-wave feminist artists Miriam Shapiro and Melissa Meyer suggest that collage, photomontage, assemblage, and related visual strategies be redesignated as "femmage" given the long-standing association between techniques that involve piecing leftover things together (like quilting and budget-conscious cooking) and women's labor. "Women have always collected things, and saved and recycled them because leftovers yielded nourishment in new forms. The decorative functional objects women made often spoke in a secret language, bore a covert imagery."[27] Shapiro and Meyer weren't talking about zines in particular in this short text, but their list of femmage characteristics include many that apply directly to that form: zines use scraps, involve "saving and collecting," address themselves to an "audience of intimates," reflect a "diarist's point of view," and integrate "photographs or other printed matter."[28] Both Höch's photomontages and the photomontages that appear so regularly in 1990s feminist zines would readily qualify as femmage, and they reinforce the connection between women's art and DIY techniques that Shapiro and Meyer discuss.

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[27] Miriam Schapiro and Melissa Meyer, "Waste not Want Not: An Inquiry into What women Saved and Assembled," in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art; a Sourcebook of Artist's Writings,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 153.

[28] The elements I've mentioned here all come from a list of characteristics of Femmage included at the end of the 1977 text. Ibid.

Zines, Punks, and Access.

The creation and circulation of zines was a central element of Riot Grrrl's production. Riot Grrrl wasn't, however, the first site of connection between American feminism and zine-like media: there is a long history of feminist amateur publishing that operated within a gift and trade economy. These connections are rarely noted, however, and the history of zines is most often told as a progression from Dadaist small press-experimentation, to early Science Fiction fan culture, and then to 1970s punk.[29] The appearance of Riot Grrrl zines in the 1990s is commonly framed, then, as an appropriation of (and protest against) the hegemonic masculinity of those earlier zine scenes; a narrative that ignores clear continuities with precedents in feminist self-publishing. Zines, as Alison Piepmeier explains, are "resistant media, and women's art, even today, is rarely identified with resistance."[30]

Piepmeier's research has illuminated a clear (but less well-known) prehistory for third-wave zines that turns on a broader definition of what a zine is, focusing on the inclusive spirit of the medium, rather than the specifics of physical construction or aesthetic. This alternative narrative begins with the women's associations at the turn of the 20th century who took advantage of newly inexpensive paper and photographic supplies to produce politically engaged scrapbooks that they would exchange amongst themselves. In March 1914, radical feminist, anarchist, and activist nurse Margaret Sanger self-published the first issue of her monthly circular *The Woman Rebel*, a zine-like pamphlet about birth control and other women's health issues for which she was

[29] Amy Spencer, *Diy : The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture*. London, (New York: Marion Boyars, 2005), 47-49.
[30] Piepmeier, *Girl Zines,* 25.

indicted (for "postal obscenity") later that year.[31] By mid century the introduction of the mimeograph machine allowed for easy mass-circulation of handmade materials by 2nd wave feminists. Several prominent second-wave books, including *Our Bodies Ourselves* and *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* were first circulated as zine-like mimeographed pamphlets.[32]

The way that third wave feminist zines are being historicized in the present includes another big blind spot beyond the ignorance of feminist precedents: self-publishing in the feminist 1990s is very often presented as much more exclusively white than it really was. Part of this omission has to do with the traditional historical lineage for zines: the Dada / Sci-fi / Punk narrative for the medium's evolution predetermines an understanding of zine-making as a mostly white activity. Feminist archivist Elke Zobl's extensive research and collecting has illuminated traditions in amateur self-publishing utilized by Chicana, Latina, and Black creators in the 60s and 70s that could help to shape a different narrative of the emergence of zine culture, and could encourage a less narrow sampling of contemporary examples.[33]

Riot Grrrl itself, which originally emerged in the mostly white environments of its founders' Pacific Northwest colleges, also accounted for much of the "whitening" of zine culture.[34] Some greater diversity did become possible, however, as the Riot Grrrl

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[31] *The Margaret Sanger Papers Project*, New York University Division of Libraries. http://www.nyu.edu/projects/sanger/project/index.php Accessed 9-2-15.
[32] Piepmeier, *Girl Zines,* 35-36.
[33] Elke Zobl, "Comparative Perspectives Symposium: Feminist Zines," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 35, no. 1 (2009), 3.
[34] Zines by women of color both within Riot Grrrl and in non-Riot Grrrl punk communities in the 1990s do exist, however, but are underrepresented, as journalist Gabby Bess recently argued, in the wave of publications on Riot Grrrl that "90s nostalgia" has inspired in recent years. See Bess, "Alternatives to Alternatives: The Black Grrrls Riot Ignored." August 3rd, 2015,

network expanded through zines (and, eventually, websites) in the later 1990s. New York writer Ramdasha Bikceem, for example (the sole African-American zine-maker represented in Fales Library's *Riot Grrrl Collection* archive) began creating her zine *Gunk* after establishing a pen-pal relationship with Riot Grrrl participants in Olympia Washington.[35]

Strong connections between DIY activities and punk music and culture (both within and outside of Riot Grrrl) are another important factor in the 1990s feminist examples that I highlight in this chapter. Several versions of DIY culture came and went in the 20th century, and many of them have been rooted in various iterations of punk counterculture (punk music, but also the visual art that sprung up with it).[36] Riot Grrrl's embrace of DIY aesthetics connects, then, to two separate threads in the history of DIY: women's creative work with found and leftover materials (as in femmage) *and* punk subculture.

Punk musical performance is built around the idea that anyone can pick up an instrument or compose a song, regardless of their training, funding, or experience. The raw, amateurish aesthetic that emerges from such efforts amounts to a critique of elite culture: of its exclusions, of its formal polish, and of its distance from the lives of its consumers. The punk rock milieu of late 1960s England has often been connected to Dada, especially in its visual aspects: punk fashion, posters, and zines spoke an aesthetic language very similar to the Dadaist trends that had emerged more than forty years prior.

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https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/alternatives-to-alternatives-the-black-grrrls-riot-ignored accessed 8-10-2015.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ted Purves, "Blows Against the Empire," in *What We Want Is Free : Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art*, The Suny Series in Postmodern Culture, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 40.

The alternative, oppositional youth culture from which the earliest punk bands emerged drew, as many in Dada did, on a broad range of signs and symbols appropriated from the popular culture.[37]

In his 1989 study of punk aesthetics throughout the 20th century, cultural critic Greil Marcus argues that the affinities between punk music in the 1960s and Dadaist experimentation of the 1910s and 20s is less a conscious lineage than it is a rebirth of the same idea in a new era. Discussing the trash collages of German Dada artist Kurt Schwitters, Marcus notes that "the formal Dada theory that art could be made out of anything matched the formal punk theory that anyone could make art."[38] But he also reminds, us, a few lines later, that this was no clear-cut case of direct cultural influence, and that Sex Pistol's singer "Johnny Rotten had not said the word 'dada' since he was two."[39]

The affinity that I've noted between Hannah Höch's untitled 1921 photomontage and the 2000 cover of the *Perfect 10 Chainletter* zine is equally indirect. I'd be surprised if more than a few of the many women in and around Riot Grrrl using Dada-inflected techniques were doing so with any consciousness of a connection to that movement, though many did nurture specific connections to the British and American histories of punk subculture. Bikini Kill drummer and zine-writer Toby Vail, for example, references cultural critic Dick Hebdige's 1979 analysis of British punk fashion in her popular early 1990s zine *Jigsaw*.[40] And though the cut-and-paste look of zines like *Jigsaw* (and, later,

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[37] See Dick Hebdige, *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*, (New Accents. London: Methuen, 1979).
[38] Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, (London: Faber, 2002), 186.
[39] Ibid, 187.
[40] Sarah Marcus, *Girls to the Front:The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 80.

the *Big Miss Moviola* tapes and zines) was in some cases a side-effect of poor funding and sub-par equipment, it was deliberate overall; a stylistic choice that referenced punk cultures' critiques of mainstream media (filtered, of course, through Riot Grrrl's fusion of punk with both feminist politics and an aesthetics of intimacy).

Lucas Hilderbrand has suggested that despite the stylistic and structural connections to punk in *Big Miss Moviola*'s aesthetics and mode of distribution, it should not be taken for granted as a punk project, because "the girls and women who contribute to the project do not predominately appear to explore or claim punk identities."[41] What Hilderbrand is referring to here are the dozens of Chainletter participants who come from small towns or rural areas unlikely to have punk scenes, or who appear in their movies styled in ways that were fairly conventional in the 1990s: spiky hair and facial piercings, in other words, make fewer appearances than one might expect from a punk video network. Hilderbrand's observation isn't wrong, but he fails to account for the specific aim of Riot Grrrl in its iteration of punk: to connect women from all over to one another, and to a shared identity forged in opposition to mainstream constructions of femininity and girlhood.

Accessibility was a founding principle in Riot Grrrl's version of punk; reaching out to girls from all over and motivating them to participate (without regard to their personal style or level of subcultural access) is among their most central goals, and is repeated over and over again in the movement's early zines, meeting minutes, posters and fliers. Though the parts of Riot Grrrl that involved music and performance remained relatively set within underground and punk contexts (and were therefore not as accessible

[41] Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice*, 203.

as its members might have hoped) the reach beyond the subculture was achieved by the circulation of zines, the work of independent record labels, and through projects like *Big Miss Moviola*. July and her immediate circle had personal ties to Riot Grrrl, but it is the lack of subculture credentials among many of the projects' participants that most strongly attests to *Big Miss Moviola*'s ideological connection to the movement.

Riot Grrrl's version of punk combined DIY values with the kinds of feminist and queer theory that many of the movement's college-aged adherents were learning in their women's studies classes. American punk culture in the 1980s (which was dominated by hardcore bands) was especially misogynistic, but the style held clear promise for feminists, in part because it featured "a potent combination of sex and anger" that opened "a fertile space both for women's feminist interventions and for the politicization of sexuality and female identity."[42] A 1991 issue of "Bikini Kill" zine (a pamphlet created and circulated by the band with that same name) includes a note about the appeal of punk genres for Riot Grrrl, despite the dismissal of women that was so common in that style's 1980s variants. "We are," the author writes, "patently aware that the punk rock 'you can do anything' idea is crucial to the coming angry grrrl rock revolution."[43] And as *Bratmobile* drummer Molly Neuman told a New York Times reporter in 1992, "there's no way any of this could have happened if it wasn't for punk rock."[44]

Another facet of DIY in Riot Grrrl involved encouraging the young women whose positions in punk culture were often inflexibly set as fans or as girlfriends to step into

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[42] Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald, "Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution, and Women in Independent Rock," in Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose, *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music & Youth Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 253.
[43] Lisa Darms, *The Riot Grrrl Collection*, (New York: The Feminist Press At the City University of New York, 2013), 143.
[44] Ann, Japenga, *The New York Times (*November 15th, 1992), sec. 2, 30.

production roles—even if they didn't have any training or experience—and trust that Riot Grrrl would work to provide a safe and supportive environment for that kind of risk-taking. Bikini Kill (one of Riot Grrrl's first and most influential bands) made a point of reserving the area right in front of the stage for women only, where they could avoid the kinds of violence and harassment that were so typical in the majority male mosh pits at hardcore shows, and also protect the band itself from abuse by male audience members.[45] Creating an environment that felt safe and encouraging for young female producers was a goal that is repeated over and over again in Riot Grrrl zines, posters, and interviews in the early 1990s. As Tobi Vail put it "our vision was of creating a feminist youth culture that was participatory and would change society. We wanted all girls in all towns to start bands."[46]

This attitude extended beyond the music and performance parts of Riot Grrrl; it was a prominent element in all of the movement's creative and political pursuits. A 1991 page of brainstorming notes from a Riot Grrrl meeting, for example, includes a list of how the women in the room could participate and "be a riot grrrl." Alongside "start a band," are recommendations that girls "print flyers," "start holding riot grrrl meetings in your town," and "make a zine."[47] In July's first *Big Miss Moviola* zine, she makes a similar call, writing that: "there oughta be hundreds of lady made movies flying all over this country…And every movie made inspires another lady to go: I can do that."[48]

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[45] Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry*, 119.
[46] Marcus, *Girls to the Front,* 272. Zine culture spread beyond urban locations more successfully than the musical performance parts of Riot Grrrl did, as zines like *Hair Pie* by two young women in Dyfed, Wales attest. That zine's subtitle was "The isolated by geography but not attitude zine for girls." Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry,* 140.
[47] Notebook, "Riot Grrrl Test Patterns," The Kathleen Hanna Papers, Fales Library NYU, 1991.
[48] Miranda July, *Velvet Chainletter*, zine, 1996, (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

Another important goal for many within the movement was to insure that women could take charge of the full process of becoming musicians or movie makers, and were not cast strictly as performers. It was the technical elements of production—especially those that had to do with expensive equipment—that were often the most daunting, and the more experienced members of the community went out of their way to help make it easier. Jenny Toomey and Kristin Thompson of Washington DC, for example, operated a DIY record label and published an inexpensive, accessibly written mail-order booklet called *An Introductory Mechanics Guide to Putting out Records*.[49] Early 1990s Riot Grrrl organizations in Northern England (Leeds and Bradford) created a workshop—*Bitch Schirmish*—in which a variety of musical instruments and equipment was made available in a club, and girls and women were invited to come in and spend a few hours experimenting with it, learning from anyone among the attendees who had something that they could teach.[50] And on a smaller scale, but in the same spirit, *Big Miss Moviola* contributor Gretchen Houge used her entry in the tape's accompanying zine to offer technical advice, assuring potential young movie makers that they already have most of the tools they'll need. "See," she writes, "cos this is no secret club. there is no secret password," and later, "i have a lot of handmade / diy movie info and how-to, so if you want to check it out, let me know."[51]

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[49] Marcus, *Girls to the Front,* 105.
[50] Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry,* 122.
[51] Gretchen Houge, *2001: A Chainletter*, zine, 2001, (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

DIY and the Aesthetics of Girl-Culture

Remaking the ways that young women received and lived with cultural products—not just how they produced them—became another (and somewhat less straightforward) facet of what DIY meant for Riot Grrrl. Young American women have often been constructed as the penultimate passive consumers of the popular culture's goods: as squealing fans, collectors of sticker-books, and lovers of fashion accessories. Teen girls were a primary target for marketers during the postwar advertising boom, and though that interest declined in the 1970s and 80s, by the mid 1990s they had reemerged as the commercial sector's ideal consumers; they were open to suggestion and they were spending roughly eighty-five billion dollars a year.[52]

Articles discussing teen and tween girls as the new super-consumers were published in Adweek, Brandweek, and Fortune magazine, among others, between 1997 and 1999.[53] As business writer Nina Munk excitedly announced in a 1997 article about marketing to youth, teen girls were "penniless mall rats no longer." The author stresses that it is girls much more than boys who can be counted on to overconsume. Girls can "move markets," Munk explains: they'll see a movie over and over again, or purchase five pairs of summer shorts to their male classmates' one.[54]

Part of what made teen girls so attractive to advertisers was a longstanding cultural tendency to represent the passive consumption of goods as a natural female pleasure and activity. That understanding of the young female consumer does two kinds

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[52] Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 3.
[53] Ibid, 4.
[54] Nina Munk, "Girl Power," *Fortune,* (Vol. 136. New York: Time Incorporated, 1997), 132.

of simultaneous damage: girls are, on the one hand, cast as the ideal subjects of capitalism, and are rewarded by the commercial culture for their complacency.[55] And the commercial girl culture, designed as it is to encourage passive consumption, is at the same time derided as shallow and frivolous; its plastic barrettes and boy-band crushes become 'proof' of girls' unsuitability for production roles.

This double bind for female consumers is rooted in the way that gender is assimilated to the commodity. Cultural critic Susan Willis has argued that gender, when it is rightly understood as a process (and not misrecognized as fixed) is a social practice, and is thus "like all our attributes and expressions…bound up with the commodity form."[56] If the commodity (in Marxian terms) is an object in which the processes and social relations of production are negated, the gendering of a product is subject to that same style of erasure: we (the consumers) don't recognize the suppression of girls' productive potential that drives a given commodity, we just buy it, and then we see the desire to consume such a product as evidence of the very passivity that is a central (but invisible) ingredient of such commodities.

Much in Riot Grrrl media encouraged women to examine and resist the messages about gender that are embedded in the popular imagery of the mainstream, but without forcing them to denounce the style and spirit of the late 20th century girl culture that most of them grew up with. Consumers of girl culture need not be passive, but they needn't be punished for their glitter or their stickers either. This can be a difficult balance to strike—resistance is less convincing without renunciation—but it's an appropriate response to the

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[55] Mary Celeste Kearney, *Girls Make Media*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 61.
[56] Susan Willis, *A Primer for Daily Life*, Studies in Culture and Communication, (London ; New York: Routledge, 1991), 23.

situation in which many young women found themselves: consuming a version of girlhood designed around the passive consumption of commercial culture, in the selfsame culture that dismisses the girlish as part of a wholesale denigration of femininity. Despite the thorniness of this territory, many in Riot Grrrl found ways to preserve the pleasures of the "girlie" and still reject the passivity with which such pleasures were associated.

This kind of balance is, as Rebecca Munford suggested in a 2004 article about "girlie" imagery in 1990s feminism, akin to what feminist theorist Linda Alcoff called "positionality."[57] Writing in 1988, Alcoff proposed feminist positionality as a response to two common but equally limiting options for feminists in the 1980s: so-called "cultural feminism" (which understands womanhood as involving a set of inherent attributes) and a poststructuralist inflected feminism that questions "the category and the concept of woman through problematizing subjectivity."[58] The former is widely criticized for its essentialism, and the latter deconstructs gendered categories at the expense of a solid ground from which to launch a strong resistance against sexism. Many of Riot Grrrl's original members (who would have been taking undergraduate women's studies classes in the late 80s and early 90s) came into feminist consciousness with an understanding of those two options as diametrically opposed, and their ways of synthesizing them in practice resonate with Alcoff's idea.

Positionality, for Alcoff, allows for a rearticulation of subjectivity as "nonessentialized and emergent from an historical experience" without negating identity

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[57] Rebecca Munford, "Wake up and Smell the Lip Gloss," in Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, *Third Wave Feminism : A Critical Exploration* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 272.

[58] Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," In W. Kolmar and F. Bartkowski, *Feminist Theory : A Reader,* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2005), 404.

categories as positions from which one can take political action.[59] In other words, positionality allows us to conceptualize a subjectivity based on our specific position in society, and then work from there. Meaning can be built up from lived experience within constructed identity categories, without necessitating an acceptance of those categories as natural, essential, universal, or static. Feminist theorist Chela Sandoval, writing in 1991, calls for a related set of tactics especially as pertains to so called "Third World" women within the US. Sandoval proposes a category of feminist "differential consciousness," the strength of which lies it its ability to recognize the constantly shifting conditions of intersectional oppression that obtain for U.S. Third World women, and build temporary coalitions out from whichever position is most helpful.[60]

The majority of Riot Grrrl's participants were middle class white women, especially in the movement's early 1990s manifestations in the Pacific Northwest, but critiques of hegemonic feminism, especially as regards its essentialism and its marginalization of women of color, were, by the early 90s, becoming part of how 1970s feminism was taught. Understandings of positional and differential tactics drawn from theorists like Alcoff and Sandoval were quite likely a part of what Riot Grrrl's college-aged members were building on when they sought to push against the often stunted vision of girlhood that was embedded within the commercial culture, but from a platform that involved identifying as "girls" in a way that utilized the products and aesthetics of that culture.[61]

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[59] Ibid, 412.
[60] Chela Sandoval,"U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," *Genders* no,10, Spring (1991), 2.
[61] Ednie Kaeh Garrison, "U.S. Feminism--Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)Cultures and the Technologics of the Third Wave," *Feminist Studies* 26, no. 1 (2000): 148.

The deployment of signifiers drawn from the commercial culture's conception of what it means to be "girlie" is extremely common throughout Riot Grrrl media. The flyer pictured below (made to advertise a Riot Grrrl convention in L.A.) is a typical example: it features stars, hearts, and a kitten that frame the listing of radical performances and workshops on offer.[62] A drawing of two cartoon hearts (with the words "girls rule" written on their surface) occupies the upper margin of a zine called "Girl Germs" and a flyer for a Riot Grrrl chapter meeting mixes swirly hand lettering and a cartoon heart with a call for "girl revolution" (and a time and place to meet up and make it happen).[63]

These examples, and many others, mix ironic appropriation of girl-identified aesthetics with genuine affection for those aesthetics, and in roughly equal measure. A similar formula often appears in Riot Grrrl fashion, which was far from uniform, but did tend to pair overtly "girlie" objects (plastic butterfly barrettes, for example) with masculine-identified accessories like combat boots or leather jackets. The dissonance that juxtapositions like these created could shake up gendered expectations, but they also operated as ways of personalizing and embracing girl-culture aesthetics, and as signals to other girls of their shared lived experience.[64]

There are numerous ways in which this strategy can be problematic. The visual combination of tough, independent young women with an aesthetics based in little-girl enthusiasms, can all too easily be misrepresented by those who would seek to rob the movement of its power by infantilizing or sexually objectifying its participants. "Better

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[62] Darms, *The Riot Grrrl* Collection, 166.
[63] Ibid, 167.
[64] Piepmeier identifies the aesthetics of combinations like these as a hallmark of third wave feminism in general, and notes that "third wave feminists find many cultural artifacts associated with femininity to have changeable meanings, particularly when they're combined in surprising ways." Piepmeier, *Girl Zines,*51.

watch out, boys," writes Elizabeth Snead in a 1992 issue of *USA Today*, "From hundreds of once pink, frilly bedrooms, comes the young feminist revolution. And it's not pretty. But it doesn't wanna be. So there!"[65] Condescending misrepresentations of Riot Grrrl like Snead's were common in mainstream press coverage in the early 1990s, and led, before long, to a policy of "media blackout" in which bands, zine editors, and chapter organizers informally agreed that they would stop responding to press inquiries, and would refuse to be interviewed or photographed.[66]

Riot Grrrl's embrace of "girlie" aesthetics was also sometimes misrepresented as a rejection of earlier feminisms, and especially the second wave feminism of their mothers' generation. As Melissa Meltzer puts it, "any woman…who wasn't allowed to play with Barbie knows [that] second wave feminism had long held a derisive attitude toward the more frivolous aspects of girlhood."[67] Riot Grrrl's continuities with second wave feminism were stronger than has often been represented, but their engagement with the signifiers of commodified girl culture has helped to reinforce unproductive narratives about mother-daughter hostility and feminist generational divide.[68]

Riot Grrrl's tendency to redeploy signifiers of commercial femininity has still another downside, beyond its vulnerability to misrepresentation. It can be seen as playing out the desires of marketers by giving women a way to personalize (and thus internalize) the messages of the mainstream culture, a process that could ultimately transform its participants into even better subjects of capitalism (and thereby accomplish the exact

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[65] Snead, Elizabeth. "Feminist Riot Grrls Don't Just Wanna Have Fun," *USA Today,* August 7, 1992.
[66] Marisa Meltzer, *Girl Power:The Nineties Revolution in Music*, (New York: Faber and Faber, 2010), 28.
[67] Meltzer, *Girl Power,*16.
[68] Deborah Siegal, *Sisterhood, Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrrls Gone Wild.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

opposite of what its practitioners intended). Discussing the recombination of mass media images in feminist zines, Allison Piepmeier acknowledges this possibility, but argues that "the comfort [Riot Grrrls] develop with consumer capitalism can become a tool of resistance, not just a mechanism for their complicity with that system."[69] That "comfort" became especially important as Riot Grrrl expanded and evolved into the mid and late 1990s, and the coverage they got in mainstream print media began to point women to the movement who would never have been reached by way of subcultural word-of-mouth. In those same years, a Riot Grrrl internet presence was beginning to develop, and it helped to support and supplement their postal-service-based communication.

The Future, on and offline.

Zine production underwent immense changes as access to the internet broadened: online journaling networks and blogs appeared, and for some, they obviated the need for zines. But Xerox-and-staple Riot Grrrl zines continued to be produced in large numbers, despite the web. That persistence of physical zine networks can, in part, be attributed to the way many women are treated in online spaces, as the internet clearly reproduces many of the inequalities that obtain in the nonditigal world. Physical zines also continue to appeal in part because they are not atemporal in the way that creative production on the internet often is. Something you write online at 16 will appear to be of the present moment for the reader who comes across it years later, when you are, for example, a mightily changed 19: evidence of time passed is often erased on the web. Physical zines,

[69] Piepmeier, *Girl Zines*, 32.

on the other hand, are objects that age, and the sense of passing time this allows becomes important aesthetic information. [70]

Often times internet zines and zine-sites facilitate (and coexist with) non-digital zines. Dozens of distribution (or "distro") websites from all over the world offer convenient listings and contact information for practitioners and fans, and they make trading and collaboration much more seamless than they ever were in Riot Grrrl's early years. The internet has also enabled a transnational zine network and a sense of international community among feminist self-publishers that Riot Grrrl's mail-order distros had never been able to manage.[71] Zine-like web magazines for young feminists (which are separate from the distro sites that enable the circulation of physical zines) have also developed over the past decade, and the aesthetics and language of Riot Grrrl continue to exert a clear influence within many of them.

Rookie, for example, is an especially popular online magazine for girls founded by an Illinois high-schooler named Tavi Gevenson. Its subject matter, look, and structure have a lot in common with some of Riot Grrrl's more polished personal zines. The image below, for example, is from a November 2011 issue of *Rookie*, in a segment of the site where various teenaged contributors share written or visual diary entries. *Rookie* solicits reader submissions and publishes them monthly in a way that echoes Riot Grrrl's spirit of access and inclusivity, and it mixes an unapologetic love of girl culture with thoughtful feminist critique. A typical issue includes a fashion segment, personal writing and drawing from girls, DIY project ideas, a music playlist, and helpful articles like "Advice

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[70] Ibid.,15.
[71] Zobl, "Comparative Perspectives," Signs, 6.

from Sophomores to Highschool Freshman" or "How to Trust Your Brain."[72] Gevenson's site is a prime example of the success of a girl-culture zine online, but even it still finds ways to encourage the production of physical zines.

One 2012 issue includes an article called "How to Make a Zine" that explains the medium's purpose and its history, and includes step-by-step visuals to guide a novice's folding and stapling. "Zine making," the article's author Emma writes, "isn't about rules or knowledge, it is about freedom and POWER."[73] Emma is writing to an audience for whom internet access has always been a given, and she works to explain why physical zines are still important. For her, the creation of non-digital, self-published objects is special because it is "exclusive." "Exclusivity," she writes, "can mean anything from 'anyone who is interested in *Doctor Who*' to 'only you and your girl gang' to 'only you,'" and it offers "the unique feeling of being one among a tiny group of special people in possession of a carefully made publication."[74]

Emma's words speak to the way that non-digital zines have become exotic in the internet age: their objectness (and the relative inconvenience of their circulation) makes them stand out amidst the myriad options for networking and connection that are available online. Many post-internet zines have become more self-conscious about their status as art objects, which makes a lot of sense, considering that their primary function in connecting people is much more easily accomplished online. Without that function

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[72] Both articles are from 2015, August and March issues, respectively. http://www.rookiemag.com/ Accessed 9-4-15.
[73] *Rookie: How to make a zine,* 5-1-2012, http://www.rookiemag.com/2012/05/how-to-make-a-zine/ accessed 09-05-15.
[74] Emma D. Playlist, in Tavi Gevinson, *Rookie: Yearbook One*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2012, 304.

sitting first and foremost in the zine-maker's mind, the object becomes more like an artifact than like a means to a communicative end.

I opened this chapter with a discussion of Miranda July's 2011 film *The Future,* in which the central character oscillates between a desire to share her work on Youtube (and to rely on the internet to stay connected to her world) and a debilitating anxiety that ultimately drives her to leave her whole life—home, boyfriend, terminally ill cat—behind. This huge choice was catalyzed by a smaller one: she and her boyfriend had decided to discontinue their internet service. When July began her career in the mid 1990s, internet access was relatively common, but there weren't very many user-friendly ways to substantively interact online. Over the next decade, the web became a place where it was easy to socialize, make connections, share images and videos, and test out personal identities. Because July's work has consistently sought to connect people, investigate identity, and create systems in which her audience's creative impulses would be mobilized through DIY networks, the rise of the social internet was a process enormously relevant for her work, and her mixed feelings about it are clearly articulated in *The Future*.

The moment in the movie when Sophie and her boyfriend Jason decide to cut off their internet service happens early on, about twenty minutes into the film, and initially it is an exhilarating (if frightening) decision for both of them. Jason, who worked online from home as a tech-support assistant, tried to plunge himself into newly meaningful real-world experiences, and Sophie was certain that the great artwork she was meant to make would emerge as soon as her Macbook refused to connect. The frustrations and mysteries of non-internet communication briefly preoccupy both characters. Jason walks

through L.A. soliciting donations for a tree-planting charity door to door, hoping against hope to discover something new and important about his neighbors and his city. Sophie—alone and bored in her internet-free apartment—screams out her window, testing her connection to the real world.

Within a few days of going offline, both characters throw themselves into connections made through paper media; not through zines, precisely, but close. Sophie's boyfriend Jason makes friends with a elderly man he met through the *Penny Saver*—a free ad paper that is a relic of the pre-internet era—and he is eventually introduced to the man's impressive, highly personal collection of hand-made cards. And in a moment of peak frustration with a dance she is trying to choreograph (and with no internet to procrastinate with) Sophie discovers that a pencil illustration on her wall—a young girl cuddling a small dog—is backed with a hand-written message that includes the phone number of the artist. She calls, and before long she begins an affair with the stranger who picked up the phone. That Sophie and Jason fall into connections that involve the handmade and handwritten, the postal service, and the telephone, speak to the renewed relevance and appeal of those forms in the absence of the internet's overwhelming presence. When Emma from *Rookie* described the power of handmade zines to make connections that, in their exclusivity, are more meaningful than connections made online, she was pointing to something that resonates with Sophie and Jason's post-internet storylines.[75]

The role of the internet in *The Future* is also about procrastination: about the new kinds of distraction and misdirection with which contemporary makers must wrestle. As

[75] Emma D. Playlist, in Tavi Gevinson, *Rookie: Yearbook One*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2012, 304.

July struggled to write the screenplay for *The Future,* the internet became a kind of enemy. She writes that she was "jealous of older writers who had gotten more of a toehold on their discipline before the web came," and describes the unproductive internet holes into which she would dig herself.[76]

> So now I was past faith. I was lying the field staring at the ants. I was googling my own name as if the answer to my problem might be secretly encoded in a blog post about how annoying I was.[77]

Leafing through the *Penny Saver* over lunch during one of these frustrating days, July spontaneously called the number for an ad listing a $10.00 leather jacket. "Normally, I never would have called," she explains. "I certainly didn't need a leather jacket. But on this particular day I really didn't want to return to the computer. Not just to the script, but also to the internet, its thrall."[78]

She arranged to visit and interview the person selling the leather jacket, an experience interesting enough that she put her manuscript (and the internet) down, and began contacting and getting to know dozens of people who posted ads selling things in the *Penny Saver* (the same activity that she included in Jason's storyline when she returned to rework the screenplay later that year). The experiences with the people she met through those classified ads—people who, by and large, did not own or use personal computers—eventually became a book about procrastination, the internet, and the creative process called *It Chooses You*.

July's transformation of the rituals of consumption (the *Penny Saver* ads were, after all, about selling and buying things) into a forum for production (the *It Chooses*

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[76] Miranda July, *It Chooses You,* (San Francisco, Ca.: McSweeneys Books, 2011), 7.
[77] Ibid, 9.
[78] Ibid, 10.

You book, as well as the *Penny-Saver* storyline in *The Future*) will be my central focus in the chapter that follows. Riot Grrrl has clearly influenced July's ongoing commitment to artworks that deal with the pleasures and difficulties of connection-making, but another important element in that movement's version of DIY culture was about consumption, and the ways that DIY could transform the consumption of popular culture into a platform for production and action.

CHAPTER 3:

RECASTING CONSUMPTION AS PRODUCTION WITHIN AND AROUND RIOT GRRRL.

During the mid-December holiday shopping season in 2011, New York City "branding studio" Partners & Spade hosted a one-night pop-up store in collaboration with Miranda July, who provided the objects for sale at the event. Each of the items on offer were purchased through NYC classified ads; July searched the local papers and then conducted telephone and e-mail interviews with the sellers of the most interesting or mysterious items. The interviews sought to uncover the histories and meanings of the objects, and the reasons behind their owners' wish to pass them on. The objects were then purchased, packaged in ways that included the sellers' information from the interviews, and resold at the Partners & Spade event for their original classified-ad asking prices (plus tax). A WWII era fork & knife set, for example, was sold to July by a retired federal agent named Sal. For the pop-up store, it was packaged with the story of Sal's father-in-law, a WWII vet who was the original owner of the fork & knife. The story of the object turns into a discussion of Sal's personal collections of memorabilia, his plans for retirement, and the memoir he is writing. Other objects for sale in the store included a bag stuffed with matchbooks, two preserved deer's feet, a giant container of loose scrabble letters, and a mixed set of sports trophies.[1]

[1] Many Fluxus artists in the 1960s sought alternative systems for distributing their work, including setting up stores (sometimes called Fluxshops) that anticipate July's experiments with retail in the 2000s. Owen Smith, "Developing a Fluxable Forum," in *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman, (Sussex: Wiley, 1998), 18.

The Partners and Spade store was, in part, a promotional event for Miranda July's 2011 book *It Chooses You*, which grew out of the script for her second feature film *The Future*. The internet, and the way it changes communication and connection-making between individuals, is a central theme in that film. In a tangential exploration of that theme, July began contacting and getting to know people who posted objects for sale in the L.A. *Penny Saver*, a free ad paper and relic of the pre-internet era. The experiences with the people she met through the *Penny Saver* became *It Chooses You*: a book of writing and photographs that included interviews with twelve of the people July found through the classified ads.

Both the book and the sale at Partners & Spade endeavor to personalize and complicate the process of buying and selling, a theme that has featured in several of July's performances. In a 2012 performance at UCLA, for example, the artist collected small, not objectively valuable objects (bobby pins, expired work identification cards, shopping lists) from the performance's attendees, and then played the role of auctioneer, using the personal stories of the objects' owners to boost their value on the auction block.[2] The money collected from all of the auctions was, at the end of the performance, gifted to the audience member who felt most in need. Like *The Auction*, the store at Partners & Spade enacts consumer transactions (buying the objects from the classified ads) and recasts them as a participatory mode of connection-making via narrative: the stories behind the objects and their sellers become the things that create the objects' monetary value. The event itself was also an advertisement for July's book (which was offered for sale at the store), a type of self-promotion and marketing that operates in an especially complex way. July is selling a book at a store and staging an interesting event

[2] Miranda July *The Auction*, Live Performance, 10/18/2012, Center for the Art of Performance, UCLA.

to draw people into the store—a very basic kind of capitalist strategy—but the event, as well as the book itself, work to highlight the potential for intimate connection making within buying and selling, and therefore work against the typical operations of capitalist consumption.

In another recent exploration of similar themes, July sought to promote her debut novel *The First Bad Man* (released in January of 2015) with an online store in which her fans could bid, ebay-style, on fifty objects featured within the novel's narrative (a pair of shoes, a handkerchief, a handwritten list, a chalkboard, a jester's hat, and so on). She didn't profit off of the auctions—all of the proceeds were donated to the National Partnership for Women and Families—but the project garnered attention and built enthusiasm for the books' release. It operated, then, as a potentially profitable promotional tool for July, but it also sought to create better readers of her work: using the buying (or bidding) experience to engage the reader with the characters and situations that would feature in the novel. If you bought, (or bid on, or even considered bidding on) the large purple T-Shirt that said "Bump, set, spike it, that's the way we like it!" for example, the scene in which the T-Shirt appears (a disturbing, poignant moment where a middle-aged man shows off a snapshot of the teenager he is courting to the middle-aged woman who has a crush on him) might resonate differently, and with more immediacy, for you as the reader.[3] And, just as the value of the objects in July's 2011 Partner & Spade store derived from the strength of their seller's personal narratives, the worth of

[3] This scene occurs in Miranda July's *The First Bad Man,* (New York: Scribner, 2015), 34. The shirt was packaged with the relevant excerpt from the book and signed by July, it received 18 bids and sold for $69.00.

the objects in *The First Bad Man* auction derived from their power within the narrative arc of the novel.

The complex implementation of consumerism and its methods in these and other of July's projects is, as I will argue, an element of her work that is strongly influenced by the legacy of Riot Grrrl. The ways in which that movement complicated and reworked what it meant to consume mass marketed music, magazines, and other elements of popular culture will be the central theme of this chapter. Riot Grrrl's remaking of the idea of fandom, its questioning of traditional subcultural positions in relationship to mainstream culture, and its redefinition of what it means to be a cultural producer all bear significantly, as I will argue, on the generation of feminist multi-media artists—including Miranda July—whose careers were rooted in the expanded milieu around Riot Grrrl and punk feminism. Riot Grrrl's deployment of DIY strategies (which I've discussed as the continuation of long-standing traditions in women's art, from Hannah Höch's photomontages to 1970s "Femmage") become relevant again here, but within the specific cultural context of late 20th century United States consumer culture, a context in which the relationship between feminism and mass culture became especially contentious.

Riot Grrrl in the wake of the Backlash

The formation of Riot Grrrl was strongly influenced by a decade of anti-feminist sentiment in American popular culture (the 1980s, roughly), a period that amounted to more than half the length of many of the movement's founders' lives. In the visual arts, feminist art was beginning to be historicized as a past style, (and, therefore, something to

be moved beyond).[4] A short-lived intellectual trend sometimes called "postfeminism" developed, and worked to rebrand the movement as an attempt to convince otherwise contented women of their disadvantage and weakness.[5] Faith Whittlesey (President Reagan's spokeswoman and senior advisor) participated in this revisioning of the second wave's contributions, declaring that feminism was a "straightjacket" for women that had limited their choices and made their lives more difficult.[6] As Deborah Siegal explains in her 2007 study of popular feminism, "the avant-garde movement that once promised less restriction and more fun…had become conflated with victimology, sexual protectionism, humorlessness, and rules"[7]

This anti-feminist backlash was challenged, towards the end of the 80s, by a series of high profile news events that forced large scale conversations about women, feminism, sex, and power.[8] In 1989 a young Canadian man named Marc Lépine entered an engineering class at Montreal's École Polytechnique, separated out the fourteen women students, and shot them all to death: he said that the attack was motivated by his hatred of feminists. Nine US abortion clinics were bombed that same year, and the high profile rape trials of William Kennedy Smith and Mike Tyson in 1991 garnered constant

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[4] Martha Rosler, "An Imaginary Talk on Women Artists at the End of the Millennium," in *Women Artists at the Millennium*, Eds. Carol M. Armstrong, Catherine de Zegher, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 133-134. Despite the rise several women art stars in the 1980s, the number of women artists in exhibitions began dropping, after an uptick in the decade prior. Anonymous feminist art and activism group *The Guerilla Girls* were established in 1985 in response to these changes.

[5] Postfeminism is a term with many meanings, and was used early in the 20th century after 2nd wave feminism, again in the 1980s, and again in recent years. In the late 80s and early 90s it often included a strong rejection of 1970s feminism. Katie Roiphe's widely discussed *The Morning After, Fear, Sex, and Feminism*, 1994 helped to popularize this position a few years later.

[6] This quote was from Whittlesey's 1984 speech, "Radical Feminism in Retreat," which was among the Reagan administration's only policy speeches on the status of women. Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women,* (New York: Crown, 1991), xii.

[7] Deborah Siegel, *Sisterhood, Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrrls Gone Wild,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 114.

[8] Ibid.

media attention. Coverage of supreme court justice Clarence Thomas's senate hearings (also in 1991) were dominated by discussion of his alleged sexual harassment of his former employee Anita Hill, bringing conversations about sexual harassment in the workplace into the American mainstream in an unprecedented (and largely anti-feminist) way.

These events were major factors in awakening a consciousness of gender injustice for many who had been raised within a backlash-inflected popular culture that encouraged them to ignore sexism and dismiss feminism.[9] Race (and American attitudes about African-American sexuality, in particular) was a factor in the narratives of several of these early 90s events, and so the "third wave" of American feminism that emerged at this time did so amidst clear examples of the intersectional nature of oppression. The discussion, for instance, of how differently Anita Hill might have been treated had she been a white woman was being had all over the country, and the Kennedy-Smith and Tyson rape trials made for easy contrasts between the way a politically connected white man and a black professional athlete were perceived when accused of violence against women. These compelling examples of the way that race and class factors shape the social construction of gender really brought home critiques of second wave feminism that saw it as essentialist. As follows, resistance to difference-suppressing notions of universal womanhood were built into most of the third wave's foundational texts.[10] The term

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[9] Sara Marcus, *Girls to the Front : The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 40.
[10] Ednie Kaeh Garrison, "U.S. Feminism--Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)Cultures and the Technologics of the Third Wave," *Feminist Studies* 26, no. 1 (2000): 145.

"third wave" was itself was coined by Rebecca Walker in an article about the Anita Hill hearings.[11]

Third wave feminist theory, the anti-feminist mood of the 1980s, and the series of high profile early 90s events I noted above are all important ingredients in Riot Grrrl's origin story, and especially in its desire to interfere with and remake the popular culture's norms for representing girls and women. Susan Faludi's thorough documentation of popular media during the backlash catalogs those norms, and notes a sharp drop from the previous decade when it comes to complex and nuanced images of women. The media landscape Faludi surveyed was so bleak that in 1987 the Association of Women in Radio and Television didn't award their annual prize for positive images of women in advertising: they claimed that they couldn't find any.[12] At the same time, the image of the American girl had become a political football. During the Republican Convention leading up to Bill Clinton's election in 1992, for example, Pat Robertson attacked the democratic candidate with a speech built around a hypothetical thirteen-year-old's abortion.[13]

When July envisioned the kind of impact that her *Big Miss Moviola* network might make, the creation and circulation of complex and varied self-representations by women was a specific focus. Writing in the zine that accompanied *Velvet Chainletter*, she invokes John Hughes's *Sixteen Candles*: a quintessential 1980s movie about wealthy, popular, and looks-obsessed teenagers. She proposes a DIY solution to the problem of a sexist media culture, writing that:

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[11] Rebecca Walker, "Becoming the Third Wave," *Ms Magazine* 11, no. 2 (1992): 39-41.
[12] Faludi, *Backlash,* xxi.
[13] Marcus, *Girls to the Front,*158.

> The real Sixteen Candles has gotta be made by a 16 year old girl and she might not be rich or pretty or white and she might not get the guy and the cake in the end and maybe nobody but her diary understands her. This Sixteen Candles doesn't say: get bigger tits. It says: Listen To Me.[14]

July goes on to implore her readers to make that "real Sixteen candles" themselves, or to find a girl whose voice isn't being heard and help her to tell her own story.

July's reference to "Sixteen Candles" is shorthand for the narrow set of representations on offer to women in backlash popular culture. Much of the impact that the backlash had in shaping the works of Riot Grrrl-influenced producers operated in the same way as July's call to women to create their own "real Sixteen Candles"; the constraints of the period gave them something to push against. *Big Miss Moviola*, for example, is organized around the idea that women's options for producing and consuming movies within mainstream culture are so unsatisfying that a DIY alternative is required, and many feminist zines from this period shared similar organizing principles and motivations. But there are also clear demonstrations in Riot Grrrl art and writing—in both the early 1990s and in the expanded network of the later 90s that July was involved in—of ways that many in the movement internalized elements of the backlash culture in which they'd spent their formative years.

Riot Grrrl's focus on popular culture—its attempt to take on a sexist music industry, for example, or to offer alternatives to mass media representations of girlhood—helped to define the movement's activism, but it also made it vulnerable to accusations of frivolity, of not being 'real' politics. The majority of Riot Grrrl participants did concentrate most of their feminist energy within the traditionally feminine domains of

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[14] Miranda July, *Chainletter 1 Directory*, Zine, 1996, (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

lifestyle and consumption, and that tendency is a symptom of the backlash's influence. American mass media in the 1980s regularly constructed women as in the market for new lifestyles, but rarely for new rights. Faludi observes that images of unsatisfied women in that period showed them seeking "self-gratification, not self-determination—the sort of fulfillment best serviced at the shopping mall."[15] Riot Grrrl's modes of addressing and remaking consumption are radical, and often liberatory, as I will argue throughout this chapter, but they speak nonetheless to the backlash popular culture's successful relegation of women to consumer domains.

Artist and art critic Laura Cottingham has observed that the symbolic vocabularies available to women artists are often limited by their unequal cultural status. "Most of the symbols that 'belong' to women," she explains, "are neither liberatory, exciting, nor sophisticated."

> Makeup, lingerie, sanitary napkins, wedding gowns, virgins, dirty dishes, whores, vacuum cleaners, motherhood, fingernail polish, hair, pantyhose, rape, cheerleading, hysteria, babies—these are the images and things that mid-twentieth century Western women could claim as having a closer syntactical, emotional, representational, and political relationship to themselves than to men. And they are not much.[16]

Cottingham is talking about women's artworks that are mostly rooted in the 1970s here, but Riot Grrrl's consistent focus on consumption and popular culture is a 1990s version of that same phenomenon. Bands, fandom, shopping, and style were what they took on because those were the domains that the mass media they grew up with allowed for the expression of youthful femininity.

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[15] Faludi, *Backlash,* 76.
[16] Laura Cottingham, "Are You Experienced? Feminism, Art And the Body Politic," 1996, in *Seeing through the Seventies : Essays on Feminism and Art*, (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2000),129.

A pervasive rhetoric of (false) choice for women was, Faludi argued, a central manifestation of backlash culture. The popular culture consistently portrayed women's circumstances as their "choice," and the idea that one could say that they chose what they got could help to dull their consciousness of gender imbalance. "It is important," the author suggests "not only that she wear rib-crushing garments but that she lace them up herself."[17] Very often consumer choice was the outlet into which women's agency was channeled, and "the passive consumer was reissued as an ersatz feminist, exercising her "right" to buy products, making her own "choices" at the checkout counter."[18] This redirection of feminist energy into consumerism has persisted as a theme in American popular culture. R&B act *Destiny's Child*'s wildly successful 2000 single *Independent Women* provides one very clear example: its lyrics call out to "all the women who are independent," and announce to potentially controlling men that they will be "dismissed." But the only parameters for independence on offer in the song are linked to women's power as consumers:

> The shoes on my feet / I've bought it
> The clothes I'm wearing / I've bought it
> The rock I'm rockin'
> 'Cause I depend on me
> If I wanted the watch you're wearin'/ I'll buy it
> The house I live in/ I've bought it
> The car I'm driving/ I've bought it
> I depend on me[19]

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[17] Faludi, Backlash, 70.
[18] Ibid., 71.
[19] Destiny's Child "Independent Women," *The Writing's on the Wall,* 1999. There is much, on the other hand, to admire in *Independent Women*, especially in a popular music context (late 1990s R&B and Hip Hop) where representations of self-sufficient women were scarce.

The rhetoric around women's consumer independence and "choice" that *Destiny's Child* foregrounds in *Independent Women*—and that Susan Faludi condemned, in 1991, as a false expression of female independence—helps to contextualize an interesting tendency within Riot Grrrl in which production (of zines, songs, films, and so on) was often located somewhere within consumption. That idea: that the consumption of mainstream culture can sometimes amount to production, doesn't originate with Riot Grrrl, but within the disciplines of sociology and cultural studies. It was developed in opposition to a long-standing assumption about mainstream popular culture: that consumers of the mass culture's products were made to be dangerously passive, and that this passivity facilitated indoctrination into a given society's dominant ideology.

Art critic Clement Greenburg was a central proponent of that view in 20th century art theory. His "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939) argued that the reception of mass culture products differs from the reception of works of avant-garde art; the former (kitsch) requires no active engagement, it "pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money – not even their time," while the latter requires (and inspires) intellectual fortitude, careful looking, and critical thinking.[20] Theodor Adorno is another important advocate of this understanding of mass media's reception; his critique of popular music and film lines up with Greenberg's perspective on kitsch, and he worries that the culture industry's near total control over passive consumers is "mediated by entertainment."[21]

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[20] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000*, eds. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, (Oxford: Blackwell), 541.
[21] Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 545. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectics of Enlightenment* 1947, (New York: Continuum, 2001), 108.

Passive consumption—and especially passive consumption of mass culture—has persistent cultural associations with femininity as well, and that equation has shaped all sorts of social norms and popped up in many places, including Western art and literature's critical conventions. Andreas Huyssen has argued that the identification of women and the feminine with the mass culture (and, conversely, of men and the masculine with a Modernist avant-garde) was a strategy common in late 19th and early 20th century approaches to interpretation. Woman became symbolic of the appealing, but undemanding, cultural products of the masses, as well as the threats those products posed, however languidly, to the intellectual rigors involved in the creation and contemplation of modernist art.[22] The language of modernism continued to feminize mass culture well into the 20th century, inscribing ideas about femininity's inferiority to masculinity into judgments about mass culture's inferiority to high art.[23]

That equation of passive consumption with femininity also obtains within the culture of fandom, and the way that the image of the media "fan" is constructed in popular culture. In media theorist Henry Jenkins's influential study of fan culture *Textual Poachers : Television Fans & Participatory Culture*, the author discusses popular stereotypes about fans, and notes that fans are regularly depicted as "feminized and/or desexualized through their intimate engagement with mass culture."[24] The fan is, by

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[22] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 47. The author provides multiple examples in Nietzche, Adorno, and others of gendered references to the mass culture as an "old wife," and other similar terms.

[23] The connections Huyssen makes between mass culture and women contest, as the author notes, a tendency in French literary theory (represented by Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and others) that sees modernist experimental writing as feminine, and sees the feminine as unrepresentable with the traditional symbolic systems that modernism sough to subvert. Ibid, 49-52.

[24] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*, Studies in Culture and Communication (New York: Routledge, 1992), 10.

definition, an active consumer—though that kind of "activity" has not generally been understood as a negation of consumer passivity. Fans are understood to be "active" in the sense of being enthusiastic (and often over-enthusiastic) about the culture they consume, but they are not generally depicted as productive.[25] It comes as no surprise, then, that pop culture's representations of enthusiastic consumers of mass culture are often constructed in our stereotypes as feminine, even when they are men.

The compulsory identification of mass-culture consumption with passivity was challenged in the later 20th century: a challenge that can also, as I will argue, apply in a rethinking of some of the gendered dynamics of consumerism that I've been discussing. As technology scholar Alvin Toffler proposed in his 1980 book *The Third Wave,* the information-age consumer is actually a "prosumer" for whom the categories of consumption and production are significantly blurred.[26] Michel De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (from 1984) is also central to late 20th century reconsiderations of the nature of consumption. He proposed that the masses ("the dominated element in society") have been misidentified as "consumers" of mass culture, and are in fact something more like its "users" and are neither passive nor docile.[27] Consumption, he suggested, is often "another production."[28] Music theorist Nicola Dibben takes up a similar argument in her critique of the Adornian position on pop, proposing that "the products of popular culture are marked by the ability to carry the voice of the dominant

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[25] Despite this typical representation, fan culture has often been very productive of new, fan-made images and texts, as I will argue below.
[26] See Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave.* New York: Bantam Books, 1980. I don't use the term "prosumer" in my arguments, as it has, since the publication of Toffler's book, come to take on other meanings, but in his original usage it clearly describes type of consumption I am discussing.
[27] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xi.
[28] Ibid., xii.

economic order *and* the scope to resist, evade or negotiate with this voice."[29] De Certeau and Dibben's views suggest a change in how we discuss mass media products: the study of a pop song or a television show should include an examination of what the consumer *does* with those texts alongside of any analysis of the texts themselves.

Writing in the 1980s, De Certeau suggested that delivery systems for mass media content were becoming much narrower in terms of the spaces they allowed for users to "indicate what they *make* or *do* with the products of these systems."[30] Television, for example, provides many fewer opportunities than a popular magazine or a radio show for users to contribute content or call/write in and react to what they've consumed. Cultural critic Mary Celeste Kearney has tracked the narrowing of those participatory spaces in media made specifically for girls. She found that the amount of participation encouraged for readers of teen girl magazines decreased significantly from the 1980s forward, with many curtailing a longstanding practice (common since the 1940s) of publishing their readers' fiction and poetry as a part of each issue's content.[31]

The dearth of such spaces within girls' media was shrewdly noted and utilized by a handful of marketers by the mid 1990s. A successful mail-order clothing catalog for girls called *Airshop*, for example, was able to appeal to their audience in part because they interspersed their young customers' drawings and poetry within the sets of images and descriptions of the items for sale. *Airshop* was—according to *Fortune* writer Nina Munk—a shining example of a marketer who understood "girl power." Girl Power (which will be discussed in greater depth later on) was a mid 1990s marketing term that

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[29] Nicola Dibben, "Representations of Femininity in Popular Music," *Popular Music* 18.13, (1999), 348.
[30] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xii.
[31] Mary Celeste Kearney, *Girls Make Media*, (New York: Routledge, 2006),137.

took advantage of girls' desire for greater cultural agency, appealing to them with the appearance of greater agency as consumers. "If you want to sell to the girl-power crowd," Munk explained "you have to pretend that they're running things."[32]

In recent years, spaces for communicating about the 'user' part of the consumer experience have been restored (and have multiplied) on the internet; platforms that encourage productive consumption abound, from fan fiction websites to product review pages where buyers reflect on their purchases. This privileging of the user's experience has become so commonplace in contemporary media that versions of it are reified in semi-participatory television shows like *American Idol* or *The Voice* where viewers vote for their favorite performers, and their online comments and responses are broadcast on the television screen in real time. Wildly popular book series and movie franchise *The Hunger Games* attests to the ubiquity of this version of participatory mass media: the films revolve around the idea of an enormous "reality show" where real people are made to fight one another to the death for the entertainment of the masses. Viewers are permitted to purchase the right to "participate" in the drama by having supplies sent to their chosen "hunger games" competitors, and are made to feel, therefore, that they are helping their favorites to survive. Throughout the series it is made clear that such attempts at participation are rigged and futile, and support, ultimately, the desires of a cruelly absolutist government.

The cynicism about new models of participatory mass-media that is expressed within the *Hunger Games* reflects our post-internet, post reality TV awareness of the

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[32] Nina Munk, "Girl Power," *Fortune,* (Vol. 136. New York: Time Incorporated, 1997), 135. *Airshop* was active as an online and catalog business from 1996-1998, with a circulation of more than a million print catalogs per season.

ways in which audience participation can be used to support corporate interests and redirect the energy of consumers towards insubstantial goals. And yet, this recent explosion of participatory media (and the variety of outlets through which consumers can actively produce as they consume) has also radically democratized much within mass media culture, and has broken down barriers between artists and audiences in rewarding ways, from online repositories of fan fiction to systems like *kickstarter* that allow cultural producers to pitch (and potentially fund) their projects by opening them up to contributions from potential audience members. Miranda July's 2002 collaboration with Portland artist Harrell Fletcher—a participatory website called *Learning to Love You More*—is a smaller, more demanding, DIY version of this same style of audience-sourced content creation. July and Fletcher created a range of art "assignments" that users could choose, accomplish, and then document, uploading the results to the site for all to see. LTLYM was an early demonstration of the internet's ability to direct and gather the creative impulses of the public; active from 2002-2008, the project inspired and displayed more than 8000 artworks.[33]

Amy Carter and Evan Dando: Riot Grrrl Fandom as Subversive Fantasy

Riot Grrrl has the distinction of being among the final U.S. youth subcultures to thrive before widespread access to the internet, and it anticipated the proliferation of virtual spaces for consumer participation and production that is underway in the present. Riot Grrrl bands often cultivated a performance style that sought to create a similarly

[33] This project will be discussed in more depth in chapter 5. A book documenting the site and a selection of the artworks it inspired was published in 2007.

participatory space for the audience to reflect on or step outside of passive consumption. As zine-writer Kay explains:

> Backstage [at Riot grrrl gigs] was pretty much open access, the bands were much more talkative...and the microphone was handed around between the songs and left on in-between sets…. The extent to which power structures are enforced through the spatial politics of fun didn't really sink in until then.[34]

The circulation of zines was another way that spaces for non-passive consumption were created within Riot Grrrl, in that they would often include serious discussion about the popular culture that their creators encountered. As a teenager, Miranda July (in collaboration with her friend Johanna Fateman) self-published several issues of a zine called *Snarla* that included many such moments of reflection. Fateman and July write, for example, that: "I'm a girl, but when I play pinball I'm not. When I play Supermario pinball I am Mario. When I play Star Wars pinball I am Luke. The games are designed that way. A lot of things are designed that way."[35]

This foregrounding of the specific experience of the consumer as a non-generic user features prominently in Tammi Rae Carland's zine *I ♥ Amy Carter*. Carland is a multimedia artist and the founder of an influential queer and feminist focused independent record company called "Mr. Lady." She lived in Olympia Washington during Riot Grrrl's heyday there, where she played in bands, founded an alternative art space, contributed two movies to *Big Miss Moviola*, and published several zines. *I ♥ Amy Carter* was organized around Carland's childhood crush on President Jimmy Carter's bookish only daughter.

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[34] Marion Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 120.
[35] Johanna Fateman and Miranda July, *Snarla*, 1993 (Fales Library, Riot Grrrl collection, Johanna Fateman Papers) Series 1, box 1 folder 6.

Amy Carter's adolescence was made very public during her father's presidential term; she lived in the White House from ages nine to twelve, and was (in Carland's words) "totally geeky and wore glasses and braids."[36] As a child Carland wrote Carter letters, collected news clippings and photos, and later followed her life as she became a political activist and a feminist in college. "I guess I had an instant crush on her" Carland writes at the beginning of her zine's first issue "only the crush had more to do with wanting to be her."[37] Later in that issue Carland (who identifies as queer) explains that she'd hoped to find out that Amy was queer too.

The desire to find a role model in the media in whom you can recognize yourself colors Carland's writing throughout the zine. She appropriates Amy Carter from the girl's (mostly reluctant) mass media representations and turns her into the smart, happy, lesbian bookworm who was nowhere available among the ready-made cultural models Carland was provided with when she was growing up. "The procedures of contemporary consumption," De Certeau writes, "appear to constitute a subtle art of "renters" who know how to insinuate their countless differences into the dominant text."[38] Carland's insertion of her "difference" into the mass media text of Amy Carter was drawn out in the zine though the juxtaposition of the author's personal musings with news clippings about the former first daughter, tabloid articles speculating about the sexual preferences of

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[36] Lisa Darms, *The Riot Grrrl Collection*, (New York: The Feminist Press At the City University of New York, 2013), 104.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xxii.

That last element—the excerpt from the slang dictionary—is a guidepost for the zine on the whole: it points to the ways that language, structured around a set of heteronormative assumptions, is bent and manipulated to serve the purposes of its marginalized users. Carland echoes this kind of reappropriation when she "rents" and reworks a mass culture space (the public text of Amy Carter) in a way that fulfills a personal need, but also creates a community. She calls for her readers to contribute Amy Carter stories, memories, and clippings, inviting collaborative occupation of this new space. This creation of a social world built around the mass-culture persona of Amy Carter amounts to what Henry Jenkins discusses as "fan reading" in which collective interpretation of a mass culture object changes and shapes that object in the minds of its fans. "Fans," as Jenkins reminds us, "possess not simply borrowed remnants snatched from mass culture, but their own culture built from the semiotic raw materials the media provides."[39]

I ♥ Amy Carter explores the way that the author's role as a consumer of mass media images and texts becomes active and productive. Her writing and collages become the place to "indicate what [she] *make*[s] or *do*[es]" with what she consumes that De Certeau called for in *The Practice of Everyday Life.* The zine also speaks to the way that identification with a popular culture figure can serve as an escape, especially useful for young people or others who have little control over their circumstances. Carland explains the forces behind her childhood obsession with Carter thusly: "if someone's fucking with

[39] Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*,45-49.

you and you have no means of physical escape you resort to mental +/ emotional escape."[40]

This version of escapism through a subversive kind of fandom is a theme in another especially interesting zine from this period, Kathleen Hanna's *My Life with Evan Dando, Popstar.*[41] Hanna was the lead singer of Bikini Kill—one of Riot Grrrl's first and best known bands—and she was quickly (and very reluctantly) identified by outsiders as the movement's poster-grrrl and leader. By 1993 when she published this zine, her band had been offered (and had refused) representation by a major record label, and Hanna was being doubly targeted: by the mainstream culture as a representative of punk feminism, and by the punk community itself, which saw Bikini Kill as having become too popular, and thereby inauthentic. [42]

Hanna was receiving hate mail from anti-feminists and criticism from her peers, and Bikini Kill encountered serious harassment at their performances on a regular basis.[43] The brutal rape and murder of Mia Zapata (lead singer of Seattle band The Gits) that same year had reminded Hanna, and everyone in the Riot Grrrl community, of the real violence and horror that undergirded the kinds of threats and the sense of everyday danger to which many of them had become inured. The choice to reject major label sponsorship had the whole band struggling financially, and Hanna was working as a stripper to help make ends meet (and in a social environment where most of her choices were the subject of public discussion and scrutiny).

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[40] Darms, *Riot Grrrl Collection,*104.
[41] Carland and Hanna were friends, and played together in Hanna's first band (which was called "Amy Carter.")
[42] Marcus, *Girls to the Front,* 271.
[43] Ibid., 270.

Evan Dando (the blandly handsome frontman for a popular mid-1990s alternative rock band called *The Lemonheads*) became the text through which Hanna communicated about her situation. The zine's main themes—danger, fame, cooptation, and gender roles in music and fan culture—were all played out through Hanna's (fictional) narrative of a violent obsession with Dando. "I fell in love with Evan" Hanna writes "because it kept my mind off the REAL people who were hurting me."[44]

Just as Carland's engagement with Amy Carter served as an emotional escape from an unhappy girlhood, Hanna's appropriation of Evan Dando opened up a productive creative space built from mass culture content. Carland's and Hanna's zines are very different from one another, but together they help to indicate the extent to which the popular culture "consumer" role was transmuted (in Riot Grrrl zines) to that of an active 'user' who was reflexive about the content she consumed, and modeled that kind of productive consumption for an audience of (mostly) young middle-class women, the very consumers who were so sought after by marketers in this period.

The first few pages of *My Life With Evan Dando, Popstar* feel like they could have been penned by an earnest enthusiast, but the tone quickly turns sarcastic and dark as Hanna proclaims herself the pop star's stalker, assembling ransom-note style tributes and disturbing hand-written "fan" letters. A collage on the fourth page juxtaposes a murky, barely recognizable photocopy of the singer with strips of type praising Dando ("Evan is so cool") between which unhinged-looked handwriting (in what appears to be white paint) scrawl out the words "Genius, Master, Fuker (sic)" and, in cut-and-paste letters, "I must kill you." The aesthetic is that of the horror-movie psychopath.

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[44] Darms, *Riot Grrrl Collection*, 235.

The collage on the facing page implies that Dando is the target of these serial-killer style notes because of his patriarchal privileges ("he's a rock-star and yr not…being white and male doesn't hurt.")[45] Several pages of letters to Dando—handwritten and full of seemingly deliberate cross-outs and spelling errors—are reproduced later in the zine, contributing to the compulsive, irrational look of the collages. Each letter begins with the words "Dear Evan." In one, Hanna writes "I am what is not supposed to be – a female stalker."[46]

The figure of the fan (as excessive devotee of a specific mass culture text) has long been associated with the feminine. In the 1920s, teenage girls in particular were represented as "fanatics" for male film stars.[47] By the 1950s, the young female fanatic was a common trope in the narrative of the male musician, especially when it came to handsome lead singers. And so Hanna's "female stalker" was not so far removed from pop culture's set of standard tropes as the author seems to have thought: the female fan has often been portrayed as an obsessive deviant (though she'd rarely be depicted as rising to the level of violence threatened by the character of the stalker in *My Life with Evan Dando, Popstar*).[48]

The way that "images of deviance" cleave to images of the female fan allows, as visual culture historian Catherine Grant explains, "for the subjectivity of fandom to come

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[45] Ibid, 203.
[46] 214.
[47] Jenkins, *Textual Poachers,* 12.
[48] The widely televised story of Margaret Mary Ray—a stalker who was arrested several times (from 1988 forward) for harassing TV personality David Letterman—would, however, have likely been known to Hanna.

into view."[49] The threat of violence enacted on the fan object highlights the mutability of that object in the hands of its consumer, foregrounding the consumer as a "user," and making plain the potential for resistance within the processes of mass-culture consumption. Dando's transformation into the author's raw material is, for Hanna, a reversal of the typical gendered arrangement, as the text from another of her collages suggests, reading: "Every woman is a vessel Every woman is a vessel Evan Dando is my vessel."[50]

At points the author switches from the voice of the stalker to a voice that is something like an outside narrator providing context. She discusses, for example, several well known female musicians who have been stalked by men, and then expresses her fears for her own safety. "My picture was in Newsweek," she writes, "I have a bikini on and my FULL NAME is followed by the words 'feminist' 'stripper' and 'incest victim.' I am going to the store to buy a shirt that says kill me on it."[51] The 1992 *Newsweek* article she references does expose Hanna to the public in a way that invites harassment: it identifies her as riot grrrl's founder and discusses the movement as man-hating (while also underplaying its seriousness, it calls one Riot Grrrl writer both "very gushy" and "very feminist" within a single sentence).[52]

The zine has many such moments from Hanna's real-life context that are full of palpable fear and anger. Channeling that fear and anger towards Dando becomes a

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[49] Catherine Grant, "Fans of Feminism: Re-Writing Histories of Second-Wave Feminism in Contemporary Art," *Oxford Art Journal* 34, no. 2 (2011): 272.
[50] Darms, *Riot Grrrl Collection,* 222. The gender role reversal that Hanna takes clear pleasure in here could also account for the dominance of woman writers within contemporary fan-fiction communities. Henry Jenkins estimated, in 1992 that 90% of all fan fiction is written by women. Jenkins,191.

[51] Darms, *Riot Grrrl Collection,* 214.
[52] Newsweek Staff "Revolution, Girl Style," *Newsweek,* issue from 11-22-1992.

demonstration of broader imbalances, as Dando (being a male mainstream rock star) would have had a very different experience of fame and fan attention than Hanna did. "He should be happy I have chosen him to stalk," she writes, pointedly echoing a common response to women who reject unwanted attention from men. "He asks for it by looking like he does. Like the beautiful victim.. he wants to be my victim."[53]

This sort of reversal of gendered expectations for victimhood and aggression permeates *My Life With Evan Dando, Pop Star*, and it is an element of the zine that was likely revelatory for many of Hanna's readers. The author pushes her critique further than simple reversal, however, imbuing the text with aesthetic and moral ambiguity and creating a complex character (the narrator) with an historical referent in an infamous figure from feminist history: Valerie Solanas. Solanas was a radical playwright and essayist who advocated the total destruction of capitalism as well as the murder of most men. In 1968 Solanas shot and wounded Andy Warhol and the art critic Mario Amaya before being hospitalized for paranoid schizophrenia. Her best known piece of writing—the *SCUM Manifesto*, from 1967—describes a type of new woman (a "SCUM female," in Solanas's terms) who is "dominant, secure, self-confident, nasty, violent, selfish, independent, proud, thrill-seeking, free wheeling, [and] arrogant."[54] Central elements of Hanna's narrator character in the zine are made to embody Solanas's "SCUM female."

The tone in large sections of *My Life With Evan Dando* is an interesting combination of intellectual, unhinged, confessional, and distant, and in this it closely echoes the *SCUM Manifesto* and Solanas's writing style. Hanna mentions Solanas at a

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[53] Darms, *Riot Grrrl Collection,* 216.
[54] Valerie Solanas, "SCUM Manifesto," in Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski, *Feminist Theory : A Reader*, (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2005), 172.

few points in the zine, and frames her as a kind of art critic. She suggests that Solanas's attack on Warhol was a referendum on his cooptation of radical ideas for profit: Warhol, Hanna writes, was "trying to act like he was questioning notions of fine art…thru the admitation (sic) of mechanical reproduction…ONLY Warhol was for real exploiting certain people… and certain revolutionary concepts."[55] Evan Dando's band (The Lemonheads) was in some ways a poppy, apolitical version of early 90s underground rock, and a parallel can be made between Hanna's claims about Warhol co-opting and emptying radical ideas and The Lemonheads' radio-friendly deployment of an aesthetic that had initially emerged in opposition to the mainstream.

Hanna (who does not have the psychological disorders that Solanas did) embraces the elder writer's violent and extreme rhetoric as part of a larger experiment in feminist writing that she hints at throughout the zine. On one page, she writes: "Confuse 'truth' with fiction. Attempt to de-centralize the manufacturing of 'truth."[56] The zine's cycling between a voice that seems to belong to the 'real' Kathleen Hanna and the voice of the stalker bent on murder is part of that attempt to blur the line between truth and fiction, especially because both voices are identified in the zine as belonging to "Kathleen."

The author engages in the confessional tone associated with Riot Grrrl and with feminist writing on the whole, but then undermines our assumptions about the accuracy of that autobiographical voice. "You think i am crazy" she writes as part of one of the letters to Evan Dando, "and you can just fuck yrself cuz…i am wordplay reversing."[57] She is pointing here to the reversals with which the zine is packed, and at the ability of

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[55] Darms, *Riot Grrrl Collection*, 217.
[56] Ibid, 212.
[57] 216

language ("wordplay") to enact such reversals, and to indicate its own opposites. "i am aLL true + personal," she continues, "and you can't imagine this is art and not autobiography."[58]

The author's claim, in that last quote, that her readers expect her writing to be direct and honest reporting on her own experience (and therefore not "art") refers to an established norm in Riot Grrrl zine writing.[59] Most zines are personal, and since Riot Grrrl operated on a currency of intimacy, the truer and more confessional your voice was in your zine, the better. As drummer and zine writer Erin A McCarley reported in 1998; "zines are a way of typing how you feel, letting it out. It's another form of crying."[60] This foregrounding of the personal and emotional is one way that Riot Grrrl zines differ from earlier iterations of that medium in punk. As music historian Marion Leonard explains in 2007, "whereas music fanzines have historically offered personal responses to an external (street or club) culture, here [in Riot Grrrl] the culture was produced in the very act of writing."[61] Because much of Riot Grrrl culture was created from within its participants' homes—especially from the mid 1990s forward when the movement was being propelled by zines much more than live musical performances—the writer's own, often intimate reflections on her life replaced the sort of reporting on concerts and other subcultural doings that were more common in earlier punk zine writing.

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[58] 216

[59] This priority given to the personal and autobiographical in feminist art is longstanding. Laura Cottingham and others have attributed it to "the central position consciousness-raising occupied as the primary methodology of Second Wave activism." Cottingham, "What's So 'Bad' About 'Em?" 1994, in *Seeing through the Seventies : Essays on Feminism and Art*, (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2000), 76.

[60] Jessica Rosenberg, Gitana Garofalo, "Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from within," *Signs* 23.3.1998, 823.

[61] Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry*, 143.

In this way, riot Grrrl zines (and third wave feminist zines in general) speak to a persistent concern about third wave feminism: that the third wave is dangerously self-involved, and that its focus on the individual's experience precludes any sort of real activism.[62] 1990s feminist zines embody, then, a central contradiction in much of third wave practice: they function as feminist activism and operate on a politics of access, participation, and community, but they are at the same time acutely focused on the specific life of the individual (excepting, of course, the occasional challenge to those norms, including those posed by *Evan Dando*).[63] Miranda July and Johanna Fateman sum that contradiction up cogently on the address page of their collaborative zine *Snarla*, requesting that their readers "write us and tell us what you think (about yourself)."[64]

Hanna's *Evan Dando* critiques Riot Grrrl's potentially self-involved tendency towards the transparently confessional, and it also challenges a larger cultural tendency towards the compulsory identification of women's writing as autobiographical (a tactic which helps to frame women's art as "merely" expressive, rather than reflexive). The author engages an autobiographical mode in sections (when she earnestly discusses her feelings about working as a stripper, for example) but she does not allow her reader to count on any stable tie between the narrative and the autobiographical voice. The improbable stories of her violent relationship with Dando, the moments where she plays visually with words and phrases in a way that changes or erases their meaning, and the integration of bits and pieces from the history of feminist theory all complicate

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[62] Rory Cooke Dicker, and Alison Piepmeier. *Catching a Wave : Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 16-18.
[63] Alison Piepmeier*, Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 9.
[64] Johanna Fateman and Miranda July, *Snarla*, 1993 (Fales Library, Riot Grrrl collection, Johanna Fateman Papers) Series 1, box 1 folder 6.

autobiographical transparency, and thereby enact a kind of critique of Riot Grrrl's compulsory narratives of self, and of similar tendencies across the range of third wave feminist practice.[65]

Hanna's deliberately antagonistic relationship to confessional writing in *My Life with Evan Dando, Popstar* is also a critique of earnest fandom and an attempt to remake and trouble assumptions about the passive reception of popular culture (especially of male pop stars) by young female fans. She models a kind of consumption of popular culture that is resistant, grounded in feminist politics, and anything but passive. In De Certeau's proposal that consumers be recognized as the un-docile "users" that they so often are, he suggested that the standard binary pair "production – consumption" be replaced with "its more general equivalent: writing – reading."[66] The relationship between a reader and a text (in the broad sense of the term) is dialectical: the text (a story, image, song, etc) asks the reader to take up a particular subject position, and the reader (with her specific biography, skills, and situation in the moment of reading) enters into a kind of negotiation with that presumed subject position.

Hot Topic and The Dinner Party: Remixing Feminist Fandom

The field of fan studies has taken much from De Certeau's model of the pop culture consumer as a reader. Contemporary views on the figure of the fan combine "the

[65] Miranda July also refuses autobiographical transparency in her work: the characters she plays in her videos and films consistently (and deliberately) both frustrate and encourage attempts to see the artist herself within the performance of the character. See chapters 3 and 4 for more discussion of such characters.
[66] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xxi

reader with the writer," and understand the object of devotion as "a key component in the formation of a fan's own identity."[67] Five years after Hanna first circulated *My Life with Evan Dando, Popstar*, she returned to the figure of the fan in a way that more clearly embraces that perspective on the subject. By that time she'd founded a new band called Le Tigre: a three-woman electronic dance music act that mixed catchy pop beats with overtly feminist lyrics, complex visual performances, matching costumes, and choreographed dancing. Their first album featured a single called "Hot Topic" that was all about fandom as a productive, positive force.

"Hot Topic" is packed with references to visual art, literature, music history and feminist theory. The women in the band position themselves as "fans" who list and shout out the names of feminist (or otherwise gender-transgressive) cultural producers, from well-known pioneers like James Baldwin and Gertrude Stein to subculture celebrities like Queercore performer Vaginal Davis and 1990s feminist punk outfit "The Butchies." The lyrics frame the band's feminist art forbearers (like Yoko Ono and Carolee Schneeman) as vital and relevant influences, in clear contradiction to cultural norms that render older women less visible and dwell on generational divisions within the feminist movement.

Gender Studies scholar Jack Halberstam discussed Le Tigre and "Hot Topic" as part of an exploration of subcultural production in his 2005 book *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. Halberstam suggests that traditional models for understanding subculture are Oedipal: they conceptualize the subcultural group as engaged in the destruction of the father (usually in the form of the mainstream culture or the social norms established by the older generation). This model does not

[67] Grant, *Fans of Feminism,* 27.

apply, however, when it comes to queer subcultures (a category in which he includes Riot Grrrl).

Queer time, Halberstam argues, is not bound by the understanding of youth and age that accompany heteronormative conceptions of time and life-stage. Queer youth subcultures, therefore, have a different (and sometimes less oppositional) relationship to the "adult" culture, and can engender the kinds of productive connections to their elders that the women of Le Tigre celebrate.[68] That potential for blurrier demarcations also extends to the interactions between the participants in a given subculture and its theorists.[69] Scholarly distance collapses in these relationships, creating a dynamic that has a lot in common with contemporary fan studies' blurry lines, where scholars often engage as fans in productive, creative consumption of the fan object.[70]

Much of "Hot Topic" is a melodic chanting of names, grouped in sets of four or eight in a way that suggests conceptual and aesthetic connections across generations and media. For example, the third verse of song includes the lyrics below:

> So many roads and so much opinion / So much shit to give in, give in to. So many rules and so much opinion / So much bullshit but we won't give in. Stop, we won't stop / Don't you stop / I can't live if you stop. Tammy Rae Carland and Sleater-Kinney / Vivienne Dick and Lorraine O'Grady. Gayatri Spivak and Angela Davis / Laurie Weeks and Dorothy Allison. Stop, don't you stop / Please don't stop / We won't stop. [71]

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[68] Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 163.

[69] Ibid., 161.
[70] Grant, *Fans of Feminism,* 269.
[71] LeTigre, "Hot Topic," *Le Tigre,* 1999.

This set of lyrics "rhymes" Riot Grrrl producers Tammi Rae Carland and Sleater-Kinney with no-wave experimental filmmaker Vivienne Dick and performance artist Lorraine O'Grady. Dick and O'Grady both engaged issues around race, gender and hybridity in pre-Riot Grrrl multi-media avant-gardes. Gayatri Spivak and Angela Davis (both theorists of alterity) follow them in the list, suggesting a theoretical framework for interpreting the works of the other four. The "rhyme" ends by naming Laurie Weeks and Dorothy Allison, two influential feminist fiction writers who speak, in a different way, to many of the same issues addressed in works by Davis and Spivak.

Le Tigre's members, then, behave as active readers whose careful combinations of the names of their fan objects suggest what they *do* with what they consume: how they use it, and how it connects to the other things they know. In live performances of "Hot Topic," the band would screen a video by multi-media artist (and *Big Miss Moviola* contributor) Wynne Greenwood behind them as they performed. The video is a collage, juxtaposing images of relevant books, magazine clippings, and album covers in rows that line up next to one another other in rhythm with the song, producing ever-changing trios of images, like the icons in a slot machine. An image of a glue stick (every DIY artist's best friend) sits in the foreground for much of the video, reminding the spectator of her role as collage-maker, empowered to combine and recombine what she consumes in the way that suits her best.

When contextualized within an expanded riot grrrl milieu that includes *I ♥ Amy Carter, My Life With Evan Dando, Popstar*, and *Big Miss Moviola*, "Hot Topic"'s lists of names (and the networks of associations that they mobilize) promote a creative mode of consumption in which the audience member is activated as an artist, empowered to take

Greenwood's glue stick to the works and the theories that the band members lay out, catchily, as the objects of their fandom.

Le Tigre fan responses that transform consumption into DIY production abound on the internet. In one especially ambitious such project, Montreal illustrator Kristin McCrea researched all of the cultural figures named in the song and painted a portrait of each (which, including the LeTigre members themselves, came to 60 portraits in all). She assembled and circulated a zine that included background on each of the people named in the song, and has exhibited the project in a gallery and on the internet.[72]

"Hot Topic"'s creation of what Jack Halberstam refers to as "an eclectic encyclopedia of queer cultural production"[73] calls up clear associations with America's most widely known work of feminist art: Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*. Chicago's installation symbolically gathered thirty-nine women—from Hindu goddesses to 20th century suffragists—and set a huge triangular table for their coming-together, proposing something like an eclectic encyclopedia of the feminist movement (or Chicago's vision of that movement) including its prehistories. In 1990, two decades after *The Dinner Party* was first displayed, it returned to the public eye when The University of D.C.'s plans to purchase the work were blocked by congress. Sound bites in which congressional representatives showily denounced *The Dinner Party* dominated media coverage of the issue, bringing the installation (and its 1970s feminist art context) to the attention of many young women who, like Kathleen Hanna and her bandmates, saw themselves as a new wave of feminists emerging from a decade of popular anti-feminist sentiment.

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[72] Kristin McCrea, "Welcome to Hot Topic," 02-22-2008. http://artingstarvist.blogspot.com/search/label/Hot%20Topic/ Accessed 12-01-2009.

[73] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place,*161.

Identification with 1970s (second wave) feminism was common among Riot Grrrl producers, and affinities like the one between "Hot Topic" and *The Dinner Party* abound. Despite this, Riot Grrrl (and third wave feminism more broadly) are commonly framed as having formed in opposition to the previous feminist generation.[74] Artist and critic Suzanne Lacy argued in 1994 that a recurrence of second wave strategies and themes in 1990s art was being largely overlooked by critics and historians. Ignorance of the 1970s feminist precedents for contemporary practice created, as Lacy went on to explain, a void in art history and theory, and muddied attempts to fully understand the way that the political functions within artistic practice.[75]

The idea of two clashing (rather than continuous) generations of women artists was reinforced within the period's largest exhibition of contemporary art by women. Marcia Tucker's "Bad Girls" (which was developed for the New Museum in 1994) had no real relationship to Riot Grrrl, but borrowed some of its terms: the "girl" in the title, for example, and the exhibition's pamphlet was called a "zine." Artist and critic Laura Cottingham's discussion of the American works in the exhibition notes that their most consistent and coherent theme is the artists' engagement in a "process of dislocation and adjustment of and against 'parental' values, including the utopian and idealized visions of their feminist foremothers."[76]

This tendency to represent feminism in the 1990s as a daughterly rejection of an out-of-touch 1970s mother is of course ungenerous to all parties, and it also reflects a

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[74] Piepmeier, *Grrrl Zines,* 22.
[75] Suzanne Lacy, "Affinities: Thoughts on an Incomplete History" 1994, in Suzanne Lacy, Moira Roth, and Kerstin Mey, *Leaving Art : Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974-2007*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 191.
[76] Cottingham, Cottingham, "What's So 'Bad' About 'Em?," 76.

larger narrative in which the cultural politics of younger feminists (including Riot Grrrls) were being constructed as a cute, stylish, and easy to dismiss kind of brattiness. A glut of newspaper and magazine articles about Riot Grrrl in 1991 and 1992 attest to this trend.[77] *Seventeen* magazine writer Nina Malkin, for example, spends much of her 1993 article on Riot Grrrl describing some of the participants' fashion choices, and works also to fit the movement into familiar kind of "girl fight" narrative, describing one interviewee as an "an official riot grrrl dropout" and noting that "already there are rumblings of an internal rift."[78]

A central element of the failure to recognize strong connections between second and third wave artistic strategies (beyond the pop culture appeal of daughterly rebellion as an archtype) had to do with a tendency, common in the art world of the 1980s, to focus solely on the "utopian and idealized visions" of the second wave that Cottingham references in her discussion of "Bad Girls." Those works that were the most explicitly utopian became the poster-girls of 1970s feminist art, and dismissing their political and aesthetic goals on the grounds of their essentialism became a standard practice.[79] Second wave artists were seen as championing a naïve notion of universal female "essence" that suppressed individuality and ignored the intersections of race, class, and sexuality-based oppression with gender oppression.

The Dinner Party's imagined attendees were each identified by place settings, and each place setting prominently featured a ceramic dinner plate decorated with a stylized

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[77] Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald, "Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution, and Women in Independent Rock," in *Microphone Fiends:Youth Music & Youth Culture*, eds. Andrew Ross, Tricia Rose, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 269. Marcus, *Girls to the Front,*169.
[78] Nina Malkin, "It's a Grrrl Thing," *Seventeen* May 1993, 80-82.
[79] Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History." *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 69, No. 3 (Sep., 1987), 349.

vulva. The plates—part of a larger trend towards so-called "central core" imagery in feminist art—can be interpreted as the reduction of all 39 dinner guests to this one same body part.[80] The work's celebration of collaborative creation (it was a collective effort), its deployment of handy-crafts (ceramics and sewing), and its references to domesticity (serving and eating), propose something like a universally feminine terrain, and combine with the plates' genital motifs to make the work a prime example of exactly the kind of essentialism that was widely decried throughout the 1980s. Academic feminists were among those who joined congressional representatives in protesting the University of D.C.'s purchase of *The* Dinner *Party*, precisely because of the work's essentialist premise.[81]

Essentialist blind spots in some iterations of 1970s feminism were a real and serious problem—especially as regards the misrecognition of white, heterosexual, and middle-class experience as a universal femininity—and they limited the movement's reach. The accusation of essentialism became, however, a dismissive catch-all in the 1980s, and was often divorced from substantive critique. Within the context of this period's so-called "culture wars," the American left and right both created easy caricatures of one another, and the critique of feminist essentialism got mixed in to

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[80] There is one odd exception this this: the image of Sojourner Truth is represented by an abstracted head rather than vulva. As Truth is the only African American woman represented in the *The Dinner Party,* this exception has been interpreted as speaking to fear or discomfort about black women's bodies on the part of the white artist. Lorraine O'Grady, "Olympia's Maid," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 209.
[81] Suzanne Lacy, "Affinities," 191.

attacks coming from parts of the left in which any belief in shared human nature or shared cultural context would be demonized as essentialist, or even racist.[82]

As feminist artist and critic Suzanne Lacy has observed: "the reduction of seventies feminist art history [as essentialist] coincides with a rise in art and art theory positioned within a stance of individual—rather than collective—identity, in a field where action seems naïve and futile."[83] The dismissal of second wave feminism that accusations of essentialism allowed was also, then, a dismissal of collective action in favor of a critical position rooted in individual experience. When Riot Grrrl producers engaged collaborative or participatory processes they were both drawing on those elements of 1970s art that privileged collectivity as a central element of what made their work feminist, and acting from within a culture that regularly identified similar impulses with the specter of a dominating, difference suppressing, and exclusively white subjectivity.

When Riot Grrrl began to emerge in the early 1990s its participants worked to combine a rhetoric of individuality with a (seemingly contradictory) focus on collective action and creative collaboration. In Sarah Marcus's recent history of Riot Grrrl, she stresses the way that a "me generation" attitude (a product of 1980s commercial culture) was manifest in the movement. Her analysis of Bikini Kill's 1991 anthem "Rebel Girl" focuses on the chorus, when Hanna shouts "Rebel Girl, Rebel Girl, Rebel Girl you're the queen of my world."[84] "The Rebel Girl," Marcus argues, "is the queen of 'my' not 'our' world—70s collectivism…has morphed into the self-centered language of alienated

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[82] Susan Bordo, *Twilight Zones: The Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 80.
[83] Suzanne Lacy, "Affinities," 191.
[84] Bikini Kill, "Rebel Girl," *Pussy Whipped,* 1993.

adolescence and been adapted for the political primacy, especially potent in the early 90s, of the personal story."[85]

Though this primacy given to individual experience is everywhere in Riot Grrrl media, it is as much a result of the broader cultural dismissal of 1970s feminism as it is an integration of a 1980s "me generation" attitude. A complex attempt to simultaneously avoid the appearance of essentialism and to embrace the idea of collective action rooted in gender identity features strongly in many of Riot Grrrl's earliest productions: grrrls are rallied to work together in recognizing and fighting systemic injustice, but a careful avoidance of universalizing language (and, by extension, of essentialist assumptions) is built into all such calls to action.

That careful stepping around of anything that smacks of essentialism can be mistaken as self-centered over-focus on individual experience, especially when much of it is coming from the mouths and pens of teenagers. The movement's 1991 manifesto, for example, notes that "we need…to figure out how bullshit like racism, able-bodieism, ageism, speciesism, classism, thinism, sexism, anti-Semitism and heterosexism figures in our own lives."[86] This thorough cataloging of the kinds of oppression that might intersect with gendered oppression issues from the same set of intentions as Hanna's "Rebel Girl" (who is the queen of "my," not "our," world) even though the former looks like academic over-prudence and the latter sounds like adolescent narcissism.

All of this is to say that the relationship between Riot Grrrl producers in the 90s and their second wave feminist forbearers has been misrepresented as starkly

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[85] Marcus, *Girls to the Front,* 110-111.
[86] Anonymous, "The Riot Grrrl Manifesto," *Bikini Kill Zine, #2.* http://onewarart.org/riot_grrrl_manifesto.htm Accessed 10-09-15.

oppositional at the same time as it is mediated by the narrativized, caricatured vision of 70s feminism that was shaped throughout the intervening decade. When *The Dinner Party* was debated in the house of representatives in 1990, its cultural meaning was reshaped by conservative, anti-feminist, and anti-arts funding voices, and also by an academic feminism that had for years made issues around essentialism one of its central debates. The things that Le Tigre's *Hot Topic* takes from Chicago's *The Dinner Party*—and the ways it departs from it—speak cogently to both of those issues.

Hot Topic's lists of names creates the same shared conceptual space for feminism that *The Dinner Party*'s tables did, and both works successfully propose complex intellectual connections between figures who are usually isolated within mainstream histories as outliers, exceptions, and tokens. The people named in *Hot Topic*, on the other hand, aren't presented as sharing any unifying trait or essence. All that unites them is the enthusiastic fandom of the individual women in the band; they are to be considered all together because of something about their readers (the women of Le Tigre) rather than something about themselves (like their female genitals). The elements of *The Dinner Party* (and, in some ways, of 1970s feminist art in general) that Hot *Topic* rejects, are those that have been the most thoroughly caricatured during the 1980s. *Hot Topic* doesn't break with *The Dinner Party* then, it breaks with the 1980s versions of what *The Dinner Party* meant.

> The viewer reads the landscape of his childhood in the evening news.
> The thin film of writing becomes a movement of strata, a play of spaces.
> A different world (the reader's) slips into the author's place.
>
> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*,
> Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, xxi.

Miranda July's 2009 public art installation *11 Heavy Things* includes eleven interactive sculptures, one of which speaks with particular clarity to the elements of Riot Grrrl's legacy that I've been discussing in this chapter: that movement's particular style of anti-essentialism, as well as its success in repositioning cultural consumers as cultural producers. The sculpture is a fiber-glass and steel platform created for the 53rd International Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale, and inscribed—in an engraved representation of July's handwriting—with the following sentences: "This is my little girl. She is brave and clever and funny. She will have none of the problems that I have. Her heart will never be broken. She will never be humiliated. Self-doubt will not devour her dreams."

The platform, which is displayed empty among other similar sculptures, requires both a participant and a spectator to complete it—to be the "little girl" and the "my" to whom she belongs—but it also needs to be photographed. Once populated and flattened into a representation (as seen in the right-hand image above) the text becomes the figure's caption. Each viewer can become a performer by stepping onto the platform, but once the tableau is photographed, that viewer-performer also becomes the *owner* of the image, deploying it (presumably) within her own social networks. In these ways, the "little girl" platform enacts what cultural theorist Craig Saper calls the "sociopoetic" in art: a quality that emerged with the Lettrists in the 1950s and featured in Concrete Poetry, Mail art, and

Fluxus, among others.[87] Sociopoetic works propose that the social situation through which the artwork is produced (and, conversely, the social situation that the artwork itself produces) are central elements of its medium. Social interaction becomes, in other words, both the artwork's canvas, *and* the major substance of its content.[88]

11 Heavy Things was displayed for the first time in 2009, one year after the iPhone hit the market and ushered in a present in which mobile internet access has combined with social networking to entangle our personal webs of online connection with our movements in real space. The "little girl" platform is designed in a way that takes advantage of that new reality: inviting creative participation from passers by, but also from their friends with smart phones, and from those friends' other friends online, and on and on indefinitely; proliferating in a way that is characteristic of our contemporary moment. Even empty, the platform immediately suggests the snapped-and-shared photograph—starring you, or your child, or your friend—that it is bound to become.

11 Heavy Things is not the first use of the platform or pedestal as a means to transform everyday or non-art subjects (like passers by) into artworks. Pedestals were part of how Marcel Duchamp contextualized his readymade objects—like *The Fountain*—as artworks, and Piero Manzoni worked with large platforms that he called "Magic Bases" on which the viewer could stand, transforming himself into a living sculpture.[89] In July's "little girl," however, the participant isn't simply transformed into an art object; the "magic" this platform catalyzes is especially complex. The participant

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[87] Saper, 152.
[88] Saper, 5.
[89] I am referring here to Manzoni's 1961 *Base Magica* (magic bases).

who stands atop it is assigned a specific identity (young and female), a relationship to the other viewers, (she is ours, as the text instructs, "this is *my* little girl,") and a place in the narrative of an elder who has struggled, ("she will have none of the problems that I have"). In this, July's work doesn't challenge what art is as much as it uses the artwork to make the viewer or participant experience their own role differently. The viewer and participant become characters in both a specific narrative—the narrative of the adult whose experience is suggested through the inscription—and the generic social relation implied between a young girl and a protective elder.

When July engages her audience as actors in this platform's narrative she also allows them a measure of control over its content; the language of the inscription is vague enough that it can seem to apply in many relationships, allowing the viewer's world and life experience to slip, like De Certeau's reader, "into the author's place."[90] As July explained in a 2005 interview, "the whole time I've been building my audience I've also been trying to unbuild the walls that come with having an audience, with having power."[91] And because the audience for the artwork—the consumer—both inserts their own experience into the narrative and produces (with their physical presence) a new (and personalized) image, the work encourages the kind of active consumption that was, as I've argued throughout this chapter, a key component of the cultural work that Riot Grrrl accomplished in the 1990s.

The narrative that this platform suggests is, on the other hand, firmly anchored to the specific role of the little girl, however one defines her, a choice that refuses to allow

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[90] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xxi.
[91] Rachel Kushner and Miranda July, "Miranda July," *Bomb* 92 (New Art Publications, 2005), 65.

the social relations mobilized by the platform to become universal. Not just any reader's story can slip into the framework of this narrative, because the participant who steps onto the platform must be willing to identify themself as a little girl, and their willingness, rather than anything about how they appear, will be what defines them in the resultant image as such. July's platform becomes, then, a tiny stage upon which the participant plays a role that is designated, from the outside, as feminine: it is the person looking at the platform, not the person standing atop it, who can read the inscription. But who, in this case, would resist such a designation? July's little girl is, as the platform's text tells us, a person who is brave, smart, and loved: and all it takes to be those things is a willingness to step onto the sculpture, pose, and thereby adopt her narrative as one's own. This particular way of presenting the feminine: as a position that is honored, special, but also optional, a role into which one can (and should want to) step, is developed in other ways in July's work, especially in her work with film and video, and it is those works that will be my central focus in chapter four.

CHAPTER 4:

SHE'S BEEN WATCHING IT ALL GO DOWN WITH REEL EYES SINCE SHE WAS A BABYGIRL; MIRANDA JULY AND THE HISTORY OF FEMINIST VIDEO.

The interactive sculpture I've been discussing—Miranda July's "little girl" platform from her 2009 public installation *11 Heavy Things*—proposes that the "she" referred to in the platform's inscription is a position of honor, raised up and reserved for someone who is special, and available to be embodied by anyone willing to step onto the fiber glass sculpture and identify with the pronoun. A similar use of "she" occurred regularly in Miranda July's writing for the *Big Miss Moviola* chainletter zines. Describing a potential movie by a hypothetical *Big Miss Moviola* contributor, for example, July wrote that "she made it up, and it was easy because she's been watching it all go down with reel eyes since she was a babygirl."[1] That "she" was also often deployed to refer abstractly to the project itself, as in these lines that ran regularly (with small variations) in many *Big Miss Moviola* zines and ads: "She is: A Challenge and A Promise… You Are: The Lady Glitterati of the Unseen-Underwater Movie Revolution."[2] Although *Big Miss Moviola* was open exclusively to women and girls, it was a non-selective, postal-service-based project, and so willingness to identify as a woman or girl was all it took to be included. No parameters are laid out for the "she" that July constantly refers to in her writing for the zines, but both *Big Miss Moviola* itself and all of the potential and actual contributors were referred to as such, and with the same tone of special reverence that is present in the "little girl" platform.

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[1] Ibid
[2] *Underwater Chainletter*, zine, 1996 (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

Big Miss Moviola was an explicitly feminist project (in that it sought to repair gender iniquities in video and film) and July—who is best known outside of the art world for her two feature-length movies—is regularly identified as a feminist filmmaker. But because the content of her work in film and video is rarely explicitly political, its designation as feminist requires some teasing out. Like the "she" in the *Big Miss Moviola* zines, July's feminism expresses itself in her films as a love for, interest in, and enthusiasm about women's lives and abilities much more often than it speaks to arguments or action against sexism. This chapter will work through the ways that feminism's recent histories in the visual arts inform July's work with moving images. I will begin by focusing on elements of the *Big Miss Moviola* project itself, its continuities with feminist video art in the 1970s, and its connections to other DIY video projects in the 1980s and 1990s. The second part of the chapter focuses on two specific mid 1990s films by July: *The Amateurist* and *Atlanta*, and works to contextualize their investigations of role playing, narrative, and the gendered politics of the gaze with themes that have featured prominently in feminist video art throughout its short history.

"You Always Suspected It, And Now You Know It's True: Girls and women are making movies every day."

The Frozen Chainletter, zine, 2005 (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

Feminist art, and feminist performance art in particular, were thriving at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, around the same time that portable video technology was first becoming accessible to artists. Performance art often relies on in-person, unmediated interchange between the artist and her audience, and it also tends to create the type of in-

the-moment experience that makes it impossible to effectively reproduce. In those ways, performance art is very distant from video art: the latter creates a relationship between artist and audience that is mediated by a screen, by time and physical location, and by mechanical reproduction. But despite these clear differences, much in early feminist video built on feminist performance art from that period, and like performance, video became a way to assert—in a fashion both seen and heard—the presence of women artists in an art world that had regularly silenced and marginalized them. Many well-established women performance artists—including Carolee Schneeman, Joan Jonas, Eleanor Antin, and Laurie Anderson, among others—regularly moved between or combined live performance and video art, and all of them conceived of and planned, as well as physically performed, their live and videotaped works.

The appeal of both media for women artists stems in part from a reaction against traditional representations of femininity in Western art. Because femininity in the Western world has, as art historian Martha Gever explains, gone hand in hand with "images of the mute compliant female body," the artist "who presents herself simultaneously as speaker and spectacle has afforded feminism a metaphor for alternative modes of representation."[3] When Miranda July began doing her first live performances in 1995 she was also beginning work on the first of her short movies. Her simultaneous adoption of both media reflects the influence of that earlier generation of women performance and video artists, as well as the persistent need for women to assert their presence as speaking subjects. And though women's video art in the 1970s was extremely

[3] Martha Gever, "The Feminism Factor: Video and its Relation to Feminism," in *Illuminating Video : An Essential Guide to Video Art*, eds. Sally Jo Fifer, Doug Hall, (New York, N.Y.: Aperture in association with the Bay Area Video Coalition, 1990), 234.

diverse in both form and content, an overall interest in opposing male domination over images of women was a relatively consistent theme, and one that persists into the 1980s and 90s.[4] Miranda July is, more often than not, a central actor in the videos she writes and directs, and in that way her work contributes to Gever's alternative metaphor for representations of women. The same can be said for the majority of the works circulated through *Big Miss Moviola*'s compilation tapes, as the artists are very often present as speaking subjects within their own videos.

Alongside this focus on women taking charge of their own representations, the *Big Miss Moviola* project was deeply interested in creating access—to art, to video technology, and to a community of women creators—and this too was a common goal in feminist video that long preceded July's contributions. Access to the Chainletter network itself, which was open to any woman who wanted to contribute, was a central component of the *Big Miss Moviola* idea, but "non-selectivity," as July explained in a 1997 zine "isn't inherently radical."[5] In order to be genuinely inclusive, and to reach the widest possible audience, she felt that the project needed to move beyond the insular world of contemporary art and the even more insular world of punk feminist subculture, and that meant embracing commercial opportunities and using the mass media to spread the word. After compiling an initial Chainletter tape that consisted mainly of participants from within the Riot Grrrl scene, for example, July began advertising in mainstream magazines like *Sassy* and *Seventeen*, and was thereafter able to involve women and girls whose

[4] Stella Rollig, *Hers: Video as Female Terrain*, (New York: Steirischer Herbst, 2000), 10.
[5] *Umatic Chainletter*, zine, 1997 (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

towns would never see a Riot Grrrl chapter or even a record store that carried Bikini Kill albums.[6]

The extent to which *Big Miss Moviola* was able to use mass media to draw a wider pool of contributors is clear in the Chainletter tapes that were compiled after the project advertised in mainstream magazines: the ages, locations, and cultural styles of the participants became visibly more diverse. The *Break My Chainletter* compellation tape, for example, includes a video by two teenagers (Jan and Brittany) that they'd conceived of as a preview for an as-yet unmade horror movie: the pair run around and scream, mug for the camera, and have what is a clearly very fun time. Their vocabulary of gestures and props are all drawn from mainstream horror movies and TV, and they don't appear to have any investment in making their movie art-like or punk.

In the letter they wrote for the tape's accompanying zine, they explain that they'd seen an ad for *Big Miss Moviola* in a magazine, and that "…Brittany and I have wanted to be actresses since we were little. It's our dream!!"[7] The tone of this comment, the girls' apparent ages in the video (they look fifteen or so), and the sense one gets from their movie that they have no aspirations towards subcultural cool, all suggest that *Big Miss Moviola* did manage to break out of its original demographic. Though Jan doesn't specify which magazine led her to the project, most of the ads July ran in mainstream magazines sought to present the network as a better, more special alternative to struggling for mainstream recognition. In the quarter-page ad/article in an April 1996 issue of *Sassy*

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[6] Include citations for the sassy and 17 articles.
[7] *Break My Chainletter*, VHS Tape, 1999 (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

magazine, for example, the artist wrote that: "This is for *all* girls, because if 10 people see one girl's film, that's making it."[8]

"Big Miss Moviola aims," July wrote in 1997, "to be a non-selective institution working with, not against, the more commercial opportunities that are available to women movie-makers."[9] She goes on, in a way that is more in-depth than average for the *Big Miss Moviola* zines, to talk through her understanding of "independent film culture," and the contributions of Jonas Mekas, a pioneering avant-garde filmmaker, poet, and critic who helped to create spaces in the art world for experimental film.

> Festivals, art-movie theaters and all that—that's not just the way that indie films naturally occur in nature, a lot of those institutions are b/c of this Mekas guy. He might of [sic] done a lot of cool things but he also made up this idea of the Art Film had to be in opposition to the Mainstream film. This means alternative movies shouldn't be available to "mainstream people" (people not like Jonas).[10]

This critique of insularity within film and video's non mainstream institutions was provocative in July's context, especially because *Big Miss Moviola* emerged from a punk milieu, and most iterations of punk have pushed against mainstream media and favored the type of tight-knit, hard-to-find settings that Mekas was working within.[11] And though July's arguments and aims around inclusivity and the embrace of mass media were well articulated within the chainletter zines, they were difficult to enact in practice, especially given *Big Miss Moviola's* tiny budget. Public screenings of chainletter videos ended up occurring mostly at small art theaters and through film series' at universities (though the

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[8] One such advertisements (which ran as a small interview, and did not, therefore, need to be purchased as an ad by July) was "She's way Sassy," in *Sassy* magazine, April 1996.
[9] *Umatic Chainlette*, zine, 1997 (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).
[10] Ibid
[11] There was, however, much in Riot Grrrl's iteration of punk that pushed against this attitude in favor of using the mass media in a limited way to increase access to the movement.

occasional screening at a music festival and one on a San Francisco public access channel did serve to potentially widen the project's reach).[12]

Another element of this interest in access within *Big Miss Moviola* was the intention that the network could help to expose its participants to artists and styles that they might never have heard of otherwise. As film studies scholar Alison Hoffman has observed, "For many young women or girls interested in experimental filmmaking, Joanie 4 Jackie represents their only viable source of established women film/video artists' work."[13] July clearly hoped to expand that element of the project, explaining, in a 1999 interview, that she "want[ed] the work of avant-garde women film/video artists to be standard fare for teenaged girls." She went on to ask us to "imagine what the future would be like if millions of girls were not only trading fanzines and their own movies, but trading videotapes of the work of Eleanor Antin and Jenny Holzer and Sadie Benning and Kristin Lucas?"[14]

In an effort to create something like the kind of access to (and interest in) women's video art that July imagines in that last quote, she developed an offshoot of the Chainletter project that she called *The Co-Star Tapes*. Those tapes were curated compilations that differed from the Chainletters in that they were selective, and organized around specific themes. And though July was never able to engage artists as well known

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[12] A 1997 list of *Big Miss Moviola* chainletter screenings included several colleges, film festivals in New York, Olympia and Toronto, and music festivals *Sprgrrl Conspiracy* and *Yoyo-a-Go-Go*. *Umatic Chainletter*, zine, 1997 (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

[13] Alison Hoffman, "The Persistence of (Political) Feelings and Hand-Touch Sensibilities: Miranda July's Feminist Multimedia-Making, " in *There She Goes : Feminist Filmmaking and Beyond*, Contemporary Approaches to Film and Television Series, Eds Corinn Columpar and Sophie Mayer, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), 24.

[14] Miranda July, in Ada Calhoun, "Performance Artist Miranda July and Her Do-It-Yourself Girl Revolution," *The Austin Chronicle*, (September 17th, 1999).

as Antin and Holzer in the project, the co-star tapes featured works by established artists whose videos were longer and more polished than most of those included on the chainletter compilations. *Co-Star Tape* curators were solicited through ads in *Big Miss Moviola* zines and were asked to propose a theme for their tape, a related visual element (a poster or booklet, for example) and a set of videos to be included.[15]

Some Kind of Loving, for example, was a 2000 *Co-Star Tape* curated by Astria Suparak. The theme for the tape was sexuality and desire, and it was made, in Suparak's words, "for teen girls to watch in their bedrooms."[16] Chicago-based video artist Jennifer Reeder's contribution to the tape—a 17 minute movie called *Lullaby*—slows Madonna's 1983 hit "Lucky Star" into an hypnotic drone, the aural and visual backdrop for a set of images (small girls practicing ballet, a teen in a cheerleading tryout, flashes of the artist stoically applying lipstick, poignant snippets of text from an eleven-year-old's diary) that present familiar elements of girl culture as a distant-feeling, slowly unfolding collage. *Lullaby* is very unlike anything that the "teen girls in their bedrooms" for whom the tape was intended would ever have been able to see on their televisions, but its imagery draws on and manipulates signifiers of girlhood that feature prominently in the narratives of youthful femininity that are universalized in the mass media. In this, Reeder models the kind of productive, non-passive consumption of girl culture that was, as I've argued, such a prominent part of Riot Grrrl's lasting influence.

The *Co-Star Tapes'* mode of distribution was different than the Chainletters; rather then being circulated between members of the network, they were sold

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[15] *Ball and Chainletter*, zine, 2000, (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).
[16] Astria Suparak, "Some Kind of Loving," http://astriasuparak.com/2000/06/01/some-kind-of-loving/ Accessed 10-10-15.

commercially in book stores, record stores, though mail order, and in any other way that July and her *Big Miss Moviola* colleagues could manage, creating a kind of affordable access to video art that was a rarity in the years before video-sharing on the internet became a possibility.[17] Each tape's curator and filmmakers were to evenly split any profits from their tape's sales, a system that showed respect for an individual artwork's value without putting limits on its circulation.

When July began working to release her own films in the late 1990s and early 2000s she was concerned about accessibility, and she resisted the idea of limited editions that is common in the distribution of artists' short videos. "I felt," she explained in a 2006 interview with video artist Lynn Hershman,

> like [limited editions] actually did a disservice to building the community that I wanted to build and I felt that the young women who weren't in big cities, those were the people who I felt like could most benefit from seeing my work or having some sort of exchange. So there was no point to making them harder to see.[18]

Instead, she made a DVD of her short films available through Chicago's Video Data Bank, where they could be reproduced on demand, and where they are fairly inexpensive to rent or buy.[19] Over the past few years—and as I'll discuss in more depth in a later chapter—July has managed to cross over to a much broader audience in the same way

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[17] Only three co-star tapes ended up getting made, and were curated by Miranda July, Rita Gonzales, and Astria Suparak respectively. The third of those was (as of 2004) available for purchase through the Whitney Museum and K Records, as well as many independent book and record stores. Astria Suparak, "Some Kind of Loving," http://astriasuparak.com/2000/06/01/some-kind-of-loving/ Accessed 10-10-15.

[18] Miranda July and Lynn Hershman, Women Art Revolution: Interview with Miranda July, Stanford University Librararies, July 27th, 2006

[19] The video databank, which was founded in 1976, discusses broadening access to video art in its mission statement, which is available on the databank website at http://www.vdb.org/content/about-vdb. At the time of this writing, July's videos are available for purchase by individual buyers (and for private use only) on a single DVD for forty dollars.

she'd hoped that *Big Miss Moviola* would (and in a way that is still quite rare in contemporary art).

Video art has wrestled with issues around access and insularity since its 1960s beginnings, and many early video artists directly addressed those issues in their work, even when that work was firmly planted within the relatively small world of contemporary art. Video artist Gary Hill's 1974 installation *Hole in the Wall* speaks cogently to artists' concerns and hopes about the medium's potential for mass communication. In that work—which was Hill's first use of video—the artist cut a jagged hole in the wall of the Woodstock Artists' Association gallery, opening the room up to the street outside. A video monitor playing a continuous loop of Hill breaking through the gallery wall was placed inside of the hole, representing, in curator Chrissie Iles's words, the "conceptual rupturing of the membrane separating the gallery from the outside world."[20]

This work attempts—symbolically, at least—to use video to break down art world barriers, but it also gestures towards the intransigence of those barriers. The video points inwards to the gallery (you would watch it from inside of the room) and the hole opening out to the street is, in the video loop, always in the process of being cut. The work of breaking through to the public (the street) becomes, in this installation, a kind of Sisyphusian task, observed from within the confines of the art world. The viewer looks out at the "real" world though the hole, but is blocked from reaching through by the video monitor and its repeating playback of the artist's actions.

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[20] Chrissie Iles, *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art, 1964-1977, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art*, 60.

Because videos can be made and then played back immediately, without developing, they are easier to produce and distribute than films. They therefore offer artists the option to communicate directly with the public in a way that was (with some exceptions) mostly unprecedented in the 1960s and 70s.[21] That potential for direct communication is part of what is evoked, in Hill's installation, by the hole in the gallery wall. Other early video artists took advantage of that potential in more direct ways: Dana Birnbaum's 1978 work *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman*, for example, debuted at two venues simultaneously—an avant-garde film festival and a Soho hair salon—a choice that radically broadened the artist's audience.

Birnbaum's video, which reworks and distorts a set of clips from the *Wonder Woman* television show, also engages another major theme in 1970s video art: television. Clips of Linda Carter (the actress who played Wonder Woman on the TV show) transforming from her regular self to her superhero self, interacting with a frightened man, running on a beach, and so on, are looped so that each repeats, some for more than a minute. By isolating these moments from their larger narratives, changing their timing, and showing them over and over again, Birnbaum calls on the viewer to look critically at the meanings that are produced and reproduced by such images.[22]

Video art that challenged television's content and role in society was common in the medium's first decades. As Michael Rush explains, "by the 1960s the total

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[21] Deanne Pytlinski, "San Francisco Video Collectives and the Counterculture," In *West of Center : Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965-1977*, Eds. Elissa Auther, Adam Lerner, (Museum of Contemporary Art/Denver, and Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art. University of Minnesota Press), 58. Mail Art related artists networks that exchanged zines or other small publications did potentially provide this kind of access, and before video technology.

[22] See T.J. Demos, *Dara Birnbaum : Technology/transformation : Wonder Woman*. (England: Afterall Books, 2010).

commercialization of corporate television had been accomplished, and, to media watchdogs and many artists, television was becoming the enemy."[23] And yet the material similarity of even the most experimental early video art to TV—a media to which the majority of the public was already very accustomed—was another element that could help to create an audience for video far exceeding that available for most other areas of contemporary art.[24]

Because home video technology wouldn't become common until around 1980, early video artists who wanted to deliver their work into people's living rooms had to do so through broadcast TV. And though the difficulties involved in getting on the air helped to confine a lot of this work to galleries and museums, some television stations did make room for video art programming. The FCC's 1972 ruling on the regulation of cable companies (which involved the creation of public access channels) also helped to open up TV's airways to artists.[25] A few especially well-funded artists were even able to get their work seen by network television's larger audiences. Chris Burden, for example, created several artworks in the style of TV ads, which played alongside regular television commercials at various times from 1973-1977, some during highly-rated prime time television shows.[26]

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[23] Michael Rush, *New Media in Late 20th-Century Art*, (New York, N.Y: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 80.
[24] By material similarity, I mean simply that video art looked like TV, it played on the same kind of screen, at around the same scale, and with roughly the same image quality.
[25] Some stations and programs that showed video art in the 1970s included *The Television Laps* (airing on WGBH and KQED), Cable Soho, TVTV, Artist's Television Network, Video Art Show, Video Freex, and Paper Tiger Television. Ann-Sargent Wooster "Reach out and Touch Someone: The Romance of Interactivity," in *Illuminating Video : An Essential Guide to Video Art*, eds. Sally Jo Fifer, Doug Hall, (New York, N.Y.: Aperture in association with the Bay Area Video Coalition, 1990), 284.

[26] Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 101. Anthony Iles and Josephine Berry Slater, "Citizen's Banned?" in *Mute Magazine*, 2.9, August 1st, 2008.

Despite all of this interest in access and mass communication within early video, the story of video art is usually told in a way that echoes traditional art-historical narratives, more firmly planted on the gallery-side of Gary Hill's *Hole in the Wall* than the street-side. Most versions of this story begin with Nam Jun Paik, a Korean-born American artist whose work in Avant-Garde performance and music circles had already gained him a reputation as an innovator before he began working with video (and with television sets as aesthetic objects) in the mid 1960s.[27] Some critics, including influential feminist artist Martha Rosler, have suggested that art history's positioning of Paik as video art's mythic figure of origin has displaced the collective, socially engaged activities that more fully represented video art's beginnings.[28] Such a displacement helps to traditionalize and, to use Rosler's term, "museumify" video's history, providing the medium with the kind of cultural authority that derives from having an individual "father figure" as its original genius and progenitor. That cultural authority was something that Paik was aware of, positioning his work with TVs and video within an art historical narrative that passed innovation up through the years from man to talented man. Writing in 1969, he surmised that:

> As collage technique replaced oil paint, so the cathode ray tube will replace the canvas […] As precisely as Leonardo. As freely as Picasso. As colorfully as Renoir. As profoundly as Mondrian. As violently as Pollock. And as lyrically as Jasper Johns.[29]

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[27] Rush, *New Media,* 81.

[28] Martha Rosler, "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment" (1985) in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art; a Sourcebook of Artist's Writings,* eds. Kristine Stiles, and Peter Selz, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 469-70.

[29] Nam Jun Paik, Judson Rosebush, and Everson Museum of Art, *Video n Videology 1959-1973*, (Syracuse, NY, 1974), 55.

Rosler also suggests that the "myths of Paik" within art's histories position his work as an antidote to corporate TV, creating a separation between video art and mass media that echoes long standing and persistent art-world divisions between fine art and popular culture, squandering some of video art's potential destruction of such barriers.[30] Paik's 1963 exhibition at the Gallery Parnass in Wuppertal Germany is an early example of the kind of criticism of television that would feature in Birnbaum's work (and that of many others) throughout the next decade.

The Wuppertal exhibition was one of Paik's first uses of television sets in his work, and it preceded his experiments with making his own videos by two years. In this exhibition, the artist filled the space of the gallery with television sets—some actively broadcasting—and arranged them in a way that forced the viewer to renegotiate her typical relationship with the familiar objects.[31] In this, Paik's installation proposed that art (and the space of the art gallery) could play a role in loosening commercial TV's oppressive hold over its consumers. The artist would go on to develop this theme in many ways: outfitting a TV with a strong magnet on top that visually alters the image on the screen (Magnet TV, 1965), filling a gallery with live plants intermingled with flickering TV screens (TV Garden, 1974) and so on. "The mythic figure Paik," writes Rosler, "has done all the bad and disrespectful things to television that the art world's collective imaginary might wish to do."[32]

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[30] Rosler, "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment," in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art,* 470.
[31] Rush, *New Media,* 84.
[32] Rosler, "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment," 469. Paik did, however, participate in broadcast TV as well: his work, and that of five other male video artists, aired nationally in the late 1960s as a WGBH produced program called *The Medium is the Medium*. Rush, *New Media*, 92.

The art-world commonality of positioning television (and the relationship of TV to its at-home viewers) as the enemy of video art was in some ways echoed within many of the USA's mid 20th century protest movements. Inspired by the avant-garde tactics of the Situationist international and by innovations in amateur media technologies (like the introduction of Sony's Portapak video camera in 1967) "members of these sociopolitical movements attempted to establish some control over popular culture and representational politics by independently producing their own forms of media."[33] Because video has the potential to counter the one-way flow of information that came from television networks, it made a more democratic media landscape seem possible. Many early video artists and artist-collectives hoped, as art historian Deanne Pytlinski explains, to decentralize the sources of televised content, liberate the spectator's mind from "control by the mainstream media," and thereby encourage "deeper and more authentic forms of interpersonal communication."[34] These objectives, as Pytlinski goes on to argue, are closely aligned with the values of the period's counterculture, including those of second wave feminism.

Nearly a dozen DIY feminist video collectives were formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s (though their work has been poorly documented, and few of them lasted for more than a year or two). Several, like the "Women's Television Project" (1971, Rochester) and "Women's Defense League Productions" (1975, Norman Oklahoma) were centered around skill-building and skill-sharing: they worked to create spaces where women could get the technical ability and experience they needed to make their own media. This was a key ingredient in making feminist video art possible, as the technical

[33] Mary Celeste Kearney, *Girls Make Media*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 55.
[34] Deanne Pytlinski, "San Francisco Video Collectives," In *West of Center,* 57.

aspects of film and video had been naturalized as a masculine domain since the inception of commercial filmmaking.[35] Other women's video collectives, like "The Women's Video Project" (New York City, 1973) focused specifically on content, working in concert with public access channels to make feminist subject matter more widely available on television.

In a 1975 letter sent out by DC based collective Spectra Feminist Media, for example, the authors note the isolation of feminist video groups from one another, and the way that this isolation was impeding potential progress: "For some time now, Spectra Feminist Media and others have felt the need for more communication among feminists in media."[36] Later on in that letter Spectra proposed that a "clearinghouse" be developed which would allow feminists in the area to share equipment and skills. A conference for women video-makers in New York that same year also sought to connect otherwise isolated feminist media groups, and it spurred the creation of a series of *International Women's Videoletters* to be sent between likeminded organizations in order "to increase awareness of what is happening throughout the country, develop a feeling of closeness among women in different cities, [and] encourage the growth and participation of an interested audience."[37]

Twenty-seven women's groups ended up participating in the *Videoletters* project, and as many as seventy half-hour tapes were produced and circulated (though only a few

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[35] Kearney, *Girls Make Media,*192.
[36] *Spectra Speaks,* Julie La Valle Jones Papers, Box 2. Courtesy of Rubenstein Library, Duke University.
[37] *Women make Movies* memo sent nationally to film and video groups, January 1975, reproduced in Martha Leslie Allen, *The Development of Communication Networks Among Women, 1963-1983*. 1988. http://www.wifp.org/womensmediach7.html accessed 12-29-13.

have been preserved).[38] The subject matter of these tapes varied widely, but many were focused on documenting the activities of the particular group who produced it: like a status report sent from a single feminist group to the broader feminist movement. One such tape—a contribution from a socialist feminist group at Antioch college—mostly consists of excerpts from conference talks, intercut with footage of the participants socializing or answering questions in between panels.[39] Another videoletter—this one from the *Rochester Women's Video Collective*—took on the subject of workplace inequality, and featured interviews with a woman deacon in the Episcopal church as well as a female switchboard operator. The visual and aural quality of the tapes varied along with their content, but the few extant examples are all unapologetically amateur in their techniques, and they clearly privilege content and communication above aesthetic novelty and visual interest.

Chicago-based *Videopolis*—an alternative video space and video activist program which was founded in the early 1970s by artist and radio journalist Anda Korsts—didn't rely on the postal service and the idea of video "letters" the way that the *International Women's Videoletters* did, but it anticipated July's network in many other ways. Its central interest was in engaging people outside of the worlds of art and professional media in the use of video technologies, and encouraging them to document what they thought was important. *Videopolis* held events and festivals at various urban locations in which they would train attendees in the use of videotape technologies. Among their main goals was to prepare and equip Chicagoans for the newly mandated public access stations

[38] Ariel Dougherty, International Vidoeletters, 1975-1977, http://www.scribd.com/doc/228461838/International-VIDEOLETTERS-Learn-View-Document-Study. Accessed, 09-21-15.
[39] "Socialist Feminist Conference: Lesbian Panel, Antioch College, 1975," Video Recording, http://mediaburn.org/video/social-feminist-conf-lesbian-panel-7515/ , accessed 02-21-15.

that would soon be available on cable, and therefore help to insure that those stations would provide the public with a genuine alternative to commercial TV.

The *Women's Video Festival*, a *Videopolis* event held in 1973 at the University of Illinois's Chicago campus (and, a few days later, at a downtown YWCA), sought to introduce the public—and women in particular—to a new and relatively inexpensive video technology: half-inch video tape. The festival displayed a collection of videos by and about women, and also made the equipment available for attendees to experiment with. As *Videopolis* organizer Lilly Ollinger explained, "we wanted to get this workshop together to use the equipment, and also show them what can be captured on videotape."[40]

The *International Women's Videoletters,* the *Videopolous* project, and other related video networks and organizations in the 1970s anticipated some of the structural and ideological elements of July's *Big Miss Moviola,* although the content produced by those groups was rarely intended to be art. Their goals were more journalistic than artistic, and they aimed to connect disparate but likeminded women's groups, introduce women to the tools they could use to create their own videos, and circulate information about feminist issues that were under-discussed in the mainstream media. Other feminist video projects in the 1970s were more explicitly engaged with the art world, and many of those were also committed to communication and access.[41]

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[40] Ron Powers "Alternative Video Flexes its Muscles," *Chicago Sun Times*, 1973.

[41] Feminist artists Susanne Lacy and Lesie Labowitz write, for example about what they call "mass media performance," in which they created multimedia works that are "designed to look enough like television's normal bill of fare and slip, as it were, into the media mainstream." Lacy and Labowitz, "Made for TV: California performance in mass media, (1979)," in in Suzanne Lacy, Moira Roth, and Kerstin Mey, *Leaving Art : Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974-2007*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 120.

These examples are a few among many important precursors for the kind of work July did with *Big Miss Moviola* in the 1990s, though poor preservation and minimal documentation made it so that July and her peers were at best only vaguely aware of them. But despite the lack of an historical record to illuminate the obvious connections between July's chainletter network and earlier feminist video collectives, the zines July circulated on behalf of *Big Miss Moviola* made clear attempts to reference continuities with earlier feminisms. In this way, the artist acted against both the traditional male-dominated narratives of DIY's development discussed in chapter one *and* the reductive (but persistent) ideas around rupture and tension between American feminist generations.

The zine that accompanied the "UMATIC Chainletter," for example, includes an extended quote about video art from Yoko Ono, noting the ways that July and her peers' ideas echo the elder artist's. "It made me think," July writes, "of how familiar and un-original the Big MM concept is. Familiar like: Destiny. Un-original like: Us ladies use E.S.P. to send schemes through history."[42] The Chainletter tapes themselves occasionally speak directly to these connections as well: filmmaker Lynn G. Ditchfield's contribution to "Giraffferator Chainletter" for example, was a documentary about a radical women's theater collective from the 1970s that spoke pointedly to independent media production and collective action as enduring commitments for feminist art. [43]

Several other DIY video collectives active in the 1990s overlapped with *Big Miss Moviola*, though most focused on distributing film and video by women and connecting amateur producers to potential audiences rather than inspiring the production of new

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[42] *Umatic Chainletter*, zine, 1997, (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).
[43] Lynn G. Ditchfield, "Extraordinarily Ordinary," *Giraffferator Chainletter*, VHS Tape, 2006, (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

videos made specifically for circulation within a network, as July's project did.[44] Jill Walsh's New Jersey-based *Ladies Art Revival* was one such project: it was founded a few years after *Big Miss Moviola,* in 1997, and it offered feature-length films by many of the same women who'd contributed shorts to July's network.[45] Walsh sold videos on behalf of female independent filmmakers, accepted feedback from their viewers and forwarded it on to the films' authors, and traveled to colleges and festivals to present screenings of their work. Her stated goals for the project call clearly back to Gever's understanding of feminist video as a means towards opposing male domination over women's images. As Walsh wrote in a 1998 *Ladies Art Revival* catalog:

> Us Ladies need to see more positive images of women, images that women create, about themselves and their friends, identity, sexuality, feminism, punk, masturbation…. We need to start representing ourselves, since we as women have been sooo misrepresented in pop culture.[46]

The inside cover of Walsh's Spring 1998 directory features an illustration of two flappers whispering to one another, and a caption that reads "Don't worry dear. *I* will get your film shown," speaking to a belief that was a motivating principle of *Big Miss Moviola* as well: that women's movies were not going to get seen without the efforts of other women.[47]

Kaia Wilson and Tammi Rae Carland's *Mr. Lady Records and Videos* was also contemporary with July's video network. Carland was a regular contributor to *Big Miss*

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[44] One especially successful 1990s video project (which does not, however, have any ties to Riot Grrrl or July's circle) was a Southern California DIY cable network called CamNet, founded by Nancy Cain and Judith Binder, that worked with local, mostly amateur correspondents to provide an alternative to network TV.
[45] Mary Billyou, Dulcie Clarkson, and Tara Mateik, among others, had films circulated by both *Big Miss Moviola* and *Ladies Art Revival.*
[46] Jill Walsh, *Ladies Art Revival*, 1998. Tammi Rae Carland papers, Riot Grrrl collection, Fales Library, NYU.
[47] Ibid.

Moviola and the author of popular Riot Grrrl zine *I ♥ Amy Carter*, and Wilson was a founding member of influential Queercore bands *Team Dresch* and *The Butchies.* Founded in 1996 in Durham, North Carolina, *Mr. Lady* began as a feminist and queer focused DIY record label, but after a few years they began to add works of video art to their catalog, seeking to present video in a way that made it as accessible and unelitist as popular music.[48] There is little documentation of the label's video distribution activities in the 1990s, though a playlist for a 2001 video screening event called *Mr. Lady Presents* included "short experimental video works from the Mr. Lady catalog" including a few by women who also contributed to *Big Miss Moviola* Chainletter and Costar tapes.[49]

GB Jones's Toronto-based *Bitch Nation* was another small queer and feminist record label that distributed some visual art, including videos. Jones—who contributed to *Big Miss Moviola*'s 2000 *Banana Cremeletter* chainletter tape—is an accomplished multi-media artist, musician, and director, and many of her activities overlapped aesthetically and conceptually with July's network. In 1990, for example, Jones collaborated with filmmaker Bruce LaBruce to host what they called *J.D.s* ("Juvenile Delinquents") movie nights in which they would screen their own very low-budget Super-8 films in various Canadian and US cities.[50] These events weren't directly related to Riot Grrrl (and Jones herself is often associated with a punk sub-genre called Queercore) but the films' punk and DIY aesthetics and their queer and feminist themes

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[48] Westry Greem, "Label Conscious: Amy Ray, Donna Dresch, and others pioneer in the indie label world," *HX for Her,* Novermber 27th, 1998.

[49] "Mr. Lady Presents," *Sound Unseen Music Festival*. Archived from the original on November 27, 2006. Accessed 05-20-2015. (Press release of a 2001 art show at the Weisman Art Museum) http://web.archive.org/web/20061127021800/http://www.soundunseen.com/2001/films/queerfilmvid.html K8 Hardy, Tami Rae Carland, and Cecilia Dougherty are Big Miss Moviola contributors who were included in this playlist.

[50] J.D. was also the name of an 8-issue zine that Jones and LaBruce produced together beginning in 1985.

link them to Riot Grrrl nonetheless, as did Jones's influential zines—*Hide*, *J.D.s*, and *Double Bill*—which ran, collectively, from the mid 1980s through 2001. With *Bitch Nation,* Jones worked to expand access to the Queercore zines, music, film, and visual art that were—as she explained in a 2008 interview—so inseparably intertwined with one another.[51]

In addition to DIY labels and distribution networks, a few feminist-focused independent film zines also overlapped with *Big Miss Moviola*. Tina Spangler's Cambridge based *Femme Flicke*, for example, published reviews, interviews with women filmmakers, and general reporting on the independent film scene. One issue featured an interview with July, and others also ran ads for both *Big Miss Moviola* and *Bitch Nation*. And though the zine was not directly affiliated with Riot Grrrl, that movement comes up regularly throughout the zines, and one issue even included a section about Riot Grrrl video called "Grrrls on Film."[52] The contents of *Femme Flicke* #6, from 1997 were relatively typical: that issue included an article about the importance of Chantal Akerman (a prolific, underecognized director who'd been producing feature films since the 1970s) and offered its readers tips on how they could find screenings and tapes of queer-focused indie films. It also included an in-depth interview with the directors of a film called *Girls Town* in which the interviewees share their frustration with the difficulties they've had trying to reach the film's intended audience: teenaged girls. "*Girls Town* is an immediate, sort of simple, art-house audience getter. Teenagers don't go to those theaters."[53]

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[51] Weston Bingham, "G.B. Jones, Girl Gone Wild," *Lexander Magazine,* December 13th, 2008. https://www.lexandermag.org/g-b-jones-girl-gone-wild/ Accessed 5-20-2015.
[52] Kearney, *Girls Make Media*,79.
[53] Anna Grace, Issue 6, *Femme Flicke*, 1997. Solidarity! Revolutionary Center and Radical Library, Lawrence Kansas, https://archive.org/details/solidarityrevolutionarycenter, Accessed 09-10-15.

These issues—the struggle to reach broad audiences with indie films and show niche audiences how to find the films that relate to them—are closely linked to the types of problems July was trying to solve with her *Big Miss Moviola* network. Spangler addresses difficulties in balancing the desire to access a broad and diverse audience, and the desire to work against a problematic mainstream film system. In the "film reviews" section of issue # 6 she writes that: "some filmmakers work within the system (ie, the capitalist movie-making machine known as Hollywood) to subvert the status quo. And others don't give a shit about the system and instead create new forms. Both have their advantages."[54] At another point in the magazine, a director being interviewed makes a similar point, talking about how she was influenced both by mainstream magazines like *Sassy* and by Riot Grrrl zines like Tammy Rae Carland's *I ♥Amy Carter* and Nomy Lamm's *i'm so fucking beautiful*. "Zines," she writes, "were like independent films, compared to Sassy which was more of a Hollywood movie."[55] Both, forms, she goes on to observe, can find ways to be genuinely subversive.

Big Miss Moviola was, then, part of a larger mid and late 1990s scene, and though there are substantial differences between each of the projects I've mentioned, they all shared similar goals, as well as an overall aesthetic that was rooted in feminism and in punk. The glue connecting women in the Riot Grrrl movement had, by the mid 1990s, become zines much more than bands, and the look of Riot Grrrl zines, as well as their DIY construction and distribution methods, is present in the print materials circulated by all of the networks I've mentioned, even those, like *Bitch Nation,* that preceded (or didn't have any direct connection to) Riot Grrrl. Another commonality that connected the *Big*

[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.

Miss Moviola project and many of its 1990s peers is that they tended to understand their audiences and their artists as overlapping constituencies, urging readers and viewers to participate as makers, and offering tips, encouragement, and resources to help them do so. July's network in particular sought to encourage a community of producers in much the same way that many zine networks did, where most every zine reader was a zine producer, and where most exchanges were trades in kind.

All of the projects I've been discussing also worked with very small budgets, and their employees tended to be volunteers. *Big Miss Moviola* was operated solely by July at first, and eventually brought in unpaid summer interns, some of whom got college credit.[56] Very small grants helped to keep the project afloat, and supplemented whatever July could scrape together from her own outside jobs. Art historian Julia Bryan Wilson recalls one such grant that she helped write for *Big Miss Moviola* early on: a request for $600.00 to have the movies July received from contributors professionally compiled onto one tape (July had, until then, been dubbing them herself at home, using two VCRs).[57] Another small grant allowed July to purchase a video projector for use during the presentations she was doing at high schools, punk clubs, and colleges. Those presentations solicited contributions for the chainletters and showed off some of the movies she'd received, and she (or other chainletter contributors) would often also do some sort of a live performance. The speaker-fees she received when she took these presentations to colleges helped to fund the other parts of the tour.[58]

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[56] Miranda July and Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Joanie 4 Jackie, a short overview," Video produced by Shauna McGarry, Yerba Buena center for the arts, 2008.
[57] Ibid
[58] Miranda July and Lynn Hershman, Women Art Revolution, Interview with Miranda July, Stanford University Librararies, July 27th, 2006

These limited resources necessitated a lot of flexibility and compromise on July's part, and she occasionally discusses some of those struggles in letters that she includes in the chainletters' accompanying zines. One particular chainletter submission—from Seattle artist Shannon Kringon—got tied up in a situation that forced July to compromise, and she discusses it at length in a 1996 zine. At that point in its evolution, *Big Miss Moviola* worked like this: participants would mail their videos to July's PO box, and once she'd received ten she would film an intro, establish an order, edit them together at home, and then send off a master tape to be duplicated by an outside service called Vaughn Communications, who offered their services at a reduced rate. The process went smoothly with the first Chainletters, but when she sent off the master tape for *Underwater Chainletter* Vaughn decided that they did not approve of Shannon Kringon's movie "Goddess Kring," and they refused to make copies unless that participant's work was removed.

Kringon's video consisted of what the artist describes as "non-scripted improvisational performance."[59] In the video she submitted for *Underwater Chainletter* she's nude (aside from some minimal red body paint) and she speaks very frankly and personally to the camera throughout. She dances around her room, talks to the camera about her relationship troubles and her mood swings, promises to write back to anyone who writes to her, and announces to the viewer that "Here's my gimmick: I'm nude. I'm on TV and I'm nude. I'm nude. I'm nude and I'm on TV."[60] Vaughn objected to the video on the grounds that it contained "sex that is NOT informational, documentary,

[59] Shannon Kringon, *Underwater Chainletter*, zine, 1996, (courtesy of Joanie 4 Jackie archive, Bard College).
[60] Shannon Kringon, "Goddess Kring," in *Underwater Chainletter*, VHS, 1996, (courtesy of Joanie 4 Jackie archive, Bard College).

artistic, symbolic, or thematic."[61] July wrote about the incident in the zine she circulated with the Chainletter when it was eventually released. She deconstructed Vaughn's decision, noting first of all that their complaint about non-artistic sex in the movie was needlessly sexualizing Kringon's body:

> As you will see for yourself, Shannon is nude thru-out her movie, she is also completely alone, therefore she does not have sex with anyone. 2). However she does talk directly into the camera. So I can only hypothesize that the 4-person review board at Vaughn communications must have decided that by talking to the camera with no clothes on, Shannon was having sex with herself, or the video camera.[62]

A little later, July expands on this point to argue that it was Kringon's frank, unashamed, nonsexual nudity that made the review panel think she should be more ashamed of herself, and, therefore, that her video included sex (even though it didn't). She went on to compare Kringon's video to the several others on the tape that included nudity but were not objectionable to the company, and teased out their differences, concluding that shooting in film instead of video, in back and white instead of color, and being skinnier and quieter than Kringon are the key ingredients required if you want to avoid being censored.

After trying (and failing) to find an affordable alternative for tape duplication, July consulted with Kringon and the pair decided that they would have to compromise with the company:

> While Big Miss Moviola is underground, girl-powered and everlasting, it is not maintained thru pure&magicalpussypower. I am always making pacts and kissing

[61] Miranda July, *Underwater Chainletter*, zine, 1996, (courtesy of Joanie 4 Jackie archive, Bard College).
[62] ibid

> the straight world's ass. I am often making decisions that would both help me/you and also fuck us over.[63]

Ultimately, (and with the artist's permission), July digitized Shannon Kringon's body in her video so that it was obscured, and Vaughn Communication agreed to duplicate the censored version. July discovered, here, that her DIY strategy had its practical limits—that "pure&magicalpussypower" can run dry—but her solution became a site through which she could address some complex issues around women's bodies and representational politics: issues that were acutely relevant to the artistic careers that the *Big Miss Moviola* network was designed to nurture.

The Amateurist, *Atlanta*, and cross-generational continuities in feminist video.

At the same time that July was running *Big Miss Moviola* she was also making the first of her own movies, a few of which were included on the chainletter or co-star tapes. And though none of these are explicitly political, they all engage with themes and ideas that are rooted in the feminist art of the prior generation (themes and ideas that are also present in many of the works contributed to her video art network). Her two feature length films, for example—*Me, You, and Everyone We Know* from 2005 and *The Future* from 2011—are both jarring, unexpected takes on the genre of Romantic Comedy, a much-maligned category of film that has been ghettoized for its associations with femininity. By embracing that genre as she does, July deploys a strategy developed by feminist art pioneers (like Faith Ringgold and Miriam Shapiro) who sought to redeem

[63] ibid

reviled "feminine" traditions like quilting and embroidery by putting them to work in self-aware and subversive ways.[64] An interest in "the gaze" and the nuances of looking and being looked at, a focus on role playing and the social construction of gender, and explorations of the ways that gender intersects with other elements of identity, all figure into her videos as well.

One early short video, *The Amateurist* from 1998, is especially clear in the way that it draws on (and reworks) common themes in feminist art from the 1970s forward. The video has two characters, both played by July, whose parts were recorded separately and then timed to coordinate in the movie. One of the characters—July costumed in a blond wig, white underwear and bra, and a ratty fur coat—exists exclusively in a black and white surveillance video playing on a television screen.[65] That character doesn't speak, but she paces, lurches around, dances crazily, collapses in a ball, and angrily flips her middle finger at the camera throughout the movie. The other character—July with short dark hair, and wearing a men's dress shirt, vest, and tie—appears to be a kind of researcher who stands beside the small television screen on which surveillance video of the blond woman is playing. The researcher carefully examines and evaluates the other woman's actions, speaking out to an unseen audience about what she observes.

In its most basic premise, the video is about the dynamics of watching and being watched, a theme that has figured prominently into feminist art, and into feminist video art in particular. "When I first started thinking about *The Amaturist*," July recalled in a

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[64] Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History." *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 69, No. 3 (Sep., 1987), pp. 326-357.

[65] This tableaux has been repeated in other of July's works: both her 1997 audio piece "How is My Driving," and her 2006 short story "Something that Needs Nothing," feature women performing in peep shows, setting up a dynamics of the gaze that is similar to what I'm describing here.

2004 interview, "I thought, 'What would be the most delicious movie to watch?' And I thought that a woman watching another woman would be what I would most want to see."[66] The commonality of images and scenes in which the watcher is gendered masculine and she who is watched is feminine—and the commonality of attempts by feminist artists to examine and deconstruct those typical roles—is probably part of what appealed to July in the idea of a movie in which one woman watched another.

Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is among the critical texts most influential on feminist video art, and it strongly informs the themes on which *The Amateurist* draws. The essay applies Freudian and Lacanian ideas to a critique of Hollywood cinema, demonstrating the ways that scopic structures reproduced in everything about cinema—from the set-up of the movie theater to the kinds of cuts and angles coded as "realistic" narrative—combine with castration anxiety to create an intricately gendered looking experience. The "male gaze," as Mulvey understands it, both fetishizes images of women (as stand-ins for the lost phallus) and confines them within the space created by an objectifying (and disembodied) eye. That male gaze is infused so thoroughly at every level of the film that it operates without regard to the genders or sexual attitudes of the actual spectators, constructing woman as "to-be-looked-at" and "build[ing] the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself."[67]

Mulvey's terms are formulated in very specific relation to Hollywood cinema, but many of her ideas have since been applied more broadly to the gendered operations of

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[66] Julia Bryan Wilson, "Some Kind of Grace: An Interview with Miranda July." *Camera Obscura* 19, no. 1 (2004), 195.
[67] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones, New York: Routledge, 2010, 65.

looking in visual culture on the whole.[68] Terminology and ideas related to the male gaze appear in many Riot Grrrl lyrics and zines, and in the *Big Miss Moviola* project as well.[69] In a 1998 interview July gave for *Bust*—a feminist fashion and lifestyle magazine that targets young women—the artist explained one reason why she thought more women should make movies and share them through *Big Miss Moviola*:

> I think most women have several cameras going at once, even if they never make a movie. Camera A is her own POV: I am walking to the post office. Camera B, the POV of the guy in the car driving alongside her: That little slut wants me. It's exhausting to have so many cameras going at once, but it's good self defense.[70]

In this, July takes the presence of the male gaze for granted as a typical part of many women's everyday lives. She also takes for granted the idea that most women have the ability to anticipate and inhabit that gaze—like the woman in her example who sees through her own eyes, but also sees herself through the eyes of the man driving alongside her—an idea that follows from Mulvey's suggestion that the women in a film audience are positioned by the film in the same way that the men in the audience are: as male beholders.[71] "The lens is an eye," July wrote in a 1996 chainletter zine, "the same eye that's watching you all the time anyways if you're a woman."[72] And this circumstance, she suggests, makes women natural movie directors; they are already experts at seeing themselves from outside, framed as in a film still or negotiating multiple "camera angles"

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[68] Many revisions and critiques of this theory have been developed since its 1975 publication, including bell hooks's useful theorization of of the "oppositional gaze," which takes intersectional oppression into consideration in how the male gaze operates in film. See bell hooks *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 1992.

[69] Punk performers in particular have a complex relationship with the gaze. Both riot grrrls and women punks from the 1970s tend to "recuperate to-be-looked-at-ness is something that constitutes, rather than erodes or impedes, female subjectivity." See Gottlieb and Wald, *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, 268. But at the same time, attacks on the male gaze and the inequalities it fosters are common in Riot Grrrl writing.

[70] Boob, Betty. "Miranda July." *Bust*, 1998, 117-18.

[71] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," in *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader,* 69.

[72] Miranda July, *Underwater Chainletter*, zine, 1996, (courtesy of Joanie 4 Jackie archive, Bard College).

at once. When July refers, in a 1997 zine, to women as having "reel eyes" she is getting at the same idea.[73]

Big Miss Moviola intern Annie Maribona communicated something similar in her introduction to the *Newborn Chainletter* zine:

> When I was five I told my mother that I felt completely disconnected from my body and felt like everyone was watching us on tv. Then I learned that the camera is an eye, when you watch a mainstream movie, the camera shows you how to objectify and confine, even victimize a woman. In order to combat this way of looking, women need to make movies and these movies need to be seen and that is where j4j [*Big Miss Moviola*] comes in.[74]

Maribona doesn't gender the gaze here, she doesn't see it as explicitly male, but she does understand it as typically objectifying and confining for its female subjects. Her suggestion that women defy that gaze from behind the camera is an idea that is reinforced in various ways throughout the *Big Miss Moviola* project, and it resonates strongly with *The Amateurist:* a movie in which both the beholder character and the character who is beheld are women, and are really the same woman, lightly disguised.

The vest-and-tie wearing character in *The Amateurist* is engaged in a cryptic process of measuring the other character (the woman in her underwear, who appears to be confined in a separate room and is being recorded on a surveillance camera mounted somewhere above her). All of the measuring occurs on the surface of the TV screen where the confined woman's image appears, the two characters are never together in the same space.

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[73] *Umatic Chainletter*, zine, 1997, (courtesy of Joanie 4 Jackie archive, Bard College).
[74] Annie Maribona, *Newborn Chainletter*, zine, 2004, (courtesy of Joanie 4 Jackie archive, Bard College). "J4J," is an abbreviation for *Joanie 4 Jackie,* the name by which *Big Miss Moviola* was known after 1997.

The main measuring system being applied by the researcher involves the shapes of numbers: she announces one or two digit numbers in a projecting, authoritative voice, and the confined woman's body position appears to roughly mimic the shape of that number (one leg pulled up, with the knee swung out, for example, is a 4). The researcher strokes the television screen with her fingertip or taps it with her nail to indicate the contours of the number as it appears in the confined woman's body. Sometimes the researcher simply observes the body shapes and then records the corresponding number, and sometimes she tries to control the other woman's movements, announcing a number and expecting the woman in the television to assume the corresponding shape. The system is clearly bizarre, and it includes its own odd jargon. The researcher, for example, assures her audience that the woman being measured is a "shiner," and is also "tender buttons" with the expectation that we understand what she means.[75]

The metaphor of measuring as mastery, as a mode by which the measurer controls and confines its object, was explored in Martha Rosler's 1977 video *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained*, a work that anticipates *The Amateurist* in many ways. Rosler's video is much longer than July's (it is forty minutes long, to the *Amateurist's* fifteen), and it is split into three "acts," the first of which will be my primary focus here. The video opens with a monologue from the artist (excerpted below), which continues to run, on and off, throughout the first act.

> The self has already learned to attach value to itself. To see itself as a whole entity with an external vision. She sees herself from outside with the anxious eyes of the judged who has within her the critical standards of the ones who judge. I needn't remind you about scrutiny, about the scientific study of human beings. Visions of

[75] *Tender Buttons* is also the name of a 1914 book by Gertrude Stein, though there is no indication that this is an intentional reference on July's part.

> the self, about the excruciating look at the self from the outside as if it were a thing divorced from the inner self. How one learns to manufacture oneself as a product. How one learns to see oneself as a being in a state of culture as opposed to a being in a state of nature. How to measure oneself by the degree of artifice. The remanufacture of the look of the external self to simulate the idealized version of the natural. How anxiety is built into these looks. How ambiguity, ambivalence, uncertainty are meant to accompany every attempt to see ourselves, to see herself as others see her. This is a work about how to think about yourself.[76]

This section of Rosler's monologue speaks directly to the issues that July and Maribona were working through in their writing about women's "reel eyes." When the woman in Rosler's description "sees herself from outside with the anxious eyes of the judged who has within her the critical standards of the ones who judge," she is, essentially, running two cameras at once, like the woman in July's example who sees her own path (walking to the post office) and simultaneously sees herself from the perspective of the man who drives alongside her.

Partway through the above excerpt a woman (played by Rosler) walks into the video's frame and joins a man in a lab coat in a mostly white room. The lab-coated man begins a long series of measurements of the woman, who is clothed at first and then eventually nude: he weighs her, measures her limbs in various ways, measures the length of her hair and the inside of her mouth, and notes all of the measurements on a large white sheet of paper.[77] The voice-over continues intermittently throughout all of this measuring, describing various ways that women's bodies and behaviors are constricted by social norms. "Her body grows accustomed to certain poses," we hear the voice say, "to sit forward or back, upright or compressed…to keeps hands together, to keep hands in

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[76] Martha Rosler, *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained,* VHS tape, 1977, (Courtesy of *Video Data Bank,* Chicago).

[77] There are other, less central characters in the room as well, including a second male figure and several uniformed women taking notes.

the lap… to remember the line of the neck…to see the body as a vehicle for the attainment of an imposed desire."[78]

The woman being so meticulously measured in *Vital Statistics of a Citizen* is unexpressive and acquiescent: she doesn't speak, but we see her responding to instructions without protest. At one point, she dutifully extends her hand out to the lab-coated man, and he measures the length of her middle finger. In contrast, the woman being measured in *The Amateurist* is anything but acquiescent: she can't see her assessor, but she seems to know that someone is watching the surveillance feed, and though her middle finger isn't measured, we see her defiantly raise it to the camera several times.

This difference in the attitudes of the two measured women corresponds, in some ways, to differences between the researcher figures in both tapes. Rosler's main labcoated man is authoritative, cool and distant, we can't hear what he says, but his gestures are regular and calm, and he has a team of helpers with clipboards assisting him. July's researcher figure is much more idiosyncratic: she speaks to her unseen audience as an expert, explaining her process and her commitment to her subject, but as the video progresses she starts to become emotional, fights to recover her composure, and flashes us a smile that is strained and false. She has little of the distanced appearance of objectivity that the lab-coated man in the Rosler video has, and is clearly impacted by the confined woman's actions, even as she tries to objectify and master her by strictly imposing her numeric systems.

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[78] Rosler, *Vital Statistics.* Some phrases have been removed for brevity.

In Rosler's video, we are constantly made aware of the real social influence exerted by the norms and systems that confine women's behaviors: the voice-over indicates specifics, and even names names. "Read from a list of girls toys and boys toys. Read from a list of average salaries for men and for women," the voice demands, demonstrating how the social roles into which boys and girls are made to fit relate directly to their economic fates as men and women. Later, a list of men's names is recited: all figures who are, as the voiceover tells us, "pioneers in the testing movement," and who have "asserted the superiority of white men over other men and over all women."[79]

The lab-coated figure represents those larger social forces; his generic qualities allow him to channel the outside authority of norm-supporting statistics and systems. The woman too, is made to represent a larger population: her quiet submission to the authority of her measurer represents the everyday acquiescence (and complicity) of women in the systems that persuade them, as the voice over puts it, "to accept the idea that there is meaning in measurement."[80] The physical distance of the camera from both figures' bodies assures that we can't really make out individual facial features, helping to reinforce the measured woman and her measurer as generic exemplars of social forces.

In contrast, July's measured woman and her measurer are both individuals: we see close ups on their faces, and their clothing, hair, and gestures are all very particular, it is difficult to abstract them into symbols for larger social forces. The roles they occupy are very similar to the roles set up in Rosler's video, but the characters who inhabit those

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[79] Ibid
[80] Ibid

roles don't do so comfortably or with confidence. The researcher, for example, stresses that her task is work, and that it wears on her: "I've looked at this [indicating the TV with the confined woman's image on it] pretty much 9-12 hours per day, every week, for the past 4.5 years." And a few minutes later, she interrupts a task to murmur: "It's not a physically exhausting job, but it takes its toll… you know."[81] The confined woman's discomfort in her role is also clear; she paces, tugs anxiously at the waistband of her underwear, and flings herself to the ground dramatically. "She's an amateur," the researcher explains with some compassion in her voice, "she wakes up every morning and thinks, 'what am I going to do today?' If she was a professional she'd know that that decision had already been made for her."[82]

The varying extents to which *Vital Statistics of a Citizen* and *The Amateurist* universalize their central roles (the role of the measured woman and the role of the measurer) speaks to broader differences between feminist thinking in the 1970s and feminist thinking in the 1990s. Third Wave feminist theory is very diverse in its ideas, but resistance to universalizing statements is a common thread. As Rebecca Munford explains, second wave feminist critiques have "foregrounded the ways in which popular culture disseminates hegemonic gender representations [while] third wave feminists have refocalised the traditionally fraught relationship between feminism and popular culture to re-examine the politics of subjectivity."[83] The individual subject, then, takes precedence over the idea of woman as representing a unified collective or a class. That Rosler's

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[81] Miranda July, *The Amateurist,* DVD, 1998, (Courtesy of *Video Data Bank,* Chicago).
[82] Ibid
[83] Rebecca Munford, "Wake up and Smell the Lip Gloss," in Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, *Third Wave Feminism : A Critical Exploration* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 268.

measured figure is a stand-in for all women, and her lab-coated figure a stand-in for patriarchy on the whole, makes an important point about the gendered operations of the gaze, but it would have felt anachronistic in the context of the Third-Wave feminist and Riot-Grrrl influenced milieu in which July was working twenty years later.

That both of July's characters in *The Amateurist* come across as individuals who seem emotionally unstable is important here as well. In *Vital Statistics of a Citizen* we see a world that is made absurd by the prevalence of unfair and arbitrary gender norms, while in the *Amateurist* we see the damage that such norms inflict upon the individuals who are made to inhabit and enact them.[84] At the same time that July's characters seem damaged, their poor performance within the roles of "beholder" and "beheld"—poor in that the confined woman does not willingly submit to her measuring, and the researcher's façade of objectivity is full of cracks—serve to damage the roles themselves. July seems, then, to argue that the patriarchal operations of the gaze are demonstrably damaging to everyone—the beholders as well as the beheld—but that the presence of those damaged individuals within such patriarchal roles helps to push the roles themselves towards the crumbling, absurd condition that they take on in *The Amateurist* (a movie whose rooms are small and dirty, whose technologies are out of date, and whose characters seem crazy).

The ways in which the video medium itself figures into Rosler and July's tapes is another evocative difference, and one that indicates elements of how the medium had changed between the late 1970s and the late 1990s. In *Vital Statistics of a Citizen,* the camera is at a great distance from the action, and its presence is hidden. Because it is

[84] July's punk aesthetics probably also influenced her decision to make those characters seem unhinged, since in punk, defiance and idiosyncrasy settle in as norms.

positioned above the actors, it gives the impression that we, the viewers of the video, are seated in an auditorium audience and are watching the proceedings from there. Our role as viewers, then, mirrors that of the lab-coated man, and our gaze is of the type described in Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*: a fetishizing, objectifying site of scopophilic pleasure.[85] The camera's eye, then, is operating in a way that viewers would have been accustomed to from Hollywood film.

The Amateurist echoes elements of that framework for looking as well: the researcher speaks to an unseen camera, and we see the measured woman through the researcher's eyes. But video itself—by way of the surveillance recording that plays on the small, beat-up looking TV monitor—is also a major presence in the movie. The recording of the confined woman announces itself as surveillance video right away: we can tell that the camera is positioned in an upper corner of a room, and its grainy black-and-white is occasionally interrupted by bursts of static. The typical late 1990s viewer would have been very familiar with such cameras, which were by then a common security device in stores and apartment buildings, and so the gaze of the beholder becomes more complicated: it is not just the researcher in the position of objectifying and assessing the confined woman, it is also the technology of video, and its well-known utility for surveillance. Both characters also address their respective cameras directly: the researcher acts as though she is giving an interview, speaking and looking straight out to the main camera/unseen audience, while the confined woman alternates between acting as though we can't see her and acknowledging us by gesturing angrily at the camera or staring sadly into its lens.

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[85] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," in "*Feminism and Visual Culture*," 60-64.

At various points in *The Amateurist* we see the researcher interact with the TV monitor's screen: she strokes it with her fingertips, bends her head close to blow on it methodically, and wipes at it gently with her sleeve like a parent cleaning dirt off a child's face. These interactions with the object on which the surveillance video is playing are part of how the movie establishes the growing emotional dependence of the researcher on her subject, but it also speaks to July's understanding of video tape as an interactive medium. July came of age in the 1980s, a decade during which home video technology became increasingly inexpensive and accessible. 1980s audiences could watch movies and TV shows at home on their own schedules, and they could do so interactively: one might pause a TV show halfway through, fast-forward to a favorite part of a movie, or record scenes from various shows and movies together onto one tape. *Vital Statistics of a Citizen* was made in 1977, when the first versions of home video technology existed, but were uncommon and expensive. The extent to which July's characters interact with video (and the extent to which Rosler's do not) can be seen, then, to reflect the increased possibilities for interaction opened up by home-video technology.

One also gets the sense, in the *Amateurist,* that the researcher character might not be perceiving of the TV screen as separate from the woman whose image appears on its surface. At one point, for example, the researcher tilts the monitor itself, hoping to adjust the woman's position. She also seems to believe that fiddling with the knobs at the bottom of the TV alters the other woman's actual environment and mood: she twists the knobs and speaks soothingly to the confined woman, noting aloud the improvements in attitude and performance that result. Her emotional attachment to the confined woman appears, then, to overlap with an emotional attachment to the television monitor itself.

Towards the end of the video, she indicates the small space between where she stands and the TV screen, and apologetically explains: "I don't know, there's a lot of things that happen that nobody knows about. Here, in this space. If I was not to reveal any of them, I'd be a machine, wouldn't I."[86]

The researcher's attitude towards the television screen/confined woman relates to what I've been discussing about the video medium's inherent interactivity, but it also resonates with ideas around feminist intersubjectivity as discussed by art theorist Amelia Jones. Jones wrote, in 2006, about a tendency she'd noted in the work of contemporary Swiss video artist Pipilotti Rist, in which the surfaces of Rist's video projections were made to seem interchangeable with the flesh of the person—generally Rist herself—who appeared in the projected images.[87] Rist's public video installation *Open My Glade* is one of Jones's key examples of this phenomenon. For one month in the Spring of 2000 *Open My Glade* was integrated into the lineup of advertisements on the enormous screen in New York's Times Square.[88] The videos, one-minute segments which Rist once described as "advertisements for feelings,"[89] project the artist's face at a massive scale as she mashes her flesh up against the surface of a piece of glass, an action that makes it appear as though she is pushing herself into (or trying to escape from) the monitor's screen. Flattened out and melded with the video projection's surface, her face becomes, as Jones puts it, "televisual." The grain of her flesh melts visually into the grain of the

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[86] Miranda July, *The Amateurist,* DVD, 1998, (Courtesy of *Video Data Bank,* Chicago).
[87] Amelia Jones, *Self Image : Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject*, (New York: Routledge, 2006).
[88] This screen was called the "NBC Astrovision by Panasonic board," http://www.publicartfund.org/view/exhibitions/5855_open_my_glade Accessed 7-24-15.
[89] Jones, *Self Image,* 227.

screen, "maximizing the potential of the televisual screen to mesh with the flesh of the other, rather than dangling it in the visual field as a possessable object."[90]

In Jones's understanding of intersubjectivity, neither the body that appears on screen nor the body that beholds the screen becomes a distanced object, and in that, it can operate as a kind of antidote for the male gaze: it complicates any attempt to inhabit the role of Mulvey's scopophilic, objectifying gazer or the role of his confined, fetishized object. And when July's researcher figure taps her fingernail on the surface of her TV screen along the contours of the confined woman's legs, or blows air lightly onto the screen to nudge to woman into a different position, she is, in her own odd way, attempting that same kind of intersubjectivity. She "mesh[s] with the flesh of the other," because that "other" (the confined woman) seems, to the researcher, to *be* the screen. Just as the viewer in Times Square will perceive of Rist's flattened cheeks as pressing into the projection surface itself, July's researcher understands the confined woman's body as inseparable from fact of its appearing on her television. That TV monitor manages, then, to operate as a site of objectifying display, and support, at the same time, important moments of intersubjective interchange: a double-character that makes sense coming from an artist who both criticizes the objectifying qualities of the gaze and sees its presence as leading to a kind of advantage for women movie makers (by way of the training it offers us in developing our "reel eyes.")

July's performance as both characters in *The Amateurist* adds another layer or complexity to all of this: intersubjectivity means something else altogether when we think about it in terms of a self and other that are actually the same person. July's work in

[90] Ibid, 155.

video and performance prior to *The Amateurist* also engaged in that kind of role playing. Her live performances (which will be discussed in depth in chapter four) involve complex dialogues between multiple characters, all voiced by July, with occasional help from a tape recorder or a synthesizer. And the only movie that she made before *The Amateurist*—a 1996 video called *Atlanta*—was another two-character narrative in which July portrayed both characters.

In *Atlanta,* role playing is even more central to the theme than it is in *The Amateurist*: the majority of the movie is simply a tight shot on July's face in which she answers questions to an interviewer as two different characters: a twelve year old girl and her middle aged mother. The girl is getting ready to swim on the US team in the 1996 Summer Olympics, and the mother is nervous, proud, and extremely tense. When July switches between those two characters, she does so mostly by way of her voice, posture, and word choices: the only visible costume change is that the mom wears a headband and the daughter wears a pair of swimming goggles pulled up over her forehead. Despite the minimal props, her portrayal of the two characters is convincing: she expertly mimics the kinds of stereotypical speech patterns and body language associated with young girls and middle aged moms, and by the end of the video she's built a strong sense of the complex relationship between them.

The presence of the artist herself as the main subject in most of her movies is continuous with established traditions in women's video, and her portrayal of multiple characters is not especially unusual either. The 1990 publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* encouraged many feminist artists to build on post-structuralist notions of gender as a kind of language in which the words and phrases are sets of visual and

behavioral codes.[91] The performance of such codes genders (and races and classes) the body in relation to other bodies and other codes, and it also opens up the social norms associated with such identities to performative deconstruction. Cindy Sherman and Nikki S. Lee's role playing self-portrait photographs from the 1980s and 1990s exemplify these ideas (in that they expose, through the manipulation of visual codes, the artificiality of identity categories), but there are also many significant examples from the prior generation of feminist artists in which identity is shown to be constituted by the performance of visual and behavioral norms.

Role-playing and transformative self-portraiture have figured into feminist art since at least the 1960s, particularly in performance and video.[92] As media historian Julia Lesage has shown, many early feminist video artists took on the subject of women's "fragmented consciousness," and did not "presume to represent a continuous stable identity or a cohesive self."[93] Lucy Lippard was among the first to recognize this trend; in a 1975 article in *Ms.* magazine she discussed the commonality of role playing and transformation in recent women's art, identifying Adrian Piper, Martha Wilson, Jackie

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[91] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1990, (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[92] There are a few much earlier examples of role-playing self-portraiture as well, including French photographer Claude Cahun's self-portrait series, which she begun in the 1930s.

[93] Julia Lesage,"Women's Fragmented Consciousness in Feminist Experimental Autobiographical Video," *Feminism and Documentary*, ed. Diane Waldman and Janet Walker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 311. The interest in autobiography (and thus narrative role-playing) is also part of the larger conflation of art and life that were popular in this period as "a way to challenge the entrenched hierarchies and categories of Modernist aesthetics." See Jayne Wark, *Radical Gestures : Feminism and Performance Art in North America*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 88.

Apple, and about a dozen others as exemplars of this tendency.[94] Describing the trends she'd observed over the last several years, Lippard noted that:

> Some chose an autobiographical method; many chose to concentrate on a self that was not outwardly apparent, a self that challenged or exposed the roles they had been playing. By means of costumes, disguises, and fantasies, they detailed the self-transformation that now seemed possible.[95]

July was likely influenced by artists like Sherman and Lee, and perhaps also by Judith Butler's ideas in Gender Trouble (especially since those ideas found their way into a number of prominent Riot Grrrl zines),[96] but her work with characters and role-playing—which generally occurs in her time-based media more than in still images—resonate most strongly with one of Lippard's central examples in that 1975 article: pioneering performance and video artist Eleanor Antin. Antin's early self-portraits included series of texts and still images where she played herself, but in the midst of transformation: in her *Domestic Peace* (1971) she documented her transfiguration into the person her mother wanted her to be throughout the length of a trip home, and in *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972) she documented a 10-pound weight loss as though her body was a sculpture to be reshaped by her will.

By the mid 1970s Antin had begun to represent herself in photographs and videos as a set of fully developed characters. Among them were an old-world European king living as an exile in Southern California, and an early 20th century ballerina, the sole

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[94] Lucy Lippard, "Making Up: Role Playing and Transformation in Women's Art," In *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones, (New York: Routledge, 2010).
[95] Ibid, 476.
[96] See Nomi Lamm's *I'm So Fucking Beautiful,* zine, 1993.

African-American dancer in a venerable Parisian company.[97] The latter character, called Eleanora Antinova, is especially complex, with storylines developed over years and in various media. Antin's 1987 video *From the Archives of Modern Art,* documents the (fictional) recent discovery of never-before-seen Antinova footage from the dancer's "lost" years: a series of bawdy silent films in which the dancer (played by Antin) interacts with a series of male leads in ribald, vaudeville-style vignettes.

This video, like most of Antin's work, is relatively low-tech, utilizing minimal props, simple costumes, and special effects accomplished with inexpensive tools like sheets, shadow puppets, and slide projectors. Her performances as Antinova are convincing, but always also a little bit contrived: she deliberately exaggerates what is feminine and graceful in the dancer's gestures. Antin's embodiments of her varied characters are also always a little bit funny; she doesn't tell jokes, but there is a slapstick quality in the way that she moves and in the faces she makes. In all of these ways, and especially in the way that her projects in every medium are driven by narrative above all else, Antin's work is clearly a model for July's.[98]

Antin's mode of role-playing in her videos disrupts the idea that the artist (and, by extension, anyone who represents herself) is representing an autonomous, cohesive subject. This disruption was, as Kristine Stiles argues, "an anathema in the context of visual art performance, where the body and the psyche had been staged as essential and

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[97] Antin has sometimes performed this character without makeup and sometimes has performed her with make-up-darkened skin. That these performances can be understood as part of the tradition of blackface performance has impacted their reception. For a full discussion of these issues, see Cherise Smith's chapter on Antin in *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[98] Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 165. Sayre argues that narrative is the primary focus and tool in Antin's work.

self-authenticating."[99] As noted earlier in this chapter, feminist performance and video art have often celebrated the artist's presence in her own work as a speaking, self-representing subject because such a presence combated a well-established art historical tradition in which women's bodies appear in artworks as silent and acquiescent props or symbols.[100] A tendency to privilege the personal and straightforwardly autobiographical was part of this focus on women's presence within their own work, and it is a tendency that was common decades later in Riot Grrrl as well. [101]

July's work, however, has consistently resisted that kind of transparent self-representation, even when hers is the sole presence in the video or performance. In *Atlanta,* for example, she slips between the personalities of the overbearing mother and her Olympic-swimmer daughter in a way that defines each of them strictly in relationship to the other. Their dialogue, and the unspoken messages that pass between them in looks and gestures, make the whole world of the video exist solely within their interactions, creating the impression of a sealed, tense space, filled to the brim with the two characters' relationship. Everything in the video points back and forth between the two characters, and nothing, therefore, points back to its author.

July's early narrative performances and videos ring resoundingly true in their representations of the ways that people interact, and in their many moments of startling emotional acuity. And yet those moments emerge, as often as not, from stories that are overtly fantastical: *Atlanta* is an exception in its familiarly human characters. Aliens and robots, women whose backstories are mysterious or absurd, abstract shapes with

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[99] Kristine Stiles, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art,* 691.
[100] Gever, "The Feminism Factor," in *Illuminating Video,* 234.
[101] There are several exceptions to this, including, notably, Kathleen Hanna's *My Life With Evan Dando, Popstar,* which was discussed in depth in chapter 2.

personalities, and submarines that call in to radio shows all populated the stories she was telling in the mid and late 1990s.[102] Her performances of these characters help to further frustrate and deny autobiographical transparency: July will evoke a particular kind of yearning so precisely articulated that everyone in the audience can strongly identify, but when she does so in the voice of a desperate, love-lorn submarine (as she did in a 1998 spoken word performance called *WSNO*) it becomes nearly impossible for the spectator to see backwards through the character to an "authentic" or "essential" Miranda July. In this way her performances accomplish a critique of riot grrrl's compulsory narratives of self, echoing the way that Antin's character-driven performances challenged similar tendencies in second wave feminist art.

As July's career has developed in the 21st century, the central characters she plays in her movies have begun to seem a little bit closer to who she really is—at least in the sense that she plays women who are artists and live in contemporary times in the USA—but role-playing has persisted as a theme in her movies in other ways. In her 2011 feature film *The Future*, a wounded and imprisoned feral cat called Paw-Paw is an important character, and July provides the voice-over that narrates his thoughts. And in her first feature-length film, *Me and You and Everyone We Know* from 2005, July's character—an unknown multi-media artist called Christine—records videos in which she zooms in on photos of people she doesn't know, and then speaks the dialogues that she imagines occurring between them, altering her voice for each character. These snippets of Christine's art practice in the movie don't play a central role, but they signify for the

[102] These fantastical narratives occurred more commonly in July's spoken word recordings than in her videos.

viewer that Christine is a feminist artist contributing to a recognizable, ongoing theme in multi-media art by women. In this, July makes role-playing into a *sign* for feminist art.

July has, as of 2015, released eight polished short movies, two feature-length films, and dozens of rougher short videos shared for free online. And though I've only just touched on a few of these examples here, the themes I have noted: an interest in the gaze, in role-playing, and in relationships between women, appear in some way or another in the vast majority of her projects, connecting all of her moving-image work to persistent themes in feminist video. But she has also expressed an awareness of the ways that these themes reflect a fairly narrow experience: the experience of the type of woman who can find the time and the resources to make a movie. The project with which I will end this chapter—*The Missing Movie Report*—isn't a video, but it is *about* videos, and it is a reflection of July's awareness of the way her work, and its continuities with earlier trends in feminist art—are shaped by her social privilege.

Knowing what we're missing: Riot Grrrl homogeneity and the *Missing Movie Report*

July's *Missing Movie Report* reflects, perhaps more than any of her other work in (or about) video, her roots in the third-wave feminism that took shape in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the artist was in her teens. Though popular feminism was under attack for much of the 1980s, academic feminisms were thriving, and peer-reviewed journals like *Signs* and *Feminist Studies* became more common than the zine-like

pamphlets and popular magazines of the previous decade.[103] Women of color feminism emerged as a powerful scholarly force in this same period, and outlets for feminists of color both in and outside of the academy were beginning to develop. "Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press" (founded in 1980 by Barbara Smith, Audre Lorde, and several others) was especially influential, and helped to define what feminist activism would look like in the coming decades.

Kitchen Table's 1984 publication of *This Bridge Called My Back*—an anthology centered on the experiences of women of color—confronted (and provided ideas for moving beyond) the hegemonic whiteness in much of organized second wave feminism. Another of their anthologies: *The Third Wave: Feminist Perspectives on Racism* represents an early exploration of the term "Third Wave," and helps to show, as Maria Elena Buszek has observed, that the idea of a "third wave" of feminism isn't rooted in a generational shift (though that is often how it is understood) but, rather, a philosophical shift suggestive of something more like a binary-smashing 'third way.'[104]

Women of color were central in defining the third wave, and critiques of an homogenized notion of universal womanhood were key in late 1980s and early 1990s feminist theory. These critiques were developed in response to the way that earlier US white feminisms had privileged the experiences of white women as representative, and had "gloss[ed] over racial specificities so as to keep the 'complication' of racism from

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[103] Deborah Siegal, *Sisterhood, Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrrls Gone Wild (*New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 107.
[104] Maria Elena Buszek, *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 318.

marring [their] vision of female unity."[105] Increased awareness of white privilege within patriarchy had, by the mid-1990s, caused many working in academic and popular feminisms to think more critically about how they understood 'woman' as a category. But despite some improvement, much of white feminist writing had still not fully integrated the facts that, as Aída Hurtado wrote in 1996, "for women of color, race, class, and gender subordination are experienced simultaneously, and…their oppression is carried out not only by members of their own group but also by whites of both genders."[106]

Cultural critic Mimi Thi Nguyen was a zine producer and a part of the punk scene during Riot Grrrl's heyday in the early 1990s, but she never felt fully comfortable identifying herself as part of that movement. In a 2013 interview with *Bitch* magazine, Nguyen explained that her engagement with women of color feminisms in the early 1990s made her aware of critiques of white feminist privilege, and she began to notice that some of those same problems "seemed to be manifesting themselves in riot grrrl, in punk."[107] The rhetoric of intimacy and girl-love that was so important in Riot Grrrl was part of the problem: it was based in the idea of a shared experience of youthful femininity that could unite all of the participants. But the presumption that the universality of such experiences could cut across classes and races ended up creating a set of references and aesthetics that only felt universal for women who were raised in relatively similar contexts. As zine writer Madhu Krishnan explains of her experience in Riot Grrrl, there was a tendency for people to assume that, if someone "is a girl, therefore I love her,"

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[105] Ellen Willis, *No More Nice Girls : Countercultural Essays*, (Hanover: University Press of New England for Wesleyan University Press, 1992,) 111.
[106] Aída Hurtado, *The Color of Privilege : Three Blasphemies on Race and Feminism*, Critical Perspectives on Women and Gender, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 7.
[107] Tina Vasquez,"Revisiting the Riot: An Interview with Punk Veteran Mimi Thi Nguyen," *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*, 2012, 39.

which ultimately "invalidates a person," erasing their individual experiences of girlhood.[108]

The vast majority of Riot Grrrls were white and middle class, and many within the movement were keenly aware that they were in danger of reproducing the problems of the previous generation's racially (and, to an extent, economically) homogenous feminist movement. Riot Grrrl's first convention, held in Washington DC in the Summer of 1992, had a two hour "unlearning racism" workshop that provoked some of the most serious debates and disagreements of the week. The session required the white girls in attendance (who were in the majority) to switch gears in a major way; they had to consider themselves as potential oppressors, when they'd spent all week meditating on their own oppression.[109] "How can we make our scenes less white in both numbers + ideology?," is the first line written on a notebook page from an early Riot Grrrl chapter meeting entitled "Some important questions for girl-punks in the 90s."[110] A popular zine called "Wrecking Ball" published reading lists that included writers like Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, and Trinh T. Minh-Ha, and urged white readers to take their arguments to heart, and a zine called "White Girls, We Need to Talk," noted on its front cover that Riot Grrrl has "not spent enough time or energy addressing the particular concerns of nonwhite girls. We have not made this movement feel inclusive for them."[111]

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[108] Madhu Krishnan in Jessica Rosenberg, Gitana Garofalo, "Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from within," *Signs* 23.3.1998, 825.
[109] Sara Marcus, *Girls to the Front : The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 165
[110] "Riot Grrrl Notebook," in Lisa Darms, *The Riot Grrrl Collection*, (New York: The Feminist Press At the City University of New York, 2013), p 35.
[111] Marcus, *Girls to the Front,* 251.

These and other examples make clear that many white participants within Riot Grrrl were aware of their movement's homogeneity, and were aware that it was a problem; but that self-awareness didn't provide much of a solution. As zine-writer Jessica Rosenburg explained in a 1997 email:

> Although there has been much discussion recently of race as an issue within riot grrrl and society in general, no one seems to have conceived any viable solution to the racial homogeneity of riot grrrl. Most of the problem lies in the fact that riot grrrl travels primarily through word of mouth, which tend to go from white girl to white girl because of racial segregation.[112]

Cultural critic Marisa Meltzer reinforces Rosenburg's point, explaining that Riot Grrrl, "resolutely, desperately wanted" to be open to girls of color, but its messages appealed more strongly to white girls, and its founders' social contexts—majority white colleges and high schools—helped to predetermine its exclusivity.[113]

In a 2013 article in the journal of *Women and Performance*, Nguyen carefully dissects her experience as a punk feminist of color working in proximity to, but not fully within, the Riot Grrrl movement. She recounts and discusses a persistent trend she'd noticed as a zine-writer and reader in the 90s: white Riot Grrrls would make confessional sorts of statements, in zines and elsewhere, where they would own up to (and express concern over) their mostly or fully homogenous social contexts within the movement. This sort of "public shame," Nguyen explains, "served as evidence of accountability," and allowed the speaker or writer to feel as though they'd done what they could, and were excused from taking part in the larger, more difficult changes to the movement that

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[112] Jessica Rosenberg quoted in "Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from within," 811.
[113] Marisa Meltzer, *Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music*, (New York: Faber and Faber, 2010), 39. This is not to say that there were no Riot Grrrls of color: there were, but they were a small minority, and their experiences were impacted by that imbalance.

would make real diversity possible.[114] When a white Riot Grrrl would bemoan the lack of diversity in her life or in her social circle, it often amounted, in Nguyen's words, to "a liberalist fantasy of self-actualization and enlightenment that requires no reciprocity, because to enunciate the *hope* for intimacy or love may well be enough for the speaker's sense of her own flourishing."[115]

A version of Nguyen's argument here can be applied in relationship to most of white Riot Grrrl's attempts to address their movement's unwished for, but functional, exclusivity. Miranda July's work at making her *Big Miss Moviola* chainletter more diverse in terms of the race, class, and age of its contributors offers an interesting case study, and speaks both to Nguyen's observations and, as I will argue, to some important, if not fully realized, strategies for solutions.[116] In the zine that accompanied the first *Big Miss Moviola* chainletter, July wrote that she'd "spent the last few months scheming ways to bust this project out of its designated (by the history) age & life experience slot. Bust out of: age 16-26, white, college educated. This should make the feedback part more useful and interesting."[117]

Her first major move towards widening the network's demographic involved ads for the Chainletter that she posted in major teen magazines: ads that, as I've already shown, made significant progress in introducing the project outside of its extended Riot Grrrl milleu, spurring a noticeable change in the ages and geographic locations of participants. The vast majority of the models featured in those magazines were white,

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[114] Mimi Thi Nguyen, "Riot Grrrl, Race, and Revival," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, November 2012. Vol. 22, Nos 2-3, 178.
[115] Ibid, 183.
[116] It is important to note that though the content of Nguyen's article applies to July's project, Nguyen is mostly discussing the movement's first years—1990-1993, and *Big Miss Moviola* did not begin until 1995.
[117] Miranda July, *Big Miss Moviola directory #1*, zine, 1996 (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

however, and the products they advertised mostly targeted a middle and upper middle class audience, so the demographics of the chainletter in terms of race and class remained about the same.

Recognizing that the time and resources required for making movies, even DIY movies, limited the pool of potential participants, her next move was to take to the street and interview people, asking any woman who would talk to her to describe the movie that she would make if she could. The results of those interviews became the *Missing Movie Report*, a huge poster featuring 24 photos of women from every walk of life (or, at least, every walk of Portland Oregon life), along with short descriptions of each of their unmade movies. "Some of the most incredible movies of 1996 will never be made," the poster's title line reads, "but that is not a reason to forget about them."[118] The poster looks somewhat like a compilation of the kinds of "missing" announcements that used to appear on the sides of milk cartons. Black and white photocopies of headshots are followed by blocks of typewritten text reporting the photographed person's answer to July's question: "If you could make a movie, what would it be about?"

A photo of a squinting woman with her finger in her mouth, labeled "anonymous" appears above the following text:

> I'm a single person that doesn't have sex. I intend to stay that way for the rest of my life. And I'm 51 now. I'm a mature woman.
>
> **Would you make a movie about that?**
>
> No, I wouldn't make a movie. I'm 51 now. I'm too old. And I'm celibate.

[118] Miranda July, *Missing Movie Report* Poster, 1996 (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

Another section of the poster includes an image of a small child labeled "Lauren," and it followed by this text:

> About a kid. Like someone who has a problem at school.
>
> **What kind of problem?**
>
> Like one that doesn't have any friends. And she doesn't do very well in school.
>
> **How old are you?**
>
> Eight.

These, and the twenty two other text-and-photo pairs in the *Missing Movie Report* poster work to create an awareness of an absence; they point to the stories that aren't being told, and they ask us to miss them (or to miss what they would be if they were movies). July sold the posters through her zines for $5.00 each, but she also urged others to make their own versions. "We, the M.M. fan club," she wrote on a zine page urging participation in the Missing Movie project "pledge to build a thirst that can't be satisfied by *Clueless* or *When Harry Met Sally*."[119] That idea of "building a thirst" for the stories that aren't being told is key to this simple project's worth: July isn't just speaking briefly with 'other' women and then patting herself on the back for having paid attention to them, she is building on a specific, concrete theory. Once we know what we are missing, this theory suggests, we won't be satisfied with what we have, and this dissatisfaction—the "thirst" the project builds—will spur structural, not just cosmetic, changes.

It is unclear if any *Big Miss Moviola* contributors outside of Portland ever made their own "Missing Movie Reports" and posted them in their own towns, as July had hoped. The instructions she provided for making *Missing Movie* reports asked the

[119] Miranda July, *U-MATIC Chainletter*, zine, 1997, (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).

potential reporters to question women in their hometowns who they didn't already know. Anticipating potential problems with this method, she added this advice: "figure out how NOT to be an invader when trying to get answers from ladies you don't know."[120] Though extremely vague, that bit of guidance suggests that July was aware of the importance of personal approach when trying to communicate across the boundaries of social groups. The interviewer is to ask without invading, and, as is clear from the results on the *Missing Movie Report* poster, without allowing their own agendas or desires to interfere with their subject's answers. That many of the answers on July's poster were unhelpful or very brief—"oh no, I'm too old for that kind of thing," or "what do you want me to say? I'd make a movie about chaos"—attests to the interviewer having withheld her own guidance or input.[121] "Some of their answers were interesting, most weren't," July recalled of the report years later. "But was I feeling the absence now? Now that I'd called upon them, were those unmade movies changing me, like ghosts?"[122]

A 2013-2014 exhibition at Carnegie Mellon University called *Alien She* displays a room full of Riot Grrrl artifacts—mostly zines, albums, and video footage—and then devotes the rest of the two story gallery space to the legacy of the movement as it manifests in the work of seven former participants, including July.[123] In one section of the exhibition, a copy of July's *Missing Movie Report* poster is displayed across the room from two framed T-Shirts by Allyson Mitchell. The first reads "Women's Studies Professors ~~Teachers~~ Have Class Privilege," (a re-working of a standard teacher-gift shirt

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[120] Miranda July, *Big Miss Moviola directory #1*, zine, 1996 (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).
[121] These quotes come from texts on the poster that are attributed to "anonymous," and "Erin," respectively.
[122] Miranda July and Brigitte Sire, *It Chooses You*, (San Francisco, Ca.: McSweeneys Books, 2011), 159.
[123] *Alien She* was curated by Astria Suparak and Ceci Moss. The other artists featured in the exhibition are Ginger Brooks Takahashi, Tammy Rae Carland, Faythe Levine, Allyson Mitchell, LJ Roberts, and Stephanie Syjuco.

that reads "Teachers have Class"). The second, reading "I'm with problematic," hangs alongside the first, gesturing to it with a pointing-finger graphic

Mitchell (a former Riot Grrrl, and sometimes women's studies professor) is mostly represented in the exhibition by gigantic and wonderful furry sculptures of female sasquatch-like beasts, but the unassuming T-Shirts speak more directly to the elements of Riot Grrrl's legacy that I've been discussing. They bespeak an awareness of class privilege—a persistent problem for women's studies—and acknowledge, at the same time, the emptiness of that awareness: like any slogan on a T-Shirt, it advertises something that you want the world to know about yourself, but it doesn't actually change anything. It is about you, and how you want to see yourself, not about the issues towards which it gestures. In this, Mitchell is pointing to a tendency closely related to what Nguyen observed in white Riot Grrrl's race related "confessions." The second shirt, which points to the first and calls it "problematic," acknowledges the hollowness of this T-Shirt "confession," but also complicates the joke: "problematic" is a loaded term used widely to dismiss objects or ideas or texts that don't conform to the acceptable political norms of the scholarly moment.

Mitchell's shirts, which are featured on the cover of the exhibition's brochure, offer a critique of the movement (as it is represented in this exhibition) on the whole. They call out the dozens of references to Riot Grrrl's radical inclusiveness that are spread around the exhibition's room of early 1990s artifacts, and they nudge us to notice the ironic lack of racial diversity amongst the authors and artists whose works are featured. It was, after all, and as Mary Louise Kearney has observed, class (and race) privilege that

"allowed riot grrrls to develop a nonheterocentric, noncommercial, and nondomestic female youth culture" in the first place. [124]

July's "Missing Movie Report" poster engages in a complex dialogue with Mitchell's framed shirts: the tiny photographs of the women who told their "missing movies" to July are represented here because the artist is representing them. Their presence operates by proxy through July, and by way of her "class privilege." And yet the application of a DIY and audience-focused strategy to the problem—DIY because it is low-budget and operates outside of any institutional support, and audience-focused because its goal is to create a thirst for the stories that aren't being told in the people who see the poster—offers the exhibition's only suggestion for a substantive, non-T-Shirt-slogan style solution to Riot Grrrl's exclusivity problem.

July's career was represented in *Alien She* by other works as well: the exhibition displayed several *Big Miss Moviola* tapes and zines, played one of the artist's live performances on a loop, and made some of her audio recordings available for exhibition visitors to listen to on headphones. That thoroughly multi-media presence within the exhibition was not unusual: most of the artists featured in *Alien She* were represented by works in more than one media. The exhibition's premise—that Riot Grrrl's influence on contemporary culture involves a major visual component—also included clear indications of the way that sound-based art has figured into the multi- and intermedia practices of many post-Riot Grrrl visual artists. Those intersections between music and visual art in Riot Grrrl, in July's work, and in the work of earlier multi-media feminist artists, will be my primary focus in the chapter that follows.

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[124] Kearney, *Girls Make Media,* 66.

CHAPTER 5: FEMINIST ART; THE MUSICAL.

In 1996, only a short while after she'd first begun performing live, Miranda July took the stage between punk bands at the Portland Oregon *Supergrrrl* convention. Costumed in a lab coat and tie, and with a bulky headset wrapped around her shaven head, she proceeded to deliver an intense multi-character narrative to an audience that seemed equal parts bewildered and supportive. The story she was telling unfolded as a set of dialogues, with July voicing all of the characters. A time travelling scientist, a whiney child interviewing a deep-voiced, lonely submarine, and an overwrought teen training to swim in the Olympics all featured into a narrative that emerged in bits and pieces throughout the length of the performance. Large sections of the story are delivered as sound poetry, with words and sentences breaking down into unhinged shrieks or staccato grunts, giggles and sighs. The artist repeats words over and over again until they become abstract sounds, and makes multiple returns to a conversational exchange between characters as though it was the chorus of a pop song. With no props or equipment, and with her hiccup-like gasps as the piece's sole percussion, July looked especially small and isolated on the mostly-empty stage. And yet by the end of the narrative the audience had come around, the nervous giggles and shuffling feet of the first few minutes giving way to steady laughter and applause.[1]

July wrote and performed this work, and dozens of other semi-musical, character driven spoken word pieces, around the same time that she was creating and circulating her first *Big Miss Moviola* chainletter tapes. The performances she developed in these

[1] Footage of this performance has been preserved in "Portland Riot Grrrl Convention," VHS, shot and edited by Metallic Blue Goth. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qged-yL6VgQ Accessed 09-23-15.

years vary in the complexity of their visual presentation, but even the most simple of them are striking to watch: when July produces the myriad voices of her characters her face and body change too, creating the impression of a schizophrenic one-woman-band, with at least a rhythm section's worth of personae crowding the stage. Those performances, their connections with persistent trends in feminist performance art, and their productive overlap with punk culture and punk musical performance, will be my central focus in this chapter.

Performance Art, Popular Music, and the Culture Wars.

July's narrative, theatrical, spoken word performances would have been a surprise for many in her mid 1990s audiences, especially as they tended to be tucked in between or before performances by more traditional punk acts. Recalling those early works in a 2015 interview, she described her audience's reactions:

> I would get up on stage to open for bands, and do pieces where I played different characters, talked in different voices. And it was really interesting to see people's reactions because mostly they just had no idea what I was doing. They would try to talk to me as if I was just up there as me, and it was like, 'Hey, I actually wrote this, and I'm trying to remember lines ...' And then sometimes it was violent. Like, trying to sweep me off the stage. So normally I would find just one woman in the crowd who seemed like she was actually interested in what I was doing, usually the girlfriend of some tough guy who was there, and I would just do the whole performance for her, at her.[2]

Despite the confusion her work sometimes inspired, it did have some ready-made cultural context: Henry Rollins, the former front man of California hardcore act *Black Flag* had been presenting his spoken word poetry on tour for much of the 1990s, as had

[2] Miranda July, quoted in Emma Silvers, "Miranda July on Her Love for the Gilman and Growing up in Berkley," *SF Weekly,* 01-21-15. http://www.sfweekly.com/shookdown/2015/01/21/miranda-july-on-her-love-for-the-gilman-and-growing-up-in-berkeley Accessed 09-01-15.

widely discussed NEA Four member, musician, writer, and performance artist Karen Finley. Finley in particular created a blurry space between musical performance and performance art similar to the space July would inhabit later on.[3] Her 1988 album *The Truth is Hard to Swallow*, for example, layers explicitly sexual and deliberately disturbing speeches and noises—interspersed with occasional sing-song passages—over electronic music. It was produced and marketed like a pop music album but the vocal elements of the songs could be just as easily at home on a punk album, or as an element of one of Finley's live performances (which were presented, more often than not, within visual art rather than music contexts).

These blurry areas between performance art and punk performance were especially visible, and even celebrated, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly in relation to the so-called "culture wars." "Culture war" was an antique term revived in a 1992 speech by Republican presidential candidate Pat Buchanon. Buchanon described extreme polarization among the US population when it came to basic values, and posited that American mass culture had become a battleground. Environmentalists and feminists were caricatured as extremists in Buchanon's speech, and were pitted, as liberals, against "traditional" conservative American values.[4] The idea of the culture wars quickly came to encompass a huge range of contested social issues and their expression in 1990s popular media.

The rhetoric of the antifeminist backlash that had thrived in the 1980s was absorbed into the conservative side of the culture wars in the early 1990s. In turn, the

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[3] Performance artist and musician Cosi Fanni Tutti is also an important precedent here, though her involvement in musical performance was with Industrial music much more than punk.
[4] Patirick Buchanan, Speech, (August 17, 1992). 1992 Republican National Convention, http://buchanan.org/blog/1992-republican-national-convention-speech-148 , accessed December 3, 2014.

liberal side of the divide embraced a set of images and narratives that, if not explicitly feminist, involved an aesthetic of female power, strength and sexual confidence that was associated by many with feminism. The same anti-feminist forces within the culture wars that had spurred the creation of Riot Grrrl were, in the early 1990s, inspiring some change in the broader mass culture too. Women-fronted rock acts—sometimes grouped into a genre called *Foxcore*—began to appear in the mainstream, and they often featured "angry woman" personae in their lead singers (*Hole'*s Courtney Love and *Babes in Toyland*'s Kat Bjelland are two of many such examples). At the same time, a new cohort of tough (if not explicitly feminist) women characters like Roseanne, Murphy Brown, and Thelma and Louise were appearing regularly in film and television.[5] And so as Riot Grrrl evolved from an early 1990s movement focused largely on underground bands to the mid 1990s movement that Miranda July participated in—one that was propelled by wide circulation of zines and other DIY projects—the mainstream popular culture was itself undergoing changes that seemed to register the presence of a Riot Grrrl-influenced aesthetic. *Roseanne* (a popular 1990s sitcom created by stand-up comic Roseanne Barr) even featured a Riot Grrrl subplot in one 1995 episode.[6]

In that episode, the Roseanne character and her sister Jackie pick up a young female hitchhiker who is dressed in a network-TV version of a punk costume (black nail polish, leather jacket, etc). The hitchhiker explains that she is in a Riot Grrrl band and on the way to a show. She gives Jackie and Roseanne a *Bikini Kill* tape as a gift, and the women listen to part of the 1993 single "Don't Need You" in the car. After they drop the

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[5] Deborah Siegal, Sisterhood, Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrrls Gone Wild (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 115.
[6] "The Getaway, Almost," *Roseanne,* Season 8, episode 7, 1995.

hitchhiker off at her concert, Roseanne reads some of the *Bikini Kill* lyrics out loud, and compares them to the rock songs she grew up with, in which women were almost always described as subservient to men. For the rest of the episode, she is inspired to call out the sexism that she suddenly notices all around her: a truck with an anti-woman bumper sticker, her husband's casually sexist language, and so on. Settling in on her couch in her Midwestern suburban home at the end of the episode, she turns to her husband and says: "there's a revolution out there that we didn't even know about."[7]

Political theater—delivered, more often than not, through pop music performance—was occurring in mainstream venues and garnering huge audiences in a way that was unique to this period. During a 1992 taping for MTV's popular *Unplugged* concert series, grunge-rock act *Pearl Jam's* Eddie Vedder stood on top of a stool in the middle of a song, and dramatically markered the words "Pro-Choice" onto his arm. Pioneering rap act *Public Enemy,* who had been performing frank, cogent attacks on American racism to increasingly larger (and whiter) audiences in the late 1980s and early 1990s, began bringing groups of actors dressed in full military regalia with them to their shows. Crowded onstage and facing out to the audience, the soldiers literalized the picture of the United States as a racial battlefield that was evoked in *Public Enemy*'s lyrics.

Amongst the most famous politically charged live displays of this type was a 1992 action by folk-pop star Sinead O'Conner: she ripped up a photograph of Pope John Paul II during an appearance on Saturday Night Live (as part of a larger protest against child sexual abuse within the Catholic church). O'Conner had been integrating elements

[7] Ibid.

of performance art into her music since a few years earlier: the 1988 dance remix of her single *Jump into the River* featured a collaboration with Karen Finley. The originally inoffensive pop tune became something wholly different after Finley's contributions. O'Conner's lyrics, excerpted below, talk about mixed feelings in a romantic entanglement, and are delivered melodically in her husky, breathy voice:

> And if you said jump in the river I would. Because it would probably be a good idea. You're not supposed to be here at all now. It's all been a gorgeous mistake. Sick one or clean one. The best one That God ever made.[8]

Finley's contributions—which occur after O'Conner's save for some yelps and bellows right at the beginning of the song—are delivered in rough screams and gasps. She describes a set of violent sexual scenarios, hinting at incest, bestiality, and a variety of other subjects not generally addressed in pop lyrics, as is clear in the excerpt below:

> Brother, do you have a prick? Yes I do, just like cows do. Brother, do you have a prick? Yes I do, just like cows do. After my mother washed me. Powdered me. I insisted that she masturbate me. You wonder why I've got panic attacks. You dream you ate me through my silken panties.[9]

Finley's presence (as a performance artist) on a hit song by a pop star—even if only on a dance remix—points again to the increasing overlap between performance art and musical performance within the context of the early 1990s culture wars.

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[8] Sinead O'Conner and Karen Finley, "Jump in the River, dance remix," CD, Maxi-Single, 1988.
[9] Ibid.

Avant-Garde Art, Popular Music, and the Anxiety of Contamination

July's early performances were shakily situated somewhere in between the performance art that developed as part of a 1970s visual art avant-garde and the intense, expressive, vocal performances associated with punk rock. This combination wasn't new: Karen Finley was, as I've discussed, an important precursor to July's 1990s performances, but there is a much longer history of productive overlap between music (particularly music made in a punk style or spirit) and performance art.

Throughout much of the Modern era, visual art's avant-gardes have suffered from what art historian Andreas Huyssen called an "an anxiety of contamination," an anxiety that compelled avant-garde art to constitute itself through a resistance to (or a withdrawal from) an ever expanding mass culture.[10] Modernist art critic Clement Greenberg was among the staunchest defenders of that divide for the visual arts, and Frankfurt School philosopher Theodor Adorno played a similar role with regard to music. Both Adorno and Greenburg had clear and pressing motivations in policing the "great divide"; each was writing within the context of burgeoning fascism in Europe, and so they'd seen how mass spectacles, the cooptation of popular arts by authoritarian regimes, and the suppression of radical art could combine to suit the needs of totalitarianism.[11]

The dream of the avant-garde as a kind of safe zone in which an artwork's aesthetic autonomy can be preserved from contamination by mass culture has, as Rosalind Krauss and others have shown, never truly become a reality; artists consistently

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[10] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), Vii.

[11] "Great Divide" is also Huyssen's term.

challenge such separations from everyday life and the popular as soon as they occur.[12] Andy Warhol's *Factory*—established in 1964 in New York City—was one art context where deliberate attempts were made at collapsing what Greenberg designated as the separate and fundamentally opposed spheres of avant-garde and kitsch. For Greenberg, the avant-garde was a byproduct of industrial capitalism, a safe zone of "genuine culture" that kitsch ("popular commercial art and literature… Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing") looted for its "twists," emptying it of meaning and (in line with Adorno's view) rendering it identical with all the rest of the mass culture: each piece reproducing the ideologies of the dominant culture and doling them out to the public as entertainment.[13] Many other artistic movements, several of which overlapped with Warhol's Pop Art scene, sought to confuse such barriers: the independent group in England, Fluxus experimentations internationally, and the Nouveau Realistes in France all emphasized the dialectical relationship of avant-garde art with the materials of everyday life, including popular culture.

Warhol's *Factory* also played a role in an increasing interest, in the American 1960s, in multi-media performance and the "total" immersive artwork. Film critic Annette Michelson goes so far as to suggest that the *Factory*, at least in the years before Warhol was shot in 1968, was a kind of Gesamtkunswerk: the "total" (or totalizing) artwork that Adorno associated with the seamlessness of the culture industry and linked

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[12] This is one of Krauss's primary argument in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985; 1986.*

[13] Clement Greenberg,"Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 1939. http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/kitsch.html Accessed 2-3-2011.

to fascist spectacle.[14] Michelson notes that the fascist type of Gesamtkunstwerk was joined, in the 60s, by a more metaphysical kind, associated with the multi-media events and environments constructed by artists in the extended circle around avant-garde musician John Cage.[15] Michelson sees Warhol's *Factory* as a third kind of Gesamtkunstwerk, redesigned "as a site of production" and recast "in the mode of carnival, thereby generating for our time the most trenchant articulation of relation between cultures, high and low."[16]

In *Popism* (Warhol's 1980 history of Pop), the artist notes a surge of interest in multi-media performance in mid 1960s New York, and discusses "Expanded Cinema," a performance series in which artists like LaMonte Young and Robert Whitman were given space to combine projected images, traditional cinema, live action and music.[17] Around the same time, Warhol began to champion (and helped to assemble) his own "factory band"—*The Velvet Underground*—who came to participate in a number of the *Factory*'s multi-media performances. Warhol describes, for example, a 1966 banquet for the New York Society for Clinical Psychology at which he was asked to give a speech. In lieu of speaking himself, he brought *The Velvet Underground* to the banquet, along with two of expanded cinema's founders: Jonas Mekas and Barbara Rubin. The Velvets shocked the psychologists by playing their assaultive rock and roll as dinner music, and as the crowd became more and more irritated and confused, Rubin and Mekas rushed in with video cameras and a mass of Warhol's "Superstars," fanned out amongst the crowd, and

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[14] Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectics of Enlightenment* 1947, (New York : Continuum, 1994), 247.
[15] Annette Michelson, "Where is Your Rupture? Mass Culture and the Gesamtkunstwerk," (*October*, 1991), 44.
[16] Ibid., 58.
[17] Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett. *Popism; the Warhol '60s.* (1980), 143.

accosted the psychologists and their dates, demanding that they answer embarrassing questions about each other and about their sex lives.[18]

The music, art, video, and performance emanating from the *Factory* were all expressions of this boundary blurring milieu, and many of its products had elements of queer border crossings as well, from the drag queens in Warhol's movies, to the artist's own queer performance of self (a performance that was shocking in the context of a New York art world that was otherwise still very dedicated to a macho social posture.)[19] As curator Jennifer Blessing showed in a 1997 exhibition dedicated to queer art internationally, a "new vision of gender transformation was emanating from America, communicated via popular culture and influenced by Andy Warhol."[20] That this influence was coming in the form of hybrid, music-and-art-combining multimedia performances helped it to overlap with the punk culture and aesthetics developing in these same years.

Musical performance within the world of feminist visual art also has a significant, if less well documented, history before the 1990s: prominent Second Wave feminist artists Martha Wilson, Diane Torr, Donna Henes and Ilona Granet collaborated, for example, in a performance-art-piece-as musical-act called *Disband*. They performed as a rock band, but the performance of being a band took precedence over the music they produced, and they stayed within the bounds of the visual arts by staging their concerts at New York City galleries and art events, rather than at music venues. Most of their songs were clearly worded and accessible condemnations of sexism, delivered with a conscious

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[18] Ibid, 146.
[19] Ibid, 10.
[20] Jennifer Blessing, *Rrose is a Rrose is a Rrose: Gender Performance in Photography* (New York, N.Y: Guggenheim Museum, 1997), 70.

sense of visual presentation: a combination that anticipated much of what was to develop more than a decade later in Riot Grrrl.

It is very unlikely that the women of Riot Grrrl were familiar with *Disband*: their performances were rarely documented and they operated within an insular late 1970s New York City art world, but other women artists that were more likely to have been on their radar—Laurie Anderson, Jackie Apple, and Merideth Monk—also regularly traversed those permeable boundaries between visual art and punk (or punk inflected) music in the 1970s. All three were featured on a 1977 album of art/music hybrids called *Airwaves*, and Anderson's work was included in an exhibition, *The Record as Artwork: From Futurism to Conceptual Art*, that travelled throughout the US that same year.

Yoko Ono's was another key figure in melding performance art and musical performance in that period, and she was an especially important influence for many in Riot Grrrl. In issue #1 of the *Bikini Kill* zine (1990), for example, *Bikini Kill* drummer Tobi Vail wrote about the regular sexism she faced as she tried to participate in her local punk scene. She explained that as a "girlfriend" she was considered to be the "opposite" of the band, and a threat to its sanctity. "It all comes down to YOKO ONO," she explains:

> You see, part of the revolution (girl style now) is about rescuing our true heroines from obscurity, or in Yoko's case, from disgrace. So part of what your boyfriend teaches you is that Yoko Ono broke up the Beatles. And as his girlfriend, according to this, you could very easily do the same thing to him and he has to be careful that this doesn't happen.[21]

A few sentences later, Vail extends her analysis to the broader popular culture, pointing out the way that movies about bands always frame "the girlfriend" as "the evil diversion."

[21] Tobi Vail, "Bikini Kill zine issue 1, 1990," Darms, *The Riot Grrrl Collection*, 42.

She connects to Ono here through her recognition of the elder artist's marginalization and dismissal in a male-dominated music culture that discourages and devalues its female practitioners.

Vail and other prominent figures in Riot Grrrl celebrated Ono for more than just her position in one of rock-and-roll's archetypal gender narratives; they also recognized what was groundbreaking in Ono's intermedia explorations of music, performance art, and film, and they saw her work as anticipating their own. In 1990, Vail referred to Ono as "the first punk rock girl singer ever."[22] Years later, Vail's *Bikini Kill* bandmate Kathleen Hanna addressed Ono in the lyrics of a song called *Hot Topic*, singing "you're getting old, that's what they'll say, but don't give a damn, I'm listening anyway."[23] July too wrote about Ono's work and noted its connections to her own interests and projects in the zine that accompanied a 1997 *Big Miss Moviola* Tape.[24]

It is Laurie Anderson's work, however, that most directly anticipates July's performances (though July wasn't aware of Anderson until her own performance practice was already well established).[25] Anderson was a prominent figure in the avant-garde art world of 1970s New York City; the artists she kept company with in those years were all pushing against art's traditional boundaries and institutions, and looking for new ways to practice and exhibit outside of the established system of commercial galleries.[26] Her

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[22] Ibid. Vail does not mention a specific work by Yoko Ono, but it is likely that she is referring to the 1970 album Yoko Ono/Plastic Ono band. Among Ono's body of recorded audio work, this album most strongly resonates with punk musical performance (though there are also some punk elements in Ono's performances *on Two Virgins,* a 1968 album collaboration with John Lennon).
[23] *Hot Topic* (1999) is by *Le Tigre*, a post-Riot Grrrl electronic music trio.
[24] Miranda July, *Umatic Chainletter*, zine, 1997 (Bard College, Joanie 4 Jackie archive).
[25] See Miranda July, Lynn Hershman, "Women Art Revolution: Interview with Miranda July," *Women, Art Revolution Digital Collection, Stanford University Libraries,* (2014, December 31).
[26] Roselee Goldberg, *Laurie Anderson*, (New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 2000), 13.

earliest performances were staged in independent alternative spaces across Europe and the United States: spaces that weren't often clearly dedicated to either visual art or music, and that encouraged fertile crossings between the two.[27] Live storytelling and musical performance have been mainstays in her work, and she has exhibited her customized instruments and performance accessories as stand-alone sculptures. The violin has been an especially important element in her work throughout her career, and she has invented various customizations of that instrument, including, in the late 1970s, a violin with a tape head in its bridge made to be played with a bow that was strung with recorded magnetic tape.[28]

As with July, Anderson's voice is a central focus in most of her performances, though unlike the younger artist, she has a more conventionally "pretty" voice, and eventually enrolled in formal vocal training. She often sings for long passages of her pieces, and she occasionally voices characters in dialogue in the same way that July did later on. Anderson's creation of the vocal personae in her sung and spoken narratives usually involves technology—like custom built voice-altering microphones—that is much more sophisticated than what July had at her disposal in her low-budget performances in the 1990s (though the latter artist sometimes used electronic feedback noise to similar effect). Anderson has regularly performed with her voice-altering devices in a way that drops her voice to a lower octave and makes it sound much more male, and also more robotic. In this, as she has explained, her characters can evoke the power

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[27] Goldberg, *Laurie Anderson*,13. Anderson, who was married to the *Velvet Underground*'s Lou Reed, worked with (and had social ties to) a range of figures in visual art, avant-garde music, and popular culture including Andy Warhol, Nam Jun Paik, Frank Zappa, and Andy Kauffman.

[28] *Tape-Bow Violin* (1979), and other of Anderson's violin customizations may be seen as following from fluxus artists Charlotte Moorman and Joe Jones's various 1960s sculptural alterations of cellos and violins, respectively.

associated with both masculinity and technology, creating what the artist has called "the voice of authority," and demonstrating the ability of vocalisation to deploy and subvert elements of perceived gender.[29]

Anderson's work is also very visual, integrating sculptural props and carefully timed series of projected images that become important elements in the stories that she tells. The technological sophistication and multi-sensory complexity of her most ambitious performances are often presented in histories of contemporary art as features exemplary of hybrid artistic practice in the age of electronic media.[30] Art historian Henry Sayre argues that Anderson's integration of various media creates a space in which "each medium fights with the other, beyond the formal laws of their own operations," creating, ultimately, a "heterogenous space of the new *Gesamtkunstwerk."*[31] Sayre's analysis focuses on Anderson's most widely known performance: a seven-hour long, two-evening work called *United States*. His categorization of this performance as a new type of *Gesamtkunstwerk* helps contextualize it with Warhol's factory, a milieu that Annette Michelson characterized in that same way.[32] In both cases, the boundaries between musical performance and performance art are explicitly dissolved.

July's Riot Grrrl peers in the early and mid 1990s probably came to know Anderson's work through an eight minute section of *United States* called *O Superman*. This section of the performance (which was inspired by Massenet's 'Au Souverin') was released as an independent song and music video, and it became an unexpected

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[29] As Sayre observes, Anderson's combination of these vocal transformations with visual signifiers of masculinity (via her hair and clothes) works to "submit her own identity to perpetual nomadism." Ibid,154. See Sayre, *The Object of Performance,* Michael Rush, *New Media in Late 20th-Century Art*, (New York, N.Y: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

[31] Sayre, *Object of Performance,*147.
[32] Annette Michelson, "Where is Your Rupture?" 44.

mainstream hit in 1981, reaching number two on the UK pop charts.[33] The artist had signed a six-album contract with Warner Brothers a few years earlier (in 1979) and *O Superman* was included on one of those albums. This move into popular culture was relatively unusual among avant-garde artists in those years; Anderson is among the few who has successfully "crossed over" into genuine pop culture visibility without really changing her practice in any way. In this, she provides an interesting precedent for the kind of interaudience (as well as intermedia) position that July has worked to create for herself in the present.

The vocal performance in *O Superman* is delivered through a voice altering device that gives most of the song a robotic tenor, but with a melodic, clearly human, and emotionally charged underlayer. Pieces of a conversation between an answering machine and another robotic voice called "mom" are ominous, warning of approaching planes, and promising to hold us in un-comforting electronic arms. The lyrics are packed full of cryptic references—to opera, to literature, to the United States Postal Service—and the visual presentation (taken from the live *United States* performances and presented as a music video) is similarly loaded.

O Superman acts—in its complex layers of meanings, its deliberate deployment of conflicting sign systems, and its duration—much more like an artwork than like a pop single. The distinction between art and mass culture generally indicates a quality difference or a difference in the level of interpretation required of its audience. But that distinction is also typically conceived of as

[33] Laurie Anderson, *Stories from the Nerve Bible: A Retrospective, 1972-1992* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 155.

indicating a political difference as well: art is understood to be more independent from (or more critical of) capitalism's systems than is possible for the products of mass culture. And yet, the highly commodified spaces of international contemporary art don't convincingly support such a distinction: as visual culture theorist Nick Mirozoeff argues, the contemporary art world "perceives itself as a space of contestation to global capital, while being almost completely an expression of that capital and its free flow into immaterial labor."[34] Anderson was ahead of the curve, in the late 1970s, in terms of understanding that art-world contradiction: her mainstream success came, as she explained in 1993, at a time when such recognition was still considered "selling out," a category of commodification that only really exists when there is a genuine avant-garde. A few years later, she explained, "selling out" began to be referred to more positively as "crossing over," and "by the time it was considered a 'smart commercial move' in the mid '80s, there was no longer much of an avant-garde to comment on it anyway."[35]

In the early 1990s there was strong art world interest in both interdisciplinarity and so called "new media" visual art: museums and galleries hosted dozens of exhibitions dedicated to new media experimentation. As a pioneer in these areas, Anderson was regularly asked to participate, and she often agreed, "signaling," as Roselee Goldberg notes, "a return of sorts for her to the art-fold."[36] To those in Riot Grrrl who may have encountered her work in that period, Anderson would have provided a singular model of

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[34] Nick Mirozoeff, "That's All Folks.." in *Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945,*ed. Amelia Jones, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 508. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass deception," (1944) is the key text for these arguments. In *Dialectics of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 94-137.
[35] Anderson, *Stories from the Nerve Bible,* 155.
[36] Goldberg, *Laurie Anderson*, 15.

art/music hybridity, as well as an important example of an artist whose successful participation in the art world did not require avant-garde insularity. These qualities made her especially relevant in a movement that often both ignored distinctions between media and sought to create connections with girls and women whose ages or geographic locations barred them from access to the art world and to traditional punk scenes.[37]

Multi-media visual art and musical performance within and around Riot Grrrl.

Miranda July's performances from the 2000s (*Love Diamond* and *The Swan Tool* in particular) combine spoken word performance with carefully timed and crafted video projections that accomplish something similar to what I've been describing in Anderson's work. Her earliest, most musical performances were much lower-tech, however, and tended to involve just the artist, a microphone, and sometimes a synthesizer. Despite strong connections between Anderson's and July's bodies of work in terms of their hybridity, their visual techniques, and their reliance on narrative and storytelling, their overall moods are very different: where Anderson is generally cool, calm and deliberate, almost all of July's performances embrace a frenetic kind of punk-rock agitation.

Miranda July's participation in punk culture—and her awareness of punk music's ability to absorb a range of theatrical and visual practices—dates back to her teenage years. At 16 she wrote a play (*The Lifers*) based on a longstanding pen-pal correspondence that she'd struck up with a man serving a life sentence in prison for murder. She cast the play via local classified ads, directed it, and arranged for its short

[37] See chapter one for an in-depth discussion of Riot Grrrl's interest in expanding access to the movement and move beyond the typical insularity of punk subculture.

run at an all-ages Berkley punk club called 924 Gilman. That venue choice that represented the first of many occasions in which she would bring her style of performance narrative into a space designed for musical performance, and the no-budget, self-reliant method by which she made it happen represented her first foray into DIY artistic production.[38] Berkley music writer Lawrence Livermore wrote favorably about the play, stressing its DIY energy and describing it as "more punk than any band."[39]

July's first formal musical act, the short-lived Portland-based *Cece Barnes Band* (1995-1996) included vocals that can stand on their own as spoken word performance, and her 1996 collaboration with Riot Grrrl duo *The Need* was a similar mix of punk music and July's performative, character driven spoken narratives. The *Need*'s short album, a 7-inch released by *Kill Rock Stars* called *Margie Ruskie Stops Time*, consists of two untitled tracks in which July voices two main characters, Margie and Steve, and intertwines their conflicts with the distorted speech of several other minor characters who yell, adopt robotic affects, and whisper menacingly.

As the album's narrative unfolds, we learn that the Margie character is working with various arcane, possibly supernatural forces, calling on them psychically to intercede in her life and stop time so that she will not have to make out on the couch with her unpleasant and demanding boyfriend, Steve. The album becomes the story of this interaction, communicated through Margie's internal dialogue, her psychic calls to the mysterious outside forces that might help her, and her conversation with Steve. In the excerpt below, from the first track, July performs the dialogue in three different voices:

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[38] Katrina Onstad, "Miranda July is Totally Not Kidding," *New York Times,* July 14th, 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/17/magazine/the-make-believer.html Accessed 08-16-14.

[39] Renko Heur and Caroline Muntendorf, "Miranda July: Best at Belonging to Yourself," *Mono.Kulter* 16 (Spring 2006). http://mono-kultur.com/issues/16, accessed 08-01-15.

Margie talking to Steve in a relatively normal, bored sounding woman's voice, Steve talking to Margie in a strained, violent voice, as though the character is pushing words out while also holding his breath, and Margie's psychic communications, which sound like they are being shouted into a Walkie -Talkie.

> What do you mean you're not in the mood. Do you have a problem with the couch Margie?
>
> No Steve, you don't have to get mad.
>
> What do you mean mad. This isn't mad. Do you want to see mad Margie?
>
> My name is Margie Ruskie, I've been in contact before, I mean, it's not my style, but, I'm so lonely, you wouldn't believe it, but there is a way out of here right? Some sort of a code to connect? This is Margie Ruskie, This is Portland Oregon, the time is one o'clock. This is Margie Ruskie. Do you read me?[40]

This recording, like many of July's recordings from those years, is both narrative-driven and focused on sound: the sound of the words, the ways they are delivered, and the lush layers of noise that intertwine with them communicate the mood and the emotions of the story's action as much as the meanings of the words do. The instrumentation, the rhythmic screams and grunts, and the steady beat that runs beneath the vocal track throughout make *Margie Ruskie Stops Time* feel like a work of music (and like punk), though just barely: the recording is right on the edge of coming across as something more like a radio play.

Riot Grrrl offered a DIY and feminist cultural context for this kind of hybridity in the 1990s, and in a setting that had very little connection to mainstream art or art-world institutions, even though similar hybrid works from artists like Yoko Ono, Laurie Anderson and Karen Finley already had an established (if unstable) place in

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[40] The Need, featuring Miranda July, *Margie Ruskie Stops Time,* Vinyl, side A, 1996.

contemporary visual art. Productive overlap between music and visual art had figured into Riot Grrrl from the beginning: that movement's earliest performances occurred at *Reko Muse*, an art gallery established by Kathleen Hanna and Tammy Rae Carland in response to the censorship of one of Hanna's artworks that was on display in the student gallery at Evergreen University.[41] Hanna and Carland, both photography majors at Evergreen, were also bandmates, and *Reko Muse* quickly became a popular music venue as well.[42]

Riot Grrrl musical performance maintained a strong visual component as it evolved. Hanna and others were known, early on, for scrawling words onto their flesh as part of their on-stage costumes. Phrases like "no fat chicks," "slut," and "property," were markered onto arms and midriffs, creating shocking images that dramatized and literalized the ways that women's bodies are invisibly marked by their treatment in the broader visual culture. Such images confronted spectators, in Marion Leonard's words, "with the very terms designed to prohibit female display."[43] The bodies of the musicians became, then, visual (and political) art, activated within the live performance of their songs. Sarah Marcus's 2010 history of Riot Grrrl discusses this trend in relationship to second-wave feminist art, noting the ways that women artists in the 1960s and 1970s sought to "use their own bodies to look at how the culture uses women."[44]

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[41] The student exhibition included works by Hanna (the offending piece included the word "slut") and by her classmate Aaron Baush-Greene. As Hanna describes it, her works were about sexism and Baush-Greene's were about Aids. Kathleen Hanna, Biography, http://www.letigreworld.com/sweepstakes/html_site/fact/khfacts.html. Accessed 10-13-12.
[42] Reko Muse was in downtown Olympia Washington, and was active as a venue from about 1990-1993.
[43] Marion Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 121.
[44] Marcus, *Girls to the Front*, 146-147.

Pioneering Austrian performance artist Valie Export's 1970 work *Body Sign Action* provides an especially clear example of what Marcus is pointing to here. For this piece, the artist staged a public performance in which an image of a garter belt was tattooed onto her thigh "as a symbol," she explains, "of membership in a caste which demands conditioned behavior."[45] When they imprint their flesh with such symbols, Export (and then Hanna and her contemporaries) literalize the ways in which women are marked as 'other' under patriarchy.[46] This visual technique even entered mainstream popular culture in the 1990s via Prince, a pop superstar who appeared throughout 1996 with the word "slave" markered onto his cheek. Though ostensibly a protest against the creative restrictions imposed on him by Warner Brothers (with whom he was under contract) the image of an African-American performer entertaining enormous audiences with the word "slave" scrawled across his face operates as political performance in the same way that Hanna's "slut" and Export's garter belt tattoo do.[47]

The permissiveness of DIY and punk allowed the idea of the "rock star" to become a platform for all manner of intermedia experimentation within and around Riot Grrrl, and as a major element of its legacy. In 1997 Canadian (and riot-grrrl influenced) multimedia artists Jane Farrow and Allyson Mitchell taught fifty first-time filmmakers,

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[45] Valle Export, "Body Sign Action," Media Art Net (2004). http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/body-sign-aktion/images/2/ Accessed 08-31-14.

[46] Kristine Stiles discusses tattooed bodies as expressions of trauma and responses to political silencing in a way that could apply to these works. See Kristine Stiles, "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies: Representations from Cultures of Trauma," in Hewitt, *Talking Gender: Public Images, Personal Journeys, and Political Critiques*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 46-52.

[47] The look of marker on skin, even when not overtly political, became a kind of signifier of Riot Grrrl in the early 1990s: women would regularly draw hearts on their hands as part of their outfits, a visual marker that helped Riot Grrrls to recognize one another at shows and elsewhere. See Marcus, *Girls to the Front*, 146.

mostly teens, to make three-minute Super 8 films on the subject of being a rock star. The results became the popular *3-Minute Rock Star* film festival, staged with live-performance soundtracks in a Toronto bar.[48] In 1998, video artist and later *Le Tigre* band member Sadie Benning collaborated with Kathleen Hanna to create a music video called *Aerobicide*. The video was a parody of the way that female-driven, anti-establishment youth trends were being commodified by male-dominated big business. And multi-media visual artists Ginger Brooks Takahashi, JD Sampson, and Wynne Greenwood (all of whom emerged from, or have strong affinities with early 1990s Riot Grrrl) each participated, throughout the 2000s, in hybrid visual art / music collectives.

July gestures towards the intermediality that is such a prominent part of Riot Grrrl's legacy in a very short untitled performance from around 1996 in which she voices two characters: a breathy, wobbly-voiced woman painfully answering questions, and the authoritarian interviewer who barks the questions at her in rapid succession. When he shouts "movie star or rock star?" she responds weakly, "movie…movie."[49] And her live performances do feel like movies in many ways: their meaning emerges through scripted exchange, and most of them unfold complex, multi-scene stories with discernable structures, conflicts, and resolutions. Her later success as the writer, director, and star of her own feature-length films attests, of course, to her abilities in those domains. And yet the way these performances were presented and distributed fall clearly on the side of the "rock star"—they were performed in music venues, usually as the only hybrid art/music

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[48] Farrow recalls that the *Three Minute Rock-Star* films, which were screened free of charge, drew an audience of over 500, delighting the bar that hosted them, who quickly sold out of beer. See Tara Mateik, "Surveying the Scene: Excerpts from the D.I.Y. Distro Resource Guide," *Felix: A Journal of Media Arts and Communication.* 2.2 (2000): http://www.e-felix.org/issue5/mateik.html. Accessed 10-19-14.
[49] Miranda July "Untitled," *10 Million Miles an Hour*, (Kill Rock Stars: 1997).

act on the bill—and they were collected, in 1997 and 1998, on two albums released by Portland's influential independent record label *Kill Rock Stars*.

Lena Beamish is the title of one such performance: it is an eleven minute mix of live and recorded voices—all July's—artfully deployed echoes and static, and a synthesizer that imitates the sound, at various points in the piece, of both an organ and a Theremin.[50] A short break in the narrative at the work's halfway point is filled by a collage of lush electronic noise that is hypnotic without being especially rhythmic or melodic.[51] The performance opens with July speaking in a child's voice, playing make-believe with a friend. It is a one-sided conversation, in which the child determines that she will play all four of the make-believe characters in their game, while the disappointed friend is directed to play the role of "the at-home audience." The child's greedy claim on all of the story's roles amounts to July poking gentle fun at herself: the odd individual figure amidst a sea of multi-performer bands, refusing to collaborate within a movement that placed a premium on collaboration.

Once July's child character has determined that she will play all of the parts herself, she begins to enact the complex narrative that accounts for the bulk of the performance. The setting is a TV talk show in which an overly cheerful, slightly menacing host is interviewing three young siblings—the Beamishes—who are noted daredevils, and who claim to be impervious to pain. The voices of the four characters are

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[50] *Lena Beamish* was performed live throughout 1996 and 97, and then included on an album—*The Binet Simon Test*—released by Kill Rock Stars in 1998.

[51] John Cage's 1937 talk on "The Future of Music" suggested that "the use of noise to make music will continue and increase until we reach a music produced through the aid of electrical instruments," and July's use of electronic noise in her mid 1990s performances is part of the legacy of Cage's ideas. John Cage, "The Future of Music: Credo," in *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 3.

each distinctive, and are woven together through July's feedback loops and echo box in a way that is eerily futuristic, creating an impression of sound being issued from across a vast distance.

As the story progresses the talk show host puts the children through a physical test to insure that they are telling the truth about their immunity from pain. When one of the brothers is electrocuted and cries out, the siblings' story quickly falls apart: we discover that Lena is the only Beamish child who is genuinely pain-free. Her first brother was faking his stoicism so that Lena would not feel alone, and the second brother was a robot that the two real children had built to complete their act. He blew his own cover by running low on batteries in the middle of a sentence, an effect July achieves in an especially dense section of words and noises during which the texture of the sound competes with the story for dominance over the audience's attention.[52] Elements of this narrative call up associations with the intentionally risky, pain-courting endurance performances of the 1970s (like Marina Abramovic's series of 1974 performances, which had the artist ritually cutting her hands with a knife and leaping into a fire).[53] July's *Lena Beamish* doesn't enact these kinds of risks in any way, but it makes risk and pain as performance (through the siblings' performance on the talk show) a central element of the spoken narrative.[54]

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[52] This foregrounding of static and other incidental electronic noise builds on the kinds of avant-garde musical experimentation associated with John Cage's circle, but probably came to July by way of that Avant-Garde's influence on Noise Rock bands like *Teenage Jesus and the Jerks* and *Sonic Youth*.

[53] Abramovic was not alone in enacting risk-taking and painful endurance performances of this time. Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, and Gina Pane (among others) were all working with similar themes. See Lucy Lippard, "The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art" *Art in America,* 1976.

[54] This tendency to make narratives out of art-world trends has become something of a pattern in July's work. In her 2014 performance *New Society*, for example, the artist takes on the popularity of so called "Social Practice" (a trend in which artists become facilitators for public interactions in the hopes of

In a 2000 interview July was asked about the roots of her style of performance dialogue and her tendency to stage complex conversations with herself through the embodiment of multiple characters. The artist referred to an idiosyncratic habit of her youth as a way of explaining the technique. "A few years ago," she recounts, "I suddenly remembered—and was sort of horrified—that I used to make these tapes where I would leave spaces so I could talk to myself."[55] The solitary, self-contained style of creativity that this anecdote reveals is a clear presence in *Lena Beamish*: it's apparent in the voice of the child who opens the performance by dominating a game of make-believe, and it emerges in the character of Lena as well, who has, after all, invented two brothers who are "like her" so that she can feel she is part of a group of three who are a team and who are also all the same. July's attribution of her performance style to a lonely childhood habit exposes something about her personal sensibility that is useful in interpreting her work. And yet her particular mode of using of her voice in performance builds on significant musical and art historical traditions as well, and connects her work to larger debates about the role of women's voices in artistic production.

The voice as an expressive medium is uniquely situated in its ability to unfold and trouble one of the central questions of Western feminist art in the late 20th century. Broad historical surveys of the topic tend to construct a series of generational oppositions in which the artists associated with 1960s and 70s (second wave) feminism sought to foster a universal feminine aesthetic or sensibility, goals that were rejected by the artists who

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mobilizing social change). July's version of Social Practice has her creating a complex participatory narrative in which she is a cult leader bent on convincing the audience who has attended her live performance that they must live in the theater forever, establish a constitution, a flag, and an anthem, and become the *New Society* of the work's title.

[55] Johnny Ray Huston, "The Marvelous World of Miranda July," in *Hers; Video as Female Terrain*, ed Stella Rollig (New York: Steirischer Herbst, 2000), p 123.

came of age within the poststructuralist inflected feminisms of the 1980s.[56] Closer study of artistic production in these periods quickly demonstrates the inaccuracies in this model of feminist art history—and it has been thoroughly debunked by many scholars in the field—but it is a narrative that has really stuck nonetheless, and that turns on the problem of "essence," and of the extent to which feminist art understands "woman" as a coherent entity that preexists its representation.[57]

The voice comes into interesting play within this debate because it seems in many ways to be definitively essential: it issues, after all, from the inside of the body. As follows, it can appear to naturalize gender: what is feminine or masculine about a voice is often perceived of as preceding symbolic representation of woman or man. And yet the voice, as literary theorist Annette Schlichter explains, "cannot be clearly positioned as either sensible or intelligible; it is not necessarily contained by culture or nature."[58] The presence of a presymbolic body in the voice feels self-evident, and yet linguistic research has consistently shown that gendered nuance in its use—in its rhythms, pitch, and timbre—are strongly determined by cultural context. Even the transformation of boys' voices during puberty, Schlichter reminds us, are not fully accounted for by biology alone.[59]

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[56] Thalia Gouma-Peterson, and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 69.3 (1987): 338. Such trends are strongly linked with poststructuralist theories rooted in the works of Julia Kristeva and others that investigate the ways in which gender is comprised by social (and textual) constructions. See Julia Kristeva, Alice Jardine, and Harry Blake, "Women's Time," *Signs* 7, no. 1 (Autumn, 1981): 13- 35.

[57] Catherine Grant, "Fans of Feminism: Re-Writing Histories of Second-Wave Feminism in Contemporary Art," *Oxford Art Journal* 34.2 (2011): 265-68.

[58] Annette Schlichter, "Do Voices Matter? Vocality, Materiality, Gender Performativity," *Body & Society* 17.1, (2011), 43.

[59] Ibid, 46. Roland Barthes' discussions of a "grain" in the voice which amounts to the "body in the voice as it sings" is useful here, as is Douglas Kahn's understanding of "meat voices," a characterization that he applies to discussions of embodied voices in the works of Antonin Artaud and other mid-century avant-

When July represents gender in her early performances, her clothing and hair (which are often styled as unisex) stay the same. Her posture and gestures do help to communicate elements of masculinity and femininity, but the bulk of that representational work is accomplished by her voice. July has a relatively high-pitched speaking voice, and she doesn't often drop her pitch significantly when she represents vocal masculinity. Her evocations of male voices are extremely convincing nonetheless, and their success seems to lie in the way that she paces her sentences and shapes the spaces between her words and phrases.

Her representations of vocal femininity are equally precise, and they tend to be just as carefully mannered: she is sparing in her use of her regular, uninflected speaking voice. Listening to her perform an interaction between a feminine and a masculine character becomes, then, an explicit illustration of the constructedness of gendered vocalization. But when those gendered voices dissolve, as they often do, into visceral shrieks or clicks or sighs, July's non-representational noises simultaneously block our interpretation of vocal gender codes and remind us of the base, bodily, and (arguably) presymbolic materials from which those noises issue.

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garde figures. See "The Grain of the Voice,' in *Barthes : Selected Writings*, (England: 1983,) 188, and Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 345-354.

Feminist Punk and L'Ecriture Feminine

> Squeaks, squeals, snarls, and whines—unmediated female noises never before heard as pop music—course through the air as *The Slits* march hand in hand through a storm they themselves have created.
>
> Greil Marcus describing *The Slits* in concert, *Lipstick Traces,* 35.

Riot Grrrl's precursors in feminist punk—including British act *The Slits,* whose performance Greil Marcus describes above—made regular use of deliberately "ugly" noises. One of their best-known singles, "Typical Girl" from 1979, is a reggae-influenced three-minute pop song with a catchy singsong chorus—"Typical girls, try to be, typical girls, very well"—but between returns to that refrain, the women let their voices overlap with one another, they get off (and then back on) beat, and their words occasionally dissolve into undifferentiated sounds.[60] In my discussion of Miranda July's non-representational noise-making in her mid 1990s performances, I argued that such expressions deliberately confound the listener's interpretation of the voice in terms of gender, especially because they occur alongside the artist's vocal representations of both feminine and masculine characters. But such extra-linguistic, unrestrained noise-making can also amount to a critique of patriarchal norms for communication that privilege reason, clarity, and beauty. As feminist philosopher Karina Eileraas suggested in 1997, these types of expressions constitute a "revolt against the grammar and syntax of

[60] *The Slits*, "Typical Girls," Island Records, 1979.

phallogocentrism" and can open up a space in which a feminine, pre-patriarchal language (along the lines of Helene Cixous's ecriture feminine) might thrive.[61]

Ecriture feminine, first discussed in Cixous's 1976 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" called for a kind of women's writing that refused masculine certainties in language and embraced the slippery-ness of signification.[62] The feminine in writing could, for Cixous, become a destabilizing force with the potential to subvert the phallologocentric culture and disrupt the binary logic that informed it. It also pushed against the Lacanian model of the symbolic in which woman is a signifier for absence or lack.[63]

> It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem.[64]

The women of *The Slits* refuse, with their "Squeaks, squeals, snarls, and whines," both silence (or Lacanian "lack") and the logic of symbolic language. And the most symbolic elements of their "Typical Girls"—its lyrics—speak, in a way, to Cixous's compulsory domains of "margin" and "harem," detailing the means by which women are pushed into unrewarding roles:

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[61] Karina Eileraas,"Witches, Bitches, and Fluids: Girl Bands Performing Ugliness as Resistance," *The Drama Review*, 41.3, (Fall, 1997): 125.
[62] Hélène Cixous, Paula Cohen, and Keith Cohen, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs*, 1:4, (1976): 875-93. These ideas were also developed by other post-Lacanian theorists, including Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray.
[63] Fiona Carson and Claire Pajaczkowska, *Feminist Visual Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 31. The Riot Grrrl trend of markering words designed to silence onto their bodies in confrontational ways seem to enact some of these ideas as well. See Judy Isaksen, "Identity and Agency: Riot Grrrls' Jouissance," Enculturation, Vol. 2, No. 2, Spring 1999. http://enculturation.net/2_2/isaksen/ Accessed 7-31-15.
[64] Cixous, et al., "The Laugh of the Medusa," 882.

> Typical girls fall under spells, typical girls buy magazines, typical girls feel like hell"—[a condition they attribute, a little later in that verse, to the gender-norm supporting mass culture]—"who invented the typical girl? Who's bringing out the new improved model? And there's another marketing ploy. Typical girl gets the typical boy."[65]

The voices in that song communicate, then, in two ways: their extra-linguistic vocalizations work to disrupt the logic of symbolic, patriarchal language, but they also use that language to criticize the system, as in the above excerpt. As Eileraas reminds us, the voice is both a non-symbolic expression of the body: "a physical phenomenon channeled by the lungs in fits of concerted breathing," and a political force, as in "the voice of the people." [66] It is a crucial concept for identity that has a stake in both the body and in politics.

Artist and music critic Dan Graham also stresses those aspects of women's musical performance that are suggestive of something like ecriture feminine in his writing on punk and post-punk "girl groups," noting how late 70s and early 80s acts like *The Slits*, *Ut*, and *The Raincoats* "approached playing as a nonperfectionist and not so tightly ordered system."[67] The embrace of amateurism is, of course, a crucial part of all punk performance, regardless of the genders of its producers, but Graham observes that there is a different, even less ordered approach in the musical and narrative structures composed by these all-women acts. He notes a "deliberate use of mistakes, silences, and personally motivated or arbitrary shifts of pattern/feeling," as well as overlapping phrases that contradict the central vocal line and "may also run counter to the main narrative

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[65] *The Slits*, "Typical Girls," Island Records, 1979.
[66] Eileraas,"Witches, Bitches, and Fluids, 124-125.
[67] Dan Graham, "New Wave Rock and the Feminine," *Open Letter*, 516 (1984): 93-94.

flow."[68] "Life on the Line," a 1979 song by *The Raincoats*, is an apt example of Graham's observations. It describes the experience of a woman who is trying to get away from someone or something, with "her life on the line." The electric violin that leads the song's melody slows down suddenly at seemingly arbitrary moments, making it seem like the other musical elements: the voice, drums, and bass guitar, are off pace, and exemplifying the kind of deliberate "nonperfectionism" that Graham describes. The lyrics echo this disorganization, describing the protagonist's state of panicked confusion: "her logic was too tangled/I couldn't untangle it/How can silence or expression /Stop or start here for anyone."[69]

The earliest Riot Grrrl acts had a lot in common with their late 1970s forbearers. The bands Graham discusses (and many others) demonstrated the way that punk's openness to amateurism and embrace of convention-shattering chaos could be a platform for subverting normative female gender expression. In this, they laid the groundwork for bands like *Bikini Kill* to intercede in the male-dominated American punk scenes of the late 80s and early 90s. The multimedia music and performance art experiments that grew out of Riot Grrrl from the mid 1990s forward—including July's narrative-driven spoken work performances—preserved some elements of 1970s punk, and followed as well from the punk-influenced, multi and intermedia art experiments of Yoko Ono, Laurie Anderson, and Karen Finley.

Riot Grrrl influenced multi-media artist, Seattle-based Wynne Greenwood, has made the integration of music and visual art the central element of her work, and her

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[68] Ibid.
[69] The Raincoats, "Life on the Line," Self-Titled, Rough Trade Records 1979.

projects draw on all of those influences. Greenwood performed, from 1999-2006, as an electro-punk trio called *Tracy and the Plastics*. The band's members: Tracy, Nikki, and Cola, were all characters played by the artist. Greenwood would set up a projector at a house party or a punk club (and, within a few years, at museums and theaters too) and play carefully timed videos in which Cola and Nikki—each of whom were actually Greenwood—would have conversations, perform backup vocals, play air guitar, and operate a drum machine and keyboard. Both of those characters existed only within the video footage. Tracy, the lead singer, was performed live by Greenwood and in real time: she built empty spaces into Cola and Nikki's scripts, during which she could hold up her end of the conversation. All of this created a platform for complex three way interactions in which Greenwood could speak to the two videotaped versions of herself, and they would appear to speak back.[70]

The dialogue excerpted below, for example, occurs between the three band members, with Tracy speaking to the recordings of Nikki and Cola, and each of them speaking back. Tracy stands on the stage and faces towards the screen, which cuts between projections of the other two characters. All three characters seem to be standing in the same plain room, adding to the impression that the dialogue is fully (rather than only one third) live. Each character uses the pause-and-question mark-filled vocal style of a kind of exaggerated 'valley girl.' The only exception to this occurs when the Cola character imitates a man who was talking to her: for those lines she lowers her voice and quickens her pace.

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[70] See Johanna Burton, "Girl, Interrupted: Johanna Burton on Tracy and the Plastics. *Artforum International* 44; 10 (Summer 2005): 107-108 for an analysis of the use of pauses and empty spaces within *Tracy and the Plastics'* dialogues.

> Nikki: Cola, what did that guy say to you last night anyways?
>
> Cola: The guy at the gas station? The guy last night?
>
> Tracy: Yeah, I didn't? I walked in right in the, I…
>
> Cola: Well he was like [in a deeper voice] "excuse me, excuse me, but you know, you'll never be modern."
>
> Nikki: God! Ugh.
>
> Tracy: That's really messed up.
>
> Cola: [in the deeper voice] "Well, you did grow up in a suburb didn't you?"
>
> And I'm thinkin… [holds up both middle fingers to mime flipping him off]. And then, you guys walked in, and I left, so…
>
> Nikki: [frustrated] Ok, let's just play the song? Let's just play the song. I'm sooo ready.
>
> Tracy: [defensively] Ok, but….no one's been talking that much…[71]

This slow-paced, casual conversation is typical for how the three characters interact in *Tracy and the Plastics* performances, and a significant chunk of most of their show consists of such dialogue, which usually occurs between the performances of songs. In some cases, more complex props and editing make the musical parts of the performances into something like live-action music videos.

The embodiment of multiple characters that Greenwood enacts in these works has something in common with Miranda July's dialogic style of performative storytelling (and the two artists were in contact: Greenwood contributed a video to July's *Big Miss Moviola* project in 1998).[72] But while July works to create distinctive voices for each of her characters, Greenwood's trio all speak in close to the same voice. This lack of

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[71] Except from Tracy and the Plastics, Spring Tour performance, 2001. http://www.tracyandtheplastics.com/livevideo.html accessed, 8-10-15.
[72] *Cherry Cherry Chainletter*, VHS Tape, 1998 (Joanie 4 Jackie archive, Bard College).

differentiation appears to be deliberate, and it is supported by the characters' uncomplicated costumes: we can recognize each of them because one is blonde, one has black hair, and one is a brunette, but that is where the disguises end, and we can easily see that they are all the same person beneath their wigs.

In a 2001 essay Greenwood described some of her ideas around *Tracy and the Plastics*, and she stresses that her characters are her—in fragments, but still her—and that the metaphor of talking to her projected self (or selves) is an important part of what the project is doing. She writes that as a queer and feminist artist she is marginalized within mainstream culture, and must thereby endeavor to reconstitute herself in fragments.[73] As the artist explained in 2001:

> By fragmented, I mean a cohesive identity that's constructed from different, often conflicting, parts of society, culture, and life that we relate to because popular culture has no whole identity to offer its audience other than one that resembles the ruling class.[74]

That her characters often self-consciously discuss how they think other people see them, as well as how they see one another, reinforces this impression of a self addressing itself in fragments.

The songs Greenwood performed as *Tracy and the Plastics* aren't typical punk: her "Tracy" has a sweet and melodic voice (though Cola and Nikki do contribute the occasional punk-rock scream) and most of the music is performed via synthesizer and

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[73] Theorists of postmodern culture have regularly held up fragmentation (or schizophrenia) as a mode by which the contemporary self responds to totalizing social forces. See Deleuze and Guttari's theorization of Schizoanalysis in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* London: Penguin Books, 2009 (originally published in 1977).

[74] Wynne Greenwood, *Tracy + the Plastics,* 2001. http://www.tracyandtheplastics.com/about/about.html Accessed 10-01-14.

drum machine. The lyrics of *Tracy and the Plastics* songs don't tend to address feminism or any other political concerns as directly as many Riot Grrrl acts did (though the dialogues between songs often do) and the five albums she released vary widely in content and style. During *Tracy and the Plastics* performances the band often plays bits and pieces as well as full songs drawn from various of their albums. The look of the videos and the overall content and tone of the project clearly connect it to Riot Grrrl, though Greenwood came late to that movement—the first Tracy and the Plastics album was released in 2000—and her links to the subculture occurred mostly through elements of its afterlife. She produced videos for *Bikini Kill* frontwoman Kathleen Hanna to perform with in concert, for example, but they were for *Le Tigre*, one of Hanna's post Riot Grrrl bands.

Greenwood's *Tracy and the Plastics* videos all feature footage of Cola and Nikki, but they also integrate photographs and drawings as elements of the settings in which the characters interact. Arrows, thought bubbles, and other useful symbols occasionally enter the frame to clarify or contribute to the narrative. Watching the handmade-looking, cut and paste aesthetic of the videos' visual environments progress from frame to frame feels a lot like flipping through the pages of a Riot Grrrl zine. For example, in *Gut* Tracer—The *Tracy and the Plastics* performance that Greenwood toured with throughout 2002—the opening video image is a collage in which crude drawings of two bodies with Xeroxed photographs for heads have a conversation about nipple hair, and whether or not it is a normal thing for a woman to have.[75]

[75] *Gut Tracer*, 2002 http://www.tracyandtheplastics.com/livevideo.html, Accessed 09-24-15.

The two voices that discuss this pressing grooming question are caricatures of young feminine speech patterns: there are lots of "likes," and "ums," and "sorrys," and every statement ends with a vocal question mark. Feminine vocal stereotypes like these are full of apparent expressions of uncertainty and have long been widely decried in books and articles advising women to speak in more "authoritative" ways. A 2010 article posted on *The Chronicle of Higher Education*'s blog, in which Hofstra University Professor Laurie Fendrich expresses concern over what she calls the "valley girl lift," is typical of such discussions. That "valley girl lift," (a tendency that is often also called "upspeak" in which declarative sentences or phrases end with a vocal question mark) is seen by many as expressive of a specifically feminine brand of weakness and indecision. "I find," Fendrich observes, "that turning declarative statements into questions reveals an unexplainable lack of confidence in one's opinions and a radical uncertainty about one's place in the world."[76] Such a vocal tick "signifies," for Fendrich, "nothing other than that you are a Valley-Girl type — i.e., an empty-headed clotheshorse for whom the mall represents the height of culture."[77] When Greenwood exaggeratedly, deliberately, deploys that sort of voice in the speaking parts for all three members of the trio, she appropriates a marker of feminine weakness or shallowness, and uses it to excess as a signifier of the thoroughly, unapologetically feminine world of these characters (an impression that is reinforced, in *Gut Tracer,* by the embarrassing intimacy of the opening conversation).

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[76] Laurie Fendrich, "The Valley Girl Lift," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 12, 2010, http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/the-valley-girl-lift/21780 *Accessed 8-10-2015.*
[77] Ibid

A similar technique was sometimes adopted in various parts of 1990s Riot Grrrl, and it was especially pronounced in the bands that were fronted by Kathleen Hanna: *Bikini Kill*, *Le Tigre*, and *The Julie Ruin*. When Kathleen Hanna speaks as part of her songs or during live performances and interviews, she often uses an exaggerated 'valley girl' pacing and rhythm, emphasizing the disjunction between the expectations for a voice like that, and the highly sophisticated language and well-developed ideas that her voice expresses.[78] Like Greenwood's characters, Hanna uses exaggeration to contest the associations of such voices with shallowness and uncertainty: reappropriating feminine vocal stereotypes and making them signify differently. *LeTigre's* 2001 single "They want us to make a symphony out of the sound of women swallowing their own tongues" (a song also sometimes known as "Third Wave Girl") is an especially clear example of that phenomenon. It open with an authoritative, confident-voiced male interviewer, who asks:

> What is it that they're, that younger women, are pushing up against? They would seem to have a list of options to choose from. A set of ways to construct their own identity that takes in everything. It's just a vast smorgasbord. The options are not as narrow as they might have been thirty years ago. So, where does the problem lie now?[79]

This question is followed immediately by an electronic collage of various women's voices responding with: "um, it's like" "and um," "uh," and "well, so, obviously," in various rhythms. These sounds and expressions are looped, stretched out and compressed, and become the driving rhythm of the song. This collage of remixed expressions of uncertainty breaks, here and there, for a short reprise in which a cheerful woman's voice chants "third wave girl! Mm hmm! third wave girl! Mm hmm!"

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[78] Many of Kathleen Hanna's performances can serve as examples of this technique, including those documented in Le Tigre's 2010 concert movie *Who Took the Bomp?* (directed by Kerthy Fix).
[79] *Le Tigre,* "They want us to make a symphony out of the sound of women swallowing their own tongues" From the Desk of Mr. Lady, Mr. Lady, 2001.

On a first listen, this song would seem to be criticizing third wave feminism for its incoherence or lack of conviction, though its title, "they want us to make a symphony out of the sound of women swallowing their own tongues" clearly suggests otherwise. The obvious editing of the women's voices is evidence of things clipped out—the content between the "ums" has been excised—and this can be interpreted as the goal of the "they" in the title, who would rather criticize the style in which women's ideas are delivered than focus on the ideas themselves. But this song also seems to celebrate these "feminine" noises, holding them up as a kind of refusal to engage in the interviewer's leading, subtly accusatory question. In this way, the "valley girl's" "radical uncertainty about [her] place in the world"[80] joins the ranks of the "unmediated female noises," that Greil Marcus admired in *The Slits*' performance style.[81] Like those decades-earlier punk rock screams and grunts, *Le Tigre*'s "ums" and "uhs" contest the very premise of coherent language, and the patriarchal structures that undergird such apparent coherence.

In Greenwood's *Gut Tracer*'s performance, the deliberate deployment of apparent signs for uncertainty and indecision extends beyond the speech patterns of *Tracy and the Plastic*'s three characters. After the initial conversation about nipple-hair—a conversation rife with the kinds of vocal characteristics I've been discussing—the live Tracy walks onto the stage and argues with video-Nikki about the merits of a painting that she's made—"Tracy, have you ever heard of, um, artistic intent? Like, I meant to do it? I have an agenda?"—and then the two begin to perform one of their songs. They have several false starts in which one or the other of them misses a cue or gets off pace before the song—a 2001 single called "Arcade Suicide"—comes together. These "mistakes" are, of

[80] Fendrich, "The Valley Girl Lift."
[81] Marcus, *Lipstick Traces*, 35.

course, carefully scripted and elaborately timed, and they are an element that is featured in several of the *Tracy and the Plastics* videos. Greenwood's multiple versions of herself struggling to get in sync and play the song as one coherent unit speaks to the experience of trying to reconcile pieces of a fragmented self that she discussed in the 2001 essay I quoted above.[82]

The calculated messiness of these scripted failures also recalls Dan Graham's observations about the links between ecriture feminine and the all-woman punk bands of the late 1970s. Graham posited that mistakes, pauses, accidental overlapping, and so on were used deliberately by bands like *The Slits* and *The Raincoats* to create a structure-subverting aesthetic that was explicitly feminine.[83] Greenwood's version of this messiness—intricately calibrated through video editing as it is—both embraces and gently mocks the enthusiastic disorder of her punk feminist forbearers.

A strong interest in collaboration and collectivity was another significant trend in both late 1970s feminist art and music. Many working within feminist visual art circles in the 1970s endeavored to create models of collective practice that could offer alternatives to the versions of art history that tracked art's development through the contributions of individual male "geniuses."[84] New York based Post-Punk act *UT* attempted something similar, subverting the implied power dynamics within rock bands by switching instruments and roles for every song, and making it so that the audience could not "identify individual performers with a particular instrument, role, or hierarchical position

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[82] Wynne Greenwood, *Tracy + the Plastics,* 2001. http://www.tracyandtheplastics.com/about/about.html Accessed 10-20-15
[83] Graham, "New Wave Rock and the Feminine," 83-84.
[84] See Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon; Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, (London: Routledge, 1999).

relative to the group's identity. "[85] This technique, which Graham characterizes as "a deliberately avant-gardist and feminist approach,"[86] was adopted by some Riot Grrrl bands as well. As musician and zine-writer Tamra Spivey recalls: "I saw [riot grrrl band] Team Dresch and they all switched instruments, and I was like, 'That's it!' I saw the freedom there. It goes beyond punk rock. I see the limitations of patriarchy, and I won't play that. I don't have to."[87]

When Greenwood acts as a collective (through *Tracy and the Plastics*) and dramatizes their struggles to work together smoothly, she connects her project to the experiments with collectivity undertaken by the previous feminist generation. Her mode of positioning the self *as* the collective also recalls July's little-girl character who insists on playing every role at the start of *Lena Beamish*. By portraying multi-character collaborations in these ways, both artists gesture to, but then dismiss, the impulse towards collectivity associated with earlier feminist art. About five minutes into Greenwood's *Gut Tracer* performance the character of Cola appears in the video projection: she is dipping a large slice of wood into a bucket of paint. When Tracy turns to the screen and asks what she is up to, she says that it is time for her to "dye a log." "Oh come on," Tracy responds, "Don't dialogue now….. we're in the middle of a show!" The three band members go back and forth about whether or not now is an appropriate time to dialogue (or dye a log), a pun that points again to the pitfalls of collaborative methods. That theme recurs throughout the performance: later on, Cola appears again to interrupt a song, this time

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[85] Graham, "New Wave Rock and the Feminine," 92.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Tamra Spivey, quoted in Jessica Rosenberg, Gitana Garofalo, "Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from within," *Signs* 23.3, 1998, 829.

with her arm in a sling, announcing plaintively to the others that she has broken her "collaborate bone."

Tracy and the Plastics stopped performing in 2006, but Greenwood's work continues to merge aural and visual content in interesting ways. Her 2013 project *More Heads* staged paper, clay, found objects, and fabric sculptures of heads as a band of ventriloquist's dummies. Arranged on the floor, they are animated by audio tracks of dialogue in a range of human voices (all Greenwood's, of course) that loop and overlap and repeat, and are backed by a techno beat. This soundtrack alternates between sections of abstract sound, and striking, often ominous bits and pieces of conversation that we can follow. One head, for example, announces "I saw this guy shaking with rage, and then he asked for help," while a set of other heads all take turns practicing the line "I am this place, this place is me."[88]

The ease with which both Greenwood and July intertwine visual and aural media was not as readily available to their forbearers (like Laurie Anderson, Yoko Ono or the women of *Disband*) who were coming of age in the 1960s and 1970s, before MTV normalized the experience of coordinated looking and listening in prerecorded pop music. The boundaries that those elder artists broke were taken for granted as broken by the Riot Grrrl and Riot Grrrl-influenced artists I've discussed here, who entered both art and music through a post-MTV mass culture. The availability of models for visual/musical hybridity in the popular culture combined, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with a set of mainstream teen idols that included, for the first time, women who foregrounded their

[88] *More Heads* was staged at Carl Soloway Gallery, NYC, in November 2013.

independence and sexual power as central elements of their pop personae. "Riot Grrrl," as Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald observed in 1994 "emerged from punk via Madonna."[89] What has become clear in the shape that Riot Grrrl's legacy has taken through the end of the 1990s and into the 2000s is that the movement's combination of punk aesthetics and a kind of feminism that sprung, at least in part, from within the popular culture, was balanced with a major doses of the visual via intermedia artists like Yoko Ono and Laurie Anderson, and music-video driven pop stars like Madonna and Janet Jackson whose careers reached their peaks in a moment when MTV had made the visual elements of popular music increasingly central to artists' success.

Combinations of visual art-based performance and pop music—particularly in its punk-inflected variants—have continued to provide fertile platforms for feminist activism. Moscow-based punk band and feminist art collective *Pussy Riot* is among the most prominent recent examples of this persistence. Founded in 2011, *Pussy Riot* consists of a shifting membership of about twelve women, most of whom have remained anonymous. They became the subject of international attention in 2012 when a February anti-Putin performance that they staged to disrupt services at an Orthodox church led to arrest and a subsequent two year prison sentence for three of the group's members.

*Pussy Riot'*s songs address institutionalized sexism in Russian politics and religion, and are concerned, as band member Serafima explained in a 2014 interview, with "gender and LGBT rights, problems of masculine conformity, absence of a daring political message on the musical and art scenes, and the domination of males in all areas

[89] Gottlieb and Wald, "Smells Like Teen Spirit," 260.

of public discourse."[90] Their performance style (which is modeled on 1970s punk) is designed to disrupt, with lots of yelling, jumping and kicking. And as Riot Grrrl historian Sarah Marcus observes, there are strong echoes of 90s punk in *Pussy Riot's* performances as well, especially in the way they use their bodies:

> The way their bodies occupy space. They're kicking, they're punching, they're always standing on something tall and being really monumental. There's this way that toughness gets projected through their body language even without being able to see their faces. That's really through the feeling of seeing a punk band of girls on the stage.[91]

Like many before them in both feminist art and feminist punk, *Pussy Riot* makes a point of working collectively: "We often change names, balaclavas, dresses, and roles inside the groups. People drop out, new members join the group, and the lineup in each guerilla performance can be entirely different."[92]

Their costumes—bright dresses and tights, with colorful balaclavas on top disguising faces and hair—are visually striking and read well from long distances and from within a crowd. Their live performances are primarily visual, with the aural elements appended later. *Pussy Riot* is, as New Yorker culture critic Ann Friedman observes, "*of* the Internet," and so their real-time demonstrations are always presented with the subsequent internet-version in mind: footage from the protests are quickly edited and overlaid with music to be widely distributed via youtube.[93] The video for the group's 2012 performance in the orthodox church—entitled, in its original posting, "Punk Prayer,

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[90] Serafima, quoted in Henry Langston, "Meeting Pussy Riot," *Vice* March 2012. Accessed September 17th, 2014. http://www.vice.com/read/A-Russian-Pussy-Riot.

[91] Sarah Marcus, quoted in Ann Friedman, "Pussy Riot Grrrls." *New Yorker*, September 14, 2012.
[92] Tyurya, quoted in Henry Langston, "Meeting Pussy Riot (interview)," *Vice* March 2012. http://www.vice.com/read/A-Russian-Pussy-Riot. Accessed 10-17-14.
[93] Ann Friedman, "Pussy Riot Grrrls." *New Yorker*, September 14, 2012.

Mother of God, Chase Putin Away"—is typical of this style. The video intercuts passages of choral singing from Sergei Rachmaninoff's "Ave Maria" with the band's three lead singers' vocals, delivered at high volume in a typical punk rock style, and layered over electric guitar.

Pussy Riot's mode of combining feminist politics, visually-oriented performance art, and punk music and aesthetics includes clear echoes of Riot Grrrl, and several within the Russian collective have noted the influence of that movement on their work, while also taking pains to note the greater political urgency of their message. As *Pussy Riot* Member Garadzha explains:

> A lot of credit certainly goes to Bikini Kill and the bands in the Riot Grrrl act—we somehow developed what they did in the 1990s, although in an absolutely different context and with an exaggerated political stance, which leads to all of our performances being illegal.[94]

Despite the clearly substantial difference between the political context of early 1990s USA and that of contemporary Russia, *Pussy Riot* has chosen to bring a Riot Grrrl influenced aesthetic to bear in their performances, their videos, and even their costumes.[95] These choices attest to the persistent resonance and impressive reach of Riot Grrrl's legacy in the present. During the trial and sentencing of the three *Pussy Riot* members who were arrested after the Moscow church performance, performers all over the world collaborated to protest their imprisonment, and to raise money and awareness. Many of those efforts in the USA involved prominent Riot Grrrl figures, like Kathleen

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[94] Henry Langston, "Meeting Pussy Riot (interview)," *Vice* March 2012. Accessed September 17th, 2014. http://www.vice.com/read/A-Russian-Pussy-Riot

[95] Kathleen Hanna appeared in a balaclava for a 1992 interview included in Tamra Davis's 1993 short film *No Alternative Girls.* Hanna's choice to wear the balaclava was motivated by ideas about resisting the male gaze and also about trying to keep herself from being a figurehead for Riot Grrrl (a movement that tried not to have figureheads).

Hanna and Toby Vail of *Bikini Kill*, as well as other women performers who've come up in this chapter. A staged dramatic reading of *Pussy Riot*'s translated court documents, for example, was produced by *Le Tigre*'s JD Sampson, and included Karen Finley among its readers.[96]

The thread that *Pussy Riot* picked up in 2011 has woven visual art and musical performance together in feminist contexts from the 1970s to the present, from artists like *Disband,* Laurie Anderson and Yoko Ono to *Bikini Kill,* Miranda July and *Tracy and the Plastics*. *Pussy Riot*'s cultural prominence in recent years has also helped to make Riot Grrrl's legacy more visible, and it has demonstrated the extent to which Riot Grrrl's punk and feminist aesthetics have been integrated into the mainstream. Pop megastar Madonna's 2012 concert in Moscow's Olimpisky Stadium speaks clearly to that legacy: during the performance of her 1984 single "like a virgin," she donned a black balaclava and removed her shirt to reveal the words "Pussy Riot" markered onto her back.[97]

This show of support for the imprisoned women was a bold move considering the Moscow location of the concert, and the markered message on the pop star's torso calls clearly back to early 90s Riot Grrrl (*Pussy Riot* themselves haven't appeared with words written on their flesh, but the cultural association of Sharpee-on-skin with bands like Bikini Kill makes such a technique seem relevant to the Russian collective's overall aesthetic). There are things to criticize in this image: Madonna's "Like a Virgin," is an apolitical song, and so the reference to *Pussy Riot* seems a little misplaced within its

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[96] "Free Pussy Riot, Public Reading," *Juice Magazine: Pools, Pipes, and Punk Rock,* http://juicemagazine.com/home/free-pussy-riot-public-reading/ Accessed 8-10-15.
[97] Miriam Elder, "Pussy Riot: Madonna Supports punk Trio at Concert in Russia," The Guardian, August 7th, 2012. http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/aug/07/pussy-riot-madonna-concert-plea Accessed 10-01-15.

performance, more a random declaration than a coherent expression of protest against the Russian government's actions. But the image's championing of solidarity among women, its mixture of political provocation and political-statement-as-fashion, and its combination of musical performance and conscious image-making speak clearly and loudly to the ways that the issues I've discussed in this chapter have continued to exert an influence in the popular visual and musical cultures of the present.

CHAPTER 6 : "YOU ARE ENOUGH" SELF-HELP, THERAPEUTIC CULTURE, AND THE BELABORED PERSONAE OF MIRANDA JULY.

In Miranda July's 2007 short story *It Was Romance*, a group of forty women who have paid to attend a workshop on "becoming more romantic" struggle to pass out the napkins that are a prop in their class activity. "We were a slow group" one of the women recounts, but "[we] finally settled on 'take one, and pass the rest down.'"[1] Later on, stacking chairs proves challenging too; these are women who have not mastered their immediate surroundings. Despite this, they attack a series of bizarre "romance" exercises with concentration and open minds. Only they, the instructor explains, and the small area directly in front of each of their faces, needs to be made romantic: not whole houses, or even whole rooms. The women's efforts and focus needn't extend more than a few inches in front of their own mouths. "We worked hard," the narrator tells us, "because we wanted results." "This," she whispers hopefully, "could change everything."[2]

The women in this workshop—each focused on their own small personal space, all struggling to pass napkins and stack chairs—share a worldview and sense of self that is widespread in July's fiction, performance narratives, and film, especially among her female characters.[3] A strong desire to do work on the self and a belief that self-change is the solution to all of life's struggles intermingles, inside of many of these characters, with a kind of slow clumsiness and general inability to meaningfully act on their surroundings.

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[1] Miranda July, "It Was Romance" in *No One Belongs Here More Than You* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 58.
[2] Ibid, 59.
[3] Antje Czudaj's, *Self-Help and the Individualized Subject in Miranda July's Art* is forthcoming from Columbia University Press in February 2016, and promises an in-depth discussion of these themes.

In one short story, a woman speaks with the sobbing owner of a runaway dog, and then lets the dog speed right by her, so lost in an inner dialogue about how best to live in the world that she cannot react in the moment.[4] In another story an amateur writer of self-help slogans stares distractedly at the photos on a man's refrigerator while he suffers a seizure on his porch.[5] One daydream leads to another, and she never manages to retrieve the medicine that she'd run to his kitchen to fetch. A third woman (a character in one of July's movies) plots a life-affirming personal-growth-related project that she will execute and share through social media, but becomes paralyzed and disconnected from her life—and at great personal cost—when she tries to put her plan into action.[6]

The impulse towards self-change that motivates each of these women (and the interpretation of that impulse as a "chief source of contemporary moral worth," [7]) became ubiquitous in American popular literature and culture in the last decades of the 20th century. By the 1990s therapeutically-inflected and self-improvement minded TV talk shows, radio call-in shows, and advice books and columns were everywhere. The increasing popularity of psychological treatment in post-war America gave an initial push towards this normalization of a therapeutic emotional style, and before long the language of psychotherapy had expanded beyond the realm of its experts and into the popular media.[8] That expanded field for therapeutic discourse eventually interlocked, as

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[4] Miranda July "Majesty," in *No One Belongs Here More Than You* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005).
[5] July "The Shared Patio," in *No One Belongs Here More Than You*.
[6] *The Future*, directed by Miranda July, (2011, Roadside Attractions).
[7] Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul : Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 184.
[8] Soldiers returning from combat in need of mental health services, as well as the rise of behaviorist therapy in the 1950s are two factors that influenced the growing normalization of psychological treatment in this era. See Johnathan Engel, *American Therapy: The Rise of Psychotherapy in the United States*, New York: Penguin, 2009.

sociologist Eva Illouz has shown, "with various other categories of American culture, such as the pursuit of happiness, [and] self-reliance."[9]

Self-help literature—a genre that draws on psychological and therapeutic discourses, traditional American up-by-the-bootstraps narratives, and a mix of spiritual and mystical traditions—emerged along with these new norms, and became an established sector of the American publishing industry in the immediate post-war period. In the final decades of the 20th century the genre grew substantially, with sales rising 96% between 1991 and 1996, and in a moment when most other areas of the publishing industry were struggling.[10] Miranda July's parents (Lindy Hough and Richard Grossinger) contributed to this trend: they ran a small press called *North Atlantic Books* (founded in 1974) and by the mid 1980s they were specializing in New Age and Self-Help titles.[11] Throughout much of July's childhood, the press's headquarters was their family's home.[12]

The expectation that ordinary people work constantly at self-improvement and self-change is a feature that figures strongly into recent self-help literature and its TV and radio siblings. As sociologist Micki McGee explains in her 2005 book on America's "makeover culture": marketers used to promise feelings of success and security in exchange for the purchase of specific products (like deodorant or dandruff shampoo). But in recent years, simply purchasing a commodity has become insufficient. Now one must

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[9] Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul,*155.
[10] Wendy Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture : Reading between the Lines* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 4. Micki McGee, *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life*, (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11.
[11] North Atlantic Books, "Company Profile." https://www.northatlanticbooks.com/ Accessed 03-13-13.
[12] Katrina Onstad, "Miranda July is Totally Not Kidding," *New York Times,* July 14th, 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/17/magazine/the-make-believer.html Accessed 08-16-14.

also "embrace a lifestyle, a series of regimes of time management or meditation, of diet and spiritual exploration, of self-scrutiny and self-affirmation."[13] The American ideal of the "self-made man," has been replaced, McGee argues, by this new self that must be continuously under construction: a "belabored self."[14]

McGee's notion of the belabored self is useful in that it highlights the ways in which constant self-regard and self-focus become the necessary work of the ordinary individual in a culture that constructs self-change as a moral value. It allows us to "reconsider the cultural preoccupation with the self in terms of labor."[15] In this, she offers an alternative interpretation of the narcissistic focus on individual concerns for which the self-help movement has been widely criticized. That critique, (which is persuasive, and is common among the scholars of this genre) suggests that the popular culture's preoccupation with the therapeutic has failed, in Eva Illouz's words, to "provide us with an intelligible way of linking the private self to the public sphere, [and] has emptied the self of its communal and political content, replacing this content with a narcissistic self-concern."[16] In other words, the individual's energies are trained towards self-improvement and self-change, and away, therefore, from collective political action.

The students participating in the workshop in July's "It Was Romance," are instructed to focus all of their efforts on transforming the area a few inches in front of their faces, while in real life outside of the class, each of them suffers unfairness and disappointment at work, at home, and in their wider contexts: discontents that might be addressed if the collective energies of the room were focused on making changes to the

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[13] McGee, *Self-Help, Inc.*,18.
[14] Ibid., 16.
[15] McGee, 16.
[16] Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul,* 2.

culture instead of remaking the self.[17] In this, July pokes fun at the conventions of self-improvement culture, and points as well to the view (referenced in Illouz's argument above) that such self-focused trends are symptoms of a Neoliberal social turn in which collective energy and class consciousness are fractured and weakened by an over-focus on the individual.

This short story, as well as the other similar scenarios present across July's varied types of narrative, don't simply condemn or dismiss those women whose obsessions with self-change work against their own interests and disenfranchise them as a class. The total ineptness of the characters (their clumsiness at napkin-passing, lost-dog-grabbing, and the like) evokes an image of the self that is definitively belabored: overworked and over-adjusted, like an elastic band that has been stretched into too many shapes and has lost its snap. These women are exhausted by the social premium placed on constant self-transformation, and their apparent selfishness is of the type that McGee recasts as the necessary labor of the present moment. What may seem like evidence of narcissistic self-involvement "is increasingly required as a new form of immaterial labor—mental, social, and emotional tasks—required for participation in the labor market."[18] Self-promotion and self-management, along with the ability to change, move, and rearrange one's life as needed, are key, in recent years, to remaining employable.[19]

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[17] In this section of the story, the students are instructed to drape cloth napkins over their faces in order to designate that small space for romance. This exercise recalls Brazilian artist Lygia Clark's 1967 *Mascaras Sensoriais*: artworks in which a seated subject has a hood draped over their face in the interests of "stimulate[ing] a rich inner experience by cutting the person off from the world." See Susan Best, *Visualizing Feeling : Affect and the Feminine Avant-Garde*. New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011, 60.
[18] McGee, *Self Help Inc.*, 24.
[19] Ibid. See "Futurework, Trends and Challenges for Work in the 21st Century," United States Department of Labor, August 1999.
http://www.dol.gov/dol/aboutdol/history/herman/reports/futurework/conference/trends/NewTrends_.htm
Accessed 8-18-15.

The belabored selves that populate many of July's recent narratives expose some cynicism about the contemporary culture of self-improvement and self-change, though they represent only one among many varied threads in her work that reflect on or react against the mass culture's therapeutic turn. References to the overlapping realms of popular psychology, self-improvement, and new age cultures float in and out of her work in every medium. Her family ties to self-help publishing help explain her connection to those themes, as does her experience of having come of age in 1980s Berkley. In a 2004 interview with art historian Julia Bryan Wilson, July talked about the influence of Berkley on the way she was taught to see the world, recounting that:

> I learned about sex *surragates* right around the time I first learned about sex[.] You couldn't just learn the facts or just the facts and their raunchy dirty counterparts, you also had to know their holistic, sometimes sleazy, therapeutic versions."[20]

July's debut novel *The First Bad Man* (2015) features a middle-aged male character—Phillip—who embodies that sleazy side of the expanded therapeutic culture. He sits on the board of a women's self-defense non-profit and visits a "color therapist" for help with his medical and spiritual problems, but he is also a sexual predator with an interest in teenaged girls. And in *New Society*—the participatory performance piece that July toured with throughout 2015—the artist plays a kind of cult leader who convinces the audience in attendance to agree to collaborate on creating a new society within the space of the auditorium. There is lots of talk of self-healing, mutual support, and a therapeutic tone overall, but when people disobey, July's cult leader character traps them there, punishing and shaming those who attempt to escape. She controls time, splits up a

[20] Julia Bryan Wilson, "Some Kind of Grace: An Interview with Miranda July," *Camera Obscura* 19, no. 1 (2004): 190.

couple to start a relationship with the woman, and decrees that no one in the New Society is permitted to become pregnant.[21]

These, and other of July's works, point clearly to the seedy and self-defeating elements of new age and self-help culture, but the artist has also engaged with therapeutic language and themes in much more hopeful and positive ways.[22] Her particular take on participatory art, for example, often positions the kinds of participation on offer as potentially therapeutic for the audience member cum collaborator. *The Hallway,* a 2008 interactive installation produced for the Yokohama Triennial of Contemporary Art in Japan, is one such example. July stages the visitor's walk down a 125 foot long museum corridor as a microcosm of their life's journey. As one progresses through the installation, 50 handwritten signs, hung at roughly eye level, force a reflection on time's passage that is both lighthearted and deadly serious. One such sign, about a quarter of the way through the hallway, reads "For a split second you think: maybe the hallway is just a metaphor, maybe this isn't my life! But then you realize you're deceiving yourself." *The Hallway* seeks to make the museum visitor's ideas about his or her own life (and its potential transformation) into the subject of the work. "Like life," July wrote in a description of her installation, "the hall is filled with indecision, disappointment, boredom and joy – and it does end."[23]

July's 2002 participatory web project *Learning to Love You More* (a collaboration

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[21] These elements of the *New Society* performance were included in its November 31, 2014 performance at Minneapolis's *Walker Arts Center*

[22] Engagement with (and critique of) self-help culture is also a thread that runs through several of the short movies submitted to *Big Miss Moviola* over the years, Jamie Mirabella's "Dear Boss," from the *Break My Chainletter*, tape is one especially clear example of this, in which a speech full of self-help tropes about power and gender in laid over a montage of images of engagement rings and Hollywood-movie wives.

[23] Miranda July, *The Hallway* http://mirandajuly.com/mj_post/hallway/, accessed 8-18-15.

with Portland-based artist Harrell Fletcher), aims at something similar, offering a range of "assignments," to be executed by visitors to the site, many of which engage the participant in the kind of self-reflection that encourages self-transformation. Assignment #52, for example, asks the participant to "Write the phone call you wish you could have," and Assignment #53 asks us to "give advice to yourself in the past." Many other of the assignments engage approaches, tropes, and symbols drawn from therapeutic and self-improvement culture. Aware of its proximity to that culture, Assignment #17 "Record your own guided meditation," warns its participants that they are not to submit spoof versions.

Assignment # 63 asked that participants "Make an encouraging banner" and post it "in a place where you or someone else might need some encouragement." More than 300 banners were produced, posted, and photographed in response to that assignment, and many echo the self-help culture's clichés, so much so that there were repeats. Kaylee Keim of Colorado, Harriet Wynne of Melbourne, and Kristin Sorenson of Texas all created banners that included the words "You are Enough," a phrase so redolent of self-help that versions of it appear within the titles of more than a dozen of that genre's books, like Daphne Rose Kingma's 2012 book *When You Think You're Not Enough: The Four Life-Changing Steps to Loving Yourself* and David Walker's 2007 *You are Enough; Always Have Been, Always Will Be.*

The words "You Are Enough," even appeared on a cake, baked by a fan of July's and presented to her at a screening of *The Future*. The baker, a Toronto life coach named Natalie Boustead, chose those words because she saw them as both anti-capitalist and

therapeutically valuable (and also, as she notes, because of their ability to fit on a cake). In Boustead's words:

> How much could be gained if we all believed we were enough, in and of ourselves, before capital gain, before the gaze of a lover or a friend shines on us with approval, before concepts of smart or dumb, pretty or ugly ever enter the picture? What systems would intrinsically fail in the face of a society that truly believed they were enough?[24]

Though Boustead's cake was produced as a gift for July, and not as a LTLYM project, it preserves the spirit of that website. It is a handmade expression of everyday creativity, it uses language drawn from the expanded therapeutic culture, and it not just meant to be eaten, but also to be photographed and displayed online; the baker wrote about it on a blog, and July herself photographed it and shared it through her Facebook and Twitter accounts.[25]

Learning to Love You More strongly reflects its particular historical moment: when it was launched in 2002, the notion that online networks could effect real-world change was only just beginning to develop. LTLYM reinforces that new understanding by using the assignments—presented virtually, and promising virtual recognition of the results—to direct and inspire real-world creativity. The site's collaborative structure also followed from a decade of renewed art-world interest in social engagement and audience participation. Terms like "relational art," "participatory art," and "social practice," have been widely used to refer to strong trends present in art since the mid 1990s. Claire Bishop, an art historian who has been central in the debates spurred by those trends,

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[24] Natalie Boustead, "U Are Enough, Miranda July, and everyone else, needs to hear/belive," *The Peak Magazine*, Issue 2 Volume 53, 2013. http://guelphpeak.org/arts-culture/2013/11/u-are-enough-miranda-july-and-everyone-else-needs-to-hearbelieve/ Accessed 8-18-15

[25] Miranda July's page, Facebook, August 4th, 2011. https://www.facebook.com/julymiranda/photos/a.10150218370894281.331216.26605324280/10150284343749281/ Accessed 8-18-15.

explains that they are united by "a shared set of desires to overturn the traditional relationship between the art object, the artist, and the audience."[26]

LTLYM upends each of those relationships as well: the site's visitors become producers of artworks and also assignment-writers, and the art objects become the locations through which they interact. In this, the site is an apt illustration of what critic Nicolas Bourriaud designated, in 1998, as "relational art," a kind of art that, in his words, "takes as its theoretical horizon the sphere of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an autonomous and *private* symbolic space."[27] The collaborative elements of LTLYM seem, however, to draw their strength from sources closer to therapeutic culture than to art theory. In an essay included with a book-version of the web project, art historian Julia Bryan Wilson observes that "with these assignments, the "relational" aspect of the project is less Bourriaud's realm of social interaction than the relation of the self to the self, to its own opaque desires and muted longings."[28] And indeed, the site's assignments are nearly all designed to facilitate the expression and sharing of private emotions, creating connections between participants, but stopping short of establishing the kind of genuinely open space for social interaction that relational art envisions.

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[26] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books, 2012), 2.
[27] Nicolas Bourriaud, "Relational Aesthetics," 1998 in Bishop anthology 160 in *Participation*, Documents of Contemporary Art, Ed. Claire Bishop, (London, Cambridge, Mass.: Whitechapel; MIT Press, 2006), 160.
[28] Julia Bryan-Wilson, "A Modest Collective: Many People Doing Small things Well," in *Learning to Love You More*, eds. Harrell Fletcher, Miranda July, Julia Bryan-Wilson, Laura Lark, and Jacinda Russell, (Munich; New York: Prestel, 2007), 146.

Feminism, Performance Art, and the Therapeutic.

The artworks I've been discussing each reframe the apparent narcissism of the viewer/participant (or, in the stories and films, of the characters) in ways that speak to a larger connection between the recent culture of expanded therapeutic discourse and the history of participatory and performance-based art. The influence of the expanded therapeutic culture is also a strong presence in the work of many of July's forbearers and contemporaries, especially among artists whose practice includes both elements of the performative *and* a meaningful engagement with feminism.

The relationship between therapeutic culture and "women's culture" in the United States has been variously fraught.[29] The mass market literature that accompanied the therapeutic turn often assumed an audience of women, and it was therefore largely dismissed by journalists and scholars, despite its popularity. Sociologist Wendy Simonds argues that this general disdain is of the same type "usually accorded by the intellectual elite to…all forms of media utilized primarily by women."[30] The genre was marginalized for its femininity at the same time that it regularly promoted the maintenance of patriarchal norms, advising its female readers about ways to adjust to the expectations of their husbands and of the dominant culture. There was also a strong strain in early self-help that was, as Illouz has shown, particularly averse to feminism, regularly deploying "the analytical jargon of psychology to reinforce traditional views of women."[31]

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[29] See Lauren Berlant on "women's culture" and the creation of a "mass cultural intimate public in the United States." Berlant, *The Female Complaint : The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, IX.
[30] Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture,* 2.
[31] Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 112.

Despite the hostility to feminism within early self-help literature, and despite its regular deference to patriarchal norms and its marginalization as a women's genre, the expanded therapeutic discourse was, before long, strongly associated with the feminist movement. Eva Illouz's *Saving the Modern Soul : Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help* devotes a lengthy chapter to the unusual alliance between psychological discourse in mass culture and feminist thought. The author's arguments center on the notion that the two movements had deep-seated affinities from the beginning; affinities that were only temporarily obscured by the conflicts of interest that I've been describing. From the 1960s forward, therapeutic discourse became a central element of feminist practice, informing the kinds of organized self-examination that were a common first step in the process of becoming aware of, and resisting, gender injustice. "Feminism and therapy shared," lllouz explains, "the idea that self-examination could be freeing, that the private sphere could and should be the object of an objective evaluation and transformation, and that emotions belonging to the private sphere needed to be made into public performances."[32]

Part of what bound feminism so strongly to therapeutic discourse in the 1960s and 1970s was that element of performativity. Story-telling in the therapeutic context "reorganizes experience as it tells it," and allows for the conversion of personal narrative into a healing or self-transformative process, or (as in feminism) into a coherent political agenda.[33] In 1969, feminist activist Carol Hanisch wrote a memo, later published as an essay called "The Personal is Political," that sought to defend those therapeutically-

[32] Ibid, 121.
[33] 184.

inflected parts of feminist practice which seemed, to some within the movement, both apolitical and reprehensibly self-involved.[34]

The practice that Hanisch was defending became known as consciousness-raising, or "CR," a method of raising awareness of gender imbalance through the collective discussion of personal experience. CR's first documented use within feminism was in 1967 during meetings of an influential group called New York Radical Women (NYRW), and it quickly became widespread. In CR, women re-cast therapeutic discourse in a way that helped to reveal how lifelong socialization into patriarchy shaped their personal experience. As feminist historian Debra Michals explains, "The line drawn by CR was from self-discovery to social discovery, from self-actualization to social change."[35]

"I believe" Hanisch argued in her 1969 memo, "that these analytical sessions are a form of political action."[36] This argument—that what looked like therapy, or, more unkindly, like narcissistic self-indulgence, was actually a kind of activism—was a hard sell: focus on the self seems completely opposed to the kind of community mindedness that political activism requires. Acceptance of CR as political action was made even more difficult to defend because it was women who were doing it, and narcissism (and vanity and self-indulgence), were already gendered descriptors regularly deployed to support ideas about women's unsuitability for political work. But despite the resistance, and as the 1970s (and second wave feminism) progressed, CR became an important part of feminist politics, and the idea that the personal could be political became a commonplace.

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[34] Hanisch, Carol. "The Personal Is Political." 1970. Republished with new introduction in 2006. http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html Accessed 03-27-2012.
[35] Debra Michals, "From 'Consciousness Expansion' to 'Consciousness Raising': Feminism and the Countercultural Politics of the Self," in Braunstein, P. and Doyle M., *Imagine Nation : The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 44
[36] Hanisch, 4.

Feminist artists also adapted CR as a generative element in politically engaged artistic practice, and faced similar criticisms to those directed at NYRW and other activist groups.

Therapeutic discourse in women's art, especially when it involves an explicit focus on the self, has often been received differently than similarly self-focused content in artworks made by men. Pioneering feminist art critic Lucy Lippard explained this difference in reception in a 1976 essay on Body Art, noting that: "because women are considered sex objects, it is taken for granted that any woman who presents her nude body is doing so because she thinks she is beautiful. She is a narcissist, and Acconci, with his less romantic image and pimply back, is an artist."[37] This formulation applies beyond artworks involving nudity, coming into play wherever the artist presents herself—her body or her personal experience—as the artwork's central subject. This difference in the reception of self-focused content in women's and men's art is made even more complicated by the way that accusations of narcissism, regardless of gender, signal "a lack of engagement with social and political discourse."[38]

And so women artists in the 1970s who chose to foreground their own bodies or their personal experiences in their art were making a socially loaded decision. Some may have simply chosen to risk the accusations of vanity or narcissism to which they were so much more vulnerable than their male counterparts. For others, the choice to engage with the personal was a conscious recuperation of therapeutic focus on the self in the service of feminism, and in reaction to the groundwork laid by debates over the political viability

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[37] Lucy R. Lippard *The Pink Glass Swan : Selected Essays on Feminist Art*. (New York: New Press, 1995),102.
[38] Jayne Wark, *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006, 179.

of consciousness raising. In either case, these artists rarely stopped at personal exploration for its own sake. "The interrogation of women's identity" was conceived, as feminist artist and critic Suzanne Lacy has shown, "in relationship to a possibility of public, lifelike, art action."[39]

Vocabulary, emotional styles and attitudes toward psychological health drawn from therapeutic culture occupied, with CR, a prominent place in feminist art practice. Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro (two influential feminist artists who founded and taught within the Feminist Art program at Cal Arts) made the therapeutic building-up of their students' self esteem into a central element of their pedagogy.[40] The model of performative-therapeutic action provided by CR also helped to establish the centrality of performance in 1970s feminist art practice. Consciousness raising sessions among the participants in Chicago and Shapiro's classes informed the students' individual artworks, and, in 1972, produced a massive collaborative house-sized installation and performance called *Womanhouse*.[41]

Performance art and feminist art have been closely associated since that period—so much so that, as Art Historian Jayne Wark explains, "it is inconceivable to speak of one without reference to the other."[42] Attempts at breaking or blurring barriers between art and life were, by that time, well rehearsed in visual art avant-gardes, offering a set of

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[39] Suzanne Lacy, "Affinities: Thoughts on an Incomplete History" 1994, in Suzanne Lacy, Moira Roth, and Kerstin Mey, *Leaving Art : Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974-2007*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 188.
[40] Laura Cottingham, "LA Womyn," 1997, in *Seeing through the Seventies : Essays on Feminism and Art*, (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2000), 129. 166.
[41] Josephine Withers, "Feminist Performance Art: Performing, Discovering, Transforming ourselves," in Norma Broude, Mary D. Garrard, *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact,* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc, 1994), 168.
[42] Wark, *Radical Gestures*, 1.

established traditions on which to build, and consciousness raising activities in feminist politics combined conveniently with this art world interest in merging art and life. One particularly cogent example of the strong bonds between therapeutic discourse, feminism, and performance art can be found in the second wave's most visible early public action, the 1968 protest against the Miss America pageant, orchestrated by New York Radical Women.[43]

Held annually in Atlantic City New Jersey, the Miss America pageant is, even today, heavily documented in newspapers and on TV, and so the 1968 protests garnered much mainstream attention and were, for many across the country, a first introduction to the women's liberation movement. Women chanted and marched with signs hosting messages like "If you want meat, go to the butcher," and "let's judge ourselves as people," but the protest's performative elements were some of its most discussed. A live sheep was crowned to emphasize the dehumanizing nature of the contest, and a "freedom trash can" became the center of a performance in which women ritually discarded objects symbolic of their limited roles within the American patriarchy: beauty products like false eye lashes, housework items like dish soap, and popular magazines like *Ladies Home Journal* were all thrown away.

These performances were rituals, and ritual became a central element of feminist performance art in the subsequent decade. Art historian Moira Roth's influential documentation of feminist performance trends *The Amazing Decade: Women and Performance Art in America*, suggests that performances structured as feminist ritual in

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[43] Moira Roth "The Amazing Decade: Women and Performance Art in America," 16.

the 1970s "should be read as attempts…to help create and to maintain a feminist culture."[44] Like the Miss America protest actions, the ritualized performances that Roth discusses were addressed to their immediate community, and didn't aspire to lasting impact as artworks.[45]

The Miss America protest actions were conceived of, as NYRW member Carol Hanisch explains, during a CR session at one of the group's meetings. "The idea," Hanisch wrote, "came out of our group method of analyzing women's oppression by recalling our own experiences."[46] Performance, therapeutic discourse (via CR), and activism are thereby explicitly linked in the Miss America action, an event that was formative for second wave feminism at the moment of its transformation into a publically discussed mass movement. Those three elements—feminist activism, the therapeutic, and performance—combine in much of the avant-garde art of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, and continue to inform July's work and that of many of her contemporaries. Pioneering video and performance artist Linda Montano is among the artists best known for an engagement with the issues I've been discussing, and her work seems particularly relevant as a guide for understanding some of what influences July's approach to those themes in her own practice.[47]

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[44] Ibid., 22.
[45] Despite that intention, many of these ritual performance are treated as more traditional art objects through photographic documentation in books and exhibitions.
[46] Carol Hanisch "A Critique of the Miss America Protest," http://carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/MissACritique.html Accessed 10-21-15.

[47] Artists I've discussed in prior chapters as having influenced July—including Andy Warhol and Laurie Anderson—also touch on these elements in their work. Warhol's disruptive 1966 event held during a New York Society for Clinical Psychology banquet (as described in my chapter 4) is one such example. Laurie Anderson's 1975 performance video *At the Shrink's* is relevant here as well.

Montano, a former nun who entered the art world in the mid 1960s, has continuously embraced therapeutic discourse in her work, regularly drawing on the self-help and new age cultures that have come to characterize that discourse in popular media. Her work seems often to conceive of art as a means of healing or transforming the artist; an approach that she describes in a 1984 interview as having emerged from her experience of living with anorexia in her late teens and early twenties. "It's only because I immersed myself in 'art' that I came out of that experience intact," she explains. "So for that reason, I will always be aware of the psychological/sociological effects of the creative process."[48]

Early on in her career Montano began to develop characters that she would perform as her artworks in lieu of displaying art objects. Her 1969 "Chicken Woman" was among the first such characters, and was joined before long by a neurosurgeon, a blues singer, and an Olympic swimmer, among many others. By the early 1970s she'd begun to frame her everyday life, not just the lives of her characters, as performances. Her 1973 *Home Endurance*, for example, consisted of staying home for one week and documenting all of her activities and experiences in writing and photographs. In 1984, she began a multi-year work called *Seven Years of Living Art* during which each year was a performance of a specific spiritual idea achieved through ritualized restrictions to the artist's every day behavior.

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[48] Linda Montano and Tehching Hsieh "One Year Art/Life Performance: Interview with Alex and Allyson Grey, 1984," in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art; a Sourcebook of Artist's Writings,* eds. Kristine Stiles, Peter Selz, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 782.

Montano's approach to artistic practice as a healing process and her understanding of life itself as its own ongoing artwork, were, in the early 1970s, part of a larger avant-garde impulse in the visual arts that had for several decades been working to erase the barriers between art and life. Like July, Montano also sought to engage her audience in art/life experiences. Her 2013 publication of *You too Are a Performance Artist* attests to this desire: it is a kind of performance art workbook that documents forty-five of Montano's performances, each of which is paired with an assignment page that offers the reader a way to accomplish their own version of the performance. Her 1978 tribute to her late husband Mitchel, for example, included a public performance of mourning intended to help her process her relationship with the deceased. In the book, she pairs this work with a set of instructions for the reader in which we are to go to a public place and have a loud conversation with a friend on a cell phone, but with no one really there at the other end of the conversation. We are to note how this changes our relationship with that friend the next time we actually talk with them.[49] The assignments have much in common with July's *Learning to Love you More* website from a few years earlier, though unlike LTLYM, they don't include a mechanism for sharing documentation the artworks after the fact.

In the present this tendency to present (and live) one's life as though it is a work of art has become a commonplace: more and more of us regularly frame the minutia of our daily lives as public performances through social networking sites like Twitter and Instagram. The mandate to live one's life as if it is a work of art has even, as Micki McGee has shown, become a major trope in the popular self-help literature of recent

[49] Linda Montano, *You Too Are a Performance Artist*, (Santa Fe: SITE Santa Fe, 2013,) *78*-79.

years. McGee refers to this trend as self-help's "aesthetic turn" and understands it as a late 20th and early 21st century response to "the changing nature of the labor market and the blurring of boundaries between the commercial and intimate spheres."[50]

McGee's study of recent self-help literature documents the emergence of this trend, noting that the genre's long-standing use of business as a metaphor for life has expanded to include something like an aesthetic alternative. "[T]he ideal of life as a work of art was increasingly offered as a source of solace for individuals whose life courses were unpredictable, while in the workplace the artist has come to serve as a new workforce ideal."[51] This change from a life-as-business metaphor to a life-as-art metaphor is tied, McGee goes on to argue, to women in particular, whose traditional roles as the primary caregivers and maintenance workers of their households have persisted despite their full-time inclusion in the workforce. Increased flexibility and integration of work and home roles is thereby required of many women, and the life-as-art metaphor can help to accommodate them to the demands of the contemporary workplace on their personal time and intimate lives.

Just as the radical performances of life-as-art undertaken by Montano and her contemporaries have been reified in both contemporary social life online and in recent self-help literature, the therapeutic and mystic elements of many such works have a corollary in the new age cultures that so often intertwine with the world of commercial self-help. Montano's ongoing project *Summer Saint Camp*, for example, offers participants a performance art experience that is also dedicated to self-healing. Acting as

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[50] McGee, *Self-Help Inc*., 20.
[51] Ibid., 177.

a kind of guru/den mother, Montano gathers the participants at her *Art/Life Institute* in Kingston New York, where she provides a convent-like experience, structuring the days in a way that encourages, in the artist's words, "sacred and artful living."[52]

Montano's approach to the camp is earnest, and its participants report transformative experiences, but a wry awareness of the ways that the project bumps up against the world of commodified self-help and new age culture appears to be built in to the artist's presentation of the work. Her announcement of the camp's new shorter format on her website, for example, includes "testimonials" from some of her better known students: a self-aware reference to a common practice in ads for commercial self-improvement programs like diet regimens. Such references are clearly present in the testimonials themselves as well. Performance artist Annie Sprinkle's testimonial, for example, plays on an infomercial trope in which the product on offer becomes the cure for myriad unrelated ills. *Summer Saint Camp*, Sprinkle writes, was "simply the most brilliant, profound, life enhancing workshop I've ever done. I found my calling, quadrupled my income, got spiritually satisfied, fell in love, enriched my sex life and my art career really took off. Sign up today."[53] Performer Veronica Vera also adopts the self-improvement testimonial's tendency towards the outsized claim, promising that "Linda Montano will help you to be a saint and miracle worker."[54]

Montano's combination of earnest belief in the mystical and transformative potential of art with a tongue-in-cheek tone that speaks to an awareness of the potential for both banality and commercial cravenness in New Age and self-help cultures is a

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[52] Linda Montano "Summer Saint Camp, the 21st Century," http://lindamarymontano.blogspot.com/2012/03/summer-saint-camp.html Accessed 10-24-15.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

another strong link between Montano and July. The work that most explicitly illustrates the ways that July's practice follows from Montano's is an ongoing mail art project by the elder artist in which she offers to "do a tarot reading by mail on any subject (sex/money/death/etc.)"[55] The participant must send a question, $7.00, and a self-addressed stamped envelope to Montano's home, and she'll return a personalized tarot reading / artwork. In May 2011 (and coincident with the release of her feature film *The Future*), Miranda July began to offer an e-mail "Oracle" service. Participants sign up for free online, and they receive biweekly predictions and advice from July. The Oracle e-mails are sometimes dismissively jokey about the whole enterprise of fortune-telling. The prediction I received on June 27th, 2013, for example, read:

> Anything w/ legs, even a table, shouldn't be eaten today or tomorrow. A legged thing you eat now will symbolically eat you later.
> good luck,
> Miranda

Other of the predictions feel much more genuine, and indicate a belief in the medium's ability to communicate real advice, as in the prediction I received on February 10th, 2014, which read:

> You fail to receive about %35 of the love your friends are giving you. Why is that? You turn away too quickly, not wanting to burden.
> good luck,
> Miranda

Both Montano and July's mail-based fortune telling services reference and rely on elements of Self-Help and New Age cultures, and both point as well to an understanding of contemporary art as instrumentalized: the artwork is supposed to *do* something concrete for its viewer (in this case, it is supposed to predict their futures and improve

[55] Linda Montano, "Linda Montano," in *Angry Women* eds. Andrea Juno, V. Vale, (New York, NY: Juno Books, 1999), 50.

their lives). A measure of cynicism about these projects' ability to really accomplish those goals is implied in each artist's presentation of the work, and can be interpreted, by extension, as an indication of the artists' doubts about a broader instrumentalization of art that has been underway for the past several decades.[56] In July's project, the Oracle's vacillation between dismissiveness and earnestness can also be seen as speaking to an ambivalence about the artist's own immediate family and their significant contributions to New Age literature through *North Atlantic Books* press.

Like Montano, July's mistrust of therapeutic discourse is always present in her work, even as she deploys its tropes. This ambivalence expresses itself in a range of ways, as I've shown through my analysis of her short stories and films, the *Learning to Love You More* site, and her e-mail Oracle. And though a tongue-in-cheek tone is sometimes also present in Montano's work (and in that of others in her generation), it is much less pronounced than it is with July and her contemporaries who reference therapeutic culture, but whose careers took shape in 1980s and 90s rather than the 1960s and 70s. The upswing in cynicism about therapeutic discourse among artists who came of age in the 1980s and 90s runs roughly parallel to an expansion, in those decades, of self-help and new age cultures into thriving sectors of commercial enterprise. The employment of CR as a mode of linking therapeutic and political practice becomes relevant again here, as its evolution in the late 1970s and 80s is a strong indicator of these broader changes.

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[56] See Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011).

According to feminist historian Debra Michals, consciousness raising had begun to lose its political force as early as 1973, as apolitical groups (often part of the New Age movement) began to adopt the practice. Michals discusses a popular 1973 book, *The New Way to Become the Person You'd like to Be*, that advocates CR as a strategy for achieving self-actualization, but does not make the leap from raised consciousness to political activism. "In essence," Michals writes, "CR was being proposed to help readers better *adapt* to the dominant culture."[57] Susan Faludi came to a similar conclusion in *Backlash*, where she dedicates a substantial chapter to the ways that trends in popular psychology worked to reinforce the anti-feminism of the 1980s. Faludi's primary example in that chapter is the work of author Robin Norwood, whose 1985 self-help best seller *Women who Love too Much* launched a lucrative public speaking career, as well as a network of support groups that served those overly-loving women to whom her book was addressed.

The *Women who Love too Much* support groups were modeled on Alcoholics Anonymous and operated based on the idea that the women who participated were addicted to their unhappy relationships. Norwood cited the feminist CR practices of the previous decade as a source for these groups, but unlike consciousness raising, this model of sharing personal stories presupposed that the women doing the sharing were at fault: they were "addicts" who needed to change themselves, and not the world around them.[58] In an additional departure from CR, no discussion was permitted; participants were

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[57] Derba Michals, "From "Consciousness Expansion" to "Consciousness Raising" : Feminism and the Countercultural Politics of the Self," in *Imagine Nation : The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, eds. Peter Braunstein, Michael William Doyle, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 60.

[58] Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women,* (New York: Crown, 1991), 351.

required to listen silently to one another, and then to the group's leader (usually a therapist or counselor who collected a fee from the participants for her service).[59]

Faludi's analysis of Norwood's career in self-help contributes to her larger argument about the so-called "codependency" movement of the period, which served to pathologize women's submission within relationships and distract from the systemic gender inequalities that necessitated such submission.[60] She goes on to show that these ideologies went beyond their role in shaping popular therapeutic culture, and ended up enshrined in the DSM through a contested new diagnoses called "Masochistic personality disorder, " a diagnoses that, in Faludi's words, "neatly summed up female socialization—and stamped it a private, psychiatric malfunction."[61] For my purposes here, however, Faludi's examination of *Women who Love too Much* speaks to the fate of feminism's briefly productive alliance with therapeutic culture. As CR in the 1980s lost its political force and the media of popular psychology worked to convince women that their only option for improving their situations was to address their own psychological flaws, the natural affinities that Eva Illouz observed as having bonded feminist thought and psychological discourse began to work against feminist progress.[62]

The relationship of performance art to therapeutic discourse reflects this shift. Feminist performance was intimately linked to the broader therapeutic culture, and that connection was formative, emerging through the 1968 Miss America protest actions, the feminist art project's *Womanhouse* performances, and other of the second wave's foundational moments. In the wake of therapeutic discourse's anti-feminist turn in the

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[59] Ibid, 348, 352.
[60] Ibid, 351.
[61] Ibid, 357.
[62] Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul,* 114-115.

later 1970s and 1980s, feminist performance art began to register a strong rejection of self-help and new age culture, even as it continued to draw on them. New York based artist Karen Finley, who is known for her spoken word performances that often include both political commentary and intensely emotional revelations of personal trauma, is one influential figure in late 20th century feminist performance art who seems to prefigure that broader shift.

Finley's ritualistic performances clearly draw on elements of the therapeutic: their confessional tone reproduces the performative personal narrative of the therapy session, and they often put a premium on catharsis. "I want to *give* something," Finley told Andrea Juno in a 1991 interview, "that helps people connect emotionally in a sense of *sharing and clarifying emotional pain.*"[63] At other points in that same interview, the artist indicates some proximity to both new age and self-improvement cultures, noting that many of her performances come from observing the energy of others and from "psychic work," and referring to her role as that of the "motivational speaker" (in the sense that she motivates her audience to connect to and experience their emotions more fully).[64]

And yet, the artist's cynicism about self-help and new age cultures is also very explicit. In 1993 she published a short illustrated book called *Enough is Enough* that openly mocked the therapeutic culture of the present. The book—which consists, in Finley's words, of "weekly meditations for living dysfunctionally"—urged its readers to be self-indulgent, to blame others, and to be controlling: all reversals of typical self-help advice, especially the type that is directed towards women readers. One section called

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[63] Karen Finley, "Karen Finley," in *Angry Women,* 43-44.
[64] Ibid, 43, 39.

"Blame your inner child" sarcastically urges readers to "exploit current self-help philosophies" and "explain your reckless behavior as something that was spiritually healthy for you."[65]

Enough is Enough was published in 1993, at the height of Riot Grrrl's visibility as a music subculture in the Pacific Northwest. Finley was an influential figure for many in that movement, and her simultaneous reliance on and cynicism about the therapeutic culture reflect some of the complexities involved with the legacy—as it was experienced in the 1990s—of feminism's alliance with psychology. That legacy was clearly a presence within Riot Grrrl; its chapter meetings and conventions all had at least some version of a consciousness raising session on the agenda, and Kathleen Hanna had, by 1993, become known as a kind of roving Punk-rock counselor, holding group therapy sessions with the women who went to see her perform.[66] A 1989 flyer by Hanna captures the way that Riot Grrrl embraced the therapeutic as part of the larger vision of feminist community. The flyer frames its "Girl Talk" support group as an anti-authoritarian DIY project in which leadership is to be handed off to the girls who attend. At the same time, it presents the group as a therapeutic outlet, complete with trained counselors and radical in its willingness to truly listen to girls. In this way, it speaks to the extent that an emotional style drawn from the culture's expanded therapeutic discourse (including self help) was enmeshed, in Riot Grrrl, with a political agenda.[67]

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[65] Karen Finley, *Enough is Enough; Weekly Meditations for Living Dysfunctionally,* (New York, N.Y.: Poseidon Press, 1993).

[66] Sara Marcus, *Girls to the Front : The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 41.

[67] The presence of therapeutically-inflected language in American politics in the 90s, especially through President Bill Clinton's well known phrase "I feel your pain," seems relevant here as well. Initially

Just as second wave feminist efforts to productively deploy psychological discourse within activism were critiqued as mere therapy, the third wave (with which Riot Grrrl was associated) was criticized for its potentially self-indulgent over-focus on the personal. Third wave women were often seen, in feminist culture critic Deborah Siegel's words, as "navel-gazing, self-indulgent, undisciplined, apolitical, overly empowered, and spoiled,"[68] and she suggests that the therapeutic culture is partially to blame for these perceived flaws:

> Third Wavers entered feminism during a cultural moment awash in personal truth-telling. Raised on *Oprah*, coming to adulthood at the height of the memoir boom, they were finding their voices at a time when recovery-movement memoirs…occupied the front tables at Barnes & Noble.[69]

In their introduction to a 2003 anthology of third wave writing, Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier point out that many of the movement's defining texts foregrounded the personal reflection as a way to avoid reproducing those aspects of Second Wave feminism that were perceived of as "controlling." If you always write from an explicitly personal place you are in less danger of universalizing your experience or presuming to speak for everyone. And yet, as Dicker and Piepmeier go on to argue, an overreliance on the personal can block the transformation from personal to political. In other words, a

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criticized as overly feminine by some media critics, it served to normalize the emotionalization of political speech. See Marjorie Garber, "Compassion," in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, edited by Paul Gilbert and Lauren Berlant, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 15-26.

[68] Deborah Siegal, *Sisterhood, Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrrls Gone Wild,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 141.

[69] Ibid, 150.

feminism situated fully in personal choice is more a self-improvement program than a political movement.[70]

When it comes to Riot Grrrl's foundational texts, however, reliance on the personal and the deployment of therapeutic discourse are often quite clearly linked to the political: they *do* make that step beyond a feminism of self-improvement. In issue # 2 of the *Bikini Kill* zine from 1991, the authors list 17 reasons why they need Riot Grrrl. They frame this as a cataloguing of *their* (rather than the broader world's) need for that movement, which points to the aspects of 3rd wave self-focus that Dicker and Piepmeier noted. And yet many in the list of reasons link personal interest and behavior to the need for broader changes. Reason number 16, for example, asserts that Riot Grrrl is needed:

> BECAUSE self hating behaviors (like fucking boys without condoms, drinking to excess, ignoring truesoul girlfriends, belittling ourselves and other girls, etc..) would not be so easy if we lived in communities where we felt loved and wanted and valued.[71]

The language of therapy in this statement ("self-hating," "belittling ourselves") suggests at first that young women are the ones who need to change themselves, but then the connection is made to a society that doesn't value women, implying that Riot Grrrl can create a non-patriarchal community in which those "self-hating" behaviors aren't a part of the landscape.

Although there is much in Riot Grrrl to link its reliance on self-help language and a therapeutic emotional style to activist and movement-building ends, those therapeutic tendencies are at the root of some convincing criticism of the movement. In a 2012 article

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[70] Rory Cooke Dicker and Alison Piepmeier, *Catching a Wave : Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 12-18.
[71] Lisa Darms, *The Riot Grrrl Collection*, (New York: The Feminist Press At the City University of New York, 2013), 143.

on Riot Grrrl and its revivals and retellings in the present, Mimi Thi Nguyen discusses the ways the movement hoped to foment "a revolution through…everyday work on the conscious self, especially through therapeutic techniques of self-examination, confession, and dialogue," tendencies that were, as the author notes, continuous with the expanded therapeutic discourse so prevalent in late 20th century popular culture.[72] The self-actualization that such techniques endeavored to create was bound, in Riot Grrrl, to communion with others. A language of radical closeness and love among girls was enabled through elements of therapeutic discourse, and was a prominent and much-discussed aspect of Riot Grrrl music and writing.

That premium placed on emotional connection and openness was also, as Nguyen argues, a means by which the voices of women of color—already in the minority within the movement—were made even less audible. Intimacy, she suggests, and especially intimacy with the "other," was allowed to replace or be misrecognized as genuine reciprocity.[73] It was assumed, in other words, that the language of intimacy and personal experience on which the movement relied could cut through any distance between white Riot Grrrls and Riot Grrrls of color.[74] More often, however, it functioned as a stand-in for real work on racial inequality, protecting white Riot Grrrl from undertaking any real reckoning with the movement's homogeneity. More than a decade before Nguyen published that critique in *Women & Performance* she was working through similar concerns in her zine, *Slant*. In one 1996 issue, she discusses her "complex relationship" with Riot Grrrl, noting her "struggle to situate myself as a Vietnamese refuge/US

[72] Mimi Thi Nguyen, "Riot Grrrl, Race, and Revival," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, November 2012. Vol. 22, Nos 2-3, 177-78.
[73] Ibid., 174-175.
[74] These critiques are discussed in more depth in chapter 3, in relation to July's *Missing Movie Report* project.

citizen" within the movement: a struggle that mostly resulted in her feeling alienated and marginalized. "Let's chant it together now," she writes, "difference & deconstruction, killer of your universal girl love."[75]

Miranda July's most recent work registers a keen awareness of the role of the therapeutic in US American culture, and she is attentive to its difficulties and ironies for contemporary feminists. In her 2015 novel *The First Bad Man*, the main character (a woman called Cheryl Glickman) works as an administrator for a non-profit called *Open Palm. Open Palm* began as a leftist, feminist, and community-minded women's self-defense center: they offered classes in which women were taught how to scream for help, how to repel an attack, and how to be confident walking alone. But at some point shortly after she began working there, the organization started producing and selling self-defense-themed exercise videos, and before long, those videos replaced all of their real self-defense training activities. "Have you heard of Open Palm?" Cheryl asks her therapist early on in the novel "Self-defense that helps you burn fat and build muscle? I pretty much invented that."[76] Later on, when Cheryl ends up in a relationship that *requires* her to defend herself, she tries out one of her company's tapes. The teacher—demonstrating a move that can tone your upper arms while also allowing you to break away from someone who is strangling you—observes "It's a catch-twenty-two……With your new ripped bod, you may actually get attacked more often!"[77]

This joke—a tiny detail within the broader narratives of the novel—manages to encapsulate many of the complexities that emerge when feminism, self-help, and

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[75] Mimi Thi Nguyen, "Slant," in Darms, *Riot Grrrl Reader,* 306.
[76] Miranda July, *The First Bad Man,* (New York: Scribner, 2015), 54.
[77] Ibid., 56.

consumer culture combine. The idea that a woman will be given the tools to defend herself—a kind of self-improvement—morphs into the idea that she will improve herself by becoming more attractive. That attractiveness is then proposed as being a potential draw for sexual aggressors—the "catch 22" from the instructor's commentary—suggesting that women who are assaulted become victims because of how they look or how they present themselves. What began, then, with the best of feminist intentions, becomes—in the space of a sentence or two—the most basic kind of misogyny, a transformation that cogently illustrates the kinds of slippery, dangerous, and always changeable connections between therapeutic culture and feminist practice that have featured so regularly throughout July's career.

One of the ways that July promoted *The First Bad Man* was through an online auction in which objects that featured within the novel's narrative were sold as artworks. Proceeds from the auction were donated to a women's shelter—an appropriate choice given that the two major relationships in the novel are abusive—and one that provides a kind of counterpoint to the jokey cynicism about the fate of feminist organizations in the present that the storyline about *Open Palm* and their exercise videos suggests. The artist's use of a commercial framework (the E-bay-like online auction) to promote her novel also speaks to a theme in July's work that has figured into my analyses in various ways throughout this dissertation: she approaches the tools of the commercial mass culture as art-making opportunities, opportunities that don't diminish an artwork's value, authenticity, or independence. In my final chapter I will focus on that approach, examining the works by July in which her attitude about art's relationship to the commercial are made most explicit.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION, GIRL POWER, SUBCULTURE, THE MAINSTREAM, AND *THE MIRANDA.*

As the online store Miranda July created for the launch of *The First Bad Man* indicates, her relationship with commercial culture is unusually productive and especially complex. She has worked within difficult to monetize media like performance art and video, but has also posed in lifestyle and fashion magazines, designed pillow-cases, window dressings, and a high-end handbag, and created a performance-art related I-Phone app. The ways in which July's work negotiates the boundaries between avant-garde art and popular culture contexts has been a central theme throughout my arguments about this artist. The other major thread running through the story I've been telling is about Riot Grrrl, and the ways in which its legacy for intermedia feminist art have shaped July's work and that of many of her peers. In this final short chapter, I'll focus on how those two threads intertwine: how Riot Grrrl's legacy in commercial and popular culture relates to and enables July's most straightforwardly commoditized works.

Early 1990s Riot Grrrl—the first, mostly Pacific Northwest-based bands, and the zines that they inspired—helped to enable and popularize DIY production as a third-wave feminist practice. The movement's subsequent broadening and extension into the later 1990s and 2000s occurred mostly through the circulation of zines and other DIY postal-service based projects like *Big Miss Moviola*, but also by way of mass media outlets: articles in USA Today, Seventeen Magazine, Newsweek, and the like, made young women aware of the movement and inspired them to find ways to participate.[1] Within

[1] By 1993 many participants and critics felt that Riot Grrrl was already over, but it has been my contention throughout this dissertation that it expanded and persisted through the end of the 1990s in a broader form.

that expanded Riot Grrrl milieu, the materials of popular culture were often reworked and manipulated as art materials. This occurred through an especially active, often subversive kind of fandom (as discussed in chapter two through songs like *Le Tigre*'s "Hot Topic," and zines like Kathleen Hanna's *My Life With Evan Dando, Popstar*) and also through collage and pastiche (as discussed in chapter one).

In addition to serving as a training ground for DIY production and active (rather than passive) consumption of popular media, Riot Grrrl provided a model for a relationship between punk subculture and the mass-mediated mainstream that, though often tense, was not oppositional by default. In the early 1990s, talk of "selling out" (losing credibility or authenticity by collaborating with the mass media) was a commonplace, in part because mainstream culture in the decade prior had been especially inhospitable to the underground. Tipper Gore's *Parents Music Resource Center* (PMRC) for example, was founded in 1985, and worked to regulate recorded music that included explicitly sexual, violent, or drug-related content.[2] Hip Hop, Punk and Heavy Metal were the genres most heavily targeted by the PMRC, and this encouraged an environment in which subcultures, including Riot Grrrl, were actively pitted against mass media and the mainstream.

But despite those circumstances, and as Riot Grrrl expanded and evolved in the later 1990s, a productive (if uneasy) relationship with the mainstream culture developed.[3] Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald cautioned the movement away from typical punk insularity in 1994:

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[2] Marisa Meltzer, *Girl Power:The Nineties Revolution in Music*, (New York: Faber and Faber, 2010), 46.
[3] Hostility to the mainstream was, however, often very strong in Riot Grrrl zines and other writing, and was exemplified in the much-discussed Riot Grrrl "media blackout" (declared in 1992). Mary Celeste Kearney, *Girls Make Media*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 63.

> If riot grrrl wants to raise consciousness on a large scale, then it will have to negotiate a relation to the mainstream that does not merely reify the opposition between mainstream and subculture. Like it or not, the Girl-Style revolution is bound to be televised.[4]

And attitudes towards mass culture did change over the movement's next few years, as is clear in the words of sixteen year old zine writer Jamie Rubin, writing from within that later, expanded version of Riot Grrrl in 1998:

> About the whole media/Riot Grrrl thing. The media thought they were using us, but we were using the media. Here's some action, let's get in on it. But the more media coverage they gave us, the more girls got behind it. It doesn't matter how they heard about it. I hear people say, 'Oh, she just heard about it a year ago through *Seventeen.* She's a cheerleading type.' I say, 'Welcome to the club. Now, we've got a lot of work to do.[5]

A decade after Rubin so cogently summed up one way that Riot Grrrl successfully negotiated the kind a productive relationship with the mainstream that Gottlieb and Wald had called for, Marion Leonard observed (through active correspondence with a group of former Riot Grrrl producers) that many have gone on to work in the popular music and media industries. "One can trace how through Riot Grrrl these women became involved in local music initiatives and zine writing, and were able to network with other motivated young women."[6] Part of the legacy of Riot-Grrrl that these women enact in the present involves a comfort with blurry boundaries between independent media art and the commercial world, and an awareness of what Rubin describes above: mainstream media

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[4] Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald, "Smells Like Teen Spirit: Riot Grrrls, Revolution, and Women in Independent Rock" in *Microphone Fiends : Youth Music & Youth Culture*, edited by Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 271.
[5] Jamie Rubin, quoted in Jessica Rosenberg, Gitana Garofalo, "Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from within," *Signs* 23.3.1998, 829.
[6] Marion Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 154.

can be an important jumping off point for independent projects, and it doesn't always have to wreck or empty them in the process.[7]

Another way that Riot Grrrl's afterlife within popular culture has taken shape is through mainstream commercial marketing, especially in the late 1990s, when the idea of "girl power" became a lucrative sales strategy for pop music, toys, cartoons, and even clothes and accessories. This part of Riot Grrrl's legacy has, on the whole, been perceived of as an unfortunate and depoliticized cooptation of the movement's feminist message. In Media Studies scholar Emilie Zaslow's 2009 analysis of girls for whom a marketer's version of feminist rhetoric has always been a part of the popular culture, the author determines that the mass culture's celebration of "girl power" reflects "a cultural moment in which the promise of feminism has been incorporated into hegemonic cultural production."[8] The "girl power" message to which Zazlow refers appears in a wide range of cultural products from the late 1990s forward, the most influential of which was England's all-female pop act, the *Spice Girls*.[9]

The *Spice Girls* debut album was released internationally in 1997, and it engendered scores of tours, spin-offs, a movie, a TV show, and every imaginable branded item for girls. One of their singles was even made available exclusively through Pepsi: customers had to collect and send in twenty soda-can pull tabs to receive the CD. Many critics were understandably dismayed by this overt commercialism, but the group's equally overt celebration of sisterhood, feminine strength, and self-reliance in their lyrics

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[7] Kearney, *Girls Make Media*, 88.
[8] Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 159.
[9] I'll focus on the *Spice Girls* here, but the phrase "girl power" appeared elsewhere in the late 90s as well, including as a rallying cry for popular cartoon super heroes *The Power Puff Girls* (Cartoon Network, 1998-2002).

and videos won them dedicated women fans of all ages.[10] The phrase "girl power" itself was used very regularly within *Spice Girls* lyrics and marketing, and it was strongly associated with the pop act throughout the late 1990s.[11]

The *Spice Girls* mixed their often genuinely feminist and progressive messages with modes of self-presentation that reinforced repressive beauty myths and clichés about feminine appeal that were drawn directly from the visual culture of patriarchy. Their stage names, for example—Sporty Spice, Posh Spice, Baby Spice, etc—each align with time-tested and gender-norm-supporting stereotypes.[12] Media Studies scholar Dafna Lemish, writing in 1998 (during the height of the *Spice Girls* phenomenon), found that the overall message of the band's most popular songs suggested to their listeners that feminist agency was only possible for women who were conventionally attractive.[13] Despite these obvious flaws, the *Spice Girls* used their extraordinarily wide reach to embrace an explicitly feminine culture and represent it as powerful and worthy; sentiments that were rarely seen or heard in voices as loud and as internationally influential as the *Spice Girls'* voices were at the end of the 1990s.

Girl Power culture (as it evolved from the late 1990s and into the present) is much broader and more accessible than Riot Grrrl had ever been, but the links between the two are hard to ignore, despite many obvious differences. In her 2010 book on girl power

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[10] As Marion Leonard and other critics have argued, however, the bulk of the Spice Girls' assertiveness tended to center around "traditional feminine concerns such as make-up, clothes, and heterosexual love." Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry,* 159.
[11] Ibid., 157.
[12] Meltzer, *Girl Power,* 79. These clichés about feminine types extended to racial stereotyping as well: the sole black woman in the group was called "Scary Spice," and her on-stage costumes characteristically included animal prints.
[13] Dafna Lemish, "Spice Girls Talk: A Case Study in the Development of Gendered Identity," in *Millennium Girls: Today's Girls Around the World*, ed. by Sherrie Inness, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 145-167.

trends in 1990s music, Marisa Meltzer interviewed former *Bikini Kill* member Toby Vail about watching the popular ascendance of the *Spice Girls.* Vail describes her ambivalence about the band, and then asks "am I crazy, or did I make this happen?"[14] After some discussion of the formation of *Spice Girls* and the international influence of Riot Grrrl a few years before, Meltzer concludes that *Bikini Kill*, in a way, *did* make the *Spice Girls* happen, and that despite the latter band's monetization of feminism and its lack of real activism, it was nonetheless built on the former's overall message and their desire to use popular media to reach girls who would not otherwise have access.[15]

Girl Power demonstrated the amenability of third-wave feminist messages to commercial cooptation, and the ease with which political critique could be reduced to mere sloganeering. But it also showed the potential of female-focused mass media for reaching and impacting a huge range of women in a positive way, complicating the knee-jerk reaction against the mainstream that is usually so strongly embedded in punk subculture. By the time that post-*Riot Grrrl* (but strongly related) bands like *Le Tigre*, *the Donnas*, and *the Gossip*, appeared in the late 1990s and early 2000s, "they could flirt with the mainstream," as Meltzer explains, "and it wasn't considered indie treason."[16] Gayle Wald and Joanne Gottlieb even suggest, optimistically, in 1994, that the "entrance of women bands, especially the so-called 'angry' ones, into the mainstream, resonates slightly differently from the standard narrative of evisceration."[17] Mainstream acceptance of new kinds of femininity, they speculate, could be driving the popularization (and commodification) of such trends.

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[14] Meltzer *Girl Power,* 85.
[15] Ibid., 87.
[16] Ibid.,124.
[17] Wald and Gottlieb, "Smells Like Teen Spirit," 252.

The similarities between *Riot Grrrl* bands and the *Spice Girls*, however thin, are a major part of why critiques of Girl Power culture (and its Neoliberal focus on changing the attitudes of individual girls in lieu of targeting systemic inequalities) are often leveled against the 1990s subculture as well.[18] *Riot Grrrl* did have a distinctive visual and aural style, and some in the movement doubtless embraced it as a matter of style alone, but an attack on the sexism of mainstream institutions and a conscious attempt to mobilize members as activists were nonetheless clear. *Riot Grrrl* did not, in other words, allow style to overtake substance or promote the "feminism without the activism" later associated with Girl Power as a commercial phenomenon.[19] And yet, the ways in which Girl Power became a lucrative feminism-as-self-improvement-program (administered, more often then not, through commercial products) are tangled up with *Riot Grrrl's* legacy. From the mid 1990s forward, "Girl Power" as feminism became a force that most young women in the USA must in some way reckon with as they endeavor to understand their own gender politics, and the language of feminine empowerment—language that is all over in Riot Grrrl—can become suspect in the wake of Girl Power culture: its messages are attractive but are also always potentially sponsored by *Pepsi*.

In a 2014 interview about the influence of Riot Grrrl on her work, Miranda July discussed the lingering impact of these issues:

> Me and my friends from that time sometimes even feel a bit plagued by our inner Riot Grrrl. Younger feminists don't have much compunction about mainstream vs. underground, selling out, etc. but we still turn these issues over and over in a way

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[18] See Rebecca Munford on the ways that Third Wave feminism's "eclectic manifestations of girl culture," have been conflated with less progressive, mass-mediated representations. Munford, "Wake up and Smell the Lip Gloss," in *Third Wave Feminism : A Critical Exploration*, eds Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 267.
[19] Meltzer describes Girl Power in this way, see *Girl Power,* 70.

> that now seems dated, that feels particular to Riot Grrrl—this "fuck you" to the mainstream.[20]

July's understanding of the tension between underground and mainstream as an anachronism, irrelevant in the present, also informs the way that she negotiates the relationship between her role as an artist and her role in the commercial culture. Access to a broad audience takes precedence, for July, over concerns about the potential loss of authenticity when an artwork is presented within a commercial context. This attitude echoes the way that coverage of Riot Grrrl in the mainstream press ultimately facilitated access to the movement for hundreds of suburban and small-town girls, a benefit that eventually outweighed the movement's concerns about the kinds of simplification and misrepresentation that inevitably accompanied mainstream coverage of their activities.

July's work in commercial contexts sometimes involves a small measure of institutional critique, gently mocking the fashion magazine or retail institution that hosts them. In a series of images for a November 2012 issue of *Paper* magazine, for example, the artist adopted magazine-friendly poses and gazed intensely into the camera in a way that made her look like a typical fashion model. In many of the images, she held handwritten signs in front of parts of her body that pointed self-referentially back to her poses. In one such photograph, she stands with her back to us in a black jumpsuit, and looks over her shoulder at the camera. A sign, held so that it faces us and covers her bottom, reads: "Oh shit. I feel some dance moves coming on and they can't be

[20] "Miranda July on Riot Grrrl," April 10, 2014, The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, http://www.pcah.us/posts/166_miranda_july_on_riot_grrrl Accessed 09-01-15.

stopped."[21] The following five images show her frozen in the kind of out-dancing-at-a-club (but by myself in a room) poses that are fashion magazine standards.

Another image (fit in between blocks of text midway through an article) adopts a similarly inexplicable but familiar fashion pose, in which July sort of squats, arranges her hands carefully, and then stares off to the side with a half open mouth. The sign she squeezes between her thighs acknowledges the weirdness of the position, reading: "Don't be distracted by me, keep reading."[22]

Overall, however, July is much less interested in critiquing the commercial context for her work than she is in making genuinely thoughtful, interesting objects and images; artworks that she believes can stand on their own, uncompromised, even among jewelry ads, branded mugs and coasters, or articles about celebrities.[23] In a 2011 photo series in *Tar* Magazine, for example, July collaborated with designer fashion label *Rodarte* and photographer Autumn De Wilde to create complex narrative collages. And in a 2009 photo shoot for *Vice* magazine, July recreated the poses and clothing of background actors from iconic film stills. That latter series draws, as much of July's work does, on established trends in feminist art. In the *Vice* shoot, the majority of the artist's labor goes into meticulously recreating the pose, costume, and expression of a background actor or "extra" in a well-known film still: a process that builds on a decades-

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[21] These images were featured in Sadie Stein, "Miranda July is Running the Show," *Paper*, Nov. 9th, 2011, http://www.papermag.com/2011/11/miranda_july_is_running_the_show.php Accessed 03-27-14.

[22] This series also speaks to the issues around the woman's body and the gaze that had been such a central theme across feminist generations in the visual arts. See chapter three for a more in-depth discussion of those issues.

[23] I mention these objects in particular because each of them has been on offer on magazines and websites alongside the works by July I am discussing in this chapter.

long history of artworks by women—Cindy Sherman's "Film Stills," as well as later series by Nikki S Lee and Tomoko Sawada, among others—that involve role-playing and masquerade. In the images shown here, July chooses a background actor from a scene in *Grease*, and recreates her costume and pose in a self-portrait.[24]

Part of July's role in these works (and in her performances and movies as well) is that of the entertainer: she is often physically present in her images, videos and performances, and she works deliberately to amuse and charm her audience. Artist and critic David Robbins has proposed a category of artworks by artists-as-entertainers that he calls "concrete comedy," and it is a category that applies especially well to July's three-dimensional works for commercial contexts.[25] One such work—a pair of vinyl pull-down window shades made available through a subscription to an "object based publication" called *The Thing Quarterly*—was made to enable a kind of at-home performance, enacted by the owner of the objects.[26] Each shade was silkscreened with a message: either ""If this shade is down I'm not who you think I am," or ""If this shade is down I'm begging your forgiveness on bended knee with tears streaming down my face."[27]

Concrete comedy, is, as Robbins describes it, "comedy that has taken material form," and it is often also proplike: "were life like theater, the comic object would be a

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[24] July has also expressed an interest in background actors (or "extras") elsewhere in her work, including in a short story called "Mon Plaisir," in which working as extras helps a couple to clarify their relationship. Miranda July, *No One Belongs Here More Than You*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005.
[25] Concrete Comedy resists, in Robbins words, "easy divisions between 'entertainer' and 'artist.'" Robbins, David Robbins and Pernille Albrethsen, *Concrete Comedy: An Alternative History of Twentieth-Century Comedy*, (Copenhagen, Denmark: Pork Salad Press, 2011), 7.
[26] See http://www.thethingquarterly.com, accessed 08-04-15.
[27] The shades were the *The Thing's* inaugural objects, made available for $60.00 each in 2007.

prop."[28] July's shades—potential props in the personal melodramas enacted in the homes of their owners—are funny, but not because the lines on them are jokes. They comprise the "comedy of doing rather than saying" that characterizes concrete comedy: it is the whole idea of the objects—and the mental images they evoke of the people who might rely on them to communicate—that create the comic effect.[29] In this, July's shades contribute to a long, multidisciplinary tradition that Robbins sees as having begun in the comic objects of German comedian Karl Valentin, and continued in works by Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, and Piero Manzoni, among others.

The fact that July's shades were made available for sale, affordably, on a website (rather than entering the market through the arcane art-world system of agents, gallerists, and collectors) is part of the joke as well. Art's complex role in evoking and manipulating our emotions is summed up in July's silkscreened handwriting deadpan, and then offered for purchase as readily as any household object bought online, and with free FedEx shipping. That the shades' written lines are composed in July's distinctive penmanship (a hand likely known to her fans, as it features in many other of her projects) points back to the work's contradictions: these objects are made to play an intimate role in intimate circumstances, and so they are composed with the intimacy of handwriting. But they are also mass produced objects for sale in the online marketplace, and so that intimacy is revealed as highly mediated, the idiosyncrasies of the handwritten letters mechanically printed.

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[28] Robbins, *Concrete Comedy,* 7, 36.
[29] David Robbins, Lauren O'Neill Butler, "David Robbins," 08-03-11, http://artforum.com/words/id=28669 Accessed 04-10-15.

In another similar work—a set of embroidered Pillowcases—we see July's handwriting mass produced again, and again for use in an intimate setting. The pillowcases come in a set: one reads "here you will dream of endless kissing" and the other "here you will dream of people you admire exposing your fraudulence."[30] Like the shades, these pillowcases are proplike comic objects: the user must decide where to lay her head (and, as follows, which dreams to have), and in doing so she condemns any bed partner to the remaining available option.

Offered through a company called *Third Drawer Down Studio* that produces "licensed contemporary artist merchandise" of the type sold in museum gift shops, these works are listed alongside branded objects by much bigger art world names: one can buy a baby-onesie featuring a design by Louise Bourgois, for example, or a set of coasters by abstract painter Sam Francis.[31] Unlike most of these other objects, however, July's pillowcases don't simply decorate useful items with extant art images. They function, rather, as concrete comedy objects that are meant to be props in their users' performances of everyday life. In this, July makes the most of a situation in which artists, even very successful artists, must rely for income on retail licensing: she uses it as an opportunity to access new audience members and enlist them in a performance in much the same way that she used her *Learning to Love Your More* web project and her participatory installations like *The Hallway* and *11 Heavy Things*.

July's 2014 collaboration with luxury purse line *Welcome Companions* is her most ambitious and complex retail art object. Like her shades and pillow cases, her

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[30] Miranda July, *Kissing Pillowcases*, Third Drawer Down Studio, **http://www.thirddrawerdown.com/products/embroidered-pillowcases-x-miranda-july** Accessed 10-24-15.
[31] See http://www.thirddrawerdown.com/collections/third-drawer-down, Accessed 10-24-15.

handbag—called *The Miranda*—is a work of concrete comedy that takes advantage of the blurred boundaries between the art world and the world of retail sales. For this work, July transformed one of *Welcome Companions*' leather women's handbags into an extremely customized case for specific objects and situations: a miniature leather pocket, for example, is designed to hold a single almond. Tiny letters stitched into the red leather below that pocket read: "Almond In Case of Low Blood Sugar." Other carefully fitted and labeled pockets are made to hold homeopathic sleeping pills, a tiny security blanket, pre-printed "all-purpose cards" to assist their user in a variety of social situations (one reads "Please Use a Lot of Lubricant") and a flash drive for storing "Ultra Top Secret Projects." The brand typically sells leather handbags and other accessories, and though their products are slightly unusual (some are shaped like animals, for example), they are definitely not in the business of selling fine art: July's contribution is their first explicitly art-like object.[32]

The Miranda has much more in common with a set of avant-garde experiments with assemblage from the mid 20th century than it does with the other objects in *Welcome Companion*'s catalog. Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*, produced between 1935 and 1940, was a box of miniaturized items created in an edition of twenty, and each box was fitted within a leather suitcase. The boxes consisted mainly of tiny versions of Duchamp's artworks, and in this way each one became a kind of portable museum, insuring the survival of the artist's body of work, but also defying traditional definitions of art that relied on concepts of originality and one-of-a-kind-ness. *The Miranda* doesn't include versions of the artist's past works, but it is follows from *Boîte-en-valise* in that is

[32] Typical *Welcome Companion* leather women's bags range from $400.00-$700.00. *The Miranda*, which was released in a limited edition, is listed for 1,500.00. See http://welcomecompanions.com/

a kind of portable portrait of the artist: each handbag includes an image of the artist's son, a square torn from her blanket, and a set of objects that make sense for her everyday life: bobby pins for her short curly hairdo, a flash drive for her digital projects, the single-almond snack (she is an extremely thin woman), and so on. The *Miranda* builds, jokily, on the idea that one's purse is a portrait of one's self: and idea that was reinforced during the launch party for *The Miranda* in which illustrator Alice Leggett was hired to draw portraits of attendees in which she only represented the spilled-out contents of their handbags.

Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* is the first of many artworks that took the form of limited edition portable assemblages, a form that became especially popular within the mid 20th century Fluxus movement. Some Fluxkits (as these boxed assemblages were called) were made to be contained within purse-like carrying cases or briefcases, like George Maciunas's 1965 *Fluxkit*, which was filled with reproductions of various Fluxus artists' objects and texts.That July's handbag is a specifically feminine object—in clear contrast to Duchamp and Maciunas's somber, masculine cases—also connects it to other earlier assemblage-like works from women artists that sought to consciously investigate feminine-gendered accessories. Fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli's 1937 hat made to resemble a high-heeled women's shoe, and surrealist artist Meret Oppenheim's 1936 sculpture *My Nursemaid*—a sculpture in which elegant women's pumps are made to resemble a cooked chicken—are two such examples.

In Fluxus artist Larry Miller's 1974 assemblage *Orifice Flux Plugs*, about a dozen and a half items appropriately sized to insert into the human body's various openings are arranged into compartments in a small plexiglass box. The objects (a tiny statue, a range

of rubberized tips of things, a condom..) are meant to be handled, picked up and considered, and wondered about. While July's collection of items in *The Miranda* suggest a narrative (one's blood sugar is low, so one will need to eat this almond), the objects in *Orifice Flux Plugs* are made to be experienced in a more primary way, without the mediation of a predetermined story. As art historian Hannah Higgins shows in her 2002 study of Fluxus, this and other Fluxkits offer "an experience for the handler that is the sensation contained in it; the Fluxkit is not *about* the sensation. The operative word *about*, like the word *of,* insists on the distance between object and user."[33]

In a short video July recorded to introduce *The Miranda* the artist takes the viewer through a narrative of a woman's weekend during which the various objects it holds become useful. The distance between the user and the object that Higgins shows *Orifice Flux Plugs* to be intentionally collapsing is a strong presence in this video: the objects are shown to be characters in a story about our experience instead of subjects of primary, sensory exploration. Though the items in the purse are very particular to the artist, July asks us to identify with the narrative: we are to picture ourselves as the woman having the experience in which the purse is useful. When July acts out her story in the video, for example, her narration takes on the second person voice: "So you are walking along, and suddenly you think…" or "You are feeling really good, until…." Primary, tactile engagement does occur once in the video, when July tells us that we've gone home with a man we met in a dance club, and we wish we had a nightie so that we could sleep in his house. In lieu of the nightie, she opens the purse and strokes a tiny scrap of fabric labeled

[33] Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, 36.

"Security Blanket," letting her head drop to her chest for a moment, and creating a break in the narrative for this purely sensory experience.

This video was shared widely online when *The Miranda* debuted, and it is used on the *Welcome Companions* website to introduce and explain the bag. The section of the site that includes specific pricing information, the video, and a written explanation of the purse lists the scrap of cloth I mentioned as "a piece of Miranda's security blanket." The idea that you get a scrap of something that belonged personally to the artist makes clear that July's public persona is part of what is on offer here: the purse courts those fans who will pay to purchase a piece of her. The commercial context for this work's presentation and its way of capitalizing on July's celebrity (through the scrap of blanket in particular) quite clearly separates *The Miranda* from Fluxus: a movement of loosely associated and highly varied artists, but one in which there was a strong overall impulse to reject both commodification and egoism in art.[34] And yet July's project also clearly resonates with a variety of Fluxus projects, even beyond its basic similarity to a Fluxkit.

The scrap of blanket included within *The Miranda,* for example, creates a strong connection with *Cut Piece*, Yoko Ono's much discussed performance, which was staged for the first time at a Tokyo art center in 1964. This work (which has been performed, with slight variations, many times over the years) endeavored to trouble the expected relationship between the artist and the audience. The performance consists of the artist sitting silently on the floor or on a chair. Audience members are invited to approach her and use a pair of scissors to cut away parts of her clothing, and they are permitted to take

[34] This position wasn't without exceptions, however. See Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, pp 121-146 for examples of Fluxus objects and texts that were made available to the public through mail order and brick-and mortar shops.

the scraps of fabric away with them when they leave. This work literalizes a model of artist / audience relationship that is unique to performance art; when there is no art object, the artist becomes the object. The scraps of fabric that the audience members take away are physical souvenirs of the work (and of Ono herself), and her apparent vulnerability within the duration of the performance enacts the vulnerability of an artwork to the whims and judgments of its audience.

Ono's performance is also explicitly gendered; an image of a woman sitting stoically while her clothes are cut away activates a set of metaphors for femininity: women as selfless givers, women as subjects of an objectifying male gaze, women as the embodied battlegrounds for culture wars. It is tempting as well to interpret this work in hindsight as a meditation on the particularly cruel (and specifically feminine) type of celebrity Ono was made to undergo after her marriage to John Lennon, when she became well known outside of the art world for the first time, but was caricatured as a shrill-voiced villain who was to blame for the break up of *The Beatles*.

With *The Miranda* July produces an object that is, like *Cut Piece*, suggestive of a range of metaphors for femininity. Handbags have strong associations with female vanity and consumerism, they're made to carry the baggage of femininity (tampons, lipsticks, candies for children), and when they appear in our dreams they are, Freud tells us, stand-ins for the vagina.[35] The July who appears in the video for the purse is a pointed (but affectionate) caricature of contemporary independent womanhood, and a caricature, as well, of the woman who could afford such an expensive purse. In the narrative the artist

[35] C.S. Hall, "A cognitive theory of dream symbols," *The Journal of General Psychology,*no. 48*,* 169-186.

acts out in the video, the purse's owner expresses self-doubt, assuages those doubts by shopping, goes to a dance club alone, enjoys a fulfilling one-night-stand, and then joins a girlfriend for fancy brunch the next morning. But the scrap of July's security blanket that one purchases as a part of the purse humanizes its caricatured owner, pointing to a certain emotional vulnerability in that it assumes the user will *need* a portable source of safety and comfort for use in her day to day activities. Because the scrap comes from July's personal blanket, it becomes—like the fabric scraps cut away from Ono's clothing in *Cut Piece*—a kind of souvenir of the artist that the audience can keep.[36]

Another element of *The Miranda* that is strongly reminiscent of Fluxus is the set of "multi-purpose cards" the artist includes within the bag. The twenty five cards range from simple communication aids (one, for example, asks that its recipient identify, on a scale of one to ten, how angry he is with the purse's owner) and others are made to initiate small performances. One such card reads:

> I just handed you this card, now you are reading it. Also I love you. If you love me too, rip this up, throw the pieces on the floor, spit on the pieces, stamp on them, and then walk out of the room like you're furious. I'll come running after you and we can kiss.[37]

Another warns its recipient that: "In three seconds I'm going to burst into song and I want you to join me. We'll be singing *This Little Heart of Mine*."[38]

The production of written scripts, sometimes printed on cards and made to initiate performances, was a significant trend within Fluxus. Georges Brecht's *Event Scores* are

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[36] July references *Cut Piece* in her 2014-15 performance *New Society* as well: she appoints "medics" from the audience who will be in charge of the New Society's health, and directs them to cut away strips of fabric from the blouse she is wearing in order to make armbands that they will wear as uniforms.
[37] Text of "MultiPurpose Cards," available at http://welcomecompanions.com/products/multipurpose-cards Accessed 10-20-15.
[38] Ibid.

among the best known. His 1963 box *Water Yam* included sixty-nine offset cards with instructions that could allow their reader to enact a Fluxus event. Brecht's instructions for *Drip Music*, for example, specify that: "a source of dripping water and an empty container are arranged in such a way that the water falls into the container."[39] Yoko Ono also produced many artworks that were instructions designed to be enacted by a user. Her 1964 book *Grapefruit* gathered some of these pieces, which range from the easy to perform (*Shadow Piece* asks that we "put your shadows together until they become one") to the inscrutable, like *Fly Piece*, which instructs us, simply, to "Fly."[40] July's *All Purpose Cards* are more specifically targeted to initiating collaboration and intimate communication between actors than Brecht's or Ono's tend to be, a theme that has characterized most of her participatory projects, including the *Learning to Love you More* web site and *Somebody*: a messaging service for I-Phone users in which the message sender directs a stranger in the delivery of a live performance to a recipient (sort of like a smart-phone enabled singing telegram service).

As a highly personalized object, a prop for performance, and a prompt for narrative, *The Miranda* both embraces the tradition of celebrity "namesake" purses and investigates and reworks that tradition. It also contributes to a history of packaged, portable art assemblages that includes Marcel Duchamp's *Boit en Valise,* mid 20th century *Fluxkits,* and performance scripts from artists like Brecht and Ono. *The Miranda* is also an explicitly feminist object, advertised in its video as a kind of utility case for the empowered, sexually independent, and unapologetically feminine contemporary woman.

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[39] Ina Blom, "Boredom and Oblivian," in *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman, (New York: Academy Editions, 1998), 69.
[40] Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions + Drawings*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

Its contents take for granted that its owner can have a child (the keepsake picture of the toddler), sleep around (as in the video's narrative), maintain work on her own important projects (the flash drive for top-secret projects), be emotionally vulnerable (the scrap of security blanket), and care about her appearance (the bobby pins), all without apparent contradiction, and packaged smartly and harmoniously: not as the heavy baggage of femininity, but in a stylish, lightweight purse. And though *The Miranda* is also, of course, all about July's celebrity and is probably of greatest interest to preexisting fans of her work, it endeavors, in all of its contents, to hand off agency and main-character status to the user whose unique experiences and relationships will provide the narrative in which the purse and its objects will feature. July does not explicitly critique the idea of the high-end namesake purse here, but she does force it to become something more art-like than strictly commodity-like (vague terms that echo the vagaries of such categories).

July's attitude towards commercial, mass cultural means and venues for making art reflects the way that the relationship between mainstream and margin were being readjusted (within punk feminist cultural contexts in particular) in the late 1990s, when her work was just beginning to get some recognition. July is no *Spice Girl*—she doesn't uncritically participate in the commodification of her work—but she isn't (at least in this specific area) much of an early 90s style Riot Grrrl either: she does not reject mainstream mass media venues on principle. Her comfort with commercial contexts for her work, and her efforts, within those contexts, to facilitate authentic, meaningful experiences (rather than simply critiquing those contexts from within, as in Chris Burden's TV advertisements, for example) speaks to the legacy of Riot Grrrl's expansion, in the mid

and late 1990s, into the kind of subculture that found ways to use the dominant culture to its advantage.[41]

Writing in 1981 on the relationship between performance art and commercial culture, pioneering conceptual artist Mary Kelly argued that "by putting himself in circulation, the performance artist parodied the commercial exchange and distribution of an artistic personality in the form of a commodity."[42] By packaging herself as a commodity in her fashion shoots, in *The Miranda*, and in other areas of her practice, July doesn't parody commercial exchange as much as she endeavors—often with great sincerity—to transform it: embracing its platforms as opportunities for meaningful artistic inquiry.

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[41] See chapter three for a discussion of Burden's TV commercials.
[42] Mary Kelly, "Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism," in *Art in Theory 1900-2000*, Eds. C. Harrison and P. Wood, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 1061.

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VITA

NAME: Cara Smulevitz

EDUCATION: B.A., Art History, The University of Illinois at Chicago, 2001.

M.A., Art History, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2004.

Ph.D. Art History, The University of Illinois at Chicago, 2016.

TEACHING: Department of Art History, University of Illinois, Chicago, 2012-2016

Department of General Education, Illinois Institute of Art, 2004-2015.

HONORS: Faculty Development Research grant, Illinois Institute of Art, 2015.

Chancellor's Fellowship for Interdisciplinary Research, University of Illinois, Chicago, 2014-2015.

Alice Dan Dissertation award for research in Gender and Women's Studies, 2014.

Provost Award for Graduate Research, University of Illinois, Chicago, 2012.

PUBLICATION: "Aural Opticality and Third-Wave Feminist Art: the Visual Legacy of Riot Grrrl."*Permeable Boundaries: Music and the Visual Arts from the 1840s Onwards*. Eds. Diane V Silverthorne and Tim Shephard. Ashgate Publishing. Forthcoming in Fall 2016.